

“Yakan” refers to the majority Muslim group in Basilan, an island just south of Zamboanga province in Mindanao. The Spaniards called them Sameacas and considered them aloof and sometimes hostile hill people (Wulff 1978:149; *Haylaya* 1980:13).

Basilan Island measures 1,339 square kilometers, the largest in the archipelago. Located at the northern end of the Sulu archipelago, it is bounded in the north by Zamboanga City; in the south by the Sulu archipelago, with Jolo as the major island; in the east by Mindanao; and in the west by the Sulu Sea and Sabah (North Borneo). Basilan enjoys good weather since it is located below the typhoon belt. Abundant rainfall throughout the year keeps the sod wet and fertile (Sherfan 1976:3; Jundam 1983:3). The island has a mountainous terrain once covered with thick forests. There are three main waterfalls which provide waterpower: Kumalarang Falls, Busay Falls, and Bulingan Water Falls. However, this small island has not been spared the ravages of environmental abuse. Basilan at present suffers from water shortage because of unabated illegal logging, which according to statistics, destroys Basilan’s forest reserves at the rate of 2,000 hectares annually. Forest denudation has reduced by over half the water outflow from its watersheds, caused heavy siltation, and dried up the two main rivers, Busay and Aguada.

Basilan is inhabited by five ethnic groups headed by the Yakan, who number around 196,000 (NCCP-PACT 1988). The other ethnic groups in order of population size are the Chavacano, Sama, Tausug, and Visayan (Jundam 1983:7).

The Yakan have Malay features. They are small of frame, with brown skin, slanting eyes and black hair—characteristics similar to the Dyak of north Borneo, leading to speculation that they originated from this race.

They speak a language known as Bahasa Yakan, which is a variation of the Sama, Sinama or Siama and the Tausug languages (Jundam 1983:7-8). It is written in the Jawi script, with adaptations to sounds not present in Arabic (Sherfan 1976).

## **History**

Historians have scant knowledge of the prehispanic history of the Yakan simply because they have little contact with other ethnic groups. Basilan’s nearness to Borneo led to the theory that the Yakan originated from the Dyak, but it is safe to say that Basilan’s history is related to that of the Sulu archipelago. The sultanate of Sulu became a center of power in the 1700s, ruled over the island of Basilan nominally, and had little influence over the Yakan who lived in the interior (Sherfan 1976:11; *Haylaya* 1980:43). Islam is said to have started in the Philippines about 1280, but some scholars believe that Islam spread in some areas of the archipelago during the early 1200s. Then and now, the inhabitants of the Sulu archipelago have been described as Muslims who have retained much of their pre-Islamic beliefs. Such folk-Islamic culture resulted from the fact that Islamic conversions were mostly

undertaken not by full-time religious teachers but by Arab Muslim traders who traversed the Malacca-Borneo-Sulu-Luzon-Taiwan route. (Sherfan 1976:12-13).

By the early 1700s, the Sultan of Sulu had defeated the Sultan of Maguindanao, signaling the rise of the Sulu sultanate in southern Philippines, with Jolo as the seat of power. The Yakan paid a yearly tribute to the Sultan.

The Spaniards made several attempts to control Jolo, but failed. However, Catholic missionaries were able to penetrate Basilan. By 1654 there were about 1,000 Christian families living in the island.

By the 1840s, colonial interests other than Spanish focused over western Mindanao, particularly the territories under the Sulu sultanate. The British, French, Germans, and Americans all became interested in these rich islands. In reaction, the Spanish government in 1842 established Fort Isabela in the northwest coast of Basilan. The area then grew into a Christian settlement which also became a trade and commercial center.

Despite such progress in Basilan, the Yakan remained in the interior, hostile to lowlanders. But a fugitive from Cavite named Pedro Cuevas escaped to Basilan where he fought and killed a Yakan chieftain named Datu Kalun (also spelled Kalung and Kalum). Cuevas then adopted the name of Datu Kalun (*Haylaya* 1980:43). The Yakan accepted Cuevas as their leader because he embraced the Yakan religion and way of life, married one of their women, and instituted meaningful sociopolitical changes in their lives. Datu Kalun consolidated the Yakan, led battles against the invading rulers from Jolo, and rid Basilan of pirates and marauders.

In 1844, the French government tried to occupy Basilan, intent on establishing a network of naval stations to protect French trade. The inhabitants of Basilan fought against the French for a year, resulting in a French withdrawal, as formalized in a proclamation dated 5 August 1845. During the same year, a US survey mission studied the potentials of the Sulu archipelago, but American intervention did not start until 1899.

In 1895, the Sultan of Sulu sent his bravest general, Datu Julkanayin, to regain control over Basilan, only to be defeated by Datu Kalun's forces. The ensuing peace encouraged more Christians to settle in Basilan. Thus, the Spaniards now considered Cuevas/Datu Kalun an ally and pardoned him for his earlier offense.

By this time, the Katipunan (revolutionary organization) had been gaining momentum in Luzon. In Mindanao, Muslim resistance contributed greatly to the weakening of Spanish colonisers. Moreover, the Spanish campaigns against the "Moros"—the derogatory term used by the colonialists against the Muslim Filipinos—caused heavy casualties and depleted Spanish resources by millions of pesos. One example is the Muslim attack on the Spanish garrison in Jolo, which dealt a heavy blow on the Spanish forces in Mindanao in 1897. The military attack is considered an important

anticolonial revolutionary effort, although the Muslims themselves did not join the Katipunan (*Haylaya* 1980).

