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Social Organization of the Muslim Peoples of Sulu

WILFREDO F. ARCE

THE reader must be forewarned that, despite its imposing title, this article is largely impressionistic. For while the data on which it is based were gathered during eighteen months of field research in the Sulu archipelago, my major interest at the time was a more particular aspect of Sulu culture.¹ Further, most of the fieldwork was done in the capital town of Jolo. However, I did gather considerable information on social organization in Jolo and, to a lesser extent, in the rest of the archipelago. This information was to be the basis of an introductory orientation to the peoples of Sulu in the 1960s. It also forms the basis of this article, which makes no pretensions to being definitive.

While the blanket term "Muslim" is often applied to the people of Sulu, the population is in fact heterogeneous. The Census Bureau gives the population total for the whole province as 326,898.² Sulu's complexity is seen in the way this

¹ The support for this research (June 1961 to December 1962) was provided by Notre Dame of Jolo College, as part of the Co-ordinated Investigation of Sulu Culture. The CISC is a joint venture of Notre Dame College and the Ateneo de Manila's Institute of Philippine Culture.

² *Census of the Philippines 1960: Population and Housing; Vol I, Report by Province: Sulu* (Manila: Bureau of the Census and Statistics, 1962), p. 2. This report will be referred to as PH-S.

population is distributed by mother tongue and, to a lesser extent, by religion.

Population of Sulu by mother tongue ³		Population of Sulu by religion ⁴	
<i>Language</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Taosug	72.9	Muslim	95
Samal	21.0	Christian	4
Badjaw	3.7	Other	1
Other Philippine languages	2.3	Total	100
Non-Philippine languages	0.1		
Total	100.0		

A brief comment on the census figures is called for. Before the Census Bureau released its final report on Sulu, I made an estimate from preliminary data with the help of knowledgeable informants. According to this estimate the percentages of the Taosug and Samal populations were 56 and 39 respectively. The discrepancy between this estimate and the final Census Bureau percentages is interesting in that it raises questions on the proper identification of Taosug and Samal—a problem which will be elaborated on in a paragraph below—and recalls reports I received about areas which were not adequately covered by the greatly harassed census enumerators. While this comment is in no way intended to discredit the Census Bureau and its personnel, it is felt that the discrepancy should be noted.

The greatest concentration of the Christian population is in the larger towns, namely, Jolo, Siasi, and Bongao. Many coastal or island towns have a Badjaw district, but the greatest agglomeration of this boat-dwelling group is found in Sitangkai, near North Borneo.

³ Percentages of mother tongue speakers were computed from Table 15, PH-S, p. 11.

⁴ Percentages for the various religious groups in Sulu were computed from the figures given in Table 16, PH-S, p. 12.

The Muslim population is composed of two distinct groups, the Taosug and the Samal. The Taosug are clearly predominant in the northern part of the archipelago—Jolo island and the surrounding islands of Pata, Marunggas, Tapul, and Lugus—and to a lesser extent in Siasi and Pangutaran. The Samal are the more numerous in the south—the Tawi-Tawi island group. The Taosug are, in all certainty, the descendants of the original inhabitants (known variously as *Buranun*, *Budananun*, and *Guimbahanun*) and of an influx of Malay immigrants in the latter part of the fourteenth century, about the same time that Islam was introduced to the archipelago. The Samal started immigrating from Johore to the archipelago in the early part of the same century.⁵ The Taosug and the Samal languages are, on the whole, mutually unintelligible,

⁵ Najeeb M. Saleeby, *The History of Sulu* (Division of Ethnology Publications, Vol. IV, Part II; Manila: Bureau of Science, 1908), pp. 149-150; 155-159.

The origin of the word *Taosug* is difficult to determine. The people of Sulu use the term *Lupa Sug* (lit. "Land of the Current") when referring to the entire archipelago. *Taosug* would seem to be a combination of two words, *tao* ("people") and *sug* ("current"). By derivation, then, *Taosug* would mean "people of Sulu."

It may be noted that Saleeby, in reporting the migration of the Samal to Sulu, interpolates the term *Badjaw* (Saleeby, *op. cit.*, p. 149). At present the inhabitants of Sulu make a distinction between *Samal* who are characteristically Muslims and housedwellers, and *Pala-u* (synonymous with *Lutaw* and *Luwa-an*) who are characteristically pagans and boat-dwellers. Sopher states that the present Samal of the Sulu archipelago are "undoubtedly sea nomads by origin" (David Edward Sopher, "The Sea Nomads: A Study of the Maritime Boat People of Southeast Asia, Based on Literature" [unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of Geography, University of California at Berkeley, 1954], pp. 191-192). It seems, then, that from the original group of Samal immigrants that Saleeby reports, two social categories have descended: those who follow a relatively new tradition of living in houses, and those who persist in the ancient tradition of living in houseboats.

It appears that this process of "samalization" is continuing. The process was observed by a team of sociologists and anthropologists who undertook six weeks of field research in the archipelago in the summer of 1962 under the Coordinated Investigation of Sulu Culture. It is stated more explicitly in Dolores Ducommun, "Sisangat, a Fishing Community in the Philippines" (ms., 1962; pp. 69, xiv), p. 8.

but many Samal can understand Taosug even if they do not speak it. The Taosug's marked quality of aggressiveness and the Samal's lack of it are noted by most informants from both groups as well as by outsiders.

