

THE DATUS OF THE RIO GRANDE DE COTABATO UNDER COLONIAL RULE*

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Introduction:

The local elite, whether indigenous or creole, is a problematic element in any colonial system. To the extent that it controls the lower orders it may be either an ally of the regime or its enemy. And to the extent that it exploits them it may either be a partner or a competitor. Whichever course it follows there are dangers. If it is defiant it risks destruction, and at the least jeopardizes the protection given by its masters. If it is compliant it may jeopardize its legitimacy among the common folk. Either way it risks displacement by an alternative elite, more responsive to the situation. Elite groups and families, then, are sensitive indicators of changing conditions; and their fluctuating fortunes deserve close attention.

The Philippines is a particularly interesting case, in this respect, because, despite four changes of regime in the fifty years between 1898 and 1948, its elite remained substantially intact. The degree of continuity among the Principalia from the conquest to the early nineteenth century is hard to establish, but it seems that thereafter the growth of export industries caused a good deal of upward and downward mobility.¹ In Pampanga, for example, Chinese mestizos who had prospered in the burgeoning sugar industry either displaced or married into the old landed elite.² What Owen has called the Super-Principalia attained in Bicol, as in Pampanga, is a level of affluence far greater than their predecessors had enjoyed.³ The Revolution, the American take-over, the explosion of public education, even the Japanese occupation, seem by comparison to have caused little mobility. Individuals rose and fell, but the family coalitions that dominated the early years of the Republic were in many cases the same that had composed the elite of the late Spanish period.

The Muslim areas of the South had a different history. Maintaining a fierce resistance, they managed to remain outside the Spanish pale until the second half of the nineteenth century. Even by 1898 the ordinary *tao* were barely integrated with the rest of Philippine society.

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¹See, for example, Renato Constantino, *The Philippines: A Past Revisited* (Quezon City: Tala Publishing Services, 1975), pp. 127-8.

²John Larkin, *The Pampangans: Colonial Society in a Philippine Province* (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1972).

³Norman G. Owen, "The Principalia in Philippine History: Kabikolan, 1790-1898, *Philippine Studies* 22, No. (1974), pp. 297-324.

but certain of their *datus* had found a foothold in the colonial order. By the end of the American period, these same *datus* had come to occupy much the same position as the big landlords of Luzon and the Visayas, despite continuing cultural differences.

Islam and Malay versions of Islamic political institutions were established in the South by the time the Spaniards came. Majul has argued that these provided the framework for resistance on a scale far greater than non-Muslim Filipinos could achieve.⁴ Exploiting their position on the peripheries of several colonial domains, the so-called Moros were able to carry on a profitable commerce with European and Chinese merchants. This they augmented by yearly raids on Spanish occupied territory. Maguindanao and Sulu became centres of sufficient importance to support sultanates with more than a semblance of centralization and hierarchy.⁵

As the nineteenth century wore on, Spain's naval blockade deprived the sultans of their economic support; then, in the second half, she began undermining their authority through a series of military and diplomatic campaigns. By 1898 they were effectively neutralized, but this did not mean the end of indigenous leadership. The sultanates had always been segmentary states, in which a good deal of the power remained with local *datus*.⁶ These now had to choose between defiance and compliance, with the latter proving the wiser course in the long run.

In Cotabato, particularly, the Maguindanaon *datus* used their client connection with the colonial authorities to legalize traditional land rights, turning their followers into tenants and themselves into landlords. As such they were able to take advantage of the development of commercial agriculture. In the same way, having first option on positions in local government, they were able to reconstitute their traditional authority. They were thus well placed to take command when independence came.

An elaborate ideology of rank, grounded in Islamic belief, supported political authority, and the historical record suggests that the power holders and leaders usually were of the nobility, until the Spanish invasion. The upheavals of the late Spanish period broke the connection, however, leaving the new generation of *datus* to command recognition on pragmatic grounds such as the use of force and access to the colonial authorities. With the years, certain *datu* lines acquired a born-to-rule reputation, but still without the old trappings

⁴Cesar Adib Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1973), p. 78.

⁵For an account of Maguindanao in the seventeenth century, see Francisco Combes, *Historia de las Islas de Mindanao, Iolo y sus Adyacentes* (Madrid: 1897). For an account of Maguindanao in the eighteenth century, see Thomas Forrest, *A Voyage to New Guinea and the Moluccas, from Balamabangan* (London: 1779).

⁶For an analysis of segmentary state systems, see J.M. Gulick, *Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaysia, L.S.E. Monographs*, 17 (London: Athlone Press, 1958). Also Thomas Keifer, "The Tausug Polity and the Sultanate of Sulu: A Segmentary State in the Southern Philippines", *Sulu Studies* 1(1972) pp. 19-64

of rank and title. The literature on the Christian Philippines is remarkably vague on the subject of political legitimacy and ideology, but there would appear to be little more than personalistic ties of the patron-client type.⁷ The new Maguindanaon datos, however, were in some sense heirs to the old; moreover they were Muslims who stood between their people and alien domination.

An understanding of the contemporary situation, and of the people's perception of it, could only be achieved through an investigation of the historical record. This paper is an outcome of these investigations, a historical account informed by some first hand acquaintance with the Maguindanaon and their oral traditions.

Documents and Oral Sources

The sources on Cotabato history are extensive. Apart from the Spaniards, who assiduously gathered intelligence from the late sixteenth century, the British and Dutch had a passing interest in Maguindanao and sent home occasional reports. A good deal of this material was published, either at the time or subsequently, though there is no telling what remains undiscovered in the archives.

At the beginning of the American period, Najeeb Saleeby produced his *Studies in Moro History, Law and Religion*, based on an examination of Maguindanaon manuscripts, but thereafter, published sources yield little of consequence besides statistical data and short routine reports.⁸ There is more to be got from the papers of General Wood and Royston Haydon, but Cotabato engaged their interest less than Sulu or Lanao, perhaps because it was the most peaceful of the Moro provinces.⁹ Karl Peltzer, the geographer, carried out a study of Christian settlement in Cotabato in 1940,¹⁰ and Chester Hunt, a sociologist worked in Cotabato City in 1953;¹¹ Otherwise there was little academic interest until the end of the 1960's when there was a sudden, though uncoordinated burst of activity. Majul's *Muslims in the Philippines*, though only published in 1973, was the fruit of many years of research.¹² Pressing its inquiry back to the pre-Spanish period, it traced the history of the Maguindanaon and Sulu sultanates through to their collapse in the mid-nineteenth century. Meanwhile Reynaldo Ilet

⁷See particularly, Carl Lande, *Leaders, Factions and Parties: the Structure of Philippines Politics*. *Yale Southeast Asia Studies*, 6, (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1965). Also, James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1977).

