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## COTABATO MANOBO ETHNOGRAPHY

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## 0. Introduction

This study, written in 1957, is a record of observations made by the author and his wife during twelve months of residence among the Cotabato Manobos between July 1955 and October 1956. The investigations were carried out in a monolingual situation. None of the Manobos in the immediate neighborhood spoke English, and those few from more distant areas who spoke English understood it so imperfectly that little or no useful information could be elicited through that medium.

We are indebted to Fred Case who helped us in our understanding of some of the Manobos' customs out of his long association with them. His comments, however, involved us in the same apparent contradictions as we had met in our own investigations and notes made by Grace Wood during her two-week excursion from Tiruray territory where she carried out major studies under a Fulbright grant. Any contradiction of statements is not to be attributed to lack of caution in recording or interpreting the data, but to the unusual conflict between statements of Manobos about their own customs and the facts as actually observed by the outsider.

The Manobo group with which this study is concerned is generally conceded to have one of the least developed cultures of the various cultural communities in the large province of Cotabato. Apart from the nomadic Negrito groups scattered through several islands of the Philippines, they may be the poorest culture in terms of their technology and possessions.

The Cotabato Manobos [at the date of writing] live in almost completely unopened territory centering about the midcoastal municipality of Lebak. There are reports of Manobo settlements as far south as Kiamba, but this center can hardly be regarded as Manobo territory. First contact with Manobos during a survey in June 1955 was made a little up the coast from Melisobong some distance north of Kiamba. The first major settlement seemed to be at Butalil some two hours' journey inland from this point. The group extends northwest up the coastline at least as far north as Lebak. But there is such a concentration of Manobos around this area that it is certain the group must extend some considerable distance further north. The limitation of their borders inland from the coast is not certain. The territory is largely unmapped, but it is said that they extend as far inland as Kidapawan on the main highway dividing the province several days' journey inland. The southern boundaries abut against the territory of the Tboli. In the north contact is made with the Tiruray and a group known as the Tubalay. Inland they make contact with another Manobo group. There are several major Manobo groups in the eastern half of the island of Mindanao. Among different groups already recognized are the Central Bukidnon Manobo, Tigwa Manobo, Agusan Manobo, Ilianen Manobo, Bagobo, and Cotabato Manobo.

Linguistic differences between the groups are probably as great as differences between any other groups of the Philippines. For all practical purposes they may be regarded as distinct groups. It is not known why the term Manobo is applied to such diverse groups, unless perhaps there are certain features of their social organization which justify a common name.

The majority of the Cotabato Manobo live inland from the coast, particular concentrations being reported in the large Kulaman Valley some one to two days' journey inland from Megenaw, and at Bulawan some distance south of Kulaman Valley. Our own observations were made within a relatively restricted area several kilometers from the barrios of Megenaw and Kidayan. After Tagalog and Ilocano and many Muslim settlers occupied most of the arable land along the coast and in the more accessible valleys close to the coast, the Manobo settlements were mostly restricted to the less valuable hill lands at the coast. They laid claim to most of the land further inland from the coast. Fear of the Manobos has kept the settlers from moving inland until quite recently. But unless moves are soon made by the government, settlers will soon have taken over most of the valuable land still worked by Manobos.

Muslims, mostly from the Maguindanao-speaking group, comprise by far the biggest proportion of the settlers along the coast. Most of the small local markets are run by these people, and most of the contacts of the Manobos with the outside are made through them. Many Manobo men speak Maguindanao with varying degrees of fluency. Few of them speak Tagalog or a Visayan dialect.

It is possible that the culture of the Manobos at the coast may have been influenced by contact with these outside groups. But there is good reason to believe that the settlement in which our observations were made is typically Manobo since there is little association between these Manobos and Muslims. Marriage between the groups is rare, the only known cases being between an outside man and a Manobo woman.

Manobos feel that the Muslims have often dealt harshly with them, and so they harbor strong resentment towards this group with whom they have the greatest contact. There is, in fact, rising resentment as more of their land is taken from them. Though the resentment may not be readily apparent, it is deep-seated. The barrier between the groups is further accentuated by the Muslim prohibition on pig meat. Very few Manobos have adopted the Islamic faith. We met only one Muslim Manobo during our stay.

There is little evidence of mixing of the dialects. The Manobos of our immediate neighborhood from which most of the language material was collected took special pride in teaching us "pure Manobo." They took exception to those who attempted to use any Maguindanao. A checklist of Manobo and Maguindanao words showed remarkably little overlap. Those few identical cognate roots common to both dialects spring from their derivation from a common linguistic stock. Checklists of words from the local group compared with lists collected from inland groups showed no significant difference between the coastal and inland Manobos. There is also so much movement between the coastal and inland groups that any culture contact features would soon diffuse to the more remote groups. Notes made by Grace Wood at Kulaman agree substantially with observations made at the coast.

#### 1. The territorial group

The Cotabato Manobo are mostly swidden farmers, scattered about in small groups in the hills and valleys. Manobos do not appear to live in barrios or villages. Aggregations of more than two or three houses close together are very uncommon. They are a people of very simple, loosely integrated culture. The two main factors that account for the loose and apparently little regulated social organization of the Manobos are the poor development of the datu system and the extreme poverty of the people.

The principal major unit seems to be the territorial group, roughly defined as a group of households which for reasons of temporary convenience have settled on a common area of land under the jurisdiction of a datu 'chief'. The boundaries of such territory are not clearly defined, but a territory seems to be a thoroughly valid unit.

Only a portion of this land is under cultivation at any one time. The principal crops are: sweet potato (camote), the perennial staple; rice, a brief seasonal crop; and corn, sown at intervals during the year in land just planted to sweet potato. As each section is harvested within the territory, fresh crops are planted in newly cleared virgin forest or land which has been allowed to revert to undergrowth for a few seasons. Periodically new clearings are made in virgin forest though this practice is being increasingly discouraged by the government under threat of fines. The practice of indiscriminate felling of timber on steep slopes is undoubtedly a harmful practice, but it is so much part of the culture that no easy solution is forthcoming. New clearings are usually made on the periphery of the old clearings, so that despite constant movement into new territory the group seldom moves very far from its old grounds.

The growing family of Datu Mama Undas (his father's group originally), who comprise a typical territorial group, seem to have restricted their movements to one slope and the foothills of a fairly sizeable mountain spur, though periods have been spent further away down at the coast. To all intents and purposes a large area of land is regarded as the territory of Datu Undas. No other family group seems to have raised crops on it. The limits of the land cultivated by previous generations are clearly enough defined by the secondary forest growth. Yearly rice crops mark off the progress of the years within the territory, most events being fixed by association with a particular rice crop.

Rebuilding of houses is frequent due to rapid deterioration from insects and weather and the fact that a house in which a person has died must be burned down. Also houses are frequently moved within the territory because people move them close to wherever their staple crop, sweet potato, is growing. (Sweet potato is seldom grown for more than two successive crops on the same piece of land, so change of residence is frequent.) Houses are flimsily built--with pole supports, bamboo walling often only on one or two sides, light bamboo flooring sometimes lashed, seldom nailed, in place, and thatch or palm leaf roof.

The nucleus of the territorial group is the datu's household. This seems to be the only household permanently tied to the territory. Within the territory claimed by Datu Mama Undas several other families had built their houses. The head of each family laid claim to relationship with Mama. (The relationship was so remote in at least one instance as to be no more than an excuse for settling on Mama's territory.) There were three such families on Mama's land: Mayodé's household (the household being designated by the name of the senior male member); Kardon's household; and Isot's household. A young married man, Kampuwan, son-in-law to an independent man named Kaut, had also built temporarily on Mama's land, but he moved within a few months to a coastal settlement some distance south.