While Zamboanga and Sulu were the centers of Spanish-Muslim hostilities, Basilan inhabitants, especially the Yakan, remained fairly unaffected by the social upheavals. Still, the Yakan were among those natives called Moros by the Spaniards (Jundam 1983:8-9).

The arrival of the Americans in 1899 changed the situation in Mindanao. The American strategy of integration was more acceptable to the Muslims than the Spanish strategy of conversion. The new colonizers were received openly by the Muslim elite. In November 1899, American troops took over the Spanish garrison in Zamboanga, one of the last strongholds of the Filipino revolutionaries in Mindanao. By December 1899, the Americans led by Colonel James S. Petit occupied the Spanish naval base of Isabela de Basilan. In Basilan, an old and sickly Datu Kalun (Pedro Cuevas) supported the new colonizers.

The Philippine-American War was raging in Luzon. So as not to spread out their forces, the Americans employed the classic divide-and-rule tactic. Major General E.S. Otis, commander-in-chief of the US Forces, sent General John C. Bates to negotiate with the Sultan of Sulu. Known as the Bates Treaty, the agreement provided for the exercise of American authority over the Sulu archipelago in exchange for the recognition of Muslim culture and religion.

The peace created by the Bates Treaty did not last. This became evident when the Muslims repudiated the Moro province, a politico-military government in Mindanao lasting from 1903 to 1914. It is important to note that barely two months before the creation of the Moro province, the American colonial government declared and classified all unoccupied Muslim and tribal ancestral lands as public lands. Immediately after the declaration, American investments entered Mindanao. Mass migration of Christians was encouraged, displacing many Muslims and tribal Filipinos from their ancestral lands (Rodil 1985:4).

The growing Moro resistance was manifested in the form of military attacks against American troops and outposts. There were bitter Muslim revolts and uprisings during the succeeding years: the Panglima Hassan uprising in Jolo in 1903; the Pala uprising in 1905; the uprising led by Datu Laksamana Usap of Sulu in 1905; and the battle of Bud Dajo from 1906 to 1909.

Datu Kalun died in Basilan on 16 July 1904 at the age of 58, soon after his first contact with the Americans. His nephew Gabino Pamaran became his successor and adopted the name Datu Mursalun. Mursalun, also pro-American, founded the town of Lamitan which became an American model of civil government and development. Mursalun worked for the material progress of Basilan, and sought ways to fight banditry and piracy in the area. During this time, a famous pirate named Jikiri was attacking the rich Muslim, Chinese, and American traders. He was as much a threat

to American rule as the Muslim “insurgents.” Although the Yakan were not involved in the growing resistance, they also provided sanctuary for the activities of Jikiri, who was eventually slain by the Americans on 2 July 1909 (*Haylaya* 1980).

There was a resurgence of Moro resistance at Patian Island when General John J. Pershing assumed governorship of the Moro province in 1909. He ordered the complete disarmament of the Muslims through a system of cash incentives, but most refused to sell their weapons. Many Muslims, in fact, decided to resume the fight against the Americans, who were then backed up by Muslim members of the Philippine Scouts (precursor of the Philippine Constabulary). Fierce battles at Bud Dajo and Bud Bagsak in Jolo ensued, forcing the Americans and local counterinsurgency forces to employ the most brutal military tactics against the Muslims. A majority of the victims were women and children, for which Pershing received severe criticism.

Alongside military suppression came a policy of education. Public schools were built but Muslim enrollment was way below Christian school attendance. Muslims considered education a threat to their culture and religion.

To ensure Muslim participation in government affairs, the Americans soon adopted a Policy of Attraction for western Mindanao. Moreover, the Philippine Constabulary (PC) replaced the United States Army units pursuant to colonial efforts to reduce American presence. The replacement of American troops, mostly by Christians under the PC, increased the hostility between Muslims and Christians.

In the political sphere, the management of Muslim affairs through the organization of the Department of Mindanao and Sulu in 1914 was unsuccessful, as leadership in the department fell in the hands of Christians. Thus, the Muslim leaders were historically opposed to the idea of independence, which meant the incorporation of Muslim areas into a political system dominated by Christians. Their fears were not baseless. As demonstrated by the Commonwealth government, President Manuel L. Quezon and other Christian political leaders failed to incorporate the development of Mindanao and Sulu into the national development plan.

The outbreak of World War II disrupted Commonwealth operations. Christian and Muslim officers and men of the military district in Mindanao and Sulu shifted to guerrilla activities against the Japanese. A civil government called Free Sulu Government administered war activities in the locality. The Japanese Occupation forces established a government in Basilan to govern both Zamboanga and Basilan. The Japanese Occupation of Basilan was rather uneventful; it barely disturbed Yakan society, except in terms of Japanese demand for food for their military machinery. No Japanese atrocities were documented in Basilan. In fact, Datu Mursalun and his family watched, without much interest, the American bombings of the Spanish fort and naval hospital in Isabela which signaled the retaking of Basilan by the American troops in 1945.

During the next two decades, Muslim and Christian relations deteriorated and

culminated in a civil war in 1970 with the formal organization of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and its military arm, the Bangsa Moro Army (BMA). The MNLF would separate the Bangsa Moro homeland of Mindanao, Sulu, Basilan, and Palawan from the rest of the Philippines (Rodil 1985:5).

