

TAUSOG: "PEOPLE OF THE MARKET"

Ben J. Kadil

The term "Tausog" has been understood always to mean "People of the Current."¹ It come from the words "*Tau*," meaning "man" or "people," and "*Sug*" meaning "current." However, another theory has it that the suffix "*Sug*" may be derived from the word "*maisug*," meaning "brave." Therefore, Tausog means "brave man,"² a distinct historical character of the Tausog, which may be also true.

These two theories happen to be the most popular. However, in this article I would like to introduce a third theory: that the terms *Tausog* was derived from the common word "*Tau*," meaning "People," but the suffix "*Sug*" does not really mean "Current," but is derived from the Arabic "*Suq*" (سوق) which means "market" or "bazaar."³

Let me clarify this theory by raising the following points:

1.) Linguistically, there has been simply a Tausog substitution of the Arabic *q* (ق) to the native *g* (غ). The reason for the substitution may be this: that the letter *q* (*qaf*), which is uttered with a glottal stress in Arabic, has been found by the native tongue to be too exacting. Subsequently, this was substituted to *g* (*ga* or *gha*) at the Tausog's leisure.

I would like to explain this matter further. In Tausog, there seems to be two general rules of the *g* pronunciation. First, when *g* is an initial letter of the word it takes the regular *g* sound as in goat, *gitna*, *gabi*, or, in the Tausog, as in *gi'tung*, *gimba*, or *gabun*. The second ruling is that when *g* is found in the middle or final syllable, its sound becomes *gh*, such as in the words *bagay*, *bugas*, *matug*. The same linguistic phenomenon takes place in the word "*Sug*." The *gh* sound is produced by vibrating the glottal opening which has no equivalent in the English language. However, if one were permitted to pronounce the word "ghost" between the consonants *k* and *g*, the Tausog *gh* sound may be approximated. Consequently, the *g* in "*Sug*" becomes critically *gh* - "*Sugh*."⁴

Alterations of many Arabic linguistic sounds is not an unusual occurrence. Some of these terms are: *Sharif* (شريف) to *Salip*, *Khatib*

(خطيب) to *Hatib*, *Fakir* (فقير) to *Pakil*, 'Ibadah (عبادة) to *Ibadat*, *Shadaqah* (شداقة) to *Sarakka*, or *A'mal* (عمل) to *Ammal*.

2.) Of course, one may raise the point that *Sugh* is not often used by the Tausog to refer to "market," in the ordinary sense of the word. In fact, the word for "market" in the Tausog is "*tiyanggi*."⁵ However, it must be pointed out that among the Tausog, the city of Jolo is called "*Tiyanggi*" and, indeed, the people of Jolo are called "*Tau Tiyanggi*" (hence, People of the Market) by those in the hinterland. For instance, the native from Parang or Maimbung have the expression, "*Manaog pa tiyanggi*" - or "to go down to the market place" - when they mean to go to the town of Jolo. In a narrow perspective, the Tausog distinguish their groups into: *Tau Tiyanggi*, *Tau Gimba* (mountaineers), *Tau Higad* (marginal dwellers), and *Tau Kapuan* (islanders).⁶ It appears, however, that the *Tau Tiyanggi* or *Tau Sugh* has come to be applied to all in the ethnic group, with the capital city of Jolo as the basis for generalization.

3.) At this juncture one may well underscore the point that Jolo is in fact popularly identified as a market not only among the Tausog themselves but among traders and merchants from other nations. It is a historical fact that many writers have described the role of Jolo to be that of a market (like Cebu, Manila, or Butuan) in international trade, even before the advent of Islam. Indeed, the increasing role of Jolo as trade market in the Malayan world had brought Arab adventurers, traders, and missionaries,⁷ who must have "imported" the term "*Suq*" to describe the busy market in Jolo.