However remote the relationship, each household in entering Mama's territory came within his jurisdiction. Mama presumably gained prestige by adding to the households on his land, but he appeared to be answerable for any crimes committed by them so long as they lived on his land and acknowledged his leadership. It is uncertain whether any formality is involved in the movement of a new family into a datu's territory. As far as can be determined, there is not. A settler presumably knows in advance whether the datu will reject or accept him.

The households within a territory are only loosely associated together. Each cultivates its own plot of ground, though women from several households may harvest sweet potatoes together if the supply of one household is scarce or an unusual demand is made by visitors on the resources of one household. The women may fish together and share the catch. If a pig or deer is killed, the meat is shared. Members of neighboring groups and nearby relatives may receive a portion as well. Apart from this there is little common social activity. It is not surprising that such associations are easily made and soon broken. At best it can be termed an association of convenience.

## 2. Household groups

A household group is the most stable and close-knit unit among the Manobos. But it is a rather pointed commentary on the relative social instability to discover that a household is by no means a fixed unit.

Since our house had been built on the land of Datu Mama Undas, most of the information about household units is drawn from observations of his household. Before the time of our arrival he had had five wives. Two had died, and one had run away. The two surviving wives still lived with him. They kept separate house on our arrival. The older wife, Pengké, lived with her son Sida in a small house close by Mama's main house. The youngest wife, Kaben, lived with Mama. Mama's eldest son, Igid (by Pengké), lived with his wife, Taiwan, not far away. The rest of the household lived together in the main house with Mama.

After a death in the main house, Mama moved to a new house. The family followed, Igid building another small separate house a few yards away. The older wife, Pengké, moved in with the main household.

Towards the end of our stay Igid built another house on the property of a Muslim datu for whom he was temporarily working. His mother, Pengké, joined him there. His brother Sida divided his time between Igid's house and Mama's. A daughter by Pengké had married a man named Labu from the family group to whom Mama's youngest wife, Kaben, belonged. Labu also lived in the main house with Mama. He associated himself for a period with an elder brother who attempted to set himself up as a datu in his home district. Mama evidently resented this loss to his group and kept Labu's child in his custody. Before long Labu had fallen out with his brother and returned to Mama's household. He was accepted back willingly enough. It seems to be a matter of prestige to keep the members of a household together.

Mama deeply resented the attempts of Labu's eldest brother, Mison, to draw members of his household away. Mison had taken Mama's young son-in-law Kabal on trips on several occasions, though Kabal resented this as well. (Kabal was married to Mama's daughter Ponil; he was also the brother of Kaben, Mama's youngest wife, and so stood in the relation of son-in-law and brother-in-law to Mama.) Kabal seemed to be more or less a free agent, though under some measure of obligation both to his uncle Mison and to Mama. But he spent most of his time with Mama's household. His younger brother, Dalan, also spent a considerable part of his time in Mama's household dividing his stay between it and his mother's place at Lengali some distance away.

Little Melikut, who was the daughter of the deceased elder sister of Kaben, Mama's second wife, also spent considerable time with Mama. She spent some time with her grandmother, Kaben's mother, at Lengali as well.

Other members of the household were Milug and Ugow. Milug was an unmarried sixteen-year-old son of Mama by a deceased wife; he was brother to Ponil. Ugow, the youngest brother of the mother of Milug and Ponil, lived with Mama for most of our year's stay except for a two-month absence at a distant district. He was further related to the group by the marriage

of his elder brother, now deceased, to Mama's niece. Along with Mama's own children he was the most regular member of the group.

All these foregoing consanguineal and affinal relatives of Mama were his household group and as such constituted the nucleus of the territorial group. It was a heterogeneous group made up of sons and daughters, married and unmarried, with two sons-in-law, a daughter-in-law, an unmarried brother-in-law, and two wives. The relationships within the group were rather complicated, Kabal being simultaneously a son-in-law and brother-in-law to Mama, and Ogow a brother-in-law to Mama and brother to a niece of Mama. Labu was son-in-law to Mama and uncle to Mama's wife Kaben.

Relatives arrived for longer or shorter visits during the period of our stay in the locale, but none stayed long enough to be regarded as household members. Members of Labu and Kabal's group frequently enjoyed the hospitality of Mama's house. When Kaben's mother, from the same group, arrived for the birth of Kaben's second child, she stayed for some considerable period afterwards but made frequent trips back to her home territory, taking her daughter-in-law, Ponil, with her on several occasions to help her with her work.

Mayodé's household had as its constant nucleus his two daughters, Deké and Safina, and his son-in-law, Galmak, married to Deké. His sons Delag (unmarried) and Gantangan (married) and another married lad stopped with him occasionally but spent most of their time away from home.

Isot's family comprised only his young wife, Gensal, and her little son Simag by a man to whom she was married at the time Isot eloped with her.

Kardon's family included his old mother, his unmarried sister Limbey, and a married sister, Alen, who, after defecting from her first husband and taking a second, finally returned with the second husband to live in Kardon's household. A young lad, half brother to Kardon through his father, spent a considerable part of his time with this group.

Datu Undas's full brother and sister, each with a separate household, lived within a mile of his house on the slopes of the family hill. These two households had independent lands and lived more or less independently of Mama. The brother, Malayu, aspired to a datuship of his own. Neither of these two family groups could be regarded as part of Mama's household, though they were very closely associated with him and obviously bound to him by strong kinship ties.

The nuclear family (father, mother, and children) is a fairly tight-knit unit. But even this unit is not a strong constant. Even before children's marriages begin to split it, it may be broken by death or desertion. The mortality rate is so high that few reach more than late middle age, and often it is death that splits the family.

Unless a full or otherwise adequate bride price has been handed over for a wife, at her death the children may go to their mother's family. Even if the husband has the option of retaining them, he may prefer to hand the responsibility over to his wife's relatives. Mama's little daughter, Melikut, spent a considerable part of her time with her maternal

grandmother after her mother's death. Mama, however, still laid claim to her.

No rigid law determines the distribution of children on the death of parents. Our houseboys, Mundi and Umpit, two full brothers, lost their parents at an early age and went to live with a young brother of the father. This man maltreated them, and they left to live with a more remote relation, Kaut, who has since cared for them. Though they call him momò 'uncle', he is legally their father, responsible for any of their misdeeds and bound to find wives for them. They in turn are bound to assist him in clearing land and growing crops.

Not all parents are willing to bear responsibility for the maintenance of their family. Kaut's sister bore a daughter to her husband, but the husband refused to settle down and make a proper living for the family. After constant shifting from one locality to another, the wife, with general approval, deserted the man. She and her daughter lived thereafter with Kaut's household. The daughter, Abi, now a young girl of marriageable age, is regarded as the legal daughter of Kaut. Because he has fed her and looked after her, he can lay full claim to any bride price at marriage. The father has forfeited any such claim. This bears out Titiev's contention in "The Importance of Space in Primitive Kinship" (1956) that in many societies "the individuals among whom it (the child) is reared and with whom it shares (at least at the outset) a common residence, comprise what may appropriately be called its natal kin. These are in every sense its nearest relatives, and with them it customarily develops its closest premarital ties of warmth and affection."

### 3. Kinship terms

Among the Cotabato Manobo a primary division is made between relatives and nonrelatives. Relatives are referred to by the general term duma 'friend' or 'of the same kind of nature'; nonrelatives are etaw 'unrelated persons'. The fuller term liyu etaw is sometimes used implying a person of another species or kind. (The root liya is used of species and as a verb means to walk behind or on the outside of something or someone.) How many stages removed a person must be to be an etaw beyond the limits of the duma group is not certain. In the case of people very distantly related, recognition of a relationship is a matter of convenience. A relationship can usually be established should a family wish to live in the territory of a particular datu, or should a person require temporary hospitality. In most cases, however, the people make a clear distinction between their duma and etaw.