Fighting between the government and the MNLF-BMA escalated during the declaration of Martial Law in 1972. By 1974 MNLF strength rose to some 30,000 armed combatants. It gained political control over significant areas of western Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago including Basilan. The MNLF gained international Muslim support through the Islamic conference which facilitated negotiations between the Marcos government and the MNLF in 1976. In December 1976, the Tripoli Agreement was signed, providing for the granting of local autonomy for 13 Muslim-populated provinces; however, it was never fully implemented by the Marcos government. Differences within the Moro camp regarding the Tripoli Agreement split the MNLF into three factions (Noble 1987:194).

## **Economy**

The Yakan are basically agriculturists whose products include rice, coconut, cassava, abaca, lanzones, cacao, and corn. Basilan's fertile land now yields cash crops, like coconut and rubber, which are cultivated in plantations that are owned or dominated by the rich Christians of Basilan. Cattle raising thrives on grazing lands. The seas surrounding the island provide abundant marine products. There are vast mangrove swamps which make ideal fishponds (Sherfan 1976:3; Nicolas 1977:81).

The Yakan have a system of labor exchange in farming, in which time for plowing is shortened by collective work shared by friends and relatives. Their agricultural practices are replete with traditional beliefs and customs. For example, their favorable working days are Mondays for planting trees, Tuesdays for a faster pace in work, and Thursdays for abundant water supply. Likewise there are days in a month favorable for specific types of plants. During a "root day," one should plant root crops; on a "stem day," stem products like sugarcane; on a "fruit day," fruits; and so on. When the noise of wild birds, wild fowls, or bees is heard during the first attempt at planting, a good harvest is expected (Sherfan 1976:102).

Rice is the most valued among all crops, with the planting and harvesting accorded rituals and prayers led by the *imam*. Rice is believed to have its own sultan and hierarchy of leaders. Thus the Yakan talk to the "king" palay to lead the other seeds to bring forth a bountiful harvest. The first bunch of ripening palay heads are handled with utmost care so as not to frighten away the rice. They also observe silence in harvesting, since noise might bring winds which would blow the rice away or make difficult the transport of harvest through the river. New rice is stored in a different way from old rice, for the old might frighten the new. New rice is always eaten with a thanksgiving prayer; and leftovers may be fed to chickens but never to dogs, as these are considered unholy (Sherfan 1976:103).

The Yakan are also good hunters, using spears and sophisticated traps. They use the *leppas* for trapping birds, the *nyas* for trapping wild chickens and rooster, and the *bubu* for catching fish from the river (Sherfan 1976:102-104). The women earn additional family income through loom weaving of traditional Yakan cloth and garments famous for their beautiful designs (Jundam 1983:16-18).

## **Political System**

Sovereignty in a Yakan community emanates from Allah. A traditional Yakan community is ruled by law made by the people as well as the Sharia or God's law. The Yakan believe that the consensus of the people must be achieved in the formulation of laws which should also be consistent with Islamic tenets (Jundam 1983:5).

In the Muslim community, the sultan is the supreme chief who appoints the *datu* and important officers. The sultan is both a religious and a political leader. The most prominent sultanate in the Philippines was the sultanate of Sulu, with Jolo as center of government. Despite the rivalry between Yakan and Joloanos, Basilan was under Jolo for four to five centuries. It was only during the reign of Pedro Cuevas that Basilan was freed from Jolo's domination. The sultanate in Basilan had its headquarters in Lamitan, Basilan.

The Agama court is the Yakan judicial court where family conflicts involving land, marriage, and petty crimes are resolved through the application of Islamic and Yakan custom laws. The sultan, as the supreme head, may preside over important Agama court sessions. The Agama court traditionally has many branches and officers with specific functions, but it still has to develop many of its setup and procedures (Sherfan 1976: 176).

The *datu* usually comes from the rich, upper classes of society. There are three kinds of *datu*: *datu balbangsa* (royal blood); *datu giyulal* (appointed *datu*); and *datu-ha-ngan* (self-proclaimed *datu*). The Yakan *datu* belong to the second category (Jundam 1983).

Usually, the sultan is represented by the *hadji* (male) or *hadja* (female) and the *pakil* at the village level. These leaders implement orders promulgated by the royal council. The *hadji* is an individual who has the means to go on a pilgrimage or *hadz* to the holy city of Mecca. Some *hadji* are elected to the position of barangay leader in Basilan.

Leaders may be categorized as imam, *khatib*, *pakil*, and *bilal*. They gain their position because of their exceptional knowledge of Islam and exemplary qualities such as piety. The *ulama* is a religious scholar who usually teaches in a religious school or *madrassa* (Jundam 1983:22).

Among the Yakan, the *imam* exercises religious and political leadership. He leads the

people in prayer, in religious ceremonies, sets the dates of fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, the culmination of fasting called *Haruraya*, among other duties. The imam also acts as the leader of a community whose primary function is to hear cases of common grievances and offenses. If arbitration at the village level is not reached, he elevates the case to the sultan.

At the village level, the khatib or bilal represents the imam. One trains to become an imam by first becoming a khatib. The duty of the bilal is to supervise the Islamic practice of praying five times a day (Jundam 1983:22-23). **Social Organization and Customs**

The traditional classes of Yakan society still exist today, except for the slave class which was abolished when the Moro province was created by the American colonizers. Today there are datu, pakil, and the common *tao*. The *tarsila* or genealogies of sultanates in Mindanao and Sulu trace those leaders who truly belong to the royalty. This is politically important since a datu, to qualify as sultan, must have parents of royal blood.