That Islam constitutes a strong bond unifying Taosug and Samal in an extra-religious manner would seem to need further investigation. It is clear, though, that the dominant culture is Taosug, and the Samal have been very highly receptive of Taosug cultural traits. Although in the past the Samal have been the more numerous, they have always fitted very conveniently into a position subordinate to that of the Taosug in the social class hierarchy.⁶ Inter-marriage between the two groups seems to be increasing. There is also a tendency for the Samal to identify themselves as Taosug.

With the previous paragraph fresh in mind, I should like to recall the percentage of Taosug reported by the 1960 Census (72.9) and to say a final word about it. This figure is considerably greater than my own estimate of 56 per cent. How is the difference to be explained? Briefly, I submit that many Samal respondents, wishing to be taken for Taosug, told the census enumerators that their mother tongue was Taosug rather than Samal.⁷ In any event, the percentage of Taosug in Sulu is not so high as recorded by the 1960 Census.

The tendency towards cultural assimilation, and perhaps a common religious bond, may account in part for the enormous similarity in social organization that an impressionistic study of the Taosug and Samal reveals. With full knowledge of the tentativeness of this description, I will present a picture of social organization as common to both groups unless otherwise noted. Further differences doubtless exist, but a paper that will take note of all these differences will draw on more detailed studies of Taosug and Samal society to be made in the future.

⁶ Saleeby, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-157.

⁷ The final census report classifies Taosug, Samal, and Badjaw on the basis of mother tongue, defined as "the language or dialect spoken in a person's home in childhood" (PH-S, p. x).

FAMILY

The Sulu Muslim has been traditionally noted for his fierce pride, and rightly so. Ferocity characterized his resistance to Spanish and American attempts to dominate him, and some would also argue that he still resists assimilation into the Philippine body politic. While other Filipinos may question the logic and utility of such resistance, one cannot question its consistency. For each Sulu Muslim is intensely proud of his own group, a group whose meaningful relationships extend in concentric circles from his nuclear family outward to other kinsmen, and finally to the members of the alliances he has made on the basis of common identification as a Taosug or Samal, and as a believer in Islam.

To the Muslim, relatives constitute, to a degree greater perhaps than in the case of the Tagalog or Bikol, the first line of defense. The child learns early in life that he must maintain intimate and cordial relationships not just with the members of his own nuclear family. The young couple and their children generally live as a dependent unit with the family of either spouse if they are Taosug, and with that of the wife if they are Samal. Conversely, a couple with adult children frequently finds itself running a household with more than one family. The dependent units are usually the families of their sons and daughters.

The reason for the high frequency of joint families may be traced directly to economic realities. Most households with dependent families are characteristically headed by a person who is a landowner, or who derives a steady income from trading or other occupations, like a job with the government. On the other hand the dependent families are usually headed by persons who have little or no means of support. In many cases an offspring receives his or her inheritance long after marriage—probably at the death of the parents, or even later. Staying with an established household head who is also a close relative becomes almost a matter of necessity, then, in the case of a young family struggling to support itself.

Eventually, however, by sheer weight of numbers, or by the death of the household head, the household breaks up.

The dependent family may now choose to become an independent household, if the family head considers himself capable of supporting his wife and children. He signifies his decision to be independent simply by moving to a new house. But he will probably have built this house right next to that of the nearest relative. If his own prospects are still uncertain he will most likely seek out another relatively affluent household and attach his family to it. The household head will generally be an elder sibling or an uncle, or someone related in the same manner to his wife.

Through all this, nonetheless, the nuclear family maintains its identity. The husband is the breadwinner, the wife the housekeeper and manager of the family's income. If they are a dependent unit in a household, there may be less pressure on the husband to bring in the fruits of his labor and on the ingenuity of his wife as a housekeeper. They can always be sure that they and their children will have a share of whatever food is prepared for the household. The husband contributes as much as he can or wants to for the maintenance of the household. No stipulation is made as to the amount of contribution a dependent member has to give, especially if he has a family to support. But in this case the principles of reciprocity (Taosug *buddi*, lit. "favor given") and its concomitant sanction, shame (Taosug *sipog*) operate effectively as regulators.⁸ Though reciprocation is not expressly demanded, the dependents feel that it is expected of them and will be embarrassed if they fail to comply.

The nuclear family, even though it may be a dependent unit in another household, must provide for many of its members' needs. Clothing, medical care, and education of children are still the responsibility of each individual family. And, when the male children marry, it shoulders most of the expenses incurred during the wedding besides providing the dowry.

⁸ The concept of reciprocity in Philippine culture is more fully developed in Mary R. Hollnsteiner, "Reciprocity in the Lowland Philippines," in Frank Lynch, S.J. (compiler), *Four Readings on Philippine Values* ("Institute of Philippine Culture Papers," No. 2; Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1962), pp. 121-48.

Hence the husband must have an occupation that at least brings in a steady income.