Among one's natal kin the terms emà and inay are used exclusively for one's true father and mother respectively. Those belonging to ego's own generation (cousins and siblings) go by the general term telehadi irrespective of sex. Within this group girls refer to the males as maama 'brother', and males refer to females as tebay 'sister'. Within the sexes a younger brother will refer to an older brother as his kakay, a term implying a measure of respect. The older will refer to the younger as hadi. The same terms are used by sisters, both true and classificatory, among



themselves. The terms may also be used between the sexes. (Mama's older sister, Begendò, often refers to Mama as her hadi.)

Natal kin of the father and mother's generation are called momò 'uncle' and inà 'aunt'. These same terms are used as terms of respect when a younger person addresses an older person with whom he is moderately well acquainted but with whom he claims no relationship.

The generation below ego (including one's true children and children of one's tebay or maama) go by the general term anak 'child, offspring'. To distinguish between true children and nephews and nieces, the term anak dibaluy is used of the nephews and nieces. Literally this means 'children on the other side'. (dibaluy is generally used as a location indicator: dutu dibaluy 'on the other side of the hill', etc.) The term momò is also used for this group, irrespective of sex.

Those two generations above or below ego are referred to as bébé. It is not certain whether, in referring to those two generations above, bébé is restricted to the true grandparents or includes also the classificatory brothers and sisters of the true grandparents. It is fairly certain that bébé used of those two generations below includes both true and classificatory grandchildren.

In reference to those who are three generations removed, bébé lulud 'knee' is used. Among the Cotabato Manobo this is the only use of body parts to describe particular generations (said to be a feature of Philippine kinship systems) although it is possible more distant generations may be recognized in similar fashion, if they are recognized at all.

The division between kakay and hadi seems to be of considerable importance. Most men are immediately able to identify other natal relatives as kakay 'older true or classificatory sibling' or hadi 'younger true or classificatory sibling'; they rarely refer to them by the less specific term telehadi. The children of a hadi always refer to cousins who are the children of their father's kakay as their own kakay, even though they may be younger.

The following terms are used among relatives by marriage. sawa is 'spouse' (of either sex). Parents-in-law go by the term nugangan. Brothers-in-law call each other epél or less commonly ebéy. ibò is used between in-laws of different sex of the same generation. A husband will refer to all his wife's sisters as ibò. Brothers of the husband will refer to his wife also as ibò, but they do not use this term for the sisters of the wife. A sister of the wife will also refer to the husband as ibò, and the wife will refer to her husband's brother as ibò. A son- or daughter-in-law is called awa. Unrelated men married to women who are sisters call each other ido.

#### 4. Personal, formal, and friendship names

The existence of a classificatory term usually implies a restriction in the use of personal names between the persons so related. It seems, however, that all may use the personal name of a natal relative or a relative by marriage of a lower generation. Telehadi of the same generation and spouses are also quite free to use each other's personal name.

The use of one's grandparent's personal name seems to be especially proscribed. In the early part of our stay younger boys would not give such a name but relayed it to us through a friend. They were always careful to whisper in passing on such information. As they became accustomed to us they were less reluctant to volunteer such names directly. Older folk were less reluctant to give such information. Just how strict this tradition is is not certain. The initial reluctance, and later willingness, to volunteer such information complicates the issue. However, a person of one generation would rarely use the personal names of relatives of a higher generation in direct address.

Manobos were also reluctant to give their own names. A name was usually relayed to a questioner through a friend. This reluctance seemed to wear off as people became accustomed to us.

A young unmarried man is censured if he uses the personal name of an unrelated unmarried girl in calling to her from a distance, though he may use it in normal conversation with her in a group. It is said that untoward use of her name by the young man might jeopardize her chances of marriage.

The head of a family is usually addressed or referred to as sawa i 'husband of ...' or emà i 'father of ...' (usually of the first child). The first child is referred to as the lebi lawa. Mama was generally called sawa i Kaben 'husband of Kaben' (Kaben was his youngest wife) or emà i Idat 'father of Idat' (his first child, now deceased).

A person may have several personal names apart from his family name, though only one may be used in everyday conversation. Many of these names seem to be chosen randomly, often from some feature associated with the birth of the person. One of Mama's daughters was named Melikut ('difficult'). Hers was a very difficult delivery, and the mother died soon after. Another son, Isenin ('Monday'), was born on Monday but had acquired two other names before he was more than two months old. His full sister was called with equal frequency Tilihan or Legiwey. Another child in Mayodé's household was named after the doctor who gave it a yaws injection. Many of the people are named after birds or animals, e.g., Kabal ('flying possum'), Ekok (an owl species). It is possible that one name is kept a particular secret, at least from strangers, but there is no positive evidence for this.

An abbreviated form of the personal name is often used when close friends address each other; it is an expression of the friendly relations existing between the various age groups and between members of the same community. Examples of abbreviation are Olok (from Polok), Undi (from Mundi), and Ampu (from Kampuwan). Such abbreviation is described by the root lamas in the following expression: Amuk mehidu sa Mama etaw,

eglamasen. 'If Mama is very much liked by a person, he [his name] is abbreviated.' (Use of the full name is described by the root selepanjang 'to go the full distance'.)

Nicknames are quite common among people of the same locality. Ugow was commonly called Gebug, a name considered quite ridiculous by his fellows. Igid's name by slight alteration became Iged, the name of a lizard species. Kaut, the uncle of our two houseboys, took his name from his blotched hands.

More general terms are often used between friends. Male friends regardless of age call each other akay or madi. Friends among women refer to each other as owé. These terms are also used between the sexes.

adug 'boy' and okon 'girl' are terms of address by an elder to a younger person, usually unmarried. ting and ti are terms of address (male, female) by a parent to a child or another person, using a more intimate form. The difference is in the degree of intimacy or personal relationship. Very young children are called batâ 'child'.

A special kind of friendship name used among the Manobos is known as luas. The following expressions refer to this:

Amuk bayi igluas, kuwaen da ngadan maama. 'If girls take friendship names, they take the name of a male.'

Linuasan ké, si Sida, bayi Kipunget, si Sini. 'We, Sida and I, have taken for our luas the name of a girl, Sini, from Kipunget.'

The luas system seems to ease the restrictions on the use of personal names between persons whose relationship normally forbids the use of such names. But since it is also used very commonly between unrelated friends, it cannot be said to have developed primarily to this end.

A common name is used exclusively and reciprocally between two friends of the same or opposite sex. Boys may choose the name of a girl, or girls the name of a boy. But any name may be chosen. Personal names are always used alone, even though a person may have several personal names. Luas friendship names are usually double forms which are not a combination of two personal names. Examples:

malang lawa (used between husband and wife, Isot and Gensal)  
legâ kukum (used between two unrelated friends, Kabal and Umpit)  
nadeg kenogon (used between two unrelated boys, Milug and Mundi)  
si tulis beliyân (used between an unrelated girl and boy, Kabal and Deké)  
bongô lukes (used between a boy and his sister-in-law, Umpit and Deké)  
sini (used between two unrelated boy friends, Mundi and Sida)

The following relations may use luas names between them: ego and his sister-in-law or brother-in-law; ego and his wife, brothers, and sisters; ego and his uncles and aunts. (It is proper for the uncle or aunt to take the initiative.)