Yakan society is patriarchal, with the *aman* or father as the head of the family. Yakan kinship is also bilateral. Thus an individual is born to two sets of kinship groups—the *usba* or father's and the *waris* or mother's, with a slight bias in favor of the father's side (Jundam 1983:22).

Kinfolk are very close emotionally and physically. In every problem, event, or family conflict, any individual can seek the help of his/her *usba-waris* or kin. Distant kin called *pamikitan* are also ready to help in times of tragedy and joy. Their houses are built very close to one another, and relatives are brought together by various social and religious activities.

The individual seldom acts as such but is always conscious of the honor, social standing, and reputation of the whole group. Any Yakan who starts a fight should first of all consider the number, wealth, and power of the adversary's kin.

On the other hand, affinal relations rarely create any sense of obligation in a family feud. But if a man or a woman's affines are also blood relatives, the relationship becomes even closer. Important Yakan traditions do not permit quarrels among relatives; if any ensues, this is quickly resolved by the elders. An imam may also be called to deliver a prayer of reconciliation in the presence of the bickering parties. But if it remains unsolved, the case is brought to the Agama court (Sherfan 1976:89-90).

The life cycle of the Yakan is full of taboos inspired by Islamic and pre-Islamic beliefs. During conception, the mother must be given all the food she is craving for, or both the mother's and the baby's health will be affected. After the first trimester of pregnancy, the *lekkad* ceremony is held, in which the *panday* (local midwife) massages the woman's abdomen while praying to drive away, or shield the mother and child from, evil spirits. Coconut oil and chicken's eggs are used after the massage to soothe the muscles of the abdomen. A pregnant woman is not allowed to eat certain foods, for

instance, twin bananas which may lead to the birth of twins. Coitus during the last month of pregnancy is allowed except on Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays, so that the coming baby will turn out to be intelligent, obedient, healthy, and have a long life.

During childbirth, the panday is assisted by the mother of the expectant mother, or by any woman who has had previous experience in delivering a baby (Jundam 1983). The first words when the child is born, are “Ya Allah, ya rasallullah” (Allah, and the Messenger of God). The words introduce the child at birth to the two principal figures in Islam. After childbirth, the Muslim prayer “Allahu Akbar” (Allah is Great) is recited so that what the baby hears first are the holy words of Islam. Diapers are in many colors except black or white (Sherfan 1976:212-213).

Sharpened bamboo splints are used to cut the umbilical cord. This and the placenta are buried within the vicinity of the house, better yet under a coconut tree, so that the child will remain and die in its homeland (Jundam 1983:27-28).

The newly born child is given a name right after birth. Most common names are Muhammad for boys and Fatima for girls (Sherfan 1976). Then a weighing ritual called *pagtimbang* is performed, in which the child is placed on a scale held by a blanket while offerings are hung on the left, to counterbalance the child’s weight. Four imams lead a ritual prayer as the child is weighed. The ritual is also performed when a baby is born on an unlucky day. The *pagtimbang* decides the destiny of the baby in its favor as against the claimant evil spirit, a serpent named Mailikidjabania (Satan).

The *pagtamat* is the Quranic graduation ceremony. Before the age of puberty, young girls and boys are expected to have learned to read and study the Quran.

Boys undergo the *pag-islam* or circumcision at the age of 10 to 12. The *pagsunnat* is clitoral circumcision, given at a tender age of four or five. Girls are not supposed to tell anybody except their mother and sisters about the onset of their first menstruation. Young women wear an *anting-anting* around their hips to protect their virginity and to make them attractive to the opposite sex. In the past, *maglegnas* (teeth filing) was done at the onset of puberty.

Puberty marks the marrying age. Traditionally, marriages are arranged by the *usbaris* (Jundam 1983). In marriage negotiations, men have more rights than women. Women have almost no voice whatsoever. The girl’s parents, particularly their descendants from the patrilineal line, have the final decision. Marriages between cousins are common because they keep the family wealth within the group or clan. However, marriage between second cousins is prohibited because this is believed to cause misfortune to the community. This is consistent with the Yakan belief that the number two divides rather than unites (Sherfan 1976:87-90). In the past, marriage with non-Muslims or non-Yakan was prohibited since such union would bring impurity to indigenous traditions. However, this is not strictly followed today.

The Yakan *adat* or custom law recognizes various types of marriages: *muli* (with



parental consent), *magtambul bay* (the pikot or shotgun type), *magpasumbali* (the suicide type), *magpalahi* (elopement), and *ngalahi* (abduction).

The bridal gift called *ungsud* may be given in the form of cash, work animals, jewelry, and land (Jundam 1983:33). The wedding ceremony lasts for three days. The residence of newly married couples is patrilocal. They move to the man's parents' residential area where they are assisted physically, materially, and socially (Sherfan 1976).

The first marital night is a serious affair. The groom first kisses the bride on the forehead to ensure marital harmony until death (Jundam 1983). Before the first intercourse, the wife makes sure that the husband considers her his wife and not a harlot. Then, so that their marriage will be transformed into a spiritual affair, the bedding items are renamed liturgically by the wife. The husband also renames their sexual organs liturgically. For example, the vagina, called *puki* in Yakan, is renamed Landasan Allah; while the penis, previously called *botoh*, is renamed Mohammad Lasa Tunggal.