⁸Najeeb Saleeby, *Studies in Moro History, Law and Religion: Ethnological Survey Publications*, 4, Pt. 1 (Manila: Bureau of Public Printing, 1905).

⁹Joseph Ralston Hayden *Papers*, Michigan Historical Collections, Ann Arbor, Michigan. *Leonard Wood Papers*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁹Joseph Ralston Hayden *Papers*, Michigan Historical Collections, Ann Arbor, Michigan. *Leonard Wood Papers*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁰Karl Peltzer, *Pioneer Settlement in the Asiatic Tropics: Studies in Land Utilization and Agricultural Colonization in Southeastern Asia* (New York: American Geographical Society 1948) pp. 127-159.

¹¹Chester L. Hunt, "Ethnic Stratification and Integration in Cotabato," *Philippine Sociological Review*, 5, No. 1 (1957) pp. 13-38.

¹²Majul, *op. cit.*

had completed a study of the final phase of Maguindanaon resistance to Spain, during the second half of the nineteenth century.¹³ A little earlier, in 1968, Peter Gowing completed a study of the American administration of the 'Moro Provinces' up to 1920;¹⁴ and a little later, Ralph Thomas carried the story through to 1946 focussing on the theme of national integration.¹⁵ At about the same time, Samuel Tan was exploring the particular theme of *Muslim Armed Resistance* between 1900 and 1941.¹⁶

Based on field research, aside from the studies made by professional historians whose names have already been cited, this paper attempts an overview of the colonial period from the vantage point of contemporary Cotabato.

The Region

The region known to the Spaniards and the Americans as Cotabato occupies almost the whole of southwestern Mindanao. The Pulangi River or Rio Grande valley almost bisects the region, separating the coastal Cordillera or Tiruray Highlands from the Central Mindanao Highlands. Wernstedt and Spencer describe it as follows:

This extensive, low-lying, swampy plain... includes a lowland area of well over 1,000 square miles. Recent uplift across the mouth of the river, which has formed the low Cotabato and Timaco hills, has resulted in the impounding of river waters and the creation of two large swamp areas, the Libungan Marsh and the Liguasan Swamp. Together these two swamps cover a combined area of 450 square miles during normal water levels; however, the swamplands expand well beyond these limits when heavy seasonal rains and river floods inundate additional areas of the valley floor, and indeed, during heavy rains, all of the lowland downstream from Lake Buluan looks like a vast lake from the air.¹⁷

This valley is the homeland of the Maguindanaon ethno-linguistic group, the name referring, appropriately, to its tendency to flood. At various times in the past small numbers have settled along the coast, or pressed on into the Koronadal valley, but only until the recent build up of population through immigration did they occupy the uplands. These were populated by Muslim Iranon and Maranao in the North, and by pagan groups such as the Tiruray, Manobo and Bila'an in the coastal and central parts.

¹³Ileto *op. cit.*

¹⁴Peter Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland: the American Government of Muslim Filipinos, 1899-1921*. (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1957).

¹⁵Ralph Benjamin Thomas, *Muslim But Filipino: the Integration of Philippine Muslims, 1917-1946*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. (University of Pennsylvania, 1971).

¹⁶Samuel Kong Tan, *The Muslim Armed Struggle in the Philippines, 1900-1941*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, (Syracuse University, 1973). Alunan Glang's *Muslim Secession or Integration* (Quezon City: R.P. Garcia 1969) includes some historical pieces, based on the published sources, but is mainly concerned with contemporary problems. Michael O. Mastura's study, *The Condition, Status and Destiny of the Muslim South (Maguindanao, Maranao, Tausug) 1880-1871*, is in preparation.

¹⁷Frederick L. Wernstedt and Joseph E. Spencer, *Philippine Island World: A Physical Cultural and Regional Geography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 545.

The indigenous population was for the most part agricultural, but there was no shortage of land until large scale immigration began towards the middle of the twentieth century. When the Americans conducted the first census, in 1903, they reported a total of 125,875, of which 113,875 were Muslims and the rest pagan.¹⁸ This was a sparse population for a region of some 8,800 square miles, and inevitably posed the possibility of immigration from the overcrowded islands, once peace and order could be established. Christian immigrants and their descendants now heavily outnumber the indigenous peoples, but at the last American census, conducted in 1940, Muslims numbered 162,996 out of a total of 298,935, and pagans 70,493.¹⁹ Cotabato City remains the only settlement of any size, with a population of some 60,000. However, it amounted to only a few hundreds at the beginning of the century and had reached only 10,000 by the end of the American period.

Maguindanaon Political Organization

Although the Sultans of Maguindanao have their pride of place in the historical record, they were not the only title holders in the valley. As Iletto notes, the upper valley Rajahs of Buayan were probably of more consequence when the Spaniards first visited in the late sixteenth century; and even at its height Maguindanao did not claim sovereignty over them.²⁰ As it slid into decline through the eighteenth century, several of the Rajahs assumed the title of sultan, as though to assert equality.

The notion of sultanate is, in any case, an inadequate tool for understanding Maguindanaon political organization, referring as it does to form rather than reality. The centralization it suggests could scarcely be realized among a homesteading population, widely dispersed over difficult terrain, with primitive communications.²¹ While a sultan might have sanctity, magical powers and exalted rank, he was just another datu when it came to politics. The basic building blocks of the system were local datudoms, autonomous in theory, but often dependent on others for access to resources such as salt and iron, and intermittently articulated into wider alliances for attack or defense.

The primary meaning of *datu* for the Maguindanaon is ruler, one who controls his people, but also protects them against abuse by other datus.²² For this a datu must be *mawalao*, the meaning of which lies

¹⁸*Census Office. Census of the Philippines Islands Taken in 1903* (Manila: Bureau of Printing 1904). The estimates, particularly of the pagan population, were probably below the actual figure.