Ego may not use a friendship name with grandparents or parents or parents-in-law. It would seem to be a system which operates for the most part within generations rather than between generations. The fact that ego may not use such names with his grandparents, parents, or parents-in-law stresses the peculiar relationship which exists between ego and these relatives. The strictest prohibition on the use of names other than kinship terms seems to exist between ego and his direct ascendants.

##### 5. Marriage restrictions and rules of residence

The only fully approved marriages in Manobo society are those arranged between etaw 'unrelated people'. Most marriages are arranged by the parents, the young people having no final say. But there is no doubt that many young people develop a secret affection for each other which may sometimes receive parental approval. It is said that the girl's family takes the initiative in seeking a husband. This was stated by some Manobos and by Fred Case as well. Grace Wood noted such reports but doubted them. The evidence is conflicting. It seems more usual for the boy's family to take the initiative. In most discussions on this point the Manobos have said that the boy's family looks for a girl. But the girl seems to be taken to the boy's family once there are signs that his family have prepared the bride price items. This act may perhaps be aimed at speeding up the payment of these items, at least the advance payments. On the other hand, it is not unlikely that the girl's family does sometimes take the initiative. This might be a holdover from the past with greater traditional sanction.

Like all societies, incest is completely prohibited. Legend holds that all nature would rise up in catastrophic protest at such an event. Certainly there is no likelihood of marriage between true brothers and sisters. It is not considered right for parallel cousins (rated as classificatory brothers and sisters) to marry. But rules are relaxed in many cases, and marriages of cousins apparently do not come under the category of incest. The practice is not encouraged, however. Parents should never undertake to arrange such marriages, which at best are only tolerated if the young people take the initiative. The exact status of this sort of marriage in Manobo society is not known. Some have said that such marriages must be made right by the datu of the couple, who in some simple ceremony, after payment of a fee or fine, expiates their guilt. Others say that the issue from such marriages are bound to be ill fated.

A measure of the social disapproval of marriage by cousins is the treatment of the first baby born to cousins. Our houseboy confided that the first child of such marriages was exposed to die after birth, but subsequent children were reared. The first child presumably was atonement for the act of cousin marriage. Many Manobos would not admit to this practice when questioned. They are well aware that abandoning babies to die is now punishable by the government, so they rarely refer to this or such aspects of the culture as observing a baby's umbilical cord during the period of necrosis to determine whether the baby has a good pused 'umbilical cord' or a bad one. (What constitutes a good or bad cord is not certain.) The people insist that a child born with a bad pused will not live long. Should it become sick, it is fatalistically assumed that it will die. In the past it would have been left exposed in a pit. Should a

bypasser take pity on it he could adopt the abandoned baby into his own house. Failing this, it was left to die.

The rules of residence at marriage contribute to the wide scattering of group members. Unless a boy's family can pay the full bride price, or a substantial part of it, he is obliged to live with the girl's family. Obung was a lad bound by this rule to live with Kaut. Umpit, Kaut's ward, was another so bound; on marrying Mayodé's daughter Safina, he was required to live in Mayodé's household.

Representatives of most families are therefore distributed widely through Manobo territory. Any Manobo traveler may be sure of hospitality from some relative en route. There are always many peripheral members of a territorial group constantly coming and going. The geographic spreading of relatives, with movements back and forth, undoubtedly contributes to the homogeneity of the group and the preservation of those features of language and custom which mark it off from neighboring groups.

It is presumably the ambition of most young men and their families to pay off the bride price, so the young man can be free to return to his own family. Judging from the case of Igid (Datu Undas's eldest son), efforts are made for the eldest boy of a family to remain with his father to ensure continuity of the household group, especially such a group as Datu Undas's, where the head lays claim to being datu. But not all men wish to return to their original group. Galmak, Mayodé's son-in-law, is happy to live on with Mayodé, though apparently he is free to leave.

It is said that a son-in-law is not bound to live with his father-in-law if the man is constantly moving from place to place. To lay claim to a son-in-law's service a man must apparently occupy and work his own land.

## 6. Social events

Among the Maguindanaon and other Philippine groups marriage sets off a round of activities, but among the Manobos a wedding seems to go almost unnoticed. Very few relatives gather for a wedding, and as far as is known there is no feast. (This is reflected in Manobo legends, many of which finish with the marriage of the main characters.) Bride price items are exchanged, betel nut is exchanged, and the ceremony is over. The essence of the marriage ceremony seems to be the exchange of betel nut between the couple. Sleeping together for a night finally seals the affair. Our houseboy, shortly before our departure, was married with no ceremony. He spent the night with the bride in the house of one of her relatives some two hours' journey away, in company with her brother, a friend of the boy.

No ceremony marks a baby's birth. The women say--and there is no evidence to the contrary--that they generally give birth by themselves in the forest or away from the rest of the group.<sup>1</sup> There is no celebration of the event.

At death the body usually is placed in a hollowed-out specially sealed log, and relatives are called to pay their final respects. Should the deceased have previously planted a rice crop, it is harvested and then consumed at a feast when the relatives gather. This seems to be the only occasion when relatives are under obligation to gather together, and the only occasion when there is anything approximating a ceremonial feast. It is believed that evil will befall the group if any of the dead person's rice is kept over for normal use.

There is no ceremony of initiation into adulthood that we could discover. Filing of the teeth and tattooing, marks of seniority, are carried out casually with no obvious ceremony. Nor are there any other major social events which might integrate the loose conglomeration of territorial groups.

The only type of dance ever mentioned by the people is the atang. (An atang was put on once for our benefit.) It is essentially restricted to two antagonists each trying by furious gesture and war cry to terrify the other into submission before a fight. Now that feuds more and more are settled peacefully, at least near the coast, an atang is sometimes staged by a single individual for entertainment only.

The principal forms of entertainment<sup>2</sup> drawing more than a single territorial group or household together are: the settling of disputes at an antang 'meeting' during the day time, and the telling of tegudon 'historical doctrine' at night. But neither can be regarded as playing a significant role in integrating the various groups. At most only a few neighboring groups are involved. Such events are not scheduled. An antang is staged whenever disputes arise; a tegudon, when some storyteller happens to arrive in the district. They are usually held indoors, and since the houses are always small this imposes an immediate restriction on the numbers who may be present.

An actor at an antang is a tege-antang, a man who knows how to speak. He may or may not be a datu. Each principal in a dispute takes to himself such a spokesman, usually a senior relative. On the few occasions when disputes were settled while we were resident in the district, a sizeable group of interested and some purely curious onlookers gathered together. They were allowed some option of joining in or making comments. But most of the proceedings were carried out by the spokesmen who presented the facts for and against and drew on various precedents for the settlement of the dispute.

The tegudon is the more important form of entertainment. These accounts, which are sometimes sung, are essentially religious; they deal with such things as creation and the supernatural. Since current events may be included in a tegudon, it is sometimes hard to draw the line between fact and legend. But for the most part a tegudon deals with the legendary past (viewed as fact by the Manobos). Superstition seems to demand that the stories be told only at night, although the normal routine of daily chores would make it almost impossible in any case to stage a duyuy 'song session' during the day. It is not certain that all the singers are priests, but it seems reasonably certain that a tegudon at least originates with a priest.

Every tegudon has the same main characters in common, and there seem to be many different versions of the same tegudon. There is plenty of latitude for developing new legends, since a priest is said to enjoy a constant succession of dreams in his lifetime.

The priest (beliyan), by virtue of his supposed knowledge of the supernatural and his claims to healing powers and the discernment of spirits, enjoys a greater measure of prestige than most other Manobos. This prestige presumably extends beyond the boundaries of the territorial group of which the man may be the datu. But while generally respected, there is no evidence to suggest that he wields any great authority. Each priest seems to operate independently of other priests and his status does not derive from them. He claims to have special dreams at night when his spirit travels to the realm of Nemula, the great being who created the world and life.