In most of Sulu, which is characteristically rural, this occupation will normally be that of a tenant or an owner of a small parcel of land planted to coconut, hemp, cassava, or upland rice. It may be combined with fishing, in which case the man will need a vinta, a net, a hook and line, and a kerosene lamp of some sort. Techniques of cultivation and fishing are still very crude, as in most parts of the Philippines, and the returns are meager. These occupations normally bring the wife in as a seller of her husband's produce. She may also help in the lighter tasks connected with farming, such as weeding. In addition she may augment the family income by making small articles at home, for example, mats, or cloth woven on an old-fashioned loom. If the family lives in the town center, she may run a small sari-sari store, the stock in trade of which will be candy, the many local varieties of cakes and pastries made from rice and, most important, cigarettes which she acquires from distributors of goods brought in from Borneo.

As in the case of other lowland Philippine groups, the wife's area of activity generally lies inside the home, while that of the husband lies outside. Each must continue to gain the approval of the other in his or her respective sphere of activity. Otherwise family ties may be definitely ruptured. The Muslim divorce is recognized at present by Philippine law.⁹ Men have exercised this prerogative more frequently than women.

Islam also allows the man to take as many as four wives. Polygamy, like divorce, however, is not practiced by the majority; these occur even more rarely among the educated Muslims. The other wives are generally looked upon as interlopers. The first wife may insist on dominating the other

⁹ Section 1 of Republic Act No. 394, approved on June 18, 1949, states: "For a period of twenty years from the date of the approval of this Act, divorce among Moslems residing in non-Christian provinces shall be recognized and be governed by Moslem customs and practices."

wives, if living in the same house. Or she may insist that the husband place her in a separate residence. The first wife usually gets her way. Although wives of one man often do not look on one another with fondness, there is no perceptible effort to turn the children of one against those of the other.

The sibling bond among children of the same mother and father is very strong and enduring. The bond among siblings of different parents is less strong; selectivity is exercised when frequency of interaction is desired. Like the Tagalog, the Sulu Muslims observe age-grading, although no distinction is made between male and female in the terms of respect for elder siblings. Elder siblings of either sex are called *kaka*. They, like all the other elder members of the household, share in parental functions of caring for and disciplining younger siblings.

In this area, where education is considered the key to better job opportunities, male children are given priority over the female when a choice has to be made because of limited financial resources. This is considered proper recognition of the male's role as the breadwinner of the family and potential leader of the kin group, and the female's role as housewife.

MARRIAGE

The Muslim marriage is far more colorful if not more elaborate than that of the other lowland Philippine groups. Attended by relatives of both bride and groom who are dressed for the occasion in very bright and flowing costumes, it climaxes months of careful preparation and negotiations between two families. For the Muslim marriage unites not only two persons but two families or kindreds as well.

The ultimate decision on the union rests not with the partners themselves but with their respective families. One manifestation of this is the fact that courtship is not considered important. A boy may meet a girl at a social gathering, and he may like her. He may try to get better acquainted with her by visiting at her house twice or three times on any convenient pretext. Then he tells his own family of his intention to marry the girl. At this point the family takes the in-

itiative away from him. It secures the services of an intermediary who probes the feelings of the girl's family. Then it mobilizes as many of its kinsmen as possible for the negotiations that follow. Material help from a kinsman is always welcome because the boy's family has to give a dowry to the girl's family and bear the expenses of all the rituals accompanying the marriage.

The formal asking of the girl's hand is negotiated by relatives from both sides with neither boy nor girl present. It also marks the first public manifestation that a marriage is being arranged. The boy's relatives proceed to the girl's house bringing food with them. At the house they sit down for a repast with the girl's relatives who will have assembled for the occasion. At the discussions that follow, a spokesman—who is usually very fluent and well-versed in the euphemistic language that is called for on these occasions—speaks for each family. The important matters taken up at this stage are: (1) the public acceptance of the boy's proposal; and (2) a proposal from the boy's family detailing the items to be included in the dowry.

There are cases where the proposal of the boy's family is met with a counterproposal that considerably raises the amount or number of items to be given as dowry. Or, if the families involved in the negotiations are both wealthy, the boy's family may not make a proposal at all and leave the amount up to the good judgment of the girl's family. Either of these cases may give rise to another meeting. It may be marked by the same solemnity as the first.

In most cases, however, the final agreement on the dowry to be paid is combined with the setting of an approximate marriage date. The meeting for this purpose is accompanied by another repast, again at the expense of the boy's family. This time the boy himself goes with his relatives and personally serves his future in-laws at the table. The marriage date is kept very flexible. For in the interim the boy's family will have to accumulate the cash and goods (cattle, rice, and jewelry are customary) needed for the dowry. In addition

he may be asked to serve in the girl's household for a short period of time.

Finally the day of the marriage arrives. The dowry required by the parents of the bride will have been at least substantially delivered by this time. The boy proceeds to the girl's house to claim his bride, accompanied by his parents and relatives. Walking to the beat of brass gongs and a big drum, they bring with them the *maligay*, the Taosug term for a miniature house made of rice cakes and decorated with little flags made of peso bills mounted on wooden or bamboo sticks. The wedding ceremony, performed by the imam at the girl's house, is followed by receptions, first at the bride's house, later at the groom's.