¹⁹*Philippines Commonwealth, Census of the Philippines, 1939*. (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1940). See also Frederick L. Wernstedt and Paul D. Simpkins. "Migrations and the Settlement of Mindanao," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 25 (November 1965) 83-102.

²⁰Iletto *op. cit.*, 2.

²¹Although the river was navigable for some 100 kilometers, such a journey would take several days paddling in a banca.

²²For an account from the Maranao perspective, see Melvin Mednick. "Some Problems of Moro History and Political Organization," *Philippine Sociological Review* 5, No. 1 (1957), pp. 39-52.

somewhere between the English brave and aggressive. The size of a datu's following depended on this capacity combined with control of some economic resource. The importance of the upper valley datu seems to have been based on rice production, part of which was exported, through the exploitation of slave labour, the taking of dues from Muslim peasants, and of tribute from upland pagans. As one proceeded down river, however, the exploitation of trade became increasingly important, with datu's controlling strategic points from which they could exact tolls. The Sultans of Maguindanao derived their unusual importance from their control of the region's principal entrepot, just inside the northern mouth of the river. The same location served as the rallying point for the large fleets that raided the Spanish Philippines, year after year, under the Sultan's aegis. Ileta shows how Maguindanao declined with the reduction in raiding and trading, while the upper valley prospered on the traffic in slaves taken from the pagan groups. It is difficult to assess the size of a datu's following, which no doubt varied a good deal; in the 1870's, two upper valley datu's, Utu of Buayan and the Sultan of Kabuntalan, were each reported to have several thousand slaves, apart from other followers.²³ However, as Datu Piang explained in an interview early in the American period, such estimates varied according to whether one included the followers of lesser datu's who attached themselves to the more important ones.²⁴

At one level one could regard the Maguindanaon as living in a state of perfect political competition for followers, slaves and resources. And to judge by the accounts of petty feuding and confrontation, this was indeed a tendency within the system; but it was mitigated by certain ideological principles.

The secondary meaning of *datu* was one entitled to rule on account of his descent from datus. Not all such datus would in fact rule, but their *maratabat* gave them something to live up to.²⁵ Thus certain ruling lines were associated with a particular place, called *ing'd*, a title or *grar*, and servile groups called *ndatuan*.²⁶ Commoner

²³Ileta *op. cit.*, p. 35.

²⁴Datu Piang formulated this principle in an early interview with American personnel.

²⁵Like the Mediterranean notion of honour (c.f. John Peristian ed. *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965). *Maratabat* is inherited in varying degree but must also be vindicated by action whenever the occasion arises. The greater the hereditary *maratabat*, the more jealously must it be defended. See also, Mamitua Saber, Mauyag Tamano and Charles A. Warriner, "The Maratabat of the Maranao," *Philippine Sociological Review* 8, nos. 1-2 (1960).

²⁶Unlike the Tausugs and Maranaos, but like some other lowland Philippine groups at first contact (c.f. Frank Lynch: "Trend Report on Studies in Social Stratification and Social Mobility in the Philippines," *East Asian Cultural Studies* 4 (1965), pp. 163-191.) The Maguindanaon recognized a four tier stratification: 1) *datus*; 2) commoners, 3) *ndatuan* or serfs; 4) *baniaga* or chattel slaves. There were also *olipun* or bond slaves whose condition was created by debt, the clearance of which released them—at least in theory. They emanated from, and presumably might return to any one of the four strata. Membership of the four strata was hereditary, but groups acquired their status through a variety of historical or pseudo-historical events. Thus the cadet branch of a datu line might opt for commoner status. Certain servile groups were descendants of Visayan captives and still called *Bisaya*. Others were associated with certain occupa-

groups or *domato* might also be linked to it, either through a traditional agreement or as cadet lines of the one stock.

In the absence of a rule of primogeniture, the succession to a title was a matter for competition. No doubt the datu qualities of the claimants, who might be numerous, given the prevalence of polygyny, were a major consideration. But here again ideological principles reduced the element of conflict. By taking into account the status of the mother as well as the father, it was possible to make fine distinctions of *bansa*.

The ranking system is complex, but it can be summarized by reference to the charter legend of Sarip Kabongsoan. The *Sarip*, which is the local form of the Arabic *sharif*, was the son of an Arab who had married the Sultan of Johore's daughter. Chance brought Kabongsoan to the mouth of the Rio Grande, where he began preaching Islam. He took wives from his converts, thus establishing a local stock that could claim descent from the Prophet Mohammed. The Sultans of Maguindanao claimed descent from a son of Kabongsoan; the Rajahs of Buayan from a daughter, and most of the other Maguindanaon datos claimed membership of one or other of these stocks, and in some instances both. The Maranao datos also claim descent from the Sarip, while more elaborate versions of the legend assert a common origin for all the datos of Brunei, Sulu and Mindanao. Their relative nobility was assessed in terms of the number of links they could trace with the Sarip, and any datu line of consequence kept a written genealogy or *tarsila* indicating these links.²⁷ The Sultans of Maguindanao seem to have been credited with the purest breeding, and reference is made to their light complexions and aquiline features as evidence of their Arab ancestry.

The legend not only provides a charter for the ranking system, and so of political authority; it also presents a model of political articulation through the transmission of nobility in marriage. It describes how a high born stranger marries the daughter of a local chief, founding a line that is far superior in *maratabat* to any of the others, and so entitled to rule. The wife's kin gain from this arrangement a more prestigious line of rulers and connection with the nobility elsewhere. According to the *tarsila*, young datos often followed this strategy, probably after failing to gain the family title. The legend also describes Kabongsoan bestowing his daughter on a Rajah of Buayan, ennobling his descendants, though in a lesser degree since women transmitted less

tions such as potting. The *baniaga* seem mostly to have originated as captives from the pagan groups.