The priests are a limited group. (We contacted very few during our stay among the Manobos.) The office of priest is not hereditary. It is said to be conferred by a vision. Sometimes a youth is told by a spirit in a vision that he is to become a priest. Our houseboy, Sida, told us that his father had been led into the forests by the spirits as a boy and this had ensured his future status as a beliyan 'priest'.

#### 7. The datu system

A datu is the head of a territorial group, with little authority outside this group. For the most part his own people are the only ones willing to recognize his authority. Few young boys would admit that men other than their own datu had any claim to a datu's rank. Datu Migted, who laid claim to full authority in his own territory, seemed to command little respect in Datu Undas's territory. His unusual mannerisms usually provoked youngsters from other groups to considerable mirth. Datus referring to other datu not related to them were by no means reluctant to disparage them, though they might defer somewhat to them if they were present. On the other hand, those who might claim any relationship to a datu of more than usual authority were not backward in pressing their claims to such relationship.

With the territorial groups so small and relatively unstable, the authority of the Manobo datu does not approximate that of datus from more rigidly organized societies. Among the Kalagans a datu could be a tyrant if he were so disposed. His office was more or less hereditary. His claim to the possessions of any of his followers absolved him from any need to work himself.

Among the Manobos, however, no man could afford to act the tyrant. His following would disappear overnight. His office does not appear to be in any way hereditary though one datu in speaking to Grace Wood made the following comments: "A datu is of higher blood. He leads his people unless they are hard-headed. He gives instruction to the people about planting. If someone is lazy, he tells him to work for his living. He talks in the antang ('meeting'). If he has followers who work for him, he gives them

something. If a person is to be fined he must come to the datu, and if the datu finds a reason for his guilt he can be fined."

This statement, apart from the reference to higher blood, is fairly consistent with the facts. The reference to higher blood probably springs, as Miss Wood suggests, from Maguindanaon (Muslim) influence where distinctions of blood are recognized.

The Summer Institute of Linguistics workers from Kalagan and Tboli territory on a preliminary survey of the southern section of Manobo territory were surprised by the fact that Manobo datu work their own farms. But this is wholly consistent with their office. Since a datu can lay no claim to another's possessions, he must maintain his claim to office by his own industry.

What little wealth a datu can hope to acquire must be obtained by trading since crops are rarely produced in sufficient excess to market.<sup>3</sup> Money has little value; horses are the most valued and sought after form of wealth. There are so few horses, however, that a man must possess more than the usual measure of business acumen and bargaining skill to acquire them. A man who has acquired many horses is marked as a leader among the people. Manobos say that a man achieves the rank of datu by horse trading. Horses and large brass gongs (agong) figure prominently in the bride price. A large family, with several daughters as well as sons, may also contribute considerably to a man's wealth and further his claims to datuship.

Against this background it is surprising to discover the existence of such a high office as sultan among the Manobos. The term is scarcely Manobo; it strongly suggests outside Moro (Muslim) influence. The office has been vacant for some time since the death of Sultan Dekiyas (abbreviated to Kiyas), whose authority was said to have taken in most of the Manobos in the populous Kulaman Valley.

During 1956 efforts were made to fill the office. Three datu claimed relationship with the deceased sultan, though their exact relationship was not clear. The sultan had only one son, still too young to take office. So three aspirants, Mamu, Kalulung, and Dalungan, laid strong claim to the position.

Mamu impressed many by his confident bearing as though used to exercising authority. His claim to office by virtue of his relationship to the sultan was less convincing than that of the others, but his personal capacity for leadership and his acquired wealth made him a highly favored contender. Dalungan was well regarded as an orator. The rank of these three datu was recognized at the coast, though opinion was divided as to the relative importance of their position. Most showed deference in their presence, but some were not willing to admit them any more authority than that of a lesser local datu.

It seems that as long as the office of datu brings credit to the group as a whole the Manobos are keen to admit the importance of such men. But should their own interests conflict with theirs, they are not so willing to make any concessions to them.



Of lesser importance than sultan is the office of councilor (kunsiyal). Below councilors come the lesser titled datus, whose authority is restricted to very small groups.

A man who has acquired an office of authority has that authority recognized by the conferring of a gelal 'title'. Some say that sultan is a gelal term. But it seems rather that a gelal is a new name, not a term for his office--a name used by others to indicate particular respect.

The existence of such a graded system of authority seems strangely out of keeping with Manobo tradition. According to Fred Case, whose lifetime of experience with the people qualifies him to speak on the subject, a man is elected to an office by other datus if he has proved himself an able leader. While a system of election is not inconsistent with Manobo culture, it is still surprising that a society so loosely organized should have developed a system of election or a way to instigate and supervise such an election.

It seems highly probable that the gelal system is controlled by outside groups. In October 1956 the three principal claimants to the office of sultan made a special trip to the local coastal barrio of Kegenaw. Each one canvassed the local officials for their support. It would appear from general comments that these authorities, although they undoubtedly made allowance for the wishes of the Manobo datus, were the principals in the matter of election. Each aspirant was prepared to pay a considerable sum to these officials should he gain the office.

The ready acceptance of the gelal system suggests that it is not altogether alien to Manobo culture. Among the Manobos there are those with a desire for greater authority than mere leadership of a territorial group. But the chances of acquiring such authority, and of maintaining it, are extremely remote in a society like theirs. Backing by an outside authority with a measure of official government sanction supplies the means to this end. But it is not achieved without cost. The man who desires to make use of such means for enhancing his authority must first have acquired more than the ordinary share of wealth, making him a logical claimant to such an office.

The use of the term sultan and the system of appointment from the coast suggest that today it is primarily a system imposed from the outside, ostensibly for the maintenance of law and order within the group. But whether the outside system merely strengthened an existing system or imposed a totally new system is uncertain.

Titled officials do not supersede the autonomy of the territorial groups but are entitled to deal only with transgressions of the law of the outside authority. Wrongs not recognized by the outside authority are settled by the Manobos independently of this system. But it seems probable that those with the greatest prestige, especially those with a gelal, are also called on to settle internal disputes that are not settled by feud.

A datu enjoys certain prerogatives within his own territory. If a dispute arises between members of his group, he arbitrates, decides the settlement to be paid, and collects any fine. It is said that if two people from closely related groups marry, the marriage may be permitted to stand if the datu is brought in to set things right. He receives the usual fee and is said to take an agong from each offending party. The gongs are then taken to sea and dropped in the water to expiate the guilt.<sup>4</sup> Should two people enter into a violent dispute the datu will intervene. As a final settlement the guilty party, under the datu's supervision, presents a sword to the offended party, saying words like these: "If I have not fulfilled my obligations, you can kill me with this."

Should a member of the datu's group give offence to someone outside the group, the two parties or principals involved take to themselves spokesmen who argue the case between them at a public meeting. The spokesmen are usually senior relatives or friends of the principals.

A datu is responsible for the misdemeanors of those under him. Kaut, the uncle and foster father of our three houseboys, was responsible for their wrongs. A nephew of Migted, whose ward he had become on the death of his father, brother to Migted, eloped with a married woman from another territory. The dispute was settled by outside authorities and Migted stood the fine. When a girl whose family had settled on Datu Undas's territory eloped with a man, Datu Undas was responsible for the return of the bride price originally paid for her though the girl was not living on his territory at the time of her first marriage. The datu presumably acts as the representative of the whole group in standing the fine.