The festivities over, the new couple spend their honeymoon at the groom's family's house (if they are Taosug) or at the bride's family's house (if they are Samal). Shortly after marriage the new couple is invited to a series of get-togethers with families of relatives on either side. This enables each spouse to meet the members of the other's kin group.

When serious incompatibility develops between husband and wife, it is usually the fault of the husband. The cause may be infidelity, or desertion and non-support. When this happens, divorce may result. Where the wife is at fault (as in the case of infidelity on her part, or her insistence on divorce for some reason or another), the husband may impose as a condition to the divorce that a substantial part of the dowry he gave at marriage be returned.

KINSHIP

Kinship among the Muslims in Sulu is no less extensive in membership than among other lowland groups, but the obligations are more binding and the loyalty demanded of each kinsman is more severe. Hence group identification is more pronounced. This identification transcends spatial distance. Although kin members tend to group themselves in one place, enclaves may be set up in places far from the core community.

The child traces descent from both father's side and mother's side, although he takes his father's given name as his

family name when he enrolls himself in school or has his name recorded in a formal document. Happy is the child whose parents belong to two previously competing kindreds because he can claim the support of both groups. This claim assumes further significance when seen as a factor cementing the emerging alliance between the two kin groups.

Although kin leaders exercise great influence in deciding whom to recognize as belonging to one's group, thereby meriting the support and protection of that group, selection of personal allies within the group is made by the individual. In reality there is more interaction based on activated personal alliances than on kindred alone. Geographical proximity influences the composition of this smaller circle. Still, kin membership is invoked at least every two years in the power play that is the national and local election of public officials. In this struggle a kinsman may run for any of the barrio, municipal, or provincial positions. Or he may support somebody running for any of these offices or positions in the national government. Competition between rival kin groups with their respective allies is generally very keen and frequently heated. Division of political loyalty among kin members does occur at times. Where it does, it is the cause of much bitterness, although manifestations of it are seldom brought to the surface.

Kinship is also invoked to enlist support, when one finds himself in a place other than his own and he has need of food, shelter, and protection. Thus it is that one will venture only with extreme reluctance to another town or barrio, when he is not aware of any kinsman or at least an ally living there (see "Alliance System," below). One has an obligation to shelter any kinsman or ally who is in need of such help.

When one makes an enemy of a person belonging to another kin group, he expects and gets the help of his kindred. Hence feuds between persons generally become feuds between kin groups and, beyond that, between alliance groups. Physical violence inflicted by one on another outside his kin group does not generally end with the apprehension and punishment of the guilty person alone. There are also his relatives

to contend with. The Taosug take pride in the belief that, if one is the object of an injustice, his close relatives will demand satisfaction from the offender or his family, in case the injured party himself cannot do so. Since one has an obligation to help one's kinsman, other relatives are drawn into the feud; this causes bad blood between two families. Moreover, the obligation to help falls on relatives not only along horizontal but along vertical lines as well. Hence bad blood between two groups may exist for generations with fresh grievances reinforcing old ones and triggering off intermittent spurts of violence.

THE ALLIANCE SYSTEM

One may speak of two kinds of meaningful alliance among the Sulu Muslims. These alliances are usually informal, sometimes latent, but highly operational.¹⁰

There are one's own personal active allies. One's immediate environment is a universe dotted closely by *de facto* allies. They are *de facto* allies because they are one's relatives. Geographical proximity of residence is apparently strongly correlated with kinship. The other persons, besides members of one's own nuclear family who live in the same household with him, are relatives. His own neighbors or townmates are very likely relatives also; one generally hears of a barrio being owned by one kin group or, in the case of a larger community, of members of the same kin group residing and owning real estate in particular sections of the town. Sometimes, even the mosque where one worships may be built by his own relatives and be meant for the exclusive use of his kindred. Thus it is that relatives immediately and necessarily form the core of one's active allies. This blends very nicely with the axiomatic loyalty to one's kindred. Within this core, frequency of interaction arises on the basis of selection through common identification: for example, close consanguineal relationship;

¹⁰ The alliance concept is borrowed from Frank Lynch, S.J., *Social Class in a Bikol Town* ("Philippine Studies Program Research Series," No. 1; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1959), pp. 49-55. This idea is further expanded in the same author's "The Alliance System," *Philippine Sociological Review*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (July, 1962).

same sex, age, generation, occupation, social class; or geographical proximity.

There are occasions when one finds himself outside this core. This occurs especially when he moves to more populous towns like Jolo, Siasi, or Bongao, or when he moves to Manila. On these occasions he may activate alliances with people who speak the same dialect, belong to the same group (Taosug or Samal), and believe in the same Islamic faith.

In activating alliances with a person, selection is clearly involved. The model of a good ally is one who in his relationship approaches that which is expected of a person belonging to one's nuclear family. Thus, a good ally is one who is "like a brother/sister," or "like a father/mother" to oneself.

Alliances with persons who belong outside the kin group are more subject to definite ruptures. For blood runs thick in the Sulu Muslim's veins. An active ally who is not at the same time a kinsman is still a potential rival; his loyalty would still belong to his own kin group. In a showdown for power, pressure would be put upon him by his own group to be an active rival of members of the other group, no matter how loyal he may personally feel to his own allies in the first group.

