

The Economic Life of Muslim Filipinos

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The Maranao

About 90% of all the Maranao live in Lanao del Sur where Lake Lanao is situated, while the remaining 10% live in Lanao del Norte, and in some parts of Cotabato and Zamboanga del Sur. Those who are in the less accessible sections of Lanao del Sur have less contact with the rest of the country as evidenced by their ways of life, attitudes, and habits. A Maranao household can easily consist of 10 members not only because the head may be allowed more than one marriage but also because of relatives joining the family group. Certainly, big family size makes existence difficult, although there are also many advantages. Except among the few wealthy ones, family members crowd under one house of light materials, of rough wood or bamboo roofed with cogon grass. Furniture is very scanty and kitchen utensils consist of a few pots, pans, and ladles. Many families outside the poblacions still use stone or wooden mortar and pestle to clean their rice. For cooking purposes, a one-burner kerosene stove is used or a native stove that requires the use of firewood. In eating, Maranaos use their bare hands as most rural people do.

A few properties of families include some pieces of gold coins used principally for adornment by women, land, and other jewelry. Malongs cost from ₱ 25 to ₱ 250 depending upon the quality. A malong is a "barrel skirt" made of silk or ordinary thread which serves as part of a formal attire, a blanket or even a container. It is not to be discounted that communal cooperation and assistance allow temporary use of more presentable and attractive adornments or jewelry by those who attend social gatherings or travel to other areas.

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¹ Statistical data used in this study have been fairly realistic in 1968. At the present time, the reader is expected to make corresponding adjustments.



Market day in Marawi.

By custom and tradition, Maranaos help their relatives in many activities especially on such special occasions as passing a board examination, marriage, funerals, or pilgrimage to Mecca. The larger the income a Maranao receives the more he is obliged to support his less fortunate relatives. Among those in the cities and larger towns, propensity to spend for PU cars or taxis is clearly evident even if this means foregoing other needs for the immediate tomorrow.

Productive economic activities among the Maranao center around the Lake towns. Lake Lanao is a source of fresh fish that finds ready need in the Maranao's simple diet of rice and sometimes vegetables. Surplus catch finds its way to the market in Marawi City where the price can be quite high. Many people living along the lake shore have found fishing a worthwhile occupation even if only as a supplementary source of income to farming or other common occupation. Primitive methods of fishing by way of nets or bamboo traps are still in evidence. Because of the use of dynamite or poison which the authorities fail to control, the fish supply in the Lake is fast depleting. While the government has been finding much difficulty in curtailing unlawful practices, it has at the same time undertaken the replenishment and conservation of the lake fishes. German carp and mud fish are abundant in the Lake. They might eventually attract people to engage in fishing as a principal source of livelihood.

Aside from being a potentially important source of food, the Lake is a major source of water for drinking and for other domestic uses. Washing and bathing are a common sight on the lake shores. Among the Maranao living along its shores, the lake also is used as an open toilet. During the El Tor epidemic which took a heavy toll in sickness and deaths the Maranao learned to boil lake water before drinking it.

Lake Lanao also serves as a major and cheap means of transportation among inhabitants of the lake towns. Agricultural products as well as manufactured goods from distant places are loaded in launches that are powered by gasoline or diesel engines. Dilapidated roads, scarce motor vehicles and expensive bus fares make the lake a good alternative for mobility especially during the market days in Marawi City.

The lake is also the source of the Maria Cristina Falls, less than 30 kilometers away. The Falls provides relatively cheap electric power which runs various industrial plants in Iligan City. This power is the hope of industrializing a wider area extending toward North and Central Mindanao.