Respect for datus and elders seems to be enjoined by Manobo tradition. It is reported by Grace Wood that a man who walks between two datus who are talking is heavily fined. Disrespect for elders is also said to be punished by supernatural means. For all this, discipline within the group seems to be very lax, and few datus can claim more allegiance than their followers are willing to give them.

## 8. Discipline

Lack of discipline is characteristic of the immediate family circle. Children are almost totally undisciplined. Babies and youngsters may cry incessantly to the distraction of the rest of the family without rebuke. A youngster may go into the most severe tantrums and even threaten its parents without reproof. Among Kalagans, children are frequently thrashed for disobedience, but in the twelve months of our residence among the Manobos we saw no thrashings although the behaviour of many of the children would have brought instant and severe punishment among the Kalagans.

Older children are very lax in obeying the commands of their seniors. Only those under the obligations of affinal ties seem bound to obey. A mother may call incessantly for a son to do some chore without receiving so much as a response acknowledging the command. Datu Mama Undas was rarely able to command his sons to do a task, even if it meant his doing it himself instead.

Along with this lack of discipline is a remarkable freedom of behavior between young people and their elders, and between young people of both sexes. A restrained form of horseplay between younger and older persons was by no means uncommon; either the younger or older person might take the initiative. Affection between members of a family is usually genuine and open.

On the debit side, there is sometimes a deplorable lack of respect for age. Kaut, an older independent man, the classificatory kakay ('older brother') of Isot, entered into a dispute with Isot on a matter affecting payment of a debt to one of Kaut's relatives. In an attempt to settle the dispute outside the usual channels, he became involved in a heated argument with Isot. Both men came to blows and had to be forcibly separated to prevent injury. In the discussion of the matter over the following few days, Kaut took extreme exception to Isot's attack, insisting that his age demanded much more respect. Public opinion backed him, though some conceded that Kaut had no right to meddle in the matter. But Isot had apparently committed no major crime in attacking Kaut, and the matter was soon forgotten.

#### 9. Age and sex divisions

There is no clear-cut distinction between age groups, a fact which might be expected from the freedom of behavior between younger and older members. We saw no signs of an initiation ceremony, although at a certain age young people of both sexes have their teeth filed and blackened, their bodies tattooed, and they begin to chew the betel nut. There is no obvious ceremony associated with this transition, but we noticed that our houseboys on two occasions refrained from eating with us for a period although they had always eaten with us without any reserve before this. They insisted that this had no significance and after a period of some weeks returned to the old schedule.

On the houseboys' return to the usual schedule, we noticed that each carried new tattoos. (There are a wide range of tattoos each with its own name; women are most heavily tattooed on their legs, males on their arms and chest.) As far as we could determine, neither the tattooing nor the filing of teeth, which they had had done previously, was accompanied by any ritual. Anyone with the necessary skill can perform the work.<sup>5</sup>

As girls approach marriageable age, they often adorn themselves in bead necklaces, tinkling anklets, and bangles. These are usually handed down from elder married sisters. Young men approaching marriage seem to be under some obligation to plant their own farms and take life a little more seriously than usual. But no great expenditure of effort seems to be involved.

Prior to marriage a bachelor may wear a choker necklace. Following marriage he may continue to keep his hair bobbed and wear rings through his ears. But an older married man who presumably has settled down and contemplates no further marriage usually sheds his bob and earrings.<sup>6</sup> It is also uncommon for the older women to adorn themselves, though one woman of doubtful character did.

While freedom in everyday behavior blurs the distinction between age groups, superstitions do make a distinction between them. Young people are not supposed to eat the back portions of fowls, pigs, or deer until they have married and had their first child. This prohibition is most rigidly observed. Very young children are not supposed to be out after the sun begins to set. They are threatened with punishment by the busaw 'evil spirits'. Only young people sing the legends known as the kagi't busaw 'voice of the spirits'. We often noticed that youngsters for no particular reason laughed at the sight of certain creatures or at the mention of their names. Our houseboy, Sida, consistently laughed at the mention or sight of a limegu 'worm'. Children watching toy animals on our verandah usually laughed at them or were prompted to do so by the adults with the statement sibelow, a reference to punishment by lightning. Grace Wood referred to a similar phenomenon, saying that particular respect is enjoined to animals. Lack of respect, for example, treating them as humans, is said to be punished by lightning.

#### 10. Division of labor

The most significant feature of the division of labor is that the datu works in the same capacity as any other male of the group. Likewise, there is no clear-cut division of labor between the two sexes other than that conditioned by natural limitations.

Men's tasks include the heavy, dangerous, seasonal labor, clearing and burning off new land for crops, and revenge. The everyday household chores fall to the women. Few women--from young girls to the very old--are exempt from these duties, though a woman with a young child may be temporarily excused. Women, for the most part, plant sweet potato, pound rice, and cook meals. Men are not ashamed to assist, though they generally undertake such work only as a diversion. Both men and women carry babies on trek. The women carry the heavy basketloads, leaving the men free to carry their spears or swords. Yet it is not uncommon for a man to carry a basketload slung from his head like a woman.

As between age groups, superstitions draw a line between the sexes. The making of the poisonous brew kamendag is a well-guarded secret and must not even be discussed in the presence of a woman. A woman may not be present when men are making metal ornaments; it is believed that the moulds would break should a woman be present. Women make the earthenware pots, and the potter herself must be the first one to eat a meal cooked in a new pot; serious consequences would follow were a male to eat this first portion, known as ti.

The women do not seem to play any role in the settlement of disputes or in arrangements of marriage. Men are always the spokesmen.

Members of either sex may sing the Manobo folktales (telaki). But only the men sing the tegudon, the religious teachings.

## 11. The economy

The Manobos are swidden farmers. Some groups seem to excel as hunters and prefer to devote their time to hunting rather than to slash-and-burn agriculture, but all must cultivate sufficient land for the bare essentials. Those who specialize as farmers may cultivate a much larger area than others. But at best their methods are primitive and scarcely guaranteed to bring good returns. Many of them cultivate steep slopes, a practice which tends to cause deterioration of the soil, even though the rapid growth of weeds stops severe erosion.

With consistent rainfall crop yields are generally adequate to supply the territorial group with the necessary staple, sweet potato. Rice is strictly seasonal and soon consumed. There is rarely sufficient excess to market, and rat plagues have often wiped out the crop. Corn planted along with sweet potato in new ground is very soon consumed. For the most part the Manobos have no excess crops to sell at the local coastal markets. Those living at Kulaman plant larger acreages of rice and sell a considerable portion at the coast, but they are more or less at the mercy of the literate traders from other groups. Between rice crops many of the men move from Kulaman to the coast to work for the settlers.<sup>7</sup> Some are well treated, but few are adequately paid, often earning no more than a few clothes.

Grace Wood commented that only the coastal Manobos have pillows, mosquito nets, and mats. But even at the coast few families are so fortunate. The average household boasts only a few cooking pots, homemade bamboo water-carrying cylinders, betel nut boxes, and bows and arrows. Few own more than one change of clothing.<sup>8</sup> Among Kalagans most own a set of visiting clothes besides their ragged work clothes. But a Manobo going visiting usually borrows his clothes from the best-dressed member of his group, leaving the lender to wear the borrower's ragged clothes in the meantime.

This poverty of possessions could be remedied in part if the people were in any way disposed to practice the arts and crafts of neighboring peoples. The Blaans and Tboli weave excellent and durable cloth in intricate patterns from abaca fibre and make it into trousers, blankets, and other forms of clothing. But the Cotabato Manobo of the last generation wore G-strings only, and today they wear whatever cast-off clothing they can borrow from each other or earn at the coast.