In the past, *magkasa* or *jina* (adultery) was punishable by death, causing severe feuds that wrought havoc on home and community. Now, however, the Agama court merely exacts fines on both erring parties. Polygamy is allowed. A man can have more than four wives as long as he can provide for all the wives and families financially and emotionally. The first wife is considered the real wife. *Magbutas* or divorce is allowed in Yakan society, and the woman must return the bride-price after the case is settled by the Agama court. Divorce, however, will not be granted if a man objects (Sherfan 1976).

The Yakan believe that some sicknesses are caused by bad spirits called *saytan* or *djinn*. Such malignant spirits inhabit the natural environment. They may be offended when mortals cut trees indiscriminately, throw waste in their dwelling places, and the like.

Death is but a return to God. A dying Yakan, upon sensing the end, calls a family meeting to ask forgiveness for offenses committed against family members. It is believed that God will not forgive those who have not received forgiveness from offended parties. Dying with eyes closed means peaceful sailing to the next life, while dying with eyes open means bad luck. The deceased's eyes are closed through a ritual. Those present at the deathbed are not allowed to cry, since tears are strong currents that may hinder the travel of the departed to the next life. The Yakan observe four death rituals: the washing of the body, shrouding, prayer, and burial (Jundam 1983:36).

### **Religious Beliefs and Practices**

“Folk Islam”—combination of Islamic principles and traditional beliefs—best describes the Yakan belief system. The belief in *saytan*, the various spirits in heaven and in the natural environment, indicates the lingering influence of pre-Islamic religious

beliefs. Yakan pre-Islamic practices are also combined with Islamic rituals, for example, in the planting rituals, death rituals, spirit worship, and ancestral offerings. As Muslims, the Yakan believe in the five pillars of Islam: the *sahada*, which says that there is no other God but Allah and that Muhammad is his prophet; the *salat* or prayer; *puasa* or fasting during the month of Ramadan; *pitla* or charity to the poor; *zacam* or tithes to Muslim religious leaders; and the *maghadji* or pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca.

For the Muslim Yakan, the world is divided into two: Dar-ul-Islam, the abode of Islam, and Dar-ul-Harb, the abode of the unbelievers. *Jihad* is the holy war waged by Muslims to protect Dar-ul-Islam from foreign invasion and against those who seek to harm their religion, people, and properties. *Magsabil* (juramentado in Spanish) is a small-scale jihad aimed at protecting personal property and family. The magsabil kills anybody who comes his way, exposing himself to death by reprisal. The belief is that whoever kills more during the magsabil will have more servants in heaven. But unless the act is justifiable and the person is a firm believer of Islam, the magsabil will not go to heaven. Every believer must have a strong faith in Allah, in his Messenger, and angels, and in the judgment day and destiny (Jundam 1983:5,38, 40; Sherfan 1976:118-125).

Heaven for the Yakan is a place where the soul can find happiness, joy, and peace. Heaven has eight classes and the eighth is God's dimension, which cannot be reached unless one works hard for it on earth (Sherfan 1976).

When one dies, the soul goes to *ahirat* (judgment place) where it awaits the verdict—to go to heaven or to hell (Sherfan 1976:142). Good deeds on earth will be rewarded on judgment day. Every sin done on earth has its own corresponding place in *narka* or hell. This is where adulterers, murderers, and prostitutes go, unless they are saved by belief in the Quran and in Muhammad. Even religious leaders are not exempt from punishment in hell if they have sinned on earth (Jundam 1983:41). Believers go to heaven called *surgah*.

The Quran is the divine revelation of Allah addressed to all people regardless of belief or race. Islamic doctrines are learned through the madrasa schools or merely by listening to the *khutba* or sermon during Friday prayer. Male believers are required to attend Friday prayers while women may not be as religious in their attendance. Women who attend the prayers are separated from the males and, except for their faces, are fully covered. Only a few Yakan, however, observe the five-times-a-day daily prayer.

### **Architecture and Community Planning**

The houses of the Yakan are either spaced far apart or clustered around the *langgal* or native house of prayer, which is the center of Yakan political, religious, and social life.

The house usually faces the east because the Yakan believe that the husband's bedside must be on the east, so he will outlive his wife. Even the piling of building materials point towards the east, to signify that family members are united in their purpose of house building. There are taboos in the selection of building materials: crooked wood signifies a corpse's elbow. A post with a hole symbolizes the dead and should be avoided. Posts with cracks must be smoothed to avoid illnesses. Tree trunks entwined with vines attract snakes into the house. There are also beliefs relating to house construction. The number of rooms and the number of steps of the stairs must be an odd number, since even numbers mean death and bad omen. The house usually has two doors facing the east, to signify life and new beginnings (Sherfan 1976:95-96).

The traditional Yakan house is called the *lumah*, which is described as a huge rectangular building with a floor area varying between 30-100 square meters, standing on high posts some 2-3 meters off the ground.

The steeply pitched ridge roof, *sapiaw*, is concave and traditionally thatched with cogon or nipa. Recently, the more durable G.I. sheets have been used, even if unsightly and unsuitable, since the traditional Yakan house has no ceiling and few or no windows. There is a belief that bad spirits could come in easily through these openings. Thus, there is often only one *tandiwan* or window, located on the front side of the house; beside this is a long bench for guests. Another *tandiwan*, however, may be added on the end wall opposite the kitchen or cooking shed.