Nonetheless, these alliances bring into contact members of one kin group with members of another, paving the way for another meaningful alliance: that contracted by one kindred with another. In a society where elders have a big voice in the matter of marriage, such an alliance is easily formed once a desirable kindred is in sight. Conscious deliberation occurs before the first marriage is contracted. With the ground broken, still closer cooperation between the two groups develops. In time the alliance is sealed by more intergroup marriages, and it emerges as a solid and potent bloc in the power play that is continually going on.

The persons who are not relatives but are active allies occupy the fringe of ego's alliance system. Beyond this point everyone else is a potential rival and must be regarded with suspicion.

Thus a group of families may move into a barrio where they are completely unknown. They will construct their houses

at a perceptible distance from any of the natives' houses. There is a tacit but mutual feeling among both the newcomers and the inhabitants of the barrio that this is the way it should be. In time normal interaction may take place between the two groups, but this comes slowly and after cautious probing through which each side apparently tests the willingness of the other to live harmoniously as *barriomates*. At the present time the newcomers in such a case will very likely stay. But there are cases also where such newcomers may feel forced to move to another place.

Thus it is also that the Sulu Muslim is generally reluctant to go unaccompanied to a place where he has neither relatives nor allies, let alone stay overnight in it. It is rather difficult for a non-Suluano to comprehend fully this reluctance, because the same manifestation of gracious hospitality found in many parts of the Philippines may greet a stranger in a Sulu barrio-home. But Suluanos themselves believe that one should always keep his guard up. Vigilance is the price of keeping one's life and limb.

This model of the alliance system and the attitude of rivalry with and suspicion towards those outside it suggests an important principle in the social psychology of the Sulu Muslims and helps explain many of the intermittent flare-ups of violence among them.¹¹ Serious disputes which develop into violence occur more between members of different alliance groups than between members of the same group. Disputes between members of the same group are generally patched up by leaders and never allowed to continue.¹²

¹¹ It should be stated in all fairness that Samal have shown a marked degree of restraint with regard to violence. Violence traceable to the operation of the principle stated in this paragraph has generally involved Taosug.

¹² The statements made in this and in the preceding three paragraphs may be painful reading for some of Sulu's educated Muslims. They deplore the violent manifestations of the principles stated and are exerting great efforts to minimize them. Still, I believe these statements are an accurate description of the situation (especially in the rural areas, or the *gimba*), and something which educated Muslims themselves realize, because they talk about it frequently.

One may note that the same principle operates among other Philippine groups. Nonetheless the adherence to it is much stronger among the Sulu Muslims. As will be seen in the next section, this principle is closely associated with a nebulous identity with a national state.

IDENTITY WITH A NATIONAL STATE

The national government is regularly represented at the barrio level by the barrio lieutenant and the barrio councilors, and at the municipal level by officials from the mayor down to his policemen. The influence of these local officials is paramount. In those communities which have a detachment of the Philippine Constabulary, their supremacy may be challenged, but their influence easily outranks that of other representatives of the national government. Teachers, health workers, and community development officers take second place because they cannot, like the local political officials, dispense Sulu's most vital form of patronage: protection. These persons are invariably also group leaders. Hence at the lowest level the individual's view of the national government is clouded by the government official's identity with a particular kin or alliance group.

This situation strongly indicates why the rank and file of Sulu Muslims feel only a remote sense of belonging to the national state. Defiance of Philippine law in Sulu has been greatly exaggerated in the national press. Still, when the exaggerations are sifted out, the residue is substantial enough to warrant the government's labeling Sulu as a "critical spot."

There is no organized resistance against the government. The law is challenged generally by casual bandit and pirate groups that intermittently harass the people and the government authorities. It was in the early 50's that outlawry assumed alarming proportions when the bandit leader Kamlon was able to unite several outlaw groups operating in the Luuk area of Jolo island.

At present the might of the state that is thrown into the peace and order campaign consists of eleven full-strength PC

companies and auxiliary contingents of the Philippine Navy and Marines. Navy patrol boats scour the Sulu seas for smugglers bringing in goods from Borneo. But the latter tend to look on the navy more as a nuisance than as a real threat; danger comes from Sulu-based pirates. Educated Muslim leaders have thrown their weight behind the peace and order campaign. In political elections, getting peace and order still remains a major objective. Excellent results are being gained, though slowly.

The state's function as guardian and preserver of the peace is shared to a significant extent with local headmen. These persons usually carry such titles as datu, panglima, maharajah, or imam. They act as arbiters in troubles involving residents of places where they exert influence.

Arbitration takes a more sophisticated form with the presence of so-called agama ("religious") courts which have been set up to arbitrate disputes according to traditional Muslim customs and practices. Local residents trace the establishment of the first agama to the early days of the American occupation.

At present there are three such "courts." Each one was established by and derives authority from the three claimants to the once-ruling sultanate. The first is presided over by Sultan Mohammad Esmail Kiram, whose area of influence extends over the southeastern part of Jolo island. The second is under Datu Hadji Amilbangsa, father of Sultan Ombra Amilbangsa; its area of influence is mostly over the southern islands of the Sulu archipelago. The third is under Sultan Jamalul Abirin; it decides cases coming mostly from the northeastern part of Jolo island. Although the head court of each of these jurisdictions is in Jolo town, the presiding officials have appointed agents who are also headmen in many municipalities. These headmen are provided with authority to decide cases.

Each agama hears complaints from the aggrieved party, issues subpoenas, conducts hearings, and renders decisions. Penalty is by fines. Most of the cases now being brought be-

fore the agama involve what are considered violations of chastity and the marriage contract. Fines range from a few pesos for touches by a male on a female, to over a hundred pesos for abduction. In addition the agama also orders indemnities, most of which are paid in cash, to the aggrieved party.

The legality of the functions of the agama seems to be built around Republic Act No. 394 (referred to in a footnote above) which authorizes divorce among Muslims according to Muslim customs and practices. There is also supposed to be a provision in the New Civil Code recognizing children born of polygamous marriages among Muslims as legitimate heirs to their parents' property. The judiciary in Sulu has in the past recognized divorces arranged by the agama; it tends to look on other decisions as extra-judicial settlements.

Although many educated Muslims frown on the activities of the agama—some have even denounced it for corrupt practices—it continues to exist and flourish. Its drawing power for the Muslim masses seems to derive from the latter's respect for traditional leaders and faith in the wisdom of their judgment.

A few years ago a congressman filed a bill in the House of Representatives proposing the separation of Sulu from the Republic of the Philippines on the grounds that the province has had a tradition very different from the rest of the Philippines and that integration would be extremely difficult to achieve. The bill, as was expected, failed to pass the House. But it accomplished for a while what many people believed it was meant to do: it focused attention on Sulu. The intention reflects very well the feeling among Sulu's leaders that the area has been neglected by the government.

Whether there is a basis in fact for this attitude is hard to judge. What is certain, however, is that there is a real cultural gap between the Sulu Muslims and the majority of Filipinos. The Muslims have developed as a minority with a different religion, different set of customs, and different history and tradition. This fact indicates that Sulu needs special treatment, if it is to develop normally as an integrated part of the Philippine Republic.

SOCIAL CLASS

The Sulu Muslims, like most people of the rural Philippines, seem to have a basically two-class system composed of a small elite and a great majority belonging to the lower class.

This two-class system reflects a long history during which one who belonged to the ruling class was always marked by having a great deal of political power and personal property. One who did not belong to the privileged group either worked as a slave or tenant on a farm, or cultivated a small plot of his own and paid taxes to the headman. The Spaniards were never able to disturb this system. When the Americans came the Sultanate ceded political power to them.¹³

With the criterion of upper class standing being economic security, the significant portion of the upper class is still composed of the descendants of the old ruling class who became heirs to the property of their fathers. Another category, which does not generally trace its descent from royalty, has broken into the elite group by accumulating wealth through the trade with British North Borneo, a great deal of which is illegal, frequently hazardous, but highly profitable.

Still another group that has moved up very swiftly in social class is composed of young professionals and government employees. Many of them were beneficiaries of study grants given by the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes under the Americans, and the Department of the Interior, the Office of the President, and the Commission on National Integration under the Republic of the Philippines. They are characteristically residents of the larger centers of population. Through them, and through the influx of Christians who have usually been

¹³ On August 20, 1899, General John C. Bates and Sultan Jamalul Kiram II signed a treaty which defined the Sultanate of Sulu as an American protectorate. This treaty was abrogated by the United States Congress in 1904. On March 22, 1915, the same Sultan signed another formal agreement with Frank W. Carpenter whereby the former ceded all political rights as ruler of Sulu. See Gregorio F. Zaide, *Philippine Political and Cultural History* (rev. ed.; Manila: Philippine Education Company, 1957), Vol. II, pp. 219-20; 245-46.

professionals or high government officials, the majority of Muslims see education as a means of upward social mobility and are flocking to institutions of learning both public and private. Education has also provided a common background for both Christians and Muslims and has helped greatly in breaking down the old attitude of mutual hostility between the two groups.

Wealth as a criterion of upper class standing is indicated by ownership of land, a well-paid job, or a profession. Other indicators of wealth and upper class placement are: the title of traditional leaders, like sultan or datu; religious titles, like hadji; ownership of a car or *kumpit* (a motorized boat for passengers and cargo); an expensive house; firearms; radio; children going to school in bigger towns, or in neighboring provinces and Manila.

The landlord-tenant relationship is characteristically harmonious despite a significant number of absentee landlords. One reason for this harmony is that there are no really big haciendas where a large number of tenants has to be dealt with through an overseer. Second, most landlords are also group leaders, and tenants their followers; hence tenants owe landlords more than the loyalty that springs from landlord-tenant relationships alone. Moreover, landlords have continued a tradition of paternalism toward their tenants; hence class-friction has been minimized.

Since education is seen as a ladder to upper-class standing, the tendency of the young is to move to bigger towns where there is a chance to go to school. Notable among these towns is Jolo, which has four secondary schools and one college, and Siasi, with two high schools and two colleges. An investment in the Sulu-British North Borneo trade, however, is still looked upon as the quickest route to upper class standing.

Foreigners enjoy a notable degree of acceptance in Sulu society. Americans especially have a tremendous amount of prestige; their social status would at least equal, perhaps even surpass, that of the local elite. The Americans developed ex-

cellent rapport with the peoples of Sulu after the Filipino-American war by putting up schools, granting stipends to a large number of local students, working very closely with traditional leaders in running the military and civil government, and through their own personal friendliness. This goodwill was solidified in World War II, when the Americans came back in the role of liberators. At present it is being further enhanced by a group of American Catholic missionaries, who have established a chain of high schools, manage two of the three colleges in the archipelago, maintain medical clinics, and distribute relief goods from time to time—while making no distinction in the religious affiliation of the recipients of these benefits.

The Chinese seem to enjoy better acceptance in Sulu than in many other parts of the Philippines. Besides recalling the close and friendly contacts between Sultans with the past rulers of China, the Muslims respect the Chinese foothold in Sulu's economy as merchants and capitalists. A great deal of intermarriage has taken place, and persons of obvious Chinese parentage occupy elective positions in local governments.

The Badjaw are considered racially and socially inferior. Compared with the Muslim group, they are ill-clothed, dirty, and inclined to shy away from groups other than their own. They frequently move around in their little house boats, which also serve as the family home. Although they anchor their house boats near Taosug and Samal settlements, their interaction with both groups is kept at a minimum—in the market or sari-sari store where the Badjaw sell or barter their small catch of fish, to obtain household utensils, some clothes, and foodstuffs in return. They have not embraced Islam. As a matter of fact, they are frequently the object of much abuse by the Muslim group.

Public school officials have given up expecting Badjaw children to come to schools which Taosug and Samal children attend. Hence schools exclusively for Badjaw have been built in some places in the south. Attendance at these schools is

still small largely because the Badjaw economy, dependent wholly on fishing with very crude techniques, permits only bare subsistence. The first and crucial problem of Badjaw parents is to keep their family alive.

VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS

Jolo, the metropolis of Sulu, is the place where one finds all the different groups of the archipelago well represented. The Taosug and the Samal combined constitute a great majority, the Christians a significant minority (about 15 per cent). In addition, there are some Chinese and Badjaw, and a few Americans.

There are three significant civic associations where membership is open to all, regardless of group affiliation; these are the Jolo Lions Club, the Jolo Jaycees, and the Bud Daho Masonic Lodge. Other associations of consequence, where membership crosses group lines, are professional ones; namely, the Sulu Medical Society and the Sulu Lawyers League. The rest are open to members of particular groups; for example, the Sulu Islamic Congress, the Sulu Muslim Association, and the Sulu Moslem Cultural Association (Muslim); the Knights of Columbus and the Catholic Women's League (Christian); and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce (Chinese).

Membership, especially officership, in any of these associations is generally sought after and prestigious because it indicates that one has attained success. Through the various social gatherings and community projects that they sponsor, the members rub elbows with the elite of the town and the province.

The members of associations whose membership is open to all groups are usually Muslims and Christians who have achieved notable success in their profession or business. Significantly, a spirit of camaraderie pervades these associations. Factionalism, if it exists, is very weak; none of these associations has ever been identified with any particular kin or religious groups, or political party.

There are other organizations with various aims and purposes that have been formed in several communities in the

province. Their effectiveness, active existence, and prestige usually depend on how many of the upper class they attract and continue to hold. Since the prevailing mood is for Muslim self-identity, most of these associations are clearly labeled as Muslim, and usually include among their aims a more vigorous participation by Muslims in community affairs and greater militancy in the Muslim faith.

COMMENT ON

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE MUSLIM PEOPLES OF SULU

Arce's paper serves to correct at least one mistaken impression of the Sulu Archipelago by pointing out that the term "Muslim" embraces in actuality three distinct groups—the Taosug, Samal, and Badjaw. However, I should like to make a few comments regarding the groups as they see themselves and one another.

It is important to remember that while the social organization of the Taosug and that of the Samal are markedly similar, each group is regarded both by its own members and by members of the other groups as a separate social grouping, or class, or perhaps even caste, within which are distinct rankings.

The Taosug, for instance, see themselves as having at least two sub-groups. The Taosug educated elite feel ashamed of the less educated and troublesome Taosug who generally live inland (the Taogimba). The latter, on the other hand, take pride in the fact that the Taosug are the greatest troublemakers in the area. In Siasi the cleavage is such that the threat of violence from the Taogimba seems to be causing the gradual relocation of the Taosug barrio of Jambangan from the interior to an overwater location. It is also responsible for the migration of some Jambangan folk across the channel into the predominantly Samal village of Sisangat.

In speaking of out-groups, the Taosug will make a distinction between the *Samal* and *Samal Laud*, and it is not uncommon to hear a Taosug informant speak of "first-class Samal" and "second-class Samal." For example, people from Jambangan will make the breakdown as follows: residents of parts of Siasi town, Jambangan and Musu will be considered first-class Samal; Sisangat is inhabited by second-class Samal. Manubul has a mixture of the two. The apparent basis for the distinction is religious. A first-class Samal follows the Islam of the nearby Taosug

more closely. The religion of the second-class Samal has more affinities with the "pagan" practices of the Badjaw.

As Arce notes, Sisangat appears to be a village in which "samalization" is taking place—where the seagoing, migrant Badjaw either builds or moves into a land house, and begins to identify with the Samal group. Once a mosque is constructed, villages of this kind become Samal in character, as opposed to the mosque-less Badjaw boat communities.

It is significant that intermarriage is taking place at an increasingly greater rate. This seems to be particularly true of Bongao, where marriages between Samal and Badjaw occur not infrequently and where one Taosug informant noted that the old order was breaking down so fast that it "wouldn't be long before there would be marriages between Taosug and Badjaw." Groups retain their identity, however, by the fact that when intergroup marriages do occur, the groom will inevitably come from a higher-ranked group: a Taosug may take a Samal bride, a Samal may take a Badjaw bride, but rarely, if ever, will the opposite situation occur. In such cases, the higher-ranked parent will always be mentioned for identification purposes. For the children of the Badjaw who has married into the Samal, it is a step up into another social class.

While not wishing to overstate the cleavages between the Taosug, Samal, and Badjaw, I have observed that the Samal and Badjaw by and large regard the Taosug with a mixture of fear and admiration; the Taosug's regard for the Samal is one of slight contempt, while he sees the Badjaw as a fit partner only for street-level barter. These attitudes must be remembered when making any generalizations about the Taosug or the Samal of the Sulu area.

RICHARD L. STONE

I should not like to quarrel with Mr. Arce's statements. Rather would I urge that his generalized treatment of the kinship system and family life of these people be sufficiently qualified. Arce emphasizes—wisely, I believe—that it is not good methodology to lump the Taosug and the Samal together, for in so doing one courts the danger of making these two groups appear more similar than they actually are. That differences between them exist is recognized by Arce, but I should like to add a few comments which might clarify the picture of Muslim social organization in Sulu.

While I have not made any study of social organization of the kind desired by Arce, nevertheless my research on the child-rearing practices

and attitudes of a predominantly Samal community—not to mention teaching and living in Jolo for about a year—has given me some insight into the existing conditions in Sulu.¹ What little I know makes me hesitate to either make or accept at this stage general statements covering both the Samal and the Taosug. I am inclined to think that it will be much safer to wait until the differences between the two groups are more fully explored. However, let me say at once that Arce is to be given much credit for advancing statements which may serve as the starting point for further research.

Arce mentions the predominance in Sulu (making a generalization for both the Samal and the Taosug) of the extended-family type of household where the dominant role—economic or otherwise—is usually fulfilled by those of the parental generation, and where the dependent units are those of the families of the offspring. The center of kinship structure in such a system is the parent-child relationship. Although not explicitly stated, it is implied that the system tends to perpetuate a one-sided dependence of children on their parents. While this may seem to apply in Sulu at large, as Arce has noted, it does not strike me as the primary organizing principle in Manubul, the community which I studied in 1962.

The structure of the more typical Manubul household is not significantly different from that described by Arce in that it is primarily based on kinship considerations. But I have observed some uniqueness in its emphasis on the sibling rather than the parent-child relationships. It is actually a joint household, the member families of which—often those of two or three sisters—are more nearly equal. The kinship ties between generations, although not rendered completely insignificant, are relegated to the background. The pattern of dependence is mutual or reciprocal rather than one sided.

The joint household, with its emphasis on the sibling relationship, fits very neatly into the maritime economy of Manubul. I do not have the necessary data to substantiate any definitive statement on the nature of the relation between kinship structure or household composition and the existing type of economy in Manubul, so I can only say that the maritime economy of the village, which is dependent on such factors as the organization of efficient boat groups (for fishing or pearl-diving purposes), serves to emphasize the sibling axis of kinship structure.

An aging parent in a society like Manubul cannot have a position comparable to that of his counterpart in a society where such stable

¹ My own research, although specifically focused on differences in child-rearing practices in Manubul, an island-barrio of Siasi, was generally oriented to such factors as the composition of the household, occupation of the head of the household, and so forth.

forms of wealth as land lie at the basis of the economy. In Manubul, there is practically no stable form of property to be handed down from parent to offspring. There is no significant inheritance to cement the kinship ties between generations and establish some kind of descent group or family line, thus helping to keep the authority of parents from diminishing with their advance in age.²

Economic factors are continually exerting pressure on other aspects of Manubul culture. Yet I do not look upon differences in the economic way of life (if I may be permitted this artificial isolation of one aspect of a group's total way of life) of the Samal and the Taosug as the sole or the most important determinants of broader differences in their social organization. There are many factors—the economic is just one of them—that will need to be studied and placed in proper perspective before one can make general statements on the social organization of the Muslims in Sulu. These factors may prove significant enough to offset the similarities that seem to exist between the Taosug and the Samal because of the desire of one to assimilate the culture of the other, or because both groups claim a common religion.³

NENA B. ESLAO

² Manubul is too small an island to permit farming or even small-scale vegetable gardening. Except for a few patches of agricultural land which some five or six families own in the neighboring island of Tapaan, there is no stable form of property Manubul folk can claim. A few motor boats (*kumpit*) are now being used and they, too, seem to constitute an important source of income for a select few. One might also look into their growing significance in relation to the general economy of the village or other aspects of its culture.

³ Some observers believe that the community of religion shared by the Taosug and the Samal, often referred to by outsiders and the people themselves, rarely transcends a common label for different interpretations and practices. However, there can be no doubt of the power of Islam as a unifying symbol.