²⁷The term *tarsila* comes from the Arabic *silsilah*, which means a chain or link. Saleeby, *op. cit.*, copied a number of such documents concerning the principal lines of Maguindanao. However, I have transcribed a number of documents relating to other branches of the Buayan line. I have also seen booklets, printed in Arabic, outlining the legendary origin of the Sultans of Sulu, Maguindanao, Maranao and Brunei. For a discussion of the analysis of such documents, see Cesar Adib Majul, "An Analysis of the Genealogy of Sulu", Paper prepared for a Filipino Muslim History and Culture Seminar-Workshop, Department of History, University of the East, Manila, 20. 10.77.

nobility than men. As Mastura has shown, marriages were regularly arranged in the process of alliance formation.²⁸

Such marriages were governed by a complex calculus, for it was on such occasions that the respective parties brought their respective claims to nobility openly. The degree of nobility conferred by the bride, relative to that of the husband, determined the size of the bride price but also the importance of the alliance. Basic to the system was the principle of hypergamy, according to which a woman might marry a man of equal or higher, but not inferior rank. A man, on the other hand, might marry beneath him; indeed an important datu had wives of every degree, including concubines who were slaves. The sons of these unions were to be called "*datu*," but they were not all of equal standing, and probably only a few would be entitled to claim the succession. In the same way, the rank of daughters varied, which was an advantage to their father since he could always find one to bestow on an ally, however low born. Because of her connection with himself, he could claim a high bride price, but because of her mother's status, he could claim she was not marrying beneath her.

The centralizing tendencies displayed by Maguindanaon society at certain points in its history are to be understood in terms of an interplay between economic and political factors, on the one hand, and ideology on the other. It would seem that when material conditions became favourable the hierarchical forms that came with Islam were there to give structure and legitimacy, lending themselves to elaboration as centralization continued. Among the Maranaos, there was no tendency to centralization, although the forms were present, presumably because the material conditions were lacking in their landlocked situation.²⁹

A reading of Maguindanaon history indicates that power and nobility tended to coincide. And while the system no doubt provided loopholes for *post hoc* ennoblement of the powerful, it nevertheless seems that society did focus on the sultanates of Maguindanao, Buayan and, from the eighteenth century, Kabuntalan. At the same time, it is inconceivable that the highest born *datu* was always the bravest; indeed the histories indicate that the title holder was often either a child or an old man, leaving the real power in the hands of a close kinsman of lesser rank. The focus of political organization, then, was not so much the title holder himself as the line to which he belonged.

The existence of a *datu*-category had the effect of identifying those who were in reality powerless and dependent with the powerful. In the same way, commoners could identify with a line of *datus* by

²⁸For an analysis of political marriages during the dynastic wars of the eighteenth century, see Michael O. Mastura, "The Maguindanao Core Lineage and the Dumatus," *Notre Dame Journal* 7, No. 2 (1977).

²⁹Melvin Mednick, *Encampment of the Lake: the Social Organization of the Moslem-Philippine (Moro) People*, *Research Series 5, Philippine Studies Program* (University of Chicago, 1965).

claiming descent from a cadet line that voluntarily 'gave way' in the succession. For the lower orders the idiom was one of voluntary support. However, in assessing the factor of ideology, it must be remembered that those who were most exploited lived, or came from, outside the boundaries of Maguindanaon society. The followers of a forceful datu, even his slaves, might share in the plunder and captives taken from Christian settlements, or exact tribute from a group of pagans.³⁰ Moreover, they could expect to receive back a portion of the produce they yielded up to him.

The Datus Under Spain

Although Spain did not establish a presence in Cotabato until 1851, she had played a hand in Maguindanaon affairs from the outset. The sultanates were segmentary states, intermittently capable of uniting for offense or defense, but always liable to internal dissension. In conflict, factions readily accepted outside help, even from Holland and Spain.³¹ The problem was, however, to prevent the allies from becoming masters, and it was just such a miscalculation that enabled the Spaniards to occupy the delta in 1861, without a shot being fired. Securing the upper valley was a less easy matter, requiring a series of campaigns over the next twenty-five years. Once again Spain exploited internal divisions, and as she demonstrated her superiority in the field, more and more datus joined her camp. But when the last of her enemies had made his submission, she was left with allies whom she could scarcely control, and whose loyalty was very much in doubt. She had brought down the old political order, but a new style of datu had emerged in place of the old.

Spain's first target was the Sultan of Maguindanao. Having reduced him to penury by naval blockade, she set about determining the succession by exploiting dynastic rivalries. When the old sultan, Kudarat II, died in 1857—under suspicious circumstances, so it is said—his nominee, Makakwa, succeeded. He it was who invited them into the delta, presumably to shore up his own insecure position. In doing so he alienated what remained of his support, becoming largely dependent on the pension Spain allowed him. Spain may have intended to use the sultan as an instrument of control, but she succeeded only in neutralizing him. He and his successors spent much of their time in the old tributary of Sibugay, in Zamboanga del Sur, avoiding involvement in the upheavals along the river.

Meanwhile in the upper valley, a powerful alliance was forming around Utu, high born datu of the Rajah Buayan line. However,

³⁰The following judgment of Datu Utu could in fact be applied in greater or lesser degree to any datu. "In effect his natural talent, his prestige, his riches, his supporters and above all his fiery despotism, had created around him a certain air of glory which made him like a feared idol or the compelled leader of whatever action took place in the basin of the Rio-Grande." Pablo Pastells, "Memoria de R.P. Pablo Pastells," *Cartas de los Padres de la Compania de Jesus de la Mision de Filipinas*, 9 (Manila: 1877-1895) p. 615. Translated by Iletto, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

³¹Tan *op. cit.*, pp. 132-133. Majul 1973 *op. cit.*, *passim*.

resistance to the Spaniards could only be sustained at the cost of severe strain: manpower losses were unprecedentedly heavy; pagan groups suffered repeated raids for slaves, to be traded for guns; ties of kinship and affinity were stretched to breaking point. Utu's unique reputation in the folk memory for cruelty and caprice was no doubt earned through his use of terror to shore up the crumbling alliance.³²

By 1888, Spain had broken the alliance, but did not attempt to remove Utu from his place in the upper valley. In 1890, however, he came down river to spend his last years under Spanish protection. According to tradition, he woke one morning to find that his followers had all deserted during the night, seeking the protection of his one time lieutenant, Datu Piang.³³ Piang was a Chinese mestizo with no claim to nobility, but he nevertheless replaced Utu as the most powerful datu in the upper valley, forming an alliance that included Utu's nephew, Ali, and several other members of the Rajah Buayan house. He does not share Utu's reputation for cruelty, but he was no less ruthless in dealing with his enemies.³⁴

