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**LIVING IN THE CITY AS SAMA-BAJAU:  
THE CASE OF MAGSAHAYA'S FAMILY**

**Aoyama Waka | The University of Tokyo**

## Living in the City as Sama-Bajau: The Case of Magsahaya's Family

Waka Aoyama<sup>1</sup>

### Acknowledgment

This manuscript is a direct self-translation of Chapter Nine, originally entitled “Magsahaya’s family: moving around over the ground as beggars,” from my Japanese book, *An Ethnography of Poverty: Socioeconomic Life of Five Sama Families in Davao City, Philippines*, published by the University of Tokyo Press in 2006. I am very grateful to the University of Tokyo Press for permitting this translation to be included in the Harvard-Yenching Institute working paper series.

### Abstract

This manuscript is a direct self-translation of Chapter Nine, originally entitled “Magsahaya’s family: moving around over the ground as beggars,” from my Japanese book, *An Ethnography of Poverty: Socioeconomic Life of Five Sama Families in Davao City, Philippines*, published by the University of Tokyo Press in 2006. A few parts have been modified, however, to fit in the given space with careful effort to retain the original contents. The basic unit of analysis is the household. Considering the term that the informants used in daily life, however, the term “family” (*pamilya*) was chosen for the titles of the chapters with the five cases included in the original Japanese version. In this particular case, Magsahaya’s household consisted of two families and other extended family members, including her own family with her second husband, their eldest son, and her second daughter from her first marriage, one family of her son-in-law’s (married to her eldest daughter, who had deceased by the time of our research) and his new wife with four children from his previous marriage and one child from his present one, and Magsahaya’s two elder sisters who were both widows. |

In this particular case, Magsahaya’s household consisted of two families and other extended family members. Her own family included her second husband, their eldest son, and her second daughter from her first marriage. The second family included one of her sons-in-law (married to her eldest daughter, who had deceased by the time of our research) and his new wife with four

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<sup>1</sup> Professor, Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, The University of Tokyo, 7-3-1 Hongo, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo, 113-0033 Japan. Email: waka@ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp

children from his previous marriage, one child from his present wife, and Magsahaya's two elder sisters who were both widows.

There are two communities of the Sama-Bajau in Isla Bella (pseudonym), Davao City, which I refer to frequently in my narrative: *Hong Kong* and *Japan Pikas*. In order to avoid any confusion with Hong Kong, the city-state in the People's Republic of China, I write its name in italics. Magsahaya's family lived in *Hong Kong* during my research from 1998 to 2000.

The survey on the subjective evaluations on social inequality among the Sama-Bajau residents in Isla Bella that the author conducted in 1999 revealed the fact that there were five livelihood groups, which could be ranked according to the socio-economic and other criteria that the Sama-Bajau raters claimed. Based on such results, we call the livelihood group that Magsahaya's family belongs to "'panaq' fishermen group." In this group, males who were of an income-producing age engaged in "panaq" fishing (spear fishing). Due to the low productivity of such fishing, however, unemployment and underemployment were common among males, while elders, females, and children would go begging. Because of the limited availability of resources, members of this group tended to present themselves as "Bajau the weak" to outsiders, and ask them for mercy and alms in order to survive everyday life. Some of them also had accepted Christianity, following the Third Group (the case of Papa Melcito's family in the previous Harvard-Yenching Working Paper, January 5, 2016).

### **Community status**

The composite score of their community status was 0.5147, which placed them at the bottom of the 184 households in our survey. Their socioeconomic standard of living measured by objective indicators recorded the lowest among those of the Sama Bajau in Isla Bella. Indeed, they were considered the poorest ones by their Sama Bajau neighbors. This kinship group, or "*kampong*" in their own vocabulary, consisted of twenty-seven households. Those households consisted mostly of relatives who lived physically close to one another in the same corner of the neighborhood.

#### **1. Living life on the move**

The household head was named Magsahaya<sup>1</sup>. Her estimated age was forty-five. Regardless of her mood, she always had her eyebrows slightly knitted and her eyes squinted as if she had been dazzled by the bright sunlight. The corners of her mouth were down curved, but this did not

mean that she never smiled. Actually, when she smiled, her high and round cheek bones became even higher and rounder. She had long black hair with brown tints and dust from the air, which was combed back and made into a bun at her nape.

Magsahaya was relatively chubby among Sama-Bajau females in *Hong Kong*. For practical reasons, she only wore a washed-out “*malong*” (a tube skirt made of machine made multi-colored cotton) and underwear when she was at home. Sometimes, her bust was partially exposed. Around her belly she wore a green string with knots, which was an “*anting-anting*” (an amulet) that an elder member of her kinship group made for her so that she would not get sick. She had wide feet with well-developed gnarled toes. The squared corners of her blackened toenails stuck out and felt hard.

Magsahaya did not know where her parents came from, but she remembered that they had lived in boats. They were Sama Dilaut. Magsahaya herself spent her childhood with her parents in boats. They often moored in Sangali, a town located in Zamboanga City in the province of Zamboanga del Sur. If asked, Majyaria would answer that she came from Sangali.

Magsahaya’s father was a “*panaq*” fisherman. Her mother and children including Magsahaya herself accompanied him in their houseboat. They would help him with fishing operations at sea. They would also gather seashells, sea urchins, sea cucumbers, and other things on the shore. Magsahaya remembers diving into the sea often in those days.

Majariya gave us the following description of spear guns that her fellow Sama Dilaut fishermen were using for “*panaq*” fishing at the time of our research in 1999. She said that although the present spear guns might look different from the ones that her parents used in the past, their basic mechanisms should be the same. The spear guns came in various sizes. Those ones that adult Sama Dilaut fishermen commonly used had a shaft made of wood called “*tugas*”<sup>2</sup> (molave in English) and were about 1.5 meters in length with a spear made of iron and about 1.8 meters in length when loaded. The spear was 1-1.5 centimeters in diameter, and it had a sharp point. It was attached to the trigger on the wooden handle by a rubber band (about 1 centimeter in width and 50 centimeters in length)<sup>3</sup>. No bait was used for this fishing method. Once the spear was

released, it would become totally detached from the shaft: the fisherman had to retrieve the spear by himself whether it did or did not catch a fish.

Fishing grounds suitable for “*panaq*” fishing were clear waters on the rocks near the shore. The depth of such waters ranged from five to twenty-five “*dupa*” (fathoms). Swimming with goggles on, they would dive into the water, aim at fish, and shoot the spear towards it. When they needed to dive deeply, they would wear a stainless-steel weight of about six kilos around their waist. The weight was tied to a long thin wire, the other end of which was held by the driver of the fishing boat or another operator on the boat. When the one under water wanted to surface, he would send a sign by pulling the wire to the one on the boat so that he could be lifted up. Fishing mates were composed of family and relatives.

Net benefits (gross benefits minus total costs) should be shared equally among the participants in the fishing operation. The owner of the fishing boat would normally get a share for one person. If he himself participated in the fishing operation, he would be entitled to shares for two persons. However, there were cases when he only received a share for one person because the fishing ground was so close, or because he was a close relative of his fishing mates. The catch includes various types of “*isda sa bato*” (coral fish), squid and others. The average volume of catch per operator per fishing activity could be five kilos at the most.

In 1999, we never saw any Sama Dilaut household making a living by such “*panaq*” fishing in Isla Bella. Nonetheless, many of the adult males of the Sama Dilaut told us that they used to do so in the past like Magsahaya’s father, her first husband and their sons. Indeed, more than a half of the households in this kinship group still kept spear guns for fishing<sup>4</sup>, even though most of them were no longer serious about using them for earning.

Let us return to the life history of Majyarya. When she became an adolescent, she married a Sama Dilaut male, who would later die from illness. By the time of their marriage, her parents had abandoned living in boats because it was no longer safe to live at sea; instead, they had adopted living in stilt houses built over the shore. Following her parents’ example, Magsahaya and her husband also started their new life in such a stilt house.

(Magsahaya, recorded on October 21 and November 21, 1999. Originally in Cebuano and translated into English by the author)

[Looking at a drawing of a houseboat by Papa Melbasa in Group Three] *True, my parents also lived in the same type of the “bangka” (small boat) like this one.* [The Sinama term for such a type of boats is] *“baroto.” The roof was slightly different [from that of the houseboat in the drawing], though.* [The roof she was familiar with had] *two sheets of “nippa” on one side, if the sheet was small, then it had three sheets, and the same thing on the other side.....I have never delivered any baby in boats. By the time when my parents died, we had lived in a house [built over the shore]. [We lived in such a house] In both Margos [Margosatubig] and Sangali..... We used to live in boats because we were making a living by “panaq” fishing. In those days, children also lived with their parents in boats. That was before pirates emerged to threaten us. Back then, wherever the sail might bring us [with the wind], we would be safe.....There was a time when we sailed from Dajyangas (the former name of General Santos City) to Davao (City). But now, it is completely impossible [to live in boats]. We are afraid [of the pirates]. .... Well, of course, it would be nice to live at sea. There would be no garbage [like garbage accumulated Isla Bella]. Yet, since we are afraid [of the pirates], it is better to live in houses [built over the shore]. ... We were not the first ones to start living on the land.*

Around the first half of the 1980s, Magsahaya and her Sama Dilaut fellows came to be often threatened by what they called “Tausug<sup>5</sup> pirates” in their home waters. To avoid such danger, they moved out of Sangali to Margosatubig, a municipality in of the province of Zamboanga del Sur. Even after their transfer, however, they often made trips to Sangali and its neighboring places. In fact, Gwardya, the eldest daughter from Majyarya’s first marriage, was born in Sangali.

(Magsahaya, recorded on September 15, 1999)

[In Sangali] *There were many “holduppers” (pirates). Many of my relatives were killed. Such pirates would deprive my fellow Bajau fishermen of the engines [of their fishing boats] as well as of their catch. If the Bajau fishermen would not give what the pirates demanded, the pirates would kill the Bajau fishermen. It would be impossible for the fishermen to escape such raids because they were too tired [from their fishing operations] to dive into the sea and swim away. If*

*you hear that somebody is lost [while fishing], you should think that he was attacked to die at sea. Most of those who were killed were male. ....He [her first husband] died in Margosatubig, but at that time, there were not many pirates yet. He fell ill. Suffering from diarrhea and bleeding, he died at a hospital in Margosatubig.*

After her first husband died sometime in the mid 1980s, Majyarya's eldest son Santolin and her second son Ahad obtained their own fishing boat. They became independent fishermen using "panaq" and "palangre." They succeeded their father's "manager," a Tausug middleperson who would lend money for their daily fishing operations. Idol, a nephew of Majyaria's, who shared the fishing experiences with the two told us:

(Idol, recorded on November 11, 1999)

*[In Margosatubig] There were many rocks. They were so large and heavy that nobody could hardly carry them. The shore had "pasil" (submerged rocks), and it looked white. It did not fit for "palangre" because the line would be caught between the rocks. ....[Their fishing grounds at that time were] far from the shore. It would take us about three hours to sail there. ....If it was windless, it would take more time. If it was windy, it would take less time. .... "Palangre" should be operated in deep-sea waters. Say, as deep as 30 fathoms, or sometimes, 70 fathoms.....[Middlepersons for their catch were] Muslim. They were Tausug. They would lend us about 200 pesos every time we went fishing. We had to return the money as soon as we could catch fish. We did not have to do so when we had no catch, though.*

In those days, Margosatubig suffered from severe red tide. It was virtually impossible to do shellfish gathering along the shore. The productivity of their "panaq" operations decreased as well. Yet, since there were still Tausug "haji" (hajj) who would provide Sama Dilaut fishermen with operating capital for "palangre" fishing in coastal waters and buy their catch as middlepersons, the Sama Dilaut families, including Majyarya's own, were somehow able to survive there.

(Magsahaya, recorded on November 22, 1999)

*When we were living in Margos (-atubig), we would gather "sikad-sikad" (a kind of shellfish), "bat" (sea cucumbers), "teheq-teheq" (sea urchin), and "lobot-lobot" (sea anemone). Walking*

*along the shore, we would gather them and bring them home. There was plenty of shellfish!... At low tide, a broad expanse of shore emerged, where we could gather shellfish. ....But now, we became no longer able to gather shellfish in Margos (-satubig). There was a time when many people died from shellfish contaminated by red tide. Since then, I have decided never to eat shellfish. I have been scared of, I mean, red tide, “pula,” you know what I mean by “pula” [meaning “red” in Cebuano]. A daughter of Danny’s [a Sama Dilaut male neighbor] happened to eat such contaminated shellfish, and eventually died. She was already at marriageable age then. Having eaten the shellfish, she lost her speech. Her lips became heavier and heavier. She was dead on arrival at hospital. “Military” [meaning a relief team from the government] came to rescue the victims of red tide, bringing in “dekstrose” [dextrose infusion]. Four Bajau died. Mahaldiya [a Sama Dilaut female neighbor] and Damdanya [a Sama Laminusa female neighbor who was married to a Sama Dilaut husband] also became ill, but they survived, thanks to the “military.” Indeed, the “military” brought in much money and rice when we lost our families and relatives to red tide. Such relief activities were operated exclusively for the Bajau.....*

Before long the haji died. The Sama Dilaut fishermen from Magsahaya’s family and relatives lost their middleman. Around the same time, pirate attacks also emerged in waters near Margosatubig. Their life became even more difficult. Eventually, Magsahaya’s family transferred to Tibanban in the province of Davao Oriental in the 1990s, and then to Isla Bella, Davao City, in 1996. Many of her relatives and former neighbors had arrived there ahead of her, and they had been living there for some time by the time her family moved in.

Magsahaya’s life history was literally a history of her spatial moves. More precisely, it could be said that an incessant series of “migrations” from one place to another formed an essential part of her life. Although she remembered the places, she was not sure about when and how long she stayed in each place. Even after abandoning their life in houseboats, Magsahaya and her Sama Dilaut fellows did not seem to abandon a mobile life. We had to reconsider the meaning of our questions on their “permanent addresses.” We had to ask ourselves what a “sedentary,” or settled life, as referred to in the literature, means.

So long as Magsahaya could recall, immediately before they came to *Hong Kong* the last time,

she and her family were staying in Taluksangay (a town in Zamboanga City where most of the members of Group Three including Papa Melbasa's family came from). Prior to that, they were staying in Tibanban (a place where Kapirin's family in Group Four stayed before migrating to Davao City). She could not remember other places they had stayed before. She remembered, though, that while her eldest son from her first marriage was born in Tibanban, her second son (Atepoy) and second daughter (Angiya) from her second marriage were born in Margosatubig. She also added that she had lost one of her daughters and one son while they were staying in Tibanban.

One thing she was sure about was that their life had been always difficult ever since they fled Margosatubig. With the decline of their fishing operations, it became almost wholly impossible for them to live in a "*probinsya*" (meaning a rural or less urbanized area) that had only the "sea" to exploit for their livelihood.

(Magsahaya, recorded on September 15, 1999)

*There was not much fish in Tibanban. No pirates, but no fish, either. [Males did] "panaq." [Females] had no work [outside], staying at home. When we had no catch, we would go to Sigaboy (the former name of Governor Generoso, a municipality in the province of Davao Oriental. One of the barangays in the municipality is Tibanban) for "gandum" (corn). Bringing a "kampil" (a basket woven from coconut leaves), we would collect small-sized corn that seemed unsellable there..... We would boil the corn before eating. Whether we could find such corn or not, we would continue to search for food anyway, though..... When we were in Tibanban, we would also go begging<sup>6</sup>, walking around (without using a small boat) and searching for food.*

However, when we asked those who used to go fishing in Tibanban, they told us stories that varied slightly from Magsahaya's version. For example, Idol told us:

(Idol, recorded on November 22, 1999)

*Nobody [provides him and his fellow Sama-Bajau fishermen with capital for their fishing operations in Davao]. If there were somebody who would offer us "kapital" (capital), we could operate long-line fishing. .... [Magsahaya, who was sitting next to him, interrupted, saying "Look at Kapirin (in Group Four). He goes to Tibanban for his long-line fishing operations."]* *Over here [in Isla Bella], it is difficult for us to go fishing, for we have none. [We asked him if*

he meant there was no fish in Davao.] *Actually, there are fish, but we can hardly afford “paon” (bait used for fishing) Bait is so expensive here.* [Magsahaya added, “One kilogram of sardine costs 20 pesos.”] *Back in Margos (-satubig), bait was practically free because those who provided us with capital for our fishing operations gave us money for the bait, too .....Well, those people were not always our “suki” (regular customers, or fish buyers who bought their catch regularly). There were people who were not our “suki,” yet gave us such money. Say, some Visayan (Cebuano) individuals.....Take Kapirin for example. He can still go fishing in Tibanban because he can get a sufficient amount of bait for his operations over there [meaning that Kapirin still has fish buyers over there].*

Davao City had characteristics distinct from the places where Magsahaya and her family previously had lived: it is a metropolitan city where all kinds of people (in terms of both ethnic group and income class), commodity, and information, flow in and out, and incessantly interact with one another to create dynamics and diversity; and more than anything, public order and security was maintained better than in any other cities that they knew. Such characteristics of the city created space for Magsahaya and her fellow Sama Dilaut migrants who would go begging as the socially vulnerable/weak. Here are some stories about comparisons between the economic aspect of their life in Davao City and that of their previous places of residence.

(Samya [a niece of Magsahaya’s] and Bitya [the mother of Atepoy’s wife], recorded on October 13, 1999)

[When they were in Margosatubig, Sama-Bajau women] *stayed at home, weaving mats. We did not [beg]. Well, we did not [beg there] because we would not be given anything at all [even if they had tried to beg]. Those Bisayan people (Cebuano residents there) were stingy.* [We asked them if such Cebuano residents belonged to fishermen’s households.] *Right. There was nobody [who would provide Sama Dilaut fishermen with capital for their fishing operations]. Those Bisayan people were never kind to us. Say, they would never give us food; even if they had leftovers, they would throw away such leftovers rather than give them to us. But it is different here (in Davao City). Bisayan people here are kind to us [meaning that they would give the Sama-Bajau food and/or cash out of pity].*

(Magsahaya, recorded on September 15, 1999)

[Compared to the other places she had been to] *Davao (City) is the best. People give us food as well as loose change. I would not mind, though, even if they give me nothing. Even if they give me only 25 centavos<sup>7</sup>, I would not mind that, either. We [referring to her household as well] are financially hard up because we have no “males” [who could work to earn money]. [Back in*

Sangali] we used to “barter” our fish (catch) for cassava, banana, and other stuff. Such barter was usually done in “palengke” (public markets) with the Bisayan (Cebuano) and Muslims. [In Margosatubig] there was a (Tausug) haji who would provide [her sons] with operating capital [for their fishing activities]. The haji was so rich that we could borrow as much money as we needed. When we caught fish, and delivered them to him, he would buy them all and deliver them to Cagayan (de Oro). The haji has been dead, though. There were many others [other middlepersons for the Sama Dilaut fishing operations] there, but none of them could be kinder than he was. We cannot find someone like him [as their middleperson for fishing here in Davao]. No assistance [from the government], either.

While Magsahaya told us that her household economically suffered because they “had no males” (earning), Ahad, her second marriage partner had a say against her. Abing was at estimated age sixty when we met him in 1999. Magsahaya as well as other Sama-Bajau neighbors often told us that he was “*buang-buang*” (mentally disturbed). Most of the time, he was a quiet person: he had an elusive smile, squatting on his heels in a corner of the house as if he was looking into the distance. Nonetheless, there were times when he burst into telling us his stories. Such shifts often amazed us, and even confused us, too.

(Abing, recorded on October 21, 1999)

[The Sama Dilaut are living on the shore because] *we have no land. We came from Zamboanga. The name of our place there was Sangali. We were making our living by fishing there. But pirates emerged, and they began to take our catch by force. So, we had to flee there (Sangali) and came here (Hong Kong).....From Zamboanga (Sangali), we went to Margos (-satubig) [before arriving in Davao City]. Ekskiyus (excuse me), those pirates had different ideas from you [referring to the Cebuano in general]. If we, the Sama Dilaut, tried to continue to live at sea in Zamboanga, such pirates would raid us like “patrol” (the Coast Guard). They are muggers. If we did not give up our catch, they would shoot us to death..... We cannot trust the government there. They think differently from you [referring to the Cebuano in general] because they are Tausug. You [kamo: second person plural] and we [kami: first person plural, exclusive of the person (s) the speaker is speaking to] think the same way, right? I mean, neither of us [kita: first person plural, inclusive of the person (s) the speaker is speaking to] steal or coerce. ....Up to now, they [referring to his siblings who still remain in Zamboanga] continue fishing, even though some of their family members were killed. ....[In the city of Tagbilaran, the province of Bohol] A son of Surgera’s [the second wife of Kanosa, Magsahaya’s elder brother] was found dead in their house. He was killed by muggers who broke into their house. That’s why many Bajau came over here (Hong Kong). We were afraid [of such pirates].....When I was still*

*young, I visited here (Davao City) from Pagadian (a city in the province of Zamboanga del Sur).  
.....When I was young, I was good at searching for food such as rice [meaning that he was still  
able to earn]. I came here (Hong Kong) from Zamboanga because I was afraid of the pirates.  
Now, I am looking for a way to make a living (on land) just like you. I can no longer go to the  
sea because I am afraid.....[Fishing and begging are]the same: Both are hard. Begging may  
be less hard. At any rate, if only we can survive [it should be good enough].....*

To be noted here, our relationship with Magsahaya and her family began quite differently from the ones with the other four groups we studied. About a year before starting our intensive observations in 1999, we made door-to-door visits for our household survey. During such visits, we found a baby who was extremely thin and apparently dehydrated. She would be later named Lasa<sup>8</sup>. The baby had been left unfed since Garding, the eldest daughter from Magsahaya's first marriage, died from hemorrhage when she delivered the baby in her home.

I was so surprised when Claire (my research assistant) and Sama Dilaut neighbors evidently decided that we, Claire and I, were going to take the baby home and take care of her. I cannot remember any more if Magsahaya clearly agreed to such an idea; I can only remember helplessly observing the people discussing what to do with the baby, vaguely expecting that they would leave the issue to social workers. Yet, when I was told about their decision, how could I say no, given the situation? All that Claire and I could do from then on was to do our best so that the baby would not die. Fortunately, once well fed, Lasa turned to be an adorable baby. She had fair skin, big round eyes, and practically no hair. Fascinated, one of our friends offered to adopt her. As Magsahaya firmly refused the offer, though, we later decided to return the baby to the community.

Such a series of events eventually transformed our relationship with Magsahaya: She came to be called "Lola" (grandmother), and we, "mommy," for the baby. Although I had been beginning to see my position as more uncertain and precarious through day-to-day research, it was then that I truly became aware of the impossibility to keep my position "neutral" as a fieldworker. After all, I was a human, too: I could not be there only to record events without being involved in their lives.

## **2. The Sama Dilaut wandering on land in today's world<sup>9</sup>**

### **2.1 Gathering food in public markets**

When we started our monthly household survey in May, 1999, Magsahaya was living with her husband, their two unmarried children (a son and a daughter), a son-in-law (the husband of her deceased eldest daughter) with his four children, and Magsahaya's two elder sisters (both widowed). As we will see in the following section (2.2), the organization of this household remained flexible with most of its members moving in and out throughout the period of our observation. Often, those who remained at home in Davao would be absorbed into the household of Ahad (the second son of Magsahaya) until the absent members came back to take them and form a separate household again. I will describe the mobility of each individual member below, when necessary.

We could not identify the main bread earner in this household. In other words, each member of the household engaged in some kind of economic activity in order to survive day-to-day. One of these activities was begging, which was particularly common among elders, females, and children. This tendency was common in other households of this kinship group, and it can be considered to reflect the difficulties that their male members were experiencing in shifting from fishing to non-fishing livelihoods.

For example, it had been quite some time since Atepy went fishing the last time after settling in Isla Bella. He had neither a fishing boat nor operating capital for his fishing activities. However, around the time when we started our observation, he eventually secured his own fishing boat. He bought it for 3,000 pesos from a Cebuano fisherman who needed immediate cash for a sick member of his household. He was also planning to buy a used engine (16 horsepower) for 8,000 pesos on credit from one of his in-laws who was leaving Davao for Cebu. He told us that he was concerned about the debt that he would incur from the purchase of the engine.

However, Atepy gave up his fishing boat. His decision was so quick that we did not notice it for a while<sup>10</sup>. Later he also added that the engine he wanted to buy turned out to be not in good condition, and therefore, he decided not to buy it. He had been hoping to go fishing with two of his in-laws in the waters near Samal Island, and Tibanban (in the province of Davao Oriental) even, using both "*panaq*" and "*palangre*." But after his failure to secure his own boat and engine, he seemingly totally gave up such hope because of the difficulty in finding someone

(non-“Bajau”) who would provide him with capital that he needed for fishing operations.

Around that time, Balsani (Magsahaya’s son-in-law), who also reported being a fisherman but seldom went fishing after moving into *Hong Kong*, began to peddle pearls. He learned the business by watching other “Bajau” pearl vendors, and started his own with Ahad (the second son of Magsahaya’s). Initially, he asked Alan, a pearl and shell vendor who belonged to Tisoy’s group (Group One in our study), to consign goods to him. He also tried to peddle flip-flops (“*tsinelas*”) that he purchased from Maranao street vendors.

Since May, 1999, we continued to observe Balsani’s new business. In our eyes, it did not seem very successful: he lacked operating capital and skills that he needed for his business; he would passively wait for potential customers to approach him; and it was not clear to us that he was earning any money at all. During our observation, we saw him start preparing for his business as soon as he woke up around 5:30 a.m. at home. Holding a cigarette between his fingers, he would thread loose pearls that he bought in bulk, and make them into necklaces. Then he would go out to Times Beach and other spots popular for locals. With no particular skills to promote his pearls, he did not seem to be seriously looking for customers, or even if he found one, he did not use any tactics to push the person to buy his pearls. He just let time pass by.

At the beginning, Ahad and Balsani peddled their pearls only in the morning. In the afternoon, they would stay at home. They would help a little with the household chores such as fetching water. At the hottest time of the day, they would take a nap. Around 2 p.m., they would get up and go off to stroll around the public space of *Hong Kong*. They would drink glasses of “*tubaq*” (local coconut wine; it cost four pesos per glass at that time) until they got drunk and their eyes turned red. Indeed, they were called “*palahubuk*” (drunkard) by their Sama-Bajau neighbors. They would pass their time by watching younger Sama-Bajau males playing volleyball until sunset. They did not know yet that Balsani would eventually die from cirrhosis of the liver a few years later.

Many of the elders, females and children in this group, went begging in order to feed themselves. So far as the weather permitted, they would go begging every day. How and where to beg, however, varied according to age and gender. For example, Abing (Magsahaya’s

husband, an elderly male) would go alone to places relatively close to Isla Bella such as Santa Ana Wharf and NCCC (a local shopping center always crowded with local residents). On the other hand, Jakarya and Sanga (Magsahaya's elder sisters) together with young children would rather go to public markets relatively far from their home. In either case, they would go out twice a day, once in the morning and another in the afternoon. We observed them bring home a small amount of cash (about 15 to 30 pesos per individual, or a group if more than two individuals went begging together), and food (fish, vegetables, and fruits) given to them if they went to public markets<sup>11</sup>.

(Kintarya [a niece of Magsahaya's] , recorded on August 21, 1999)

[This morning] *we have still no money to buy food. Sometimes, we do not eat in the evening, either, because we have no money.* [When her mother comes home from a public market with any food and/or small change given to her as alms] *only then we can eat. She (her mother) brings home "gabi" (taro) that she is given. But you know, we do not force people to give us food. If someone gives us something, we will receive it. It's OK. If nobody gives us anything, we do not mind it, either. It's OK, too. In any case, however, we* [referring to herself and other girls around her age in her neighborhood] *feel ashamed to go begging because, you know, we are already "dalaga"<sup>12</sup>, "right?*

(Lankatiga [a cousin of Magsahaya's] and Bitya, recorded on September 23, 1999)

(In Bankerohan Market) *while there are those who give us something, there are also others who tell us not to beg. So, we should not press shop owners (for food and/or small change). They might get scared and go away from their shops.....Even if we are given nothing, it is OK.* [When we asked them if they had been begging all their lives] *No, only here (in Davao City). In the past (when they were in Sangali and other places before coming to Davao) we did not beg because we were able to catch a lot of fish. Our husbands would go fishing in those days. But we can no longer go fishing. No fish here. In the past, there were those who would pity us (and offer operating capital for fishing activities). But now, look at our husbands. They will never go fishing again. It is difficult to go fishing here (in Davao City).....Our children do not go begging. They are afraid to be hit by jeepneys (Public Utility Jeep, or PUJ; a kind of public transportation in the Philippines) and cars.*

One day, I happened to find Angiya when I went to Bankerohan Market to shop before dawn.

She was with Sonya and Ayan (both were granddaughters of Magsahaya's, estimated age four years). Cutting through the crowd in the main street of the market illuminated by the soft orange light of sodium vapor lamps, the three were silently heading for the fish section located at the lowest part of the market. Along the way, we also saw some female members from other groups (Group Two and Group Four) peddling "*ukay-ukay*" (second-hand clothing), but Angiya and the two kids remained unconcerned. Angiya seemed to be preoccupied with an empty bucket that she was carrying by hand.

Walking a certain distance behind them, I saw Angiya together with the two little ones being given fish guts, fish bones, and fish no longer fresh enough to sell by kind Visayan fish vendors in the market. While Angiya was wearing an expressionless face, Ayan, who seemed too young to understand exactly what they were doing, kept smiling, showing her double teeth. However, Ayan also brought a white plastic cup, which she would not hesitate to hold out towards passers-by, and ask them for small change whenever she had a chance, just like her grandmother, aunties, and elder sisters would do.

Then Angiya and her companions went back to the upper level of the market to repeat the same operation. They were able to get about a kilo of deformed green mangoes and overripe yellow ones. They also collected about a total of fifteen pesos of coins. When the eastern sky began to turn pale pink, they stopped walking and stood motionless, looking exhausted. Then Acelda and Pina (both are daughters of Makabista's) arrived. The two groups merged, and went to a store selling cassava, where they bought two piles of the most inexpensive kind (one pile weighs about 1.5 kilo and costs six pesos).

Done with the morning operation, Angiya and her fellows tried to get in a jeepney (Passenger Utility Jeep, PUJ) to go home. However, the driver refused their boarding. I heard one of the PUJ drivers murmuring "Bajau girls like them would not pay the fare....." Another one added in a loud voice, "Other passengers cannot stand their odor!" Although it was true that they did not have enough money to pay their fare, I was not sure if they had an odor particularly stronger than other passengers did. After a while, they gave up taking a jeepney and walked a long way back to *Hong Kong*.

During the period of our observation (from May 1999-December 1999), Magsahaya's household recorded a monthly average income of 2,683.8, or that of 243.9 pesos per head, if only cash counted. This income level was not much more than about one sixth of that of what Gwapo's household (Group One in a previous chapter) showed. It was hardly possible for me to collect the precise data on how much each individual member of the household earned as the household had multiple sources of income, each of which was rather small and unpredictable in its character. If asked, they would answer that Magsahaya was in charge of pooling such incomes day to day, and she seemed to be doing so to a certain extent. However, how she redistributed the pooled cash to other members remained ungraspable not because she would not tell us but because neither she nor I could not find a way to record it exactly due to the frequency of such operations.

Compared to the other four groups we also closely studied, the formation of Magsahaya's household remained highly flexible. The members repeated merging and dispersing as sub-units, and the number of such sub-units also varied from a single individual to more than five individuals. In other words, it was almost impossible for me to apply the concept of household as it is defined in conventional economics to this particular case. Although the household I learned from Economics supposedly serves as the basic unit of reproduction both biologically and socially, what I was participating in and observing was too elusive to fit into such a category.

So long as we use the average monthly income (cash only, exclusive of income in kind) to compare the three Sama-Bajau groups from the lower community statuses in the research site, the living standard of these groups appeared to be just at the same level. However, once their consumption and expenditures were counted, these groups could be clearly ranked. For example, Magsahaya's household recorded the lowest by far on expenditures on livelihood. They invested the least in gainful economic activities. The contribution ratio of begging into the total household income was the largest in this group.

## **2.2 Traveling as beggars**

Members of Magsahaya's household as well as those of other households in this group showed higher spatial mobility than those of the other groups during our observation. More specifically, they would leave *Hong Kong* for one to two weeks, sometimes even for several months, visiting Sama-Bajau communities in other places, peddling dry goods, and/or begging. While such members were on the move, the remaining members would run the household separately: the traveling members would not send a remittance to the remaining ones; nor would the former give much share to the latter when they returned home.

Magsahaya's household was typical of this group. It had both sedentary and mobile members. However, it was difficult to distinguish who were more sedentary or mobile at each moment; the sedentary members and mobile ones would alternate according to the changing situations they perceived individually or collectively. As a result, our observation showed that most of the household members, regardless of age and gender, were not completely settled in *Hong Kong* in terms that they temporarily left for other places to form a separate sub-household more than one time within the eight months in 1999. The only exception was Abing (Magsahaya's husband), who never traveled anywhere during the same period.

Magsahaya's household showed the following pattern of splitting in spatial movement: 1) a group of adult females (including Magsahaya sometimes) and five to nine children, and 2) Balsani and two to three other male members in the same "*kampong*." These two groups would operate independently once they split from the original household in *Hong Kong*. While the former would typically engage in begging, the latter would rather buy and sell pearls. During the Christmas season, both were likely to do "mamasko" (caroling for small change) as well.

Magsahaya had her eldest son Santolin in Margosatubig. There were times she wanted to visit him, especially when she had difficulties in Davao City. Actually, she complained about hardship almost every time we met, and she made a total of thirteen trips out of Davao City during our observation. However, only two of those trips were meant to reach Margosatubig,

and indeed, only one of such attempts succeeded. Although she and other members certainly had mental maps of places to visit when they traveled, it was also true that they seldom had a clear and fixed plan prior to their departure. With just enough money to reach their (first) destination, they would leave, and then flexibly adapt their sojourns (and next destinations) according to the changing situations they were in.

Magsahaya and her household members would move around. Nonetheless, this does not at all mean that they would move about anywhere with no particular reason. Their destinations included relatively far places within Mindanao such as Cotabato City (in ARMM), Butuan City (in Caraga, Region XIII) to relatively near places such as Nabongtulan (in the province of Davao del Norte) and Tagum City (in the province of Davao del Sur). All of them were reachable by bus. They would make stops on their way, occasionally begging for small change and food, and sleeping on the street. Such travels would last one to two weeks till they returned home to Davao City.

The monthly average travel expenses of Magsahaya's household during the period of our observation was 302.5 pesos. Given the frequency and the number of household members who moved about, this record of expenditures may look too small. Magsahaya explained, however, that most of the time they could get a discounted fare, or sometimes even a free ride, on the bus, which they most frequently used to travel. She also added that while traveling, they could feed themselves by peddling knickknacks and begging for food and change. Magsahaya told us about her recent trip to Cotabato City.

(Magsahaya, recorded on October 21, 1999)

*There were many "Bajau" there. Some of them were from Margos (Margosatubig), and others were from Zamboanga (City). Aside from, Angiya, Tanong and Kintarya, who were Virginia (Balsani's wife)'s children from her previous marriage, were with us. Indeed, many other children traveled along with us, for they were not allowed to beg here (in Davao City). But I will not go back to Cotabato (City) any time soon. My whole body aches so much that I cannot stand it. I went (to a clinic attached to a drug store) two days after I returned from Cotabato (City).....[If she begged all day] I could get about twenty to thirty pesos. I took "Bachelor"<sup>13</sup> (to Cotabato City). When we did not have enough money, our fares could be discounted to only 30 pesos [from 90 pesos as regular fares], and sometimes even down to 15 pesos. When we took*

*night buses, our fares could be free. Drivers would pity us..... We would sleep on the street and at terminals (of the bus). There was no such thing as street tax. People would pity us because we had no money. (Those who often gave them money were) Visayan (Cebuano).....I would do like this[She demonstrated to us how she would beg on the street, stretching out her right hand towards us while sitting on the floor], and if any passersby throws change to the ground, I would pick it up. Sometimes I had one (a plastic up to receive alms) in my hand..... We will never push the Bisaya (Cebuano) (to give alms). .....(One of the places where she goes for begging in Davao City is) “tindahan” (a store). The store is located in a public market. It is called “Super.” Its owner is Maranao. ....(With the cash she receives from begging) I would buy fish, firewood, and water. (While she was sojourning in Cotabato City last time) we cooked for ourselves. We brought our own cooking pots and ladles. We were able to borrow other things we needed for cooking because there were many others (Sama Dilaut) from Zamboanga.....It was difficult for us to put aside only ten pesos (to save a day). Actually, we could save only five pesos a day at most. ....(If they kept begging for three weeks) we could have no more than 200 pesos left in our hand..... When we went to Cotabato City last time, this child [pointing to Amelita, the eldest daughter of her late daughter Guwardya’s] did not beg. Neither did Sonya (the second daughter of Guwardya’s). They were not ashamed to beg, but they simply did not like begging. That’s what they say. ....Nobody else but ourselves could feed us. So, I am not ashamed to beg. I would be more ashamed if I fail to feed ourselves, right?*

Adult male members of Magsahaya’s household also made trips during our observation. Their trips were meant to be business: They left home, hoping that they would be able to earn money by peddling shells and pearls while traveling. At first, their trips tended to be cut short. They had difficulties in feeding themselves because they lacked skills and operating capital as newcomers in this business. They were also reluctant to go begging, unlike their female and child counterparts. However, having repeated trials, the duration of their trips became longer. While their first trip in October lasted only two days, in November they began to travel as far as to Surigao City (in the province of North Surigao) and other cities along the northern shore of Mindanao Island for one to two weeks.

According to Magsahaya, the group of females and children begging, and that of males peddling,

would normally operate separately. The females strategically preferred to go alone so that their operations asking for pity would not be bothered by the presence of their male members. Nonetheless, when they moved from one city to another, the two groups would be merged for security and other reasons.

Once Magsahaya asked us, “Kanus-a man ang pasko? Mga pila pa ka bulan na? (Cebuano: When is Christmas? About how more months from now?)” She needed the information in order to think about, if not really plan, her next trip. Not only for Magsahaya but also for many of her Sama-Bajau neighbors in Isla Bella, Christmas season marks important dates on their mental calendars. For one thing, during the season, many of them would go begging or what was called “caroling” around the City. Indeed, some Sama-Bajau from other places would come and join such seasonal operations. For another, Christian churches in the area would give Christmas parties where they could be given gifts. Magsahaya told us that she had a plan to attend one of such parties held at one of the churches in *Hong Kong* before she and Sonya would depart for Sangali. Eventually, she attended the party and went on a trip on December 27, 1999.

Majyaria listed two reasons why she preferred to travel to other places for begging, even though it was not always easy. First, she found the government crackdown on begging stricter in Davao City than in some other places. Second, at the same time, somehow, she saw the number of “Bajau” beggars actually increasing in Davao City.

The frequency of her sojourns outside Davao could be considered a means for her to search for resources to survive. These trips also allowed her to avoid the risk of staying in one place too long and missing the opportunity to cultivate her social network in other places. But traveling also made it difficult for government agencies and NGOs to assist her (and others like her) so she could enjoy more social services including education for her children. It was difficult for these agencies and NGOs to locate the beneficiaries if they continued to move from one place to another without any notice. Moreover, how could the agencies produce documentations, whether such papers are meant for governmental records or reports for foreign donors, if the recipients are “not settled,” or how could anyone keep an accurate record of them if the list of residents of the recipient community kept changing? Sometimes, we heard people comment on the poverty of the “Bajau” by saying, “they are poor because they keep wondering.” From Majyria’s perspective, however, she had to keep moving around because she could not find

enough resources to rely on in Davao City, even though her trips could end up exhausting her even more.

### **2.3 It is not always easy to eat regularly**

In Magsahaya's household, it was rare to see "all of the household members" eating together due to the relatively high spatial mobility of each one that we have described so far. Instead, they would flexibly split into sub-units for meals. The formation of such sub-units varied constantly, reflecting the status of mobility of the members at each time. I need to admit here that I spent most of the time participating in and observing their activities within Davao City; I had no chance to observe how they fed themselves while they were out.

Most of the Sama-Bajau in the research site would purchase their necessities in small lots. Their purchase cycle tended to be short, reflecting the unstable flow of cash income in their households. Magsahaya's household showed one of the most extreme cases of such daily practices: They could hardly eat anything unless they could get some food and small change from begging in the market. In a sense, their begging activities were like gathering activities for survival. Literally, they were living from hand to mouth.

(Lankatiga and Bitya, recorded on September 23, 1999)

(Normally) *we eat cassava and fish. Rice does not make us sated. But cassava gives us satisfaction.* (The fish they usually buy is) "*pirit*" (*Euthynnus affinis*: kawakawa, mackerel tuna). *We can buy the fish only when we can afford, though. If we buy dried fish, instead, we would buy dried sardines. .... (When they beg) we would accept anything people offer. If we have money, we will buy food by ourselves. If we do not, we will beg, instead. But we will not force people (to give them alms). When we cannot afford to buy fish, we will eat only vegetables. Say, eggplants, string beans, gabi..... We will eat anything (that can be given to them in the public market). We cannot choose what to eat because we have little money. If we had money, we would choose, though. .... The fish we can afford included like the one that costs about 10 pesos or 15 pesos per kilo (the most inexpensive kinds they could find in the market such as fish no longer fresh enough to sell and fish gut). If we could afford, we would add coconut milk when we cook cassava. If we could not, we would not mind it. As to fish, we would slice it and boil it in a cooking pot. We add "kamatis" (local tomatoes), garlic, and ginger to make it soup. [We asked them about the use of cooking oil] No, we do not use (cooking oil). If we could afford, we would*

*buy it also, though.....(The frequency of meals is) twice a day. Today we will not cook for lunch, for we have no money. (How often they eat per day) depends on how much we could afford. So, it changes from day to day. [We asked them what they would do if they see their neighbors starving] Well, sometimes, we would share our food with such persons. Just a little, like a plate (of food), though. We specially care about children. If we have something to give them, we will, but if we do not, we cannot. ....[We asked about that second-hand clothing business they quit recently] Our capital (for such business) had exhausted. Our husbands were selling pearls, and so when they can earn from their business, (their families can also eat)....., but if they cannot earn, we cannot eat, either. Indeed, they only came home empty handed for the last five days.....So, we collected bananas for free (from Bankerohan Market).*

Most of the time Magsahaya and Angiya prepared meals for the household members. The frequency and amount of each meal changed according to the cash and food collection through their begging operations. They would eat twice a day at most. It was not unusual that they ate only once a day. Although it was not often, they would take coffee in the morning when they could afford it. One time, they had a small sachet of instant coffee, a no-branded one which was cheaper than locally circulating “Nescafe.” Two grams of the coffee powder was put directly into boiling water in a kettle, from which everyone present took a direct sip in turn. When I had my own sip, it just looked like thinly brown-colored hot water with little flavor.

Their typical meal was staple food (rice or cassava) with one side-dish. They preferred fresh fish to dried fish, but sometimes they had no choice but to cook the latter due to the budget constraints. They would make clear soup locally called “*tinula*” with fish and vegetables, using very little “*lomas*” (spice such as local tomatoes called “*kamatis*” and flat mild onions having purplish turnips called “*sibuyas bombay*”). The soup would be served in brown glass soup plates and metallic bowls for the household members to share. They would sit together around the food, eat it with the fingers of their right hands, and take sips directly from the soup plates/bowls. When we were with them, they always kindly invited us to eat first. We did, but rather quickly: We put only a small amount of food into our mouths as a gesture of appreciation, feeling guilty about making the others, both adults and children, wait as we knew that they were starving.

As we have seen so far, the number of Magsahaya’s household members changed constantly throughout our observation. On top of it, daily consumption also kept fluctuating. These factors

made it even more difficult for us to gather “accurate” data on their consumption, but we believe that it turned out to be more important to find how elusive their economic activities were. We estimated, though, that they spent about 15 to 30 pesos (equivalent of one to two cellophane bags, or 1.5 to 3.0 kg) on cassava, and/or 15 to 18 pesos on rice (one kg) every day. They would also spend about five pesos on vegetables a day. Their expenditures on fruits recorded only in June and July with ten pesos a day each month. Indeed, during the two months, most of the household members including Magsahaya herself were absent, having gone outside Davao City, and the remaining members were temporarily absorbed into the household of Atepoy (Magsahaya’s second son) living next door. As we were not able to follow the mobile members, we took records of Atepoy’s household instead.

Majorya’s household recorded about 20 to 30 pesos expenditure on fish every day. In 1998, it was not easy to find fresh fish that cost less than 30 pesos per kilo in the public market. Indeed, Magsahaya’s household members would buy less than one kilo of fish at a time, look for fish at discounted prices due to its losing freshness, or simply choose inexpensive kinds of dried fish to meet their budget constraints. During our observation, they spent about five pesos on spices a day, which contained mainly salt and chili.

Five months of our-eight-month observation witnessed their purchase of powder milk for baby Lasa. Their expenditures on the item was 270 pesos in July, 1999, while it was 95 pesos (equivalent to a can of 400 grams) a month from September to December, in 1999. Lydia was born in February 1998. As her mother Garding (Magsahaya’s eldest daughter from her first husband) died from bleeding at the time of her birth, Magsahaya’s family took her in. When they could not afford powder milk, they would give the baby rice porridge, and sometimes, even black tea, which was considered good for the baby’s health.

The number of Magsahaya’s household members fluctuated from eight to fourteen with an average of eleven a month throughout our observation. Accordingly, the average monthly expenditures on foods per head changed constantly. What I should point out is, however, their monthly average expenditures per head on non-staple foods such as vegetables, fruits, and fish recorded extremely low. For example, the average expenditures on fish per head per month in

Magsahaya's household could reach only about 30% of that in Tisoy's household (from Group One with the highest community status in our study), and slightly less than 80% of that in Kapirin's household (from Group Four with the second lowest community status in our study). As we did not compute the cash values of the foods that they gathered through begging, the number on their expenditures presented here may underestimate the level of their actual consumption. Nonetheless, regardless of the methods for getting foods, whether it be begging or other activities, one thing seemed true: nothing guaranteed each one of them would secure sufficient food nutrient intake every day.

Gambling (*tikam*) was reportedly played by no one in Magsahaya's household. However, our daily observations tell that it was rather usual to see young females like Angiya, children like Jakmud and Sonya, and their friends gather around the gambling table in the public place, whether it was rainy or sunny. As our monthly household survey showed, particularly in June and July, 1999, there were times when Virginia (Atepoy's wife) bet as much as 20 pesos a day. Those who played the game were apparently more serious about betting than Birang from Group Two, who enjoyed it more as a pastime. In a way, Angiya and her neighbors from this group considered the game as a means to increase disposable cash. Indeed, it was not uncommon to see a female or child who won a bet immediately leave the gambling table and go out to buy staple food.

Although we never measured their weights, every time Magsahaya, Angiya, and the children came back from their travels to other cities, we had different impressions on their shapes: sometimes, they seemed to have put on weight, being in a cheerful mood; and at other times, they seemed just exhausted and hungry, being rather quiet if not sullen. Indeed, Magsahaya stopped traveling far after October, 1999, saying that she was not feeling well.

Magsahaya and her household members would often tell us that they were hungry, directly and indirectly asking us for some food and/or small change. Once we came to be dubious about their being really hungry all the time. We decided to observe them all day from some distance. I also tried to make surprise visits to their household around the time when they were supposed to take meals. Both attempts proved to us that they were actually hungry. We saw no trace of cooking in

their hearth even after 10:00 a.m. Their cooking pots were cold and empty. Moreover, we saw Magsahaya and young girls lying down quietly, murmuring that they could do nothing but sleep when they had no food.

Given the limited availability of food in this group, children were given priority. When they could afford it, they would buy snacks for their children from “sari-sari” stores (local convenience stores) nearby. We could not deny, though, the fact that some of their young children, especially infants, were obviously suffering from malnutrition, though the degree of malnutrition varied from one baby to another. Dental care was another issue among them: many of them had milk-teeth that looked like they were melted from the gums. Skin diseases such as scabies were also more common among their children than those in other groups with higher community statuses. Indeed, babies covered with scabs all over their bodies were nothing new there. For example, Lydia’s limbs were always covered with blister-like rashes; bit by bed bugs, she might have scratched herself. Many of their children would suffer from diarrhea as well.

The somatic complaints that Magsahaya and her household members shared with us included many kinds: headaches, stomach aches, joint aches, fatigue, weariness, malaise, and so on. Compared to other groups with higher community statuses, the members of this group complained to us about their health far more often. Indeed, we met more patients diagnosed with tuberculosis or with leprosy. Most of these patients were elderly members. When their conditions were severe, they would resort to the community health center for free consultations, and/or they would visit Davao Medical Center<sup>14</sup> in Bajada.

Magsahaya and others in her group complained, however, that the doctors often made them go home without clear “names of their sickness” (diagnoses). Even if the doctors did give them some explanations, it was often difficult for them to understand their words clearly due to the language barriers. Moreover, even if they were able to be given prescriptions, they would not know how to afford the medications, given their financial constraints and lack of information and access to available social services.

For example, feeling dizzy and exhausted all the time, Magsahaya repeatedly visited the

community health center and the government hospital during our observation in 1999. Nonetheless, there was nothing clearly wrong found with her. According to her, the doctors simply advised her to rest well and eat well, and sent her home. Since we did not have a chance to validate her narratives with the doctors, we would not know exactly what kind of communications took place then. What we could tell was the fact that she had neither rested nor eaten well during those days.

#### **2.4 *Saco, karton, and recycled items***

There were several possible routes for getting from the highway to the corner where Magsahaya and her family were living in Isla Bella. One of the routes that they most frequently used was to pass the government-owned toll-free bridge. Although it was called “*tulay*” (bridge), it was more like a long passage built along the houses over the shore. Built out of pieces of coconut lumber, which were arranged rather irregularly, at first the passage appeared as a labyrinth to our eyes. Entering the passage, one would first pass through a Maranao-inhabited area with relatively large well-built houses, and pass through a Bisayan-inhabited area with rows of modest-sized houses. Then, one would find the passage abruptly end, which is actually a backdoor to *Hong Kong*. There was no more bridge or catwalk. Instead, there was just water, whether it was at high tide or low tide, due to its closeness to the coastline. There one would need to go down into the water, shallow or deep, to walk towards the other side. If the water was too high, however, one might use a small boat to cross the distance of about five-meters.

On reaching the corner where they lived, one would climb the wooden ladder, which was removable, only there during the day and withdrawn at night, up to the front balcony of Atepyo’s house. From there, one would go on to a connected passage, or a series of a pair of round bamboos bundled together, and then cross a coconut lumber, or more precisely, a thin and irregular-shaped timber offcut which would bend beneath when one walked on it. There one would arrive at the front of Magsahaya’s house. Finally, one would have to step on a thin and small wooden block to go up into the inside of the house, which was built at a higher level from the all the passages connected to it.

There was another route to reach Magsahaya's house from the opposite direction by passing the "front" door (main entrance) of *Hong Kong* and then its public space, instead. However, this passage required one to cross a long catwalk built of bundles of uncut bamboos. Two to four bamboos were tied together as a unit, and about six to eight units were arranged all the way up to the corner where Magsahaya and her family lived. There were no railings attached to the walk, of course. To me, at first it simply looked like a labyrinth hanging in the air. Given that most outsiders would try to approach *Hong Kong* from the main entrance connected to the relatively well-maintained main passage along the public space, the corner where this group dwelled, located as at the most remote side from the main passage, was one of the most difficult, or even "invisible" corners of *Hong Kong* for outsiders to visit.

Magsahaya's house was one of the smallest in *Hong Kong*. It had a room-less structure, of which floor area was about 10 square meters. Spilt bamboos were used for the floor. The roof and walls looked like they were thatched with nipa (*Nipa frutescens*) leaves, but this was actually with coconut leaves. They said that coconut leaves were cheaper, but less durable than nipa leaves. Indeed, Magsahaya and Abing had the roof of their house thatched anew in July, 1999, but we ended up observing it gradually and rather quickly deteriorating toward the end of the year.

Most of the stilt houses in this corner appeared as makeshifts using discarded materials such as blue tarpaulin sheets, cardboard, and sacks. Magsahaya's house was not only an exception but also stood out as one of the houses most severely beaten by weather and the unavailability of resources to make repairs. It had no doors. Instead, the openings in front and back of the house were covered with patches of recycled sacks. Throughout the period of our observation, little home maintenance was undertaken: the decay of the materials used for the house seemed even faster than that of her neighbors.

Magsahaya's house had no windows on the right wall towards the public space. As we have described earlier, the wall itself, though, was too vaguely defined. Apparently, the house was not meant for communal social and religious events. The house did not contain much inside, not even a piece of hand-woven mat; there were piles of cardboard and pillows that they would use

to lie down on and rest. There were neither suitcases nor plastic cases to keep their clothing; Instead, T-shirts, skirts, and other items were either piled up on the small shelf built into the house or simply hung from the wires that were extended between the walls.

Turning to the left wall, we could see a gnarled log post in the corner. It had several nails where one could hang clothing and other items. Many other things were also hung from the beam, such as empty plastic one-liter-sized Coca Cola bottles, a black plastic container with many flip-flops inside, red and yellow plastic gallon containers, and plastic bags full of unsorted toys.

The kitchen space (about 1.5 square meters) attached to the residential area was also filled with recycled items. For example, a tin can of Magnolia Ice-Cream was used as a cooking pot. Their hearth was made from another discarded tin can, which was relatively large. The rattan-made baby cot that we used to use for Lydia was also there, tied to the outside of the kitchen wall as a rack to keep empty gallon containers.

There was no division between the kitchen space and the residential area. This allowed the household members and visitors to move between the two areas freely. The kitchen space served purposes other than cooking such as washing clothes, bathing, and personal hygiene. Excretion actions, however, could take place within the residential areas, according to the situation. Although there was no wall around, there was a certain level of privacy with no attention paid or indifference pretended by others when one needed personal space. Sometimes, I saw a small child, naked, squatting at the stern of a fishing boat in order to relieve himself. At other times, I saw a few children eating together from a plate on the same fishing boat now parked upside down. After the children finished their meals, women came and spread the clothes they had just hand-washed on the same boat under the sun.

Magsahaya's family like any of their neighbors in this corner would purchase water from a Cebuano-owned sari-sari store at the back, which was located very close to their house but outside *Hong Kong*. The amount of water they would purchase was limited to 2 pesos (8 gallons) a day. They would have to spend another 5 pesos (20 gallons) for bathing and washing clothes. Although they would carefully rinse the clothes and dishes with the water they

purchased, they would also collect sea water under the floor at high tide for prewashing. Since they did not take baths or wash clothes every day during our observation, they spent only 7.5 pesos a week on soap and detergent.

Magsahaya's house remained unelectrified in 1999. Actually, it used to have power by tapping electricity illegally from a Cebuano neighbor's house with its owner's permission, but one day it was abruptly disconnected. During the period of our observation, they spent about 5 pesos a day on kerosene for lighting (a lamp), and ten pesos on fire wood for cooking.

## **2.5 Children wishing to go to school**

In Magsahaya's household, there were three school-aged children in 1999: Magsahaya's own child from Abing, and their two grandchildren. Magsahaya herself had never had a chance to go to school. Neither had Abing and their two sons who had been married and had independent households by the time of our research. None of these adult members had reading and writing skills.

Magsahaya told us that she would imagine it should be convenient if one went to school and learned how to read and write. On the other hand, she also faced the fact that her household could not afford to school their children. