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Magosaha, by Nimmo

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Much more could be said here, but it becomes increasingly obvious in the argumentation that there was a parallel between the arguments that Americans used to justify continued "benevolent" colonial status for the Philippines with those used by Filipinos to justify the "benevolent" kind of bondage or servitude that in fact had been shown to exist.

In one of Worcester's telling attacks, he charged: "The belief seems common among Filipinos that the act of baptizing wild people, whether with or without their consent, affords adequate excuse for subsequently retaining them in servitude, the favor conferred by the act of baptism being so great that the fortunate ex-heathen ought to be willing to work the rest of their lives in return for it!" No bishop or priest spoke a word.

Salman pointedly remarks on Worcester's charge that "its terms could be applied almost exactly to the justificatory ideologies of Spanish and American colonial rule. In fact Philippine nationalists had spent much effort demystifying Spain's gift of Christianity and would do the same for the benevolent paternalism of American colonialism in the twentieth century."

The book lends itself to a multitude of reflections, not only those of the author. One may think of the *kasama* system in Central Luzon before the war, the *sacada* abuse in Negros then and since, and the not-too-rare cases of real industrial slavery which appear from time to time in the newspapers, not to speak of the occasional kidnapping and enslaving of young Visayans in Lanao.

The bibliography is extensive, both in published books and unpublished papers of key American and Filipino figures. It could have profited by the book of Smythe mentioned above, and for Magindanao slavery, learned a great deal from the first volume of *Jesuit Missionary Letters from Mindanao*, published by Fr. Jose Arcilla in 1990 (and now appearing in a larger series from the U.P. Press).

Salman's treatment of the twentieth century, which is the subject of his book, is excellent. His comparisons with sixteenth-century *alipin*, and the Spanish treatment of slavery suffer from a number of inaccuracies, but do not significantly detract from his treatment of his main topic. The book deserves to be widely read.

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Magosaha: An Ethnography of the Tawi-Tawi Sama Dilaut. By H. Arlo Nimmo. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2001. 261 pages.

H. Arlo Nimmo is well known among Philippine readers, scholars and anthropologists for his moving account of life among the Sama Dilaut of Tawi-Tawi in the mid 1960s. As a young American anthropologist he lived with the boat people of the southern Philippines, commonly referred to as the Badjaos,

for a total of more than two years. In his personal memoir of this period, titled *The Songs of Salanda* published in 1994, he told the story of the Sama Dilaut's precarious life on the periphery of Philippine culture and their confrontations with the ever encroaching modern world. He skillfully sketched the lives of the individual Badjaos he lived with and related the often-poignant stories of Filipino missionaries and traders who interacted with them. In *The Songs of Salanda* he also explored his own personal development as a young anthropologist just starting out in life. Nimmo won the Philippine National Book Award for social sciences in 1994 for *The Songs of Salanda* and garnered much literary acclaim both here and in the United States. He is currently Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at California State University in Hayward California and lives in San Francisco.

Magosaha: An Ethnography of the Tawi-Tawi Sama Dilaut, is in effect, the scholarly sequel to *The Songs of Salanda*. The book is a compilation of Nimmo's Anthropological notes taken from 1963–1967, as a whole these create a comprehensive ethnographic description of the Sama Dilaut people living on the waters along the shores of Tawi-Tawi in the Sulu Archipelago. To set the context for his study Nimmo provides a brief history and summary of the major political, military, and religious conflicts and changes, which have taken place in the Sulu region over the past thirty-five years, and how they have heavily impacted the Sama Dilaut. He made return visits to the primary sites of his study in 1977, 1982 and 1997 and reports his observations in the conclusion. In the brief span of little more than one generation the Sama Dilaut's nomadic, boat dwelling lifestyle has been all but destroyed by rapid changes in technology and the influx of large numbers of Tausug and land dwelling Sama settlers from the surrounding region.

The name Sama Dilaut, which these people use to refer to themselves, simply means Sama people of the sea. They are closely related to the land dwelling Sama people who are a distinct group within the ethnically mixed Muslim communities living on the southwest coast of Mindanao and on the numerous islands of the Sulu Sea from Basilan near Zamboanga to Sitangkai just off the east coast of Sabah. Jolo is at the center of this group and is dominated by the Tausugs. Up to the 1970s the Sama Dilaut of Tawi-Tawi lived primarily in small clusters of a few dozen one family houseboats moored on protected reefs in the general area of Bongao island. They moved from place to place in this area according to the seasonal weather patterns, the opportunities for good fishing and to avoid aggressive or threatening neighbors. They occasionally made longer trips to visit relatives living near the island of Sitangkai and to Semporna on the east coast of Borneo, or to join fishing expeditions north toward Palawan. The term used for the title of this study, *Magosaha*, refers to this restless habit of moving about.

After defining the geographical area of his research and placing it in an historical context Nimmo sets about to systematically describe and catalog the culture of the Sama Dilaut. He begins with their boats which were the key to

their entire culture. Boats determined their lifestyle as semi-nomadic fisherfolk and in the past provided the best examples of their woodcarving and building skills. Their lives revolved around their boats and boats made it possible for them to move from place to place. The gracefully designed *lepa* with beautifully reticulated carvings on the prow and stern and painted side panels was one of their most characteristic houseboats.