Although they claim to make mats and pots, we observed no one making them during our stay. (The same comment was made by Grace Wood after her stay at Kulaman.) There is little incentive to manufacturing or excess crop production due to the system of request exchange, which is open to considerable abuse. A man who has earned a good set of clothes will not keep it for long once he has moved in among his friends again. A good crop will soon be consumed if a horde of relatives request more than temporary hospitality.

Even if they were to produce goods for market, there are no main roads through their territory by which they could transport them there. They have no organized markets of their own and carry out most of their trade through coastal barrio markets run by Muslims.

Manobos earn little or nothing from the outside groups. Yet they must constantly bring in expensive bride price items manufactured by other groups: gongs, swords, betel nut boxes, etc. For, in spite of the fact that the Manobos are one of the poorest groups in the Philippines, relatively exorbitant bride prices are asked within their own group.

## 12. Marriage arrangements

The setting of a bride price involves considerable discussion between the male members of the two concerned families preceding a final decision. The price is reckoned in terms of units of sunggudan 'bride price item'. The number of units varies. Some say it is as low as five for a woman previously married to another man. It may go as high as thirty units for a well-favored maiden. One or more horses, several gongs, some large betel nut containers (up to an arm span across the mouth), swords, and articles of clothing (ginis) must be included. About five of the major units must be laid down before the marriage may be consummated. Following the marriage the spouses' two families become involved in a lifelong series of reciprocal payments.

After ten units have been paid, the family of the girl is obligated to return five units. These units are referred to as the lobing 'dress' of the girl. The units retained by her family are known as the ikam 'mat' of the father. Further payments by the boy's family are divided in the same manner. There seems to be no end to the system. Superstition ensures this. It is said that a full payment of the bride price to the girl's family would result in the death of the head of the family. To forestall this her father immediately returns one of the items, thereby bringing the boy's family under further bride price obligations.

Even after the bride price has been met, the girl's family will bring a gift of a horse or some other item to the boy's family at regular intervals. Such a payment is no longer regarded as a sunggudan but is called simply tamuk 'trade item'. The boy's family is under obligation to exchange items of equal value.

The birth of a child to the couple, especially a daughter, places the boy's family under further obligation to the girl's family. Several more units must be paid before the child is released to the boy's group. Some say that the girl's family brings a horse and that the boy's family reciprocates with some other bride price items, but it is reasonably certain if this is so that the girl's family comes out on the credit side. There is a notable tendency to exaggerate the value of the bride price. It is obviously ridiculous to suggest that a horse is involved at the birth of each daughter; there are far too few horses to go around. But the fact that a horse is mentioned at least establishes the principle of further payments as children are born. Should the boy's family be unable to pay at once, the girl's family may be content to wait until the baby (if a girl) has grown

and married. Bride price items handed over for her at that time will then be shared out with the mother's family.

Death of a wife does not immediately release the husband's family from its bride price commitments. One or two more sunggudan still must be handed over.

Marriage binds two unrelated families together in a form of lifelong economic interdependence. A marriage also binds the various relatives of the boy's group together under a joint obligation. No territorial group can hope to find all the necessary sunggudan at the time the marriage is first proposed. The father of the groom (or foster father) is primarily responsible for finding the required items, but he expects to be assisted by the groom's older brothers and by other closely related kin. Few are ever in a position to give immediate help. Many will not help, particularly the more distantly related kin, unless there is a reasonable chance of reciprocal assistance when a member of their immediate circle wishes to marry. The capacity of any family to reciprocate can generally be rated by the number of unmarried girls in that family.

In cases of a boy's family not being able to meet the bride price, a boy who wants to marry may enter into a contract with a Maguindanaon to pay his bride price. To do so involves him in a lifetime contract with a group whose dealings involve customs different from his own and put him at a great disadvantage.

Failing such a desperate expedient or the availability of funds within the group, bride price items can be obtained by marrying off some girl of the boy's group. The proposed marriage of Datu Undas's youngest son, Sida, touched off such a scheme. His other son, Igid, had some time previously married the first of two wives. This wife soon ran off to a man at Kulaman. Nothing was immediately done about it though some bride price had been handed over by Igid. The offending man already had one wife, an attractive young lass, Malegan. Shortly before plans for Sida's marriage became generally known, Malegan was abducted by Datu Undas. How much force, if any, was employed in this abduction is not known. The fact that there was no counter raid suggests that Datu Undas's rights to the girl were recognized as valid. It was generally known that Datu Undas hoped to gain bride price items by marrying Malegan off to some other man. So plans were shortly implemented for Kaut's ward, Umpit, to marry Malegan. But Kaut had no immediate reserve of trade items to lay with the datu. Soon after, Kaut's adopted daughter, Abi, was sent down the coast to a man who had already asked for her but had not yet paid the necessary first sunggudan. It was hoped by this move that payment might be expedited. But nothing came of it. Abi returned, Umpit could not be married to Malegan, and Sida's marriage was temporarily delayed. Things were later complicated when Malegan ran away without reference to Datu Undas and married a man of her own choosing.

Such is marriage among the Manobos, a constant effort to find wives for sons and to marry daughters off to gain bride price items, a constant intrigue to make the better of a bargain, and an interminable series of plans and excursions to collect the bride price items.

### 13. Marriage breakdown

The breakdown of marriages is extremely common, more the rule than the exception. In the span of two years Datu Undas's wife, Kaben, left him and married Kardon; Alen, Kardon's sister, ran away from her first husband and married a second; Malegan was abducted from Kulaman; and Abi from Kaut's family was involved in a brief marital mix-up for which both parties were fined. Before our arrival in the area one of the datu's wives had run away, and so too had his son Igid's first wife. Igid's second wife was also briefly abducted to hasten up his payment of the final bride price items. Kaut's eldest daughter had run away from her first husband and married a young man, Kampuwan. Isot, now happily married to Gensal, had run off with her while she was still the wife of an older man.

Many factors contribute to the breakup of marriage. A husband may be unwilling to support his wife or settle down. The wife may merely take a dislike to him. The husband may be lax in paying up his bride price, and so the girl's family seeks a more reliable suitor for her. It was claimed that Alen's first husband had not paid up his bride price. This was sufficient justification for her defection and marriage to another man. Two people may develop an attraction for each other and arrange to run off. It was said that Kaben, Datu Undas's wife, had for some time been attracted to Kardon, who had finally returned the interest. Most of the datu's relatives had apparently been aware of this for some time but, partly out of sympathy for the girl (much younger than the datu) and partly out of fear of the datu's reaction, had not alerted him. When his suspicions were finally roused, the girl was kept under careful observation. But then in the end couple eloped.

From a neighboring territory a lad of no more than seventeen ran off with a mother of five children who was at least fifteen years his senior. It was said that the woman had taken the initiative. The matter was settled when the boy's datu paid his fine and the woman returned to her first husband. But they ran off again within a week.

All this clearly reflects the lack of centralized authority in Manobo society. There is no group larger than the territorial group within which authority is recognized. Each is a law to itself. No outside authority can guarantee the stability of marriage or ensure that commitments entered into at marriage will be met by both parties. When Datu Undas's wife, Kaben, ran off, there was no higher authority among the Manobos to whom he could go to have the couple apprehended. The young men of his own and affiliated groups were sent out to find the erring couple and warn other Manobos of the defection. But it was highly improbable that any other datu would be willing, or have the authority, to apprehend and return them.

In the absence of higher authority Manobo justice is frequently meted out by the offended individual and his relatives. This practice is being stamped out by the government, but blood feuds are still by no means uncommon.



Revenge is indiscriminate. The avenging party may kill any relative of the offending party, and counter revenge is almost certain.