4.) Furthermore, let us look at the Sama, the Tausog's close neighbors and associates, who were once upon a time also subjects of the Sultan of Sulu. Now, the Sama's word for "current" is "*sollog*" and not "*sug*," and their term for "market" could have been the same as the Arabic "*suq*."⁸ (For example, when a Sama is to go to Jolo, he would say "*Tulak ako ni Suq*," meaning, "I am leaving for Jolo.") How do the Sama call the Tausog, therefore? They call their neighbor "*Aa Suq*" and not "*Aa Sollog*." It appears that among the Sama, the Tausog has never been regarded as "People of the Current" but as "People of the Market." Incidentally, the Sama language has assimilated a considerable

amount of the Arabic. For instance: *suqui* – regular customer or seller (in a market or one's market place); *min* (من) – from *maha* (ما) – not, no; *niyat* (نية) – intention, motive; *siddik* (سديق) – to trust on someone.

5.) Ultimately, one must admit that Tausog can mean “People of the Current” for good reasons. The geographical location of Sulu is such that it is the path and meeting point of different wind and water currents coming from the Celebes and the Sulu seas.⁹ Nonetheless, one may still ask the question why the Sama and Badjao, who are also of Sulu are not also called Tausog. In fact, the Sama and Badjao are even more exposed to the sea currents than are the Tausog themselves.

In sum, my point here is that the term Tausog may actually refer to *Tau* “*Suq*,” the so called people of *Tiyanggi* (Jolo). The meaning of that term has enlarged to include all the Tausog-speaking groups (Tausog Purol and simply speakers of the language), who have gained the reputation for being *local traders in markets*.

NOTES

1. Cf. Gowing 1977:5, 1979:2; According to Erving (1974:132) the name “Tausog” appears to be derived from “*taw*” (person or people) and “*sug*” (current). The Tausog inhabit the Sulu Archipelago and the term Sulu seems to be derived from a cognate, “*sulug*,” also meaning current in the Maguindanao and Binisaya. The riptides, whirlpools and swift currents playing about many islands seems to have inspired the name; Kiefer (1972:2) says, “The word *Tausog* literally means ‘people of the current’ and refers to the treacherous ocean currents around the Sulu waters.”

2. A few other Tausogs are somewhat inclined to agree to this second theory.

3. It is noteworthy that several Tausogs who know Arabic conferred with me over the idea. After having been convinced of its merit, I was motivated to set forth the theory in writing.

4. A linguistic phenomenon of this kind is not uncommon. Also, different languages may actually have different phonemes. In the case of Chabacanos, for example, speakers tend to pronounced “good” as “*koot*”; a Malay speaker may say,

“bek” for “beg.” English, for instance, does not employ the German *ch* sound which appears in *buch* for “book.” Hence, the Tausog language is no exception to changes in phonemes.

5. “Market” in Tausog is ordinarily called “*tabo*” and sometimes “*pasal*” (generally the Tausog has no final *r*, although the word in Malay is “*pasar*,” from the Persian “*bazar*,” which means “market.” One notes that the phonemes *b* and *r* were finally dropped in Tausog). *Tiyanggi*, which in Binisaya also means “market,” has been exclusively used by the Tausog to refer to Jolo, the capital. “*Lupa Sug*” is another term which, locally, can mean the town of Jolo. Politically, however, it includes all the localities in the Sulu province. And still another, “*Sug*” on which centers our arguments, is “Jolo” which may or may not include the surrounding communities in the whole island. It should be understood further that the term “*Jolo*” is a Spanish derivation from the word “*Sulu*” or “*Xolo*” and is thus a foreign term, appearing artificially in the political map of the Philippines.

6. This type of classification should be differentiated from the “social stratification” in Sulu according to Muhammad Kurais II. If I may quote his “serious anecdote” told during the 10th Annual Seminar on Mindanao-Sulu Culture held at Silliman University, “The Tausog looks down on the Sama, and the Sama looks down on the Badjao, and since they have nobody lower, the Badjao just looks down on the fish at the bottom of the sea.”

I must note further that the term “Tausog” has been erroneously used to designate all Tausog-speaking groups, as Tausog happens to be the *lingua franca* in the Sulu Archipelago.

7. Cf. C. A. Majul 1973:347.

8. There appears to be no other alternative meaning in Sama for the word “*suq*,” which refers to a market place or *tiyanggi*. Arabic influences in this area has been fairly strong.

9. Erving, *op. cit.*, p. 132; Kiefer, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

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