Agriculture is a principal pursuit of the Maranao. The average size of a Maranao farm is from one to two hectares. In the Basak areas of lowlands, rice is the main crop and is usually raised only

once a year. Farmers are almost wholly dependent upon rainfall although the lake, rivers, and springs constitute a potentially economical source of water for irrigation. Aside from rice, upland farming yields corns, and fruits of various kinds such as bananas, jackfruits, *madangs*, *durian*, avocado, mangoes, and vegetables. Cabbage, pechay, onions, carrots, cassava, camote, native and Irish potatoes are grown, but most of the vegetable crops are not raised in commercial quantity. Truck gardening that is considerably practiced in progressive Christian communities is unknown. Much of the fruits and vegetables displayed in the market stalls come from Christian areas like Iligan and Cebu. It is to be noted that the scientific cultivation of fruit trees for commercial production is not being practiced in Lanao del Sur. Hardly any care, like pest control or smudging, is given to the trees to increase productivity. Fruit trees are left at the mercy of the elements. This fact explains the scarcity of fruits. In predominantly Christian areas on the other hand, more and more farmers are realizing the advantages of scientific orchard management.

The carabao is the Maranao farmer's principal work animal. Occasionally, the cow is used for tilling the soil and is raised primarily as a source of meat. Goats are raised in small number for meat, pet, and ceremonial purposes. The Maranao do not engage in mechanized farming and this is not only due to lack of agriculture know-how but also because of the insufficient capital, even only for the purchase of small tractors. Hectare yields are difficult to ascertain since the Maranao farmer uses a peculiar system of measuring land. A farmer determines the area he owns in terms of rice paddies. A hectare could consist of several paddies of varying sizes. A farmer cultivating about two hectares of riceland may realize an annual yield of 40 cavans or so only for a money value of about P600, which could not even meet the minimum annual needs of his family.

Because of pressing family needs and lack of adequate storage, a rice farmer usually sells all his produce immediately after harvest and resorts to buying for family consumption later in the year. A farmer and his family may also raise vegetables and other crops but these are mainly used for home consumption. Chickens are hardly or inadequately domesticated. Hogs are never raised because of religious restraint.

Landholdings are governed more by custom than by governmental law, and proprietary rights are, therefore, hard to exercise unless these are backed up by family strength, prestige and long-time recognized possession and occupation. On this basis, transfer of possession and "ownership" are difficult to effect especially if the new owner happens to be unacceptable to the inhabitants in the area, or to members of the clan. Even government institutions, like Mindanao

State University which has acquired title by legislative decree; find landholding problems very real indeed. Legal title to a land is often contested by the natives' traditional claim.

Weaving is solely a woman's undertaking. Many Maranao households weave mats or malongs. Depending on the number of women helping, one household can finish as many as a total of three mats a week that can sell at about ₱3 each. Malong-weaving is more elaborate and provides a household as much as ₱ 15.00 net income in one month.

As in many other parts of country, the sari-sari store is one of the most essential retailing institutions among the Maranao. A typical store would measure about 10 x 5 feet and usually is just a part of the operator's own dwelling. At any one time, store merchandise inventory consisting of candies, cookies, cigarettes, and canned items may be valued between ₱ 50 to ₱ 100. Daily sales hardly exceed ₱3 and profit could go as high as 25% to 30%. This is explained by the fact that transportation facilities to and from supply sources are expensive and difficult.

The problem of high prices is partly aggravated by the practice of some local governments to tax merchandise for sale, even though said goods are only in transit and will be disposed of in other towns. Stocks of sari-sari stores are replenished by purchases from wholesalers and retail outfits in Marawi or Iligan and occasionally from itinerant and traveling panels.

Along the main street in Marawi City, many of the larger stores and business establishments are operated by Chinese or Christian Filipinos who have lived long in Lanao. These outfits not only engage in retailing but also sell wholesale to Maranao retailers in other lake towns. Maranao and Christian share the eatery business. The former control the retail trade in the public market at the lake side. They have large monopoly of the rice milling business and transportation.

Metal craft is an established industry in Tugaya, one of the larger towns around the lake. Tugaya brass products do not sell only as household utensils but also as tourist souvenirs that can be found even on the display counters of giftshops in Ermita, Manila. These brass articles have found decorative acceptance among the foreign and Filipino households of Forbes Park and other high-class housing projects in Makati.

Brass work in Tugaya has been quite lucrative in spite of the antiquated methods of molding and manufacturing which require relatively too much time and labor. Brass foundry operators appear among the occupation groups that earn larger and steadier income. An operator may make an annual gross sales of ₱ 3,000 and a profit



Brassmaking is a home industry in Tugaya, Lanao del Sur.

easily of about 50% . However, it is to be noted that the middlemen make more money on brass articles than the brass foundry operator – from 150% to 200%.