It is claimed that the offended party in the case of desertion has the right to kill both offenders, the girl and the man to whom she has defected. Both must be killed for justice to be satisfied. It is considered to be a crime to kill only one. The legitimacy of this settlement seems to be recognized by outside authority.

Such extreme action may be avoided if the bride price is returned, but it seems more than likely that many disputes were settled in the heat of the dispute before the less drastic means were discussed. If the bride price is returned, it must be returned in full with the addition of several units as a fine.

While it is reasonably certain that most disputes among Manobos spring from marriage and marriage breakup, not all marital breakups are followed by bloody settlement. It is more common to settle such a matter by arbitration and discussion between the two parties. A society in which marriage so frequently breaks up could scarcely commit itself to an endless round of feuds without facing extinction.

#### 14. Succession, ownership, and inheritance

Manobo society has neither rules of succession nor inheritance. The datu's rank seems, for the most part, to be earned. It is not a highly important position and commands little respect outside the immediate territorial group. In the case of the sultanship at Kulaman the issue of succession is of greater importance. But the fact that several men are contending for the position against the young son of the dead sultan would seem to indicate that there is no fixed line of succession even in the case of a sultanship.

A person's possessions amount to very little: one set of clothing, mostly ragged, some fishing equipment, a bow and arrows, and sometimes a long spear. Very few people own mats or blankets though some may own pillows. Household equipment is at a bare minimum: a few bamboo cylinders, water pots, a wooden pounding bowl for rice, one or two metal cooking pots. Some people have a brass betel nut box, but most have only small bamboo cylinders for this purpose.

Horses, swords, and gongs are in great demand and much prized. But there are very few in the group, and they are kept in constant circulation as marriages are arranged. Those who own horses never have saddles or proper bridles. Few Manobos keep pigs; few keep more than a few fowl.

Manobos do not have many assets at any one time in their lives. At death there is very little to pass on. (The situation may be a little different at Kulaman where some of the datos are said to have more wealth, but it is very doubtful if even these datos have very much by comparison with datos of other cultural communities.) Should the head of a family die it is said that any bride price items still outstanding to him are reckoned as payable to his sons in the order of their seniority.

Individual ownership is not noticeably practiced. Clothes are freely passed around among the members of a group. Should someone plan to visit another area, he usually borrows the best clothes of some other member of his group in temporary exchange for his own tatters. Requesting someone else's possessions is one of the most distinctive customs; if there are restrictions we have not discovered them. Few would refuse to give anything once it is requested. A man who lives in his wife's group seldom seems able to keep any valuables to himself. But since any who are asked may also ask from others, it ultimately balances out, resulting only in the constant circulation of goods.

The lack of a strongly developed system of private property is reflected in the language. The strongest word for ownership found so far is épe 'owner'. This may mean owner of goods or an animal. But the same word is used in a number of other contexts in which possession is not in view; for example, épe salà 'one who does wrong/the owner of a wrong' and épe pali 'a person with a wound'.

ipaten is used of personal possessions. But the root ipat means essentially 'to put in charge of'. An older married girl may hand over her outfit of necklaces to her younger unmarried sister. She puts the younger sister in charge of them; they are not to be regarded as her permanent possession.

Some measure of personal ownership is, however, recognized in the group. If a person plants a field to rice, that person must be the first to reap from it. No one ever steals from an unharvested stand of rice. The owner must be informed, even though he or she may be living at some distance away. It is said to be fatal to harvest someone else's rice.

When a person dies, all his clothes, even if they are new, are buried with him. Should he die before rice harvest, his body is kept in a special coffin made from a sealed hollow log until the time of harvest. Then his rice crop is gathered. It is never stored for the group's use during the following year but is all consumed at a feast when the relatives gather to pay respect to the dead.

## 15. Conclusions

The topography of Cotabato Manobo country does not permit any great concentration of people except at Kulaman Valley and a few other localities. Manobos are not a very populous group, and their distribution over an extensive territory militates against concentration. Their individualistic farming habits, often in rather inaccessible places, also tend to split them into numerous small groups.

A strongly developed datu system might have united them into larger, more closely integrated groups. But their independence and relative lack of discipline are hardly compatible with such a system. A Manobo datu may be a law to himself, but even within his own small group his authority is limited. Even if he could exercise the right to arrogate his people's possessions, the group is too poor for him to acquire much wealth. What

wealth there is figures prominently in the bride price and is kept in constant circulation.

Moreover, it is not possible for a datu's household to proliferate. For while descent is probably through the male line, no law requires the members of the same male line to associate together under the leadership of the senior male of the family. Each member is more or less free (if he should ever become free of his bride price obligations) to choose his own place of residence or establish his own household. But any tendency for the male kin to associate together is negated by the requirement that a boy live with his father-in-law's family until such time as full or adequate payment of the bride price is made. Poverty makes it almost impossible for a young man, even with the aid of the rest of his family, to pay off his commitments very speedily.

The poverty of the Manobos and high bride prices unite the society more than any other factor. The higher the bride price, the greater the number of kin who must contribute towards it. No single family unit can muster sufficient reserves. Closely related groups, even though they may be geographically remote, are in constant touch with each other as every effort is made to gather the necessary items together. In the opposite camp of the girl's family, items once received are distributed among the immediate kin and also to more remote kin to whom they may be indebted for former favors. This is as much as anything a precautionary measure against the future breakdown of the marriage. The responsibility for refunding the bride price falls to all those who shared in it originally.

Since the members of any family line are distributed so widely and since any unit of that line is more or less free to associate where it wishes, there are no known major divisions among the Cotabato Manobos. They are a loose but homogeneous association such that a man traveling through an area, while always on guard against reprisals springing from individual family feuds, may always count on hospitality from some relative.

Cotabato Manobo society is minimally institutionalized. The people are bound together by common customs, beliefs, and language, assenting to authority only as they are prepared to recognize it or require it for their own well-being. It is not surprising that marriage, which more than anything else binds the group together, more often than not breaks down. This is in marked contrast to the highly institutionalized social structure of other Luzon groups, among them the Kalingas, whose culture has been so well described by R.F. Barton (1949).

The future of the Cotabato Manobo people is very much in the balance. With such a society they will quickly succumb to intrusions from outside groups. In view of their unsophisticated farming methods and with little regard for personal ownership of goods or lands, they scarcely fit into the new pattern developing around them. They resent the changes, which will certainly accelerate in the next few years, but see no solution to the problem. Unless an outside authority protects them against complete loss of their lands, it is only a matter of time before they become a dispossessed minority in their own territory.

## NOTES

[All notes were added in 1987 and are the comments of Ross Errington, SIL researcher currently living among the Cotabato Manobo.]

1. Although giving birth is, in the present, still a private affair, more recently it takes place in the woman's home with the assistance of a midwife.
2. In addition to these that Kerr mentions, a horse fight also gathers a crowd. The crowd will be even larger if more horses compete over the mare in heat.
3. This has changed more recently in certain areas with the introduction of coffee as a main crop.
4. Since a marriage of people from closely related groups happens rarely, this practice of dropping the gongs into the water is also rare.
5. Similarly, anyone with the necessary skill may circumcise a man of marriageable age who desires to be circumcised.
6. Thirty years after Kerr's observation, very few men are seen to wear bobbed hair or earrings, a change that is probably due to the number of lowland Filipino settlers in the Manobo area.
7. More recently, this migration is practiced less frequently, perhaps because of the number of lowland settlers in the Kulaman Valley at present.
8. Thirty years after Kerr's observation, most adult Manobos now own more than one set of clothes, perhaps due to the partial shift to a cash economy, the availability of goods from lowland settlers and storekeepers, and relief from mission organizations in the Manobo area, although Manobos still have a poverty of possessions in comparison to other groups.

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