They also produced many other types of craft including dugouts and miniature boats for religious rituals. This chapter leads naturally to the next, which describes their fishing traditions. Almost everyone in the community fished, either alone or with another family member or in large groups. They used hooks, spears, nets, plant poisons and even dynamite to catch every variety of fish from the smallest fingerlings to large sharks and manta rays, all these provided the people with their main source of nutrition and with economic opportunities. Fish were traded or sold for other commodities and for the small amounts of cash the people accumulated. Fishing expeditions using large drift-nets and fish drives at night with torches and kerosene pressure lanterns were the Sama Dilaut's most important group activities other than religious or ceremonial social gatherings. Besides fish and crustaceans, cassavas and a few vegetables grown by the women in small plots on shore, were their dietary staples. Rice and sugar had to be purchased for special occasions and were therefore considered luxuries.

The author lived with a family on board a houseboat for an extended period of time. He reports that contrary to the romantic notion of an easy life adrift on the tropic seas, Sama Dilaut house boats were cramped and unsanitary with little privacy and were often wet from leaking roofs and splashing waves. The people rolled out mats at night and slept bundled together to keep warm and for affection. Usually only one nuclear family lived on a boat. Widowed parents sometimes moved from boat to boat of their married children if they did not remarry or find another single relative to live with. Wives usually moved to their husband's moorage as this was where he was most productive as a fisherman. Families moved back and forth for extended visits to relatives of both the husband or wife if they each came from a different moorage. Divorce was permitted when couples could not be reconciled and children were given the option to "elope" by spending one night together on the community headman's boat if they could not afford a formal wedding or the parents could not agree on the terms of a marriage.

Nimmo provides extensive tables to document the living patterns of Sama Dilaut families and writes at length about their complicated kinship alliances, family support networks, and the system for determining who will be the community headmen. The aged were respected for their knowledge of rituals and curing and older women could acquire additional prestige as midwives. Girls or boys were equally desired by expectant parents as both genders were important for work on the boat. Romantic love was not a pre-

requisite for marriage but Nimmo observed that many young couples were in love when they married and that "extremely intimate and close ties characterized the nuclear family. (p. 113)" Living on small boats seemed to foster strong family ties.

After tackling the "social realm" the author proceeds to the "spiritual realm," which covers the complicated system of beliefs, which characterized the Sama Dilaut's religious life. They believed in a supreme being named Tuhan but this entity did not play a very significant roll in their daily lives. The two elements they were most concerned with were a host of local spirits or *saitan* who could be easily angered and the ghosts of departed ancestors who had to be respected. In the case of illness or bad luck a male or female shaman named a *djin* was called in to perform cures and rid an individual or the community of malevolent spirits. Many problems were attributed to these forces and a system for placating them had to be worked out by the shamans. Usually offerings of bits of food, betel nut or tobacco were made or pledges to change ones behavior were needed to quiet the tempers of departed ancestors.

Many Muslim influences and terminology were evident in the Sama Dilaut belief systems however it appeared to the author that most of their spiritual beliefs pre-dated the coming of Islam. Weddings, funerals and the partial circumcision of boys when they came of age were important life-cycle events and required elaborate rituals and feasting for families that could afford the expense. The entire community participated in the Pamatulakam ceremony, which was preformed to rid the moorage of bad luck and illness. Evil spirits were tempted with symbolic offerings to board a small boat specially built for the occasion, once safely aboard the spirits were put out to sea.

Although the author admits he was not able to complete his research on the aesthetic accomplishments of the Sama Dilaut due to factors beyond his control, he does provide quite a lot of valuable information. The Sama Dilaut people did not have much knowledge of reading and writing at the time of his visit but they did have a highly developed system of oral communication. Singing was a central part of their esthetic life. There were different songs and different melodies for almost every activity in their lives. There were lullabies for babies, love songs for lovers, *kata-kata* chanting for healing the sick, dirges for the dead and songs for all the different types of fishing. There were even songs for unhappy individuals who were not allowed to air their grievances in angry spoken words but were permitted to sing them publicly. Much of this fascinating singing tradition has now been lost due to an invasion of tape decks, radios and televisions. Boat building and woodcarving were also highly developed skills, which have disappeared, in the last few decades. One craft, which has remained and flourished is mat making which is a popular product with the tourists.

In his epilogue Nimmo sums up in detail the many foreign influences which have conspired to overwhelm the culture of the Sama Dilaut. Military

conflicts have disrupted their lives, large numbers of immigrants have arrived from other islands with different traditions, and conversion to conservative Muslim sects has all but eliminated their spiritual traditions.

Nimmo concludes matter-of-factly that, "Within a generation or two, most will lose their boat-dwelling past and become part of Muslim Sama cultures. When the Tawi-Tawi Sama Dilaut abandoned their boats, they relinquished their traditional method of preserving their culture. (p. 232)." Nimmo's conclusion is sad but probably correct, not only for the Sama Dilaut but also for so many of the unique cultural communities, which are rapidly disappearing throughout the Philippines and Southeast Asia. The best that can be hoped for is that indigenous and foreign scholars will carefully document their unique cultural accomplishments for future generations.

There are numerous black and white photographic illustrations, which appeared to be excellent. However they were printed in a format, which is too small and grainy making them difficult to read. Although there are a couple of specific glossaries in the text a general one would have been helpful for the many non-English words and for some of the more esoteric anthropological terms. Over all, H. Arlo Nimmo has produced another invaluable book for all readers interested in Philippine culture and the ethnic traditions of the southern Philippines. He writes extremely well with an engaging style that helps the reader move comfortably through a great deal of complex scholarly information. He has a sensitive eye for detail yet never loses sight of the wider context of his subject matter. He is clearly a man who can write both from the heart and with the highly trained mind of a social scientist.

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