Piang's alliance was not subjected to the strain of a war with Spain, however. Indeed, he declared himself her friend, and Saleeby supposed that his overthrow of Utu was effected with the approval of Spain. He certainly enriched himself by supplying food to the up-river garrison at Reina Regente, but also established useful ties with Chinese traders at the river mouth. Saleeby reported that "at the time of the Spanish evacuation he [Piang] had become the richest Moro in Mindanao and the most influential chief of the island."³⁵

Despite her superior firepower, Spain could scarcely have defeated Utu without Maguindanaon help. She needed not only additional manpower, but local knowledge, particularly of how to win over Utu's restive supporters. The Sultan and his kinsfolk either could not or would not intervene, but others came forward, most notably Datu Ayunan.³⁶ Ayunan seems to have been the first of his line to assume political importance but he does not seem to have been of the high nobility. His base, a point of minor strategic importance some twelve miles up-river, became the front line when the war with Utu began; but instead of fleeing he chose to stay, becoming the leader of a powerful alliance. He engineered a number of

³²For a general discussion of the kind of conditions under which Utu was operating, see E.V. Walter, *Terror and Resistance: a Study of Political Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

³³Regarding Piang's early career and overthrow of Utu, see Pablo Pastells, *Mision de la Compania de Jesus de Filipinas en Siglo XIX* (Barcelona, 1916-1917) Vol. III pp. 215; 262. (See also Iletto *op. cit.*, p. 63). According to this account Piang and others broke with Utu following a dispute over arms. According to oral tradition, which is still current, Utu's followers deserted him when he refused to open his granaries during a time of famine. See Captain C. Mortera, "The career of Bai Bagongan of Buluan, Cotabato", Ms. (1934) in *Hayden Papers op. cit.*

³⁴*Reports of the Philippine Commission to the Secretary of War*, 9 (1902) p. 481; also Appendix 12, p. 578.

³⁵Najeeb Saleeby, *The History of Sulu* (Manila 1908), p. 262.

³⁶Iletto *op. cit.*, pp. 61-3.

defections from Utu's ranks, and may have been behind the revolt of Piang, who had become his son-in-law. Spain viewed his aggrandizement with unease, and while conferring on him the title *gobernador-cillo*, took steps to curtail his influence once Utu had been defeated. He died in 1898, on the eve of the Spanish withdrawal, passing his title on to his brother Balabaran.

When the Spaniards withdrew at the beginning of 1899 they left Cotabato under a triumvirate, composed of Datu Piang, representing the Maguindanaon, Ramon Vilo, representing the 600 Christian Filipinos now living in the delta, and another, representing the Chinese trading community.³⁷ Within a few months the men of Piang and Ali had invaded the lower valley, seizing and later killing Vilo. The Chinese remained under Piang's protection, but the Filipinos were subject to various outrages, and several datos, unfriendly to Piang, were forced to flee. Among these was Balabaran, who suggested that Piang had taken over what remained of his brother Ayunan's old alliance. In any case, when American troops arrived at the end of the year, the up-river datos promptly withdrew, offering their services to the new regime.

Although the Spaniards maintained sizeable garrisons on the coast and smaller establishments in the interior, they made little attempt to administer the population outside the small delta settlements at Tamantaca and Cotabato. Pursuing a 'policy of attraction', they avoided interference in religious practices or the datos' rights over their followers. They formally abolished slavery, and a Jesuit establishment offered sanctuary to Utu's runaway slaves, but many datos still had theirs when the Americans arrived. In the lower valley even the high born had dwindled into local dignitaries, and a number were seeking escape in opium and gambling. Political marriages were still contracted, but within a narrow span. In the hinterland, however, political alliances were still important, and reinforced by marriage, though the ranking system was already in disarray.

The Datus under the United States

The Maguindanaon offered only one serious challenge to American rule, under the leadership of Datu Ali in 1903.³⁸ Ali was defeated and killed in the following year. Thereafter Cotabato was the most peaceable of the Moro provinces, with only occasional and localized outbreaks of disorder. Continuing the Spanish 'policy of attraction', the Americans left the datos as they were, making friends out of former enemies.³⁹ But the end of fighting meant the end of alliances. The way to prosperity was now through cultivating the favour of the

³⁷R.P.C. 9 (1902) pp. 522-4.

³⁸Gowing *op. cit.* pp. 151-4; Tan *op. cit.*, pp. 35-38.

³⁹This is particularly apparent in the case of Datu Alamada, who carried on a local resistance in the interior up to 1913, and Datu Ampatuan who briefly defied the regime in the same year. (Tan *op. cit.*, pp. 37-38; 62-148). Both leaders subsequently became part of the governmental system.

administration, or through participating in the development of the province as a major producer of rice and corn.

Ali mounted a brave resistance to the Americans, which took guerilla form after his defeat in a major encounter. But there was no question of his becoming another Utu. Piang, the real power in the upper valley, refused to support him, and indeed supplied the Americans with intelligence as to his whereabouts. It may also be true, as tradition says, that he simultaneously warned Ali to move on, and he would surely have given support had the Americans shown signs of weakening. But in the event Ali's death saw him on the winning side and the authorities in his debt.

Piang had impressed the Americans from the outset. In 1902, the following report was forwarded to the Philippine Commission:

He is very shrewd, has brains and is self made, being now quite wealthy and a power in the valley, as he controls all of Datu Ali's influence over the tribes and adds to this his own brain. He is the only prominent Moro who seems to appreciate what the American invasion means and the business opportunities it brings with it. The Chinese blood in him makes him a shrewd businessman, and he has accumulated quite a fortune and is daily adding to it. He practically controls all the business of Cotabato, especially exports, through his Chinese agents in that place; has complete control of the Moro productions, and working with the Chinese merchants makes it practically impossible for a white firm to enter into business in the Rio Grande Valley, even with much capital behind them.⁴⁰

At an interview, he [Piang] guessed that he might have 15,000 people, but could not be sure because the followers of the up-river datu were all his followers since their masters were his friends.⁴¹ Another military observer reported that:

... the control of Piang over his people is absolute and complete. All know the refusal to work or fetch materials as ordered would have resulted in a swift and sure chastisement which might be limited to a flogging with rattan, but possibly would not stop short of beheading.⁴²

Although the Americans at various times declared their determination to break the hold of the datu, Piang retained much of his power to the end. In 1926, when he was in his late seventies, an American observer described him in the following terms:

In late years younger datu have striven to displace him, but although no longer supreme, he is still easily first in the valley. . . . His slaves still surround him, his word is still law, and it is said, although probably could not be proved, that in accordance with the old Maguindanao code he still has recalcitrants of certain sorts cast to the crocodiles. I know that he recently put an influential datu on the wood pile for two months for crossing him. Also the old fox has accumulated much wealth during the three or four decades of his power: 42,000 coconut trees (they are good for \$1 per tree each year) thousands of carabao, thousands of hectares of rice, land, horses, cattle, build-

⁴⁰R.P.C. 9 (1902) p. 528.

⁴¹Interview with Datu Piang R.P.C. 8 (1901) p. 105.

⁴²General G. Davis, "Notes on the Government of the Country Inhabited by non-Christians in Mindanao and the Neighbouring Islands", Ms. (1902) in *Dean Worcester Collection*, (University of Michigan Library), p. 256.

ings, boats, and what not—to say nothing of the tithe paid him by his loyal subjects. He is also reputed to have a huge hoard of gold coins. . . .⁴³

What the observer said for Piang went for other datos in lesser degree. He had retained his slaves and followers, his hold over land and those who cultivated it, and his control of both force and legal sanctions.

At the outset it looked as though the American administration would break the power of the datos; instead it came to rely on them. Cotabato's quiescence, compared with the other Moro provinces, was largely due to the influence of Piang and his associates.⁴⁴ Moreover, he was ever responsive to American programs.⁴⁵ He led the way in developing commercial agriculture. He supported modern education to the extent of sending his own sons to study in Manila, one becoming an agriculturist, another an educationist, and a third the first Muslim attorney. He gave his backing to settlement of immigrants from the Visayas, and in the face of nationalist opposition, to a proposal for massive American investment in Mindanao. The pro-Americanism of Piang and the other datos, and their hostility to Philippine nationalism also proved an asset in the earlier years, though something of an embarrassment later, when independence had become a firm prospect.

The datos, for their part, found themselves well placed to take advantage of the economic and political changes that were taking place. In the economic sphere this meant intensifying the production of rice and corn. The Maguindanaon had, of course, long lived by commerce; and while raiding and toll-taking might have been more important sources of wealth at certain periods, agricultural products had always been more important, particularly in the upper valley. With raiding suppressed and the toll posts increasingly by-passed by the new overland routes, and with the demand for forest products declining, they later became of prime importance. The datos' task was to adapt their traditional rights over land and people to meet modern conditions.

Spain's policy had been to choke off Maguindanaon commerce with other countries, but not to stop trade as such. Iletto notes that the need of her establishments for supplies stimulated local trade, and that rice and high quality cacao found their way from the upper valley to Manila and Sulu, through Chinese intermediaries.⁴⁶ In 1901, the Americans found some 204 Chinese in the town of Cotabato, mainly engaged in the sale of rice, wax, coffee, rubber and guttapercha, which last they sent to Singapore.⁴⁷ They estimated the aggregate of exports at about \$150,000 Mexican. The bulk of these products came from the

⁴³Letter, J.R. Hayden to Dr. Barr, 12-9. 1926, *Hayden Papers op. cit.*

⁴⁴See Thomas, *op. cit.* p. 103; Tan *op. cit.*, p. 148.

⁴⁵See, for example, the report on Abdullah Piang's death in the *Philippine Herald*, 10. 12. 1933. Thomas (*op. cit.*, p. 129) notes Piang's support for American investment, as proposed by Congressman Bacon in 1926.

⁴⁶Iletto *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁴⁷*R.P.C.* 8 (1901) p. 111.

upper valley, and so were under the control of Datu Piang, who also had close ties with the Chinese traders. He, however, seemed to be the only datu to engage in commerce, the rest confining themselves to primary production.

Economic statistics occur irregularly. In 1908, the Governor of Moro province reported the establishment of saw and rice mills, and exports to the value of ₱21,246.50.⁴⁸ By 1919, the figure had reached ₱760,428, exceeding imports by more than ₱200,000.⁴⁹ Rice had become the most important item, with copra coming second and corn third. In the years that followed, the area under rice increased from 1,864 ha. in 1920 to 24,630 ha. in 1935.⁵⁰

In this rapid development of agriculture, Cotabato's problem was not land but people. The population had always been sparse, particularly in the south of the province, and had been further reduced by the cholera epidemic of 1902. It may have been on this account that the datus were prepared to accept Christian immigrants, seeing them as potential followers and payers of tribute. Meanwhile their relations with their Maguindanaon followers underwent certain changes.

The description of Piang's domain in 1926, quoted earlier, suggests that at least some datus kept their slaves, although the institution had been abolished and slaving outlawed. In the long run, however, slaves became servants, bodyguards, tenants or labourers, without their relations with their masters changing a great deal. Muslim farmers, like the Christians, needed protection from the depredations of bandits and cattle-rustlers, and this dependence gave the foundation of need to traditional loyalty.

Given the abundance of land and the critical importance of having followers to occupy it, little thought was given to the drawing of boundaries or the establishment of claims—except where ancestral graves were situated (*pusaka* land). The Americans began a cadastral survey, and introduced procedures for registering claims, but these lagged far behind the taking up of land, and widened the scope for land grabbing. Maguindanao farmers who put faith on their traditional rights, sometimes found that their land had been registered by Christian immigrants, or even their own datus.⁵¹ A new type of tenant appeared, paying a third of his crop to the owner, although the rate of tenancy remained relatively low, even in 1971.⁵²

⁴⁸*Annual Report of the Governor of Moro Province. For the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1908* (Zamboanga, 1908).

⁴⁹*Reports of the Governor-General of the Philippines Islands to the Secretary of War*, (Washington, 1909) p. 81.

⁵⁰P.J. Webster, "Mindanao and Sulu Archipelago: Their Natural Resources and Opportunities for Development," *Bureau of Agriculture Bulletins*, 38. (Manila 1920) p. 41. *Statistical Bulletin of the Philippine Islands*, 1935.

⁵¹For an account of agrarian conditions in Cotabato during the American period, see Peltzer *op. cit.*, pp. 127-159.

⁵²In 1939, the date of the earliest estimate, 23% of farms were operated by tenants; in 1960 the percentage of a very much larger total was 26%. It is

While the mass of Maguindanao farmers remained where they were, a number, as in the old days, followed young datos to set up new settlements, either taking up virgin lands or displacing pagan *kaingeros*. In later years these were to provide the springboards for a number of political careers.

The Americans' policy of attraction entailed some recognition of Moro customary and religious laws. This arose from the difficulty in getting Moslems to bring their cases to court rather than to the datos, and also in separating religious from secular cases.⁵³ There is little data on this topic from Cotabato, but it is suggestive that as late as the 1970's, cases of murder were being settled by datos informally rather than in the courts. However, a circular from Governor Gutierrez, dated 1935 reveals further complexities.⁵⁴ He complained that in certain districts, provincial and municipal officials were adjudicating "so-called religious cases", appropriating the fines imposed and making prisoners work for their private benefit. An examination of the names of municipal presidents and other officials indicates that the datos monopolized these positions.

The American authorities were slow to give Muslims responsible political office; no Maguindanaon served as provincial governor until the Japanese occupation, though there was usually one on the provincial board. Piang was for some years a member of the national legislature, but all that most datos could hope for was a municipal district presidency, an office carrying less power and reward than a full municipal presidency and a great deal less than a mayor under the Republic. Nevertheless, these administrative divisions placed a limit on the dominance of figures such as Piang by reserving office for local datos.

Until the 1930's all offices were appointive, so that advancement depended on the favour of the governor rather than ability to rally support. As long as he lived, Piang had first call on it, but he died in 1933 and his eldest son Abdullah, who had taken his place in the National Assembly, died a few months later. There were four other sons, well qualified in terms of education to succeed, but they now had to compete with Sinsuat, son of Balabaran, who had stood second to Piang for some years. He had already had some experience of national affairs when he was appointed senator in 1935.⁵⁵ Then in the first election for the National Assembly in 1936, he defeated Attorney Menandang Piang by 312 votes to 128. Ugalingan Piang regained the seat in the next election, when there was a franchise of more than 20,000 votes.⁵⁶ With this election Maguindanaon politics once again

doubtful whether these estimates took into account traditional relationships through which a datu received a percentage of the farmer's crop. *Philippine Statistics: 1969 Yearbook*.

⁵³Gowing, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-192. Thomas, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-70.

⁵⁴Provincial Circular, 98. (15.1.35). *Hayden Papers, op. cit.*

⁵⁵*Directorio Oficial de la Asamblea Nacional* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1938) pp. 143-144.

⁵⁶*Directorio*. (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1940) pp. 149-150.

became a matter of large-scale alliance formation, though the contest did not begin in earnest until after the Japanese occupation.

The American records have surprisingly little to say about Sinsuat Balabaran.⁵⁷ Born in 1864, he had grown up during the ascendancy of his father's brother Ayunan. His father, Balabaran, succeeded to the title of *gobnadorcillo* on the eve of the Spanish withdrawal, and also proclaimed himself sultan, but evidently lacked Ayunan's political strength for he was forced to flee Taviran for the delta in 1899 and again in 1901, for fear of Piang's men. A subsequent marriage between Sinsuat and the daughter of the Sultan of Kabuntalan suggests a recovery, but Balabaran died soon after and the importance of such alliances declined with the end of fighting. Later, Sinsuat himself retired to the family bailiwick, where he was appointed Municipal President. Between 1923 and 1931, he served as special adviser to Governor Guttierrez, having already represented Mindanao and Sulu in the negotiation of the Jones Act of 1916. Throughout this period he must have been consolidating and extending his political base, for in a 'Who's who among the Datus', dated 1927, he is described as "controlling territory from Tumbao to the southern mouth of the river, and having great influence over the Tiruray in the adjacent mountains."⁵⁸ Evidently he was also acquiring large tracts of land, worked by tenants, while his many brothers and sons were pushing back the frontier, establishing themselves along the coast and even in the growing town of Cotabato. Sinsuat's own move to the outskirts of town reflects his increasing rapport with the Governor and other Christian settlers, which was later to place the mayorship under family control.

Also of note was Ampatuan, who, being of Arab descent, was entitled *Sarip* and accorded equal status with the descendants of Kabongsoan.⁵⁹ A former lieutenant of Datu Ali, he had been won over by Piang, whom he succeeded on the Provincial Board in 1917. He is described as controlling 1,500 families in the upper valley.⁶⁰

Compared with these three, the representatives of the royal houses were at best local notables. A few, like Datu Dilangalen, retained sizeable followings. Others were left with little but their nobility. There was still a sultan in Kabuntalan, but no one claimed the title in the upper valley. Mastura, son of Kuderat II, became *Sultan sa Maguindanao* as a very old man in 1926, but when he died a few years later, the title was claimed by Ismail of the Sibugay line over the protests of the Cotabato line.

⁵⁷Thus, Bureau of Insular Affairs Chief, Frank McIntyre, wrote, "...our record of Datu Sinsuat and my memory are not so detailed." Memorandum of 16.8.26, *Bureau of Insular Affairs*, U.S. National Archives, 5828/42.

⁵⁸Major Carter, "Who's Who Among the Datus" Ms. (1927) *Bureau of Insular Affairs*, U.S. National Archives, 5075-147.

⁵⁹According to local sources, Ampatuan's great grandfather was an Arab immigrant. However, neither he nor the intervening descendants are mentioned in the Spanish records. From this, it may be concluded that Sarip Ampatuan was the first to assume political importance.

⁶⁰Major Carter, *op. cit.*

Piang and Sinsuat also saw to it that some of their sons took advantage of the American education program. Menandang Piang became the first Maguindanaon attorney, closely followed by Duma Sinsuat and Salipada Pendatun. The last was the orphaned son of the upper valley *Sultan sa Barongis*, but owed his advancement to the patronage of an American teacher, Edward Kuder. Some of the old nobility also sent sons to school, but many rejected education as covert Christianization—as indeed it had been under the Spanish regime. The mass of the population likewise remained illiterate and ignorant of English, so that they were dependent on their leaders in any dealings with the government.

The Japanese Occupation and After

The Japanese period is poorly documented, but the oral record is relatively fresh.⁶¹ In many respects it recreated the conditions existing during the late Spanish and early American periods, with the invaders controlling the delta and a few centers up-river, and obtaining the cooperation of the datos thereabouts. In the hinterland, Maguindanaon guerilla groups were in control, nominally under American military direction, but in practice independent of it and of each other for much of the time. Salipada Pendatun, Gumbay Piang, Luminog Mangilen and Mantil Dilangalen were the principal figures, emerging as political leaders in the liberation period. However, none of the collaborators suffered any lasting penalty.

One important consequence of the Japanese period was the release of large quantities of arms, which were never taken in after the war, and the formation of private armies. These became a major factor in the turbulent electoral politics of the Republic. It is not entirely fanciful to see this as a revival of traditional political forms; however, just as outside connections were important in the proto-colonial period, so connections with one or other national party were important under the Republic. Success depended on a combination of high level connections in Manila and widely ramifying alliances in the provinces. These alliances increasingly included Christian immigrants, who were soon to outnumber the Maguindanaon. It is a tribute to the skill and tenacity of the Maguindanaon politicians that they were able to keep hold of the principal positions until 1971.

Politics under the Republic proved a more difficult and costly business than it had been under the Americans, though the rewards were also greater. A number of notable families were eclipsed, most notably the Piangs, with the death of Congressman Gumbay in 1949. They retained control of their home municipality, but it was several

⁶¹Edward Haggerty describes a brief visit to Cotabato in his *Guerilla Padre in Mindanao* (New York and Toronto: Longmans Green and Co., 1946.) A mimeographed newspaper, *Mount Peris Echo*, under the editorship of Gumbay Piang, has yet to be traced. Ralph Thomas has summarized the Japanese sources in "Asia for the Asiatics?" Muslim Filipino Responses to Japanese Occupation and Propaganda during World War II. *Dansalan Research Center Occasional Papers*, No. 7, May 1977. Also in *Asian Forum* (July-September, 1972).

times subdivided to make room for expansive neighbours such as the Ampatuan family.

Salipada Pendatun remained Cotabato's principal representative in Manila up to the suspension of parliamentary government in 1972, first as senator, later as congressman. This removed him increasingly from provincial affairs, but his interests were protected by his brother-in-law, the resistance veteran Datu Ugtog Matalam, who held the governorship. Their control was repeatedly challenged, by the Sinsuats and Ampatuans, and various Christian aspirants. The Sinsuats gained the congressional position only once, in 1949, narrowly losing it in 1969. However, they have always retained their hold on their home municipality, which was recently subdivided, and only lost the predominantly Christian Cotabato City in 1968.

In 1978, Datu Blah Sinsuat was among those elected to the new national body, or the *Interim Batasang Pambansa*. The record of this family is particularly remarkable, running as it does from the beginning of the Spanish period through to the present. However, it is not unparalleled. For example, an appointed governor of one of the new provinces into which Cotabato has been divided was the great grandson of Sultan Mastura.

New Datus for Old

The Spanish occupation of the delta in 1861 presented the Maguindanaon datus with the critical choice between defiance and compliance. Those who chose defiance were eventually broken, but they remained a threat long enough for the complaint to make themselves indispensable to the colonial regime, and so retain a fair measure of autonomy. With the American take-over the sequence was quickly repeated, after which they settled down to converting their domains into agricultural estates. As effective controllers of the Muslim masses they were duly appointed to local government, and having acquired the necessary connections, moved in due course into the national arena.

However, the datus could not maintain a complete hegemony in the rapidly developing regional economy. Increasingly they found themselves part of a composite elite, in which they enjoyed a near-monopoly of political office and controlled wide lands, but left commerce to the Chinese and public administration to Christian Filipinos. Despite the Piangs' example, few established outside connections necessary to commercial enterprises, or the educational qualifications for entry into the upper levels of the public service. Their strength lay in their monopoly of access to the Muslim masses.

The datus' relation to the masses was now very different from what it used to be. With an end to raiding and reduction in toll and tribute taking, they had fewer rewards for their followers. Such patronage as they could dispense took the form of access to land and the occasional use of influence with the authorities. The nature of their

legitimacy had also changed. If Spain had failed to destroy datuism, it had nevertheless, destroyed the traditional order. Whether compliant like the Sultans of Maguindanao, or defiant like the Rajahs of Buayan, the high nobility had been the principal casualties of the period. They survived as dignitaries, perpetuating their rank through appropriate marriages, but without even the semblance of political authority outside their immediate domains. Power had passed to a new style of datu.

The permanent separation of power and rank was made clear in 1902, when Datu Utu's death made a widow of the high born Raja Putri, daughter of Sultan Kuderat II. The American authorities were given to understand that she would marry either Datu Ali or Datu Piang, but the former was not of equal rank while the latter was not of the nobility at all.⁶² Rather than break the rule of hypergamy, she married the current Sultan of Maguindanao, Mangigin, who was of appropriate rank but a political cipher. There were occasional marriages between the old and new datus, but this was no longer a basis for alliance, and the rising generation were more likely to take Christian wives.

Earlier, it was suggested that *datu* had "ruler" as a primary meaning and, "descendant of rulers" as a secondary meaning. The latter, however, provided the basic principle for a notional order that bore some resemblance to reality before colonial rule. Spain destroyed that order and created a new crop of datus who formed part of the colonial order. In fact their place in that order, between the infidel invader and the Muslim masses, was profoundly ambiguous. Seen from above, they mediated the policies of the colonial regime; viewed from below, they provided a defense against alien forces. Thus situated they prospered and their power became entrenched. The datus of the Spanish period had created their own *maratabat*; by the end of the American period they were once again inheriting it, not unlike the old datus, but also not unlike the elite families of the Christian Philippines.

⁶²R.P.C. 9 (1902) p. 528. The rumour that Datu Utu was the real father of Piang is not without significance in this respect.