Walls are made of either the horizontally placed wooden planks, or the cooler sawali (plaited bamboo or reeds). For flooring, the choice is between split bamboo poles (with the convex sides upwards) or timber, for the main room. For the kitchen, the floor is usually of bamboo, used for practical reasons since waste can easily be thrown through its spaces. Even the kitchen walls are plaited so that smoke can easily escape. If a wooden floor is used for the main house, a small piece of bamboo is inserted, or a hole is made on the floor, for betel expectoration.

The *lumah* has three parts: the main house, kitchen, and *pantan* or porch. The main house alternates as sleeping quarters, a women's weaving area, and a reception area during celebrations. The kitchen, on the lower level is a smaller version of the main house and is used for cooking and dining, except during celebrations when food is served in the main house. It is connected to the main house by an open platform. The *pantan*, located between the main house and kitchen, may either be covered or left open. Made of split bamboo poles, the porch is used to entertain guests and for relaxation of family members. It also serves as the entry to the house, since this is where a bamboo or wooden ladder is attached. A second ladder is placed against the platform leading to the kitchen.

The *pantan* is also used for hanging and drying clothes, and for storing long bamboo water containers called *dagtung* and water jars. There is one doorway connected to the platform which, in turn, leads to the kitchen and another doorway that opens to the roofed porch that leads to the main house. The *angkap* (mezzanine), where

young girls may hide themselves from aggressive boys, is sometimes added to the house.

## Visual Arts and Crafts

The Yakan have designs or motifs used repeatedly in all their visual arts and crafts. The *pussuk labbung* is a sawtooth design used for cloth baskets and the native sword called kris. The *bunga sama*, used for table runners, monuments for the dead and on trunks, is a symmetrical design made of rectangularly shaped figures. The *kabban buddi* is a set of triangles, squares, and other geometric shapes used for cushions, pillows, casings, mats, and hats. The *baggang kettan* combines incised triangles and rectangles, and is used to decorate the kris. The *ukil lagbas* consists of a combination of various lines—wavy, crossed-wavy, and straight—used on shirts, windows of houses, and boats (Sherfan 1976:210-211).

Weapons such as knives and swords are part of the Yakan's visual arts. The *punnyal* is a small knife which can be hidden within one's clothing. The *barung* is carried with pride since it is a symbol of strength and is also acceptable as bridewealth. The *taming* is the traditional shield used along with two types of spears; the *budjak* and the *sangkal*, now used only in war dances. The *bangkung* is another type of bolo seldom used nowadays. The *pira* is a traditional weapon used by little boys when going on a long journey. The *barung* and the kris, although popular, are less valuable or admired among the Yakan (Sherfan 1976:156-160).

Yakan visual art includes Yakan kitchen utensils and household implements. Metalware includes the *talam*, a beautifully decorated bronze tray, and the *sanduk* or ladle used for special occasions. Yakan basketry is both colorful and functional. The *tutup* is a food cover made of bamboo leaves. The *peiyuk* is a clay jar with cover used for cooking. The *baling* is a decorative clay jar treasured as heirloom. The *kombo* is a lidded container for rice storage. A *lakal* is a bamboo frame used to hold the cooking gadget when placed on the ground. The *tempipih* is a big basket carried on the back. A conical basket called the *saan* is used as a liquid strainer.

Baskets are also used to measure and weigh. The *gantang* is bigger than the government ganta. The *batil* measures nine gantang. The *laga* is 10 gantang. The *ilug* is 30 gantang. The *lukung* is equivalent to 100 gantang. An example of Yakan pottery is the *poga*, a covered clay jar used as water container (Sherfan 1976:201-204).

Yakan women are excellent weavers, and are famous for their beautifully woven traditional costumes of cotton and pineapple cloth. The basic garment for men and women consists of a tight-fitting upper garment with tight-fitting trousers called *sawal*.

The shirt is open in front from lapel down to the waist, using up to 40 sequined or

golden buttons. To close the shirt, a long string is crisscrossed from one button to the other so that when tightly drawn, the shirt closes from top to bottom. Usually the shirt remains open since the string is often lost. Over the shirt, male and female wear a tight-fitting jacket which is exquisitely embroidered in the front and back, with cuffs decorated with multicolored sequins.

The difference in male and female apparel lies in accessories. Men wear a handwoven *pis* (headcloth) and a 15 meter-long *kandit* (belt or sash) made of red cloth called *gilim*. The *pis* serves as “protection” from spears and knives during combat, and may be fastened around the trousers. The women wear a short skirt over the trousers, around which a rectangular, handwoven cloth is tied. This cloth is the most expensive part of their costume because it is woven in a tedious manner. Men and women wear the *saruk*, the Yakan hat worn to make one look more attractive and elegant. Some wear the hat over the turban and use it as a purse for betel nuts, tobacco, and money. Yakan warriors wear a bulletproof shirt prepared by hadjis and imams who write Arabic script all over the shirt (Sherfan 1976:160, 205-207).

Today, traditional costumes are seldom worn. The men may combine traditional clothing with Western clothes. The women wear a loosely hanging, thin blouse either with a long skirt or loose pants (Wulff 1980:2640).

Ornaments such as necklaces may be worn as charms. A crocodile tooth polished with a hole at the base is believed to bring good luck when worn as a necklace. The Yakan also wear amulets against bullets. These contain unreadable symbols, are wrapped in black cloth, sewn in triangular form, and tied around the neck. Belts made of snake bones are strung together to protect them against bodily pain. One charm that protects them from sicknesses due to evil spirits is the *manik tegiyas*— a necklace or bracelet made of the fruits of a flower beaded together. The *manik sembulan* is made of a bamboo stem cut into short pieces, strung together either as a necklace or bracelet, and serving as added protection against sickness inflicted by evil spirits. To gain more strength against evil spirits, men and women wear the anting-anting. This consists of a string with a piece of cloth containing beads as pendant (Sherfan 1976:143-147).

The Yakan also wear functional gadgets. The *pegupaan* is a bamboo container for all the paraphernalia for chewing betel nut. The *lutuan*, a small bronze box with engravings carried at the waist, has a similar function (Sherfan 1976:203).

A unique form of visual art is the facial makeup done on brides and grooms. After creating a foundation of white powder, the makeup artists proceed to paint dots and lines in various patterns on the faces, creating the effect of formal and elaborate masks which match the ornate costumes of the celebrants (See logo of this article).

## **Literary Arts**

The most prominent example of Yakan literature is the origin myth or legend. Two

related origin myths narrate the story of the world and of mankind. First, there was only darkness until God created light, and then water which the wind scattered all over. Then God created the trees which bore 7.7 million fruits. Next, he created a bird which died after eating the last fruit. After the bird's death, God created 70 Adams one after another, each with a life-span of 70 years. The last Adam is supposedly the ancestor of the people.

God also created the mountains. Adam then stood on top of the highest mountain, realized that he had no wife, and complained to God. A spirit appeared and told him to come back on Friday. On that day the spirit drew a woman's figure and instructed Adam to have sexual relations with it. His sperm flowed to the mountains and seas, producing the poisonous animals on land, but the sperm that reached the sea produced the good animals or fish. Then, the Angel Gabriel, with God's permission, put Adam to sleep, removed a rib from him, and converted this into a woman named Sitti Hawa (Eve). God told Adam to give his wife a fitting gift. Upon God's suggestion, this gift was in the form of a formula: *La Ilaha illallah* which means "There is no god but Allah." They had four children, two boys and two girls. The boys were Kain and Habil. Two were white and two were black. Marriage between the children of the same color was incest, therefore forbidden. From them, the various races of mankind were created.

Another story is about the origin of the Yakan people. First there was a great deluge; then in the west, a *yakal* or hardwood split open to produce the first man of Basilan. In the east, there was a mountain range called Tong Magtangkal. From an anthill came Punso, the first woman of Basilan. The two met, fell in love, and had four children. Each of their children was given land. The eldest girl was named Kumalang after a river called Bohe Kumalang in the west. In the north resided their son Gubawan, whose name was derived from a river. The southeastern part of the island was given to their son Tumahubong, where a river of the same name was found. The last child, a son, was named Basilan, after a river Bohe Basilan in the east. One day, a trader named Julol from Borneo came and fell in love with Kumalang. The parents of Kumalang agreed to their daughter's marriage if Julol could bring seeds of mangoes, coconuts and *marang*. He did. Thus, Basilan today is full of fruit trees (Sherfan 1976).

The animal folktale is another popular Yakan literary form. One such tale is about the conflict between monkeys and butterflies. One day, butterflies, ducks, and birds went paddling, using a big leaf and a sugarcane for outrigger. One monkey ate the sugarcane, so the animals on the leaf capsized. The angry birds refused to bring the monkey ashore, but the latter convinced one butterfly to do so. When he reached the shore, however, the treacherous monkey crushed the insect to death. This angered the butterflies, sparking a major fight between butterflies and monkeys, a battle which the butterflies feared they would lose because of their smallness. The leader of the butterflies then thought of a strategy: pit the monkeys against one another. They alighted on the monkeys' noses and then swiftly flew away, so the monkeys started hitting one another. All but one pregnant monkey died because of this clever strategy. Later, however, the monkeys multiplied again, so they are still around to this day

(Eugenio 1989:42-43). **Performing Arts**

The Yakan have a rich musical tradition which may be broadly divided into instrumental and vocal. Yakan musical instruments are made of bamboo, wood, and metal. Their musical instruments also demonstrate the influence of the traditional cycle of rice production in their lives. Several instruments are used in each stage of rice production. The *daluppak* is a digging stick with a bamboo clapper. The *kopak-kopak* is a bamboo clapper on a stick. The *kulintangan* (*kwintangan*) kayu is a percussion instrument consisting of wooden beams played after the planting season, to enhance plant growth. The wooden *tuntungan* is a percussion plank with jar resonators, also played during the harvest season for thanksgiving.

The *gabbang* is of bamboo split into five, and arranged like a xylophone. It is played by small children near the fields to guard the crops against prying animals. The *kwintangan batakan* is an earlier form of *gabbang* which has six, seven, or nine bamboo pieces. The *suling* is a bamboo mouth flute used by the men in courting women. Another bamboo instrument used by the men in expressing love or admiration is the *kulaing*.

The *kulintangan* or *kwintangan* consists of several bronze gongs arranged according to size, and used during celebrations such as weddings and graduations. It is also played by any individual in the home and after work, for self-expression and relaxation. The *agong* is a percussion instrument used to announce marriage or for tolling the dead. The *jabujabu* (*djabu-djabu*) is a type of drum that summons the people to prayer (Nicolas 1977:100-108; Sherfan 1976:195-199).

There are three main types of Yakan vocal music: the *lugu* and other melodies used in reading the Quran and other religious books; the *kalangan* or songs which may be further reclassified into *jamiluddin* and *lunsey*; and the *katakata*, *nahana*, *yaya*, *lembukayu*, and *sa-il*, among others. The *kalangan*, *jamiluddin*, *katakata*, *nahana*, and *yaya* are sung solo, while the *lunsey*, *sa-il*, *meglebu-lebu seputangen*, and *lembukayu* involves singers from two groups singing solo as they answer each other.

The *kalangan*, *jamiluddin*, *lunsey*, and *lembukayu* are courting songs. The *katakata*, *jamiluddin*, and *nahana* may also narrate the history of the Yakan people. The *katakata* is a long traditional song narrating the lives, loves, and historical backgrounds of people who lived during early times. The Yakan believe that such stories originated from people who lived in another world. The *katakata* is sung only at night, at a big gathering with food served by the host or hostess. The singing, in episodes, may last for several nights. The singer lies on a mat, the back supported by several pillows. The audience either sit or lie around the singer. The *jamiluddin* relates love stories. At present, it is also sung when families discuss marriage engagements. Both the *katakata* and *jamiluddin* are sung by wise men and women of the tribe.

The *sa-il* and *lunsey* are sung during a wedding ceremony, with messages revolving

around good advice regarding married life. Another type of sa-il is sung during the magtammam or Quranic graduation.

During social gatherings, the maglebu-lebu seputangan is sung, by a group of men answering a group of women. Each group has a soloist who sings the kalangan, expressed in metaphors.

The yaya is a lullabye. The *magsambag* is a method of studying the Quran in which a *mulid* or student follows the Quranic singing of the teacher. The student and teacher are not allowed to sing together.

Then there are the songs which the Yakan sing during daily activities. In keeping watch over rice fields, they sing some forms of the jamiluddin and kalangan. While resting at home, they also leisurely sing the katakata, jamiluddin, and nahana. Children at play imitate the adults in singing the kalangan, jamiluddin, lembukayu, and lugu (Nicolas 1977: 97-100).

One popular Yakan dance is adapted from the *Tausug* 's *pangalay* and called by the same name. The dance is accompanied by the kulintangan kayu and performed by three people. In the Yakan "bumblebee" mimetic dance usually performed by a male dancer, a searcher successfully finds honey with the aid of a torch. He overeats, and the result is a stomachache (Orosa-Goquingco 1980:175). Another example of a mimetic dance is the *tahing baila* which imitates the movement of a fish (Tiongson 1991:236). At weddings, the *tumahik* or war dance is performed by the groom as well as by male relatives of both the groom and bride. Dressed in Yakan finery, the dancer uses a spear and a shield to fight an imaginary enemy to the music of the kulintangan.

- R. Matilac/Reviewed by S.K. Tan

## References

Dacanay Jr., Julian. *Ethnic Houses and Philippine Artistic Expressions*. Pasig: One-Man Show Studio, 1988.

Eugenio, Damiana L., ed. *Philippine Folk Literature: The Folktales*. Quezon City: TheUniversity of the Philippines Folklorists Inc., 1989.

*Haylaya: Celebration After Spiritual Renewal*. The Presidential Commission for the Rehabilitation of Southern Philippines. Metro Manila, 1980.

Jundam, Mashir Bin-Ghalib. *Yakan*. Asian Center Ethnic Research Field Report. SeriesII, No. 1. Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1983.

NCCP-PACT. *Sandugo*. Manila: National Council of Churches in the Philippines, 1988.



- Nicolas, Arsenio M. "Ang Musika ng mga Yakan sa Pulo ng Basilan." In *Musika Journal*, Vol. 1 (1977), 79-110.
- Noble, Lela. "The Muslim Insurgency." In *The Philippines Reader*. Edited by Daniel B. Schirmer and Stephen Roskamm Shalom. Quezon City: Ken Inc., 1987.
- Nocum, Armand. "Unabated Logging Seen in Basilan Watershed." *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 8 July 1992, 6.
- Orosa-Goquingco, Leonor. *The Dances of the Emerald Isles*. Quezon City: Ben-Lor Publishers, 1980.
- Philippine Touring Topics*. Vol. XI, No. 4 (August 1934), 30.
- Pronouncing Gazetteer and Geographical Dictionary of the Philippine Islands*. Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1902.
- Regional Map of the Philippines IX—(B)*. Manila: Edmundo R. Abigan Jr., 1988.
- Rodil, B.R. "Reflections on the Moro Right to Self-determination." Lecture delivered at the first assembly of the Ranao Development Forum, Marawi City (18-19 May 1985).
- Sherfan, Andrew D. *The Yakan of Basilan: Another Unknown and Exotic Tribe of the Philippines*. Cebu City: Fotomatic (Philippines) Inc., 1976.
- Tiongson, Nicanor G., ed. *Tuklas Sining: Essays on Philippine Arts*. Manila: Sentrong Pangkultura ng Pilipinas, 1991.
- Wulff, Inger. "Continuity and Change in a Yakan Village." *Papers in Anthropology*, Vol. XXIX, No. 2 (Fall 1978), 25-78.