A foundry worker who may work for more than one operator may earn about ₱ 2.50 a day. Aside from brass products, ornaments of gold and silver, like rings, necklaces, buttons, tie-clips, and cuff links are also made for sale. Bolos, knives, and other domestic and farm tools are also made in Tugaya.

Government employment is an attractive pursuit to many Maranaos. This is especially true of positions that provide a steady and relatively high salary like elementary school teaching and others that are financed by national government funds. Employees paid from the municipal coffers receive as low as ₱ 40 monthly while public school teachers easily receive more than ₱ 200. Off and on nationally-financed public works projects such as road building, bridge construction and repairs provide some residents with employment opportunities. Not infrequently these projects, however, provide only very temporary employment and could not be considered as a steady and significant income source.

Professionals and college degree holders among the Maranao are

relatively few. In most cases, this predicament is mainly due to the financial inability of parents to send their children to college. Numerically, teaching or education ranks first among the courses, though law is presumably the most prestigious career. The Maranao are fast realizing the importance of formal education in improving their economic lot and in uplifting their social life. This awakening can even be seen among their women who used to be cloistered in the home, but are now seeking opportunities for education. Financial assistance from members of the same clan and the Commission on National Integration have aided the pursuit of higher education.

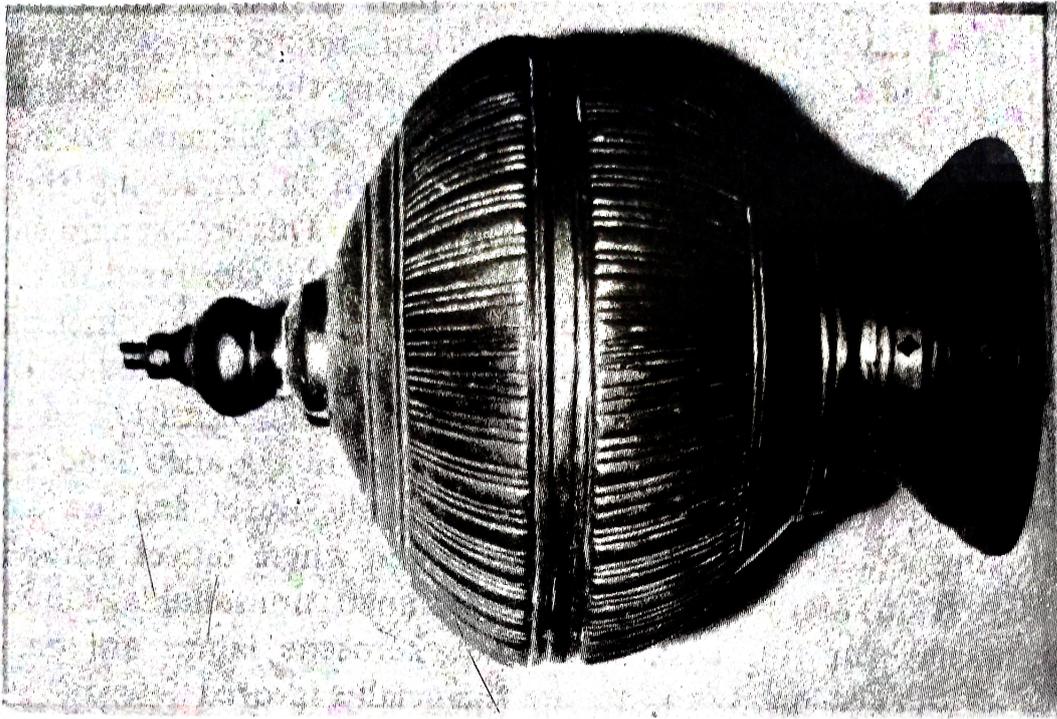
Infra-structures and community facilities in Maranao land are far from adequate. Many still rely on open wells, rivers, and the lake for drinking and other household uses. Even where faucet water is available, as in Marawi City, many Maranao households cannot afford to pay for this basic need. The kerosene lamps are main sources of light at night, and to the financially favored few, the air pressure lamp is being used. Many roads are still plain dirt and become very muddy and impassable during the rainy season. Except for a couple of towns, most municipalities do not even have a post office or telegraph station so that communication with the rest of the country is very slow. Recreation centers like bowling alleys and movie houses are few. Basketball, volleyball and native sports provide inhabitants with popular means of recreation.

The lack of many economic institutions like branches or agencies of manufacturing concern, credit and other financial institutions, large market and retail shops, and factories is clearly evident in Marawi City, the principal center of business activity in Maranao land.

The Sulu Area

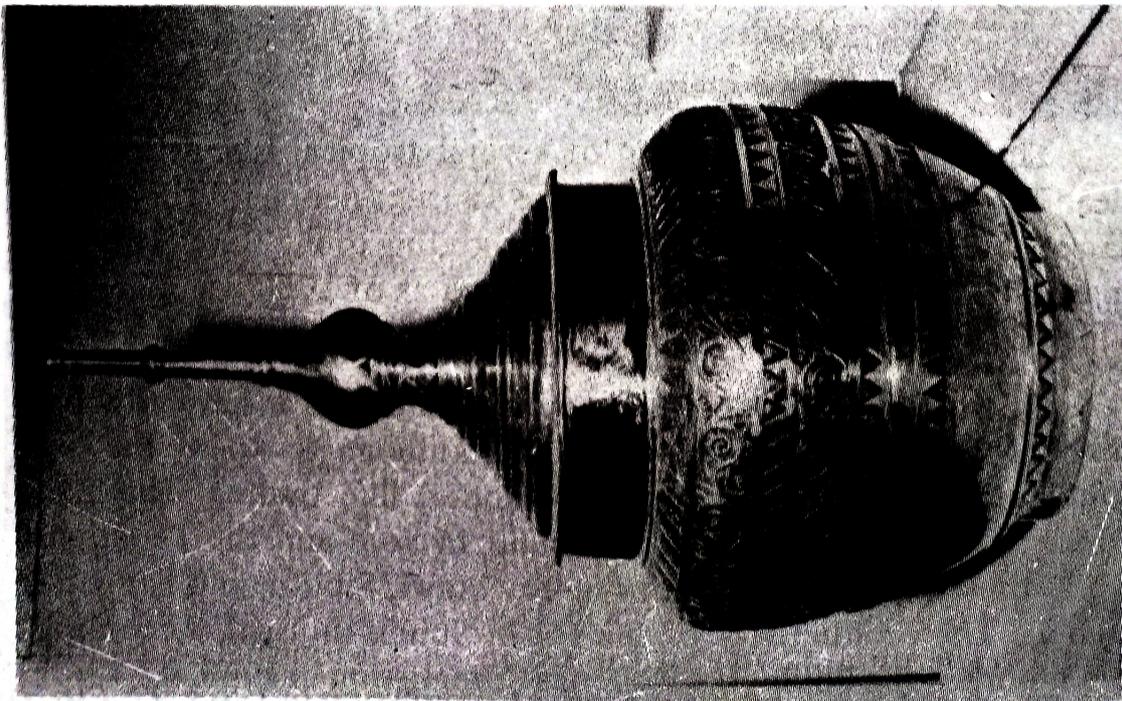
The Sulu Area consisting of several tropical islands located in clear blue waters, is inhabited by the Taosug (people of the current), Samal and the Badjao (sea gypsies). According to the Bureau of Census and Statistics, the population of the area as of 1960 was 326,898 of which 310,926 or 95% are Muslims.

Of the Muslim population, approximately 15% have established residences in Palawan, Davao, and Zamboanga where they have found more lucrative means of livelihood like trading. The highest concentration of the Taosug is found in Jolo and the Tapul group while there are thin dispersions in Tawi-tawi, Sibutu, and Pangutaron Islands. The productivity of the sea in Sulu is unusual. According to the report of the Philippine Fisheries Commission in 1963, 92,726,210



LEFT: A brass container (*gador*) made in Tugaya, Lanao del Sur. (Photo courtesy of the Aga Khan Museum)

RIGHT: A *gador* from Brunei (one of the many imported into Mindanao and Sulu). (Photo courtesy of the Aga Khan Museum)



kilograms of commercial fish of different varieties were caught. The waters of the Sulu area also abound in shells from which pearls may be obtained.

The Taosug

The Tausog are divided in two groups: the Parianon (people of the landing) live along the seacoast and are principally fishermen, and the Guimbahanon (hill people) live in the interior and are principally farmers. The Guimbahanon cultivate the land intensively to the extent of harvesting rice twice a year. Fields are planted to rice and to vegetables fit for the particular season. Fruits are abundant in the inland areas. Among them there are mangosteen, durian, jackfruit, lanzones, madangs, mangoes of several varieties (*mampalam*, *bawnu*, and *wanni*) oranges, custard apples, pineapples, and bananas. Roots crops such as ubi, cassava, and taro (*gabi*) are raised to substitute for rice. Coffee and tobacco are grown, too. In the island of Jolo, carabaos, cattle, and horses supplement land motor vehicles as a means of transportation for people and products. In the smaller islands, hardly any vehicles for hire are available. Trails cross the smaller islands in all directions and there is intensive inland communication with the sea.

It is difficult to estimate the annual income of a typical Taosug farmer but it is safe to assume that his annual harvest is around 60 cavans of palay with a value of about ₱ 1,000.

Unlike the Guimbahanon who are principally farmers, the Parianon engage in fishing and in pearl diving on which they rely greatly as a legitimate means of livelihood. On account of superior business know-how, the Chinese have gained a strong foothold on these industries. Parianons also engage in trade that extends beyond the territorial waters of the Philippines to Borneo, Indonesia, and other neighboring Southeast Asian countries. Their venture beyond Philippine waters is explained by the fact that they are a sea-oriented people and are therefore expert sailors. They take out copra and rice and bring in silk, amber, porcelain, gold dust, dyes, brass, copper, iron, and principally cigarettes and highly dutiable commodities like perfumes, rugs, textiles, and playing cards which they sell at high profit.

In the past, many of these trade activities were practically without government regulation and undoubtedly deprived the national coffers of considerable revenue. Because of the high margin of profit derived from the sale of imported goods, smuggling is still a very tempting undertaking in spite of the government's determined efforts at curtailing if not totally stamping it out. The lucrative smuggling

business has certainly enabled the income of the Parianons to exceed those of the other tribes. Many of them have household luxuries like refrigerators, phonograph, and/or radio sets. For mobility, the traders use fast *kumpits* equipped with outboard and inboard motors that enable them to outrace and elude Philippine navy gunboats. These *kumpits* are equipped with high powered weapons as protection from pirates that roam the Sulu seas, and from easy apprehension by government agents.

These various productive activities undertaken by the Taosug have been hampered by the unstable recurrent breakdown of peace and order conditions especially during the decade immediately following the end of the Second World War. Economic changes have been rapidly taking place in Christian communities, but this has not been so in the Sulu areas and in the other predominantly Muslim territories.

An incisive assessment of the economic situation in Jolo which still finds considerable truth and validity in the present day Sulu was written by a Taosug journalist, Ibrahim Jubaira, several years ago:

A bad situation can certainly lead to another. Smuggling is a booming lucrative business. Money comes fast and easy. What happens? The more enterprising ones see the possibility of making money easier than do the smugglers. Outlaws plunder the mountain sides. Quite a nice combination, indeed. Their two-pronged activities confuse the government. Troubles come up one after the other which split the attention of law-enforcement agencies.²

The Samal and Badjao¹

Each of the Samal and Badjao constitute a social minority group in relation to the Taosug. They are concentrated in small scattered islands in the southern half of the Sulu Archipelago.

By nature they are less militant and aggressive than the major Muslim groups like the Maranao and the Taosug. Being a sea-oriented people, they live on boats and in coastal villages made up of stilted houses built out on the water. Because of their difficulty of meeting the bare needs of economic subsistence, a good number of them have consistently transferred from one of the smaller islands in the Sulu group to another. Their possession of minimal property, except for a few personal belongings, make for their greater mobility and

² In *Manila Times Progress* magazine, 1960.

wanderings. Their principal source of livelihood is the sea and fish is the primary item in their diet. Whatever little surplus catch that they have is bartered or sold in order to secure some clothing and rice or root crops. Samals who have set up houses on land have succeeded in growing some agricultural crops like coconuts, tapioca, rice, and root crops. In a desperate effort to improve their economic plight, and with the assistance of other members of the clan, some Samals have succeeded in securing high school or a minimum of college education. This educational preparation, coupled with some political influences, has enabled them to succeed in becoming public school teachers in some of the remote Sulu islands.

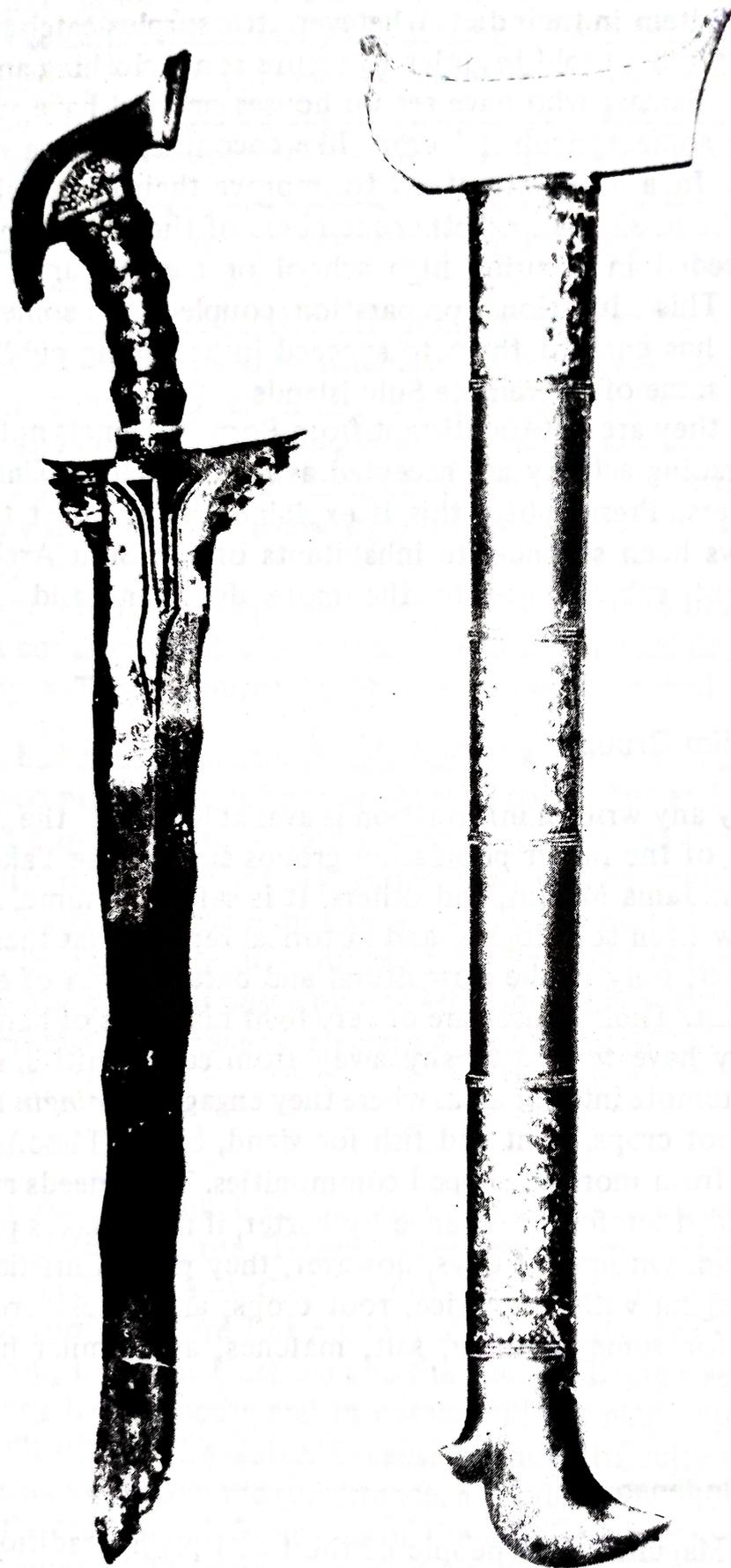
While they are not too distant from Borneo, Samals not engaged in much trading activity are accepted as menial help to Chinese and other traders. Presumably, this is explained by the fact that they have always been second-rate inhabitants of the Sulu Archipelago, owing silent subservience to the more dominant and sea-faring Taosug.

Other Muslim Groups

Hardly any written information is available about the economic conditions of the minor population groups such as the Yakan, Melebuanon, Jama Mapun, and others. It is safe to assume, however, based on written sociological and historical reports that these groups are, at most, only in the agricultural and barter stages of economic development. Their houses are of very light materials of bamboo and grass. They have tended to shy away from communities, either by staying in remote interior areas where they engage in *kaingin* and grow rice and root crops, hunt and fish for viand, or live in some coastal points far from more developed communities. Their needs and wants are few and, therefore, exchange by barter, if at all, takes place only among them. On market days, however, they go to Christian settlements bringing with them rice, root crops, and forest products in exchange for some clothing, salt, matches, and similar household items.

The Maguindanao

The Maguindanao (people of the flood plain) traditionally and currently occupy the region along the Rio Grande de Cotabato which serves as an artery to the people living along its banks. The river provides not only an easy means of transportation and communication but it also is a source of water for domestic uses. Along the river, various crops are grown including rice, tobacco, and corn.



This finely crafted kris with gold and gold-plated hilt and scabbard was made in Lanao and was fit to be worn by a sultan. (Photo courtesy of the Aga Khan Museum)

In times of heavy rain, floods wash away not only crops but also homes along the river banks.

The Maguindanao family, like the families among other Muslim groups, is a fairly large one consisting not only of immediate members, which are the parents and their children, but also directline relatives of the second degree, like grandparents and grandchildren. As an economic unit, the family is even larger as considerable communal assistance practices, including financial, are evident in marriage celebrations, feasts, social events, deaths, and religious festivities.

Agriculture is the chief pursuit of the people. The plains in Cotabato are wide and fertile and, coupled with a favorable climate, provide a potentially tremendous source of rice. Because of the vast agricultural potential of Cotabato, Christian settlers from the Visayas and Luzon have continually come. While Christian influx has tended to help develop what were originally Maguindanao settlements, which are affected by the establishment of infra-structure facilities and more efficient production methods, social and economic rivalries arise in the contact between Muslims and Christians.

Because of the traditional systems of landholdings based on customary claims rather than on legal title and ownership, land disputes arise between Maguindanao claimants and the Christian farmers. These conflicts have tended not only to be costly in lawsuits but have sometimes resulted in violence.

Extreme economic necessity has forced many Maguindanao farmers to sell their lands to adventurous settlers from Christian communities. Christian encroachments have forced some of them to retreat to the interior or to migrate to a few towns that have managed to remain predominantly Muslim. Unlike, however, the Maranao, the Maguindanao have adopted many Christian practices as evidenced by their mode of dressing and in their personal habits.

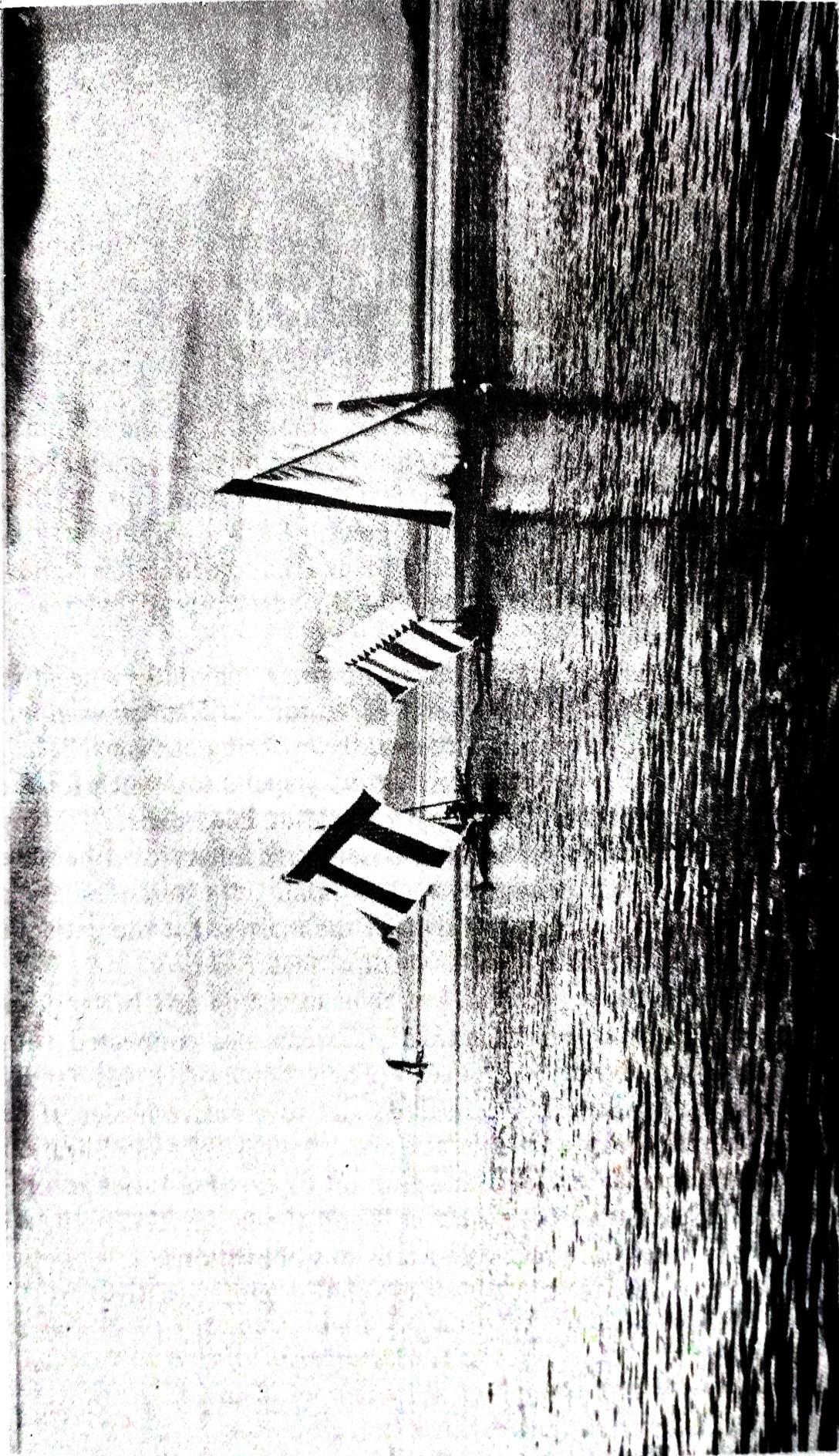
Some of the troublesome effects of the changing socio-economic situation in areas of mixed population have been reported by a Muslim observer as follows:

The national census of 1948 placed 80% of the Moslems as having no definite source of income, no property. This still holds true today. An average Moslem is either a farmer or a fisherman. If he is farmer, he works under a despotic landlord who cares nothing for his tenant's future. The average Moslem farmer is forever indebted to his landlord, chained to that tract of land for years, and indebtedness that is inherited by his children and children's children. If he is an independent farmer he may till that piece of land for years without the benefit of a title — only to be nosed

out later by some unscrupulous individuals who know their way around with the government. The victimized illiterate Moslem farmer may appeal for help, but in most cases, the authorities concerned are too busy (or pretend to be) attending to, what they think, more important matters than this Moslem's petty trouble. His case may sleep for years and be forgotten. He loses his patience with the government; he consequently takes the law into his own hands.

If the average Moslem is a fisherman, he still indulges in crude methods of fishing which his forebears used fifty years ago. To augment the meager catch derived from this crude method of fishing, he resorts to the use of dynamite. And so, he gets involved with the law. He is either fined or put in jail. As a result, the family suffers. The average Moslem in this case becomes desperate. Again, he takes the law into his hands.³

³ Ibrahim Jubaira, *Manila Times Progress* magazine, 1960.



MORO VINTAS. Fishing is a major industry in the Sulu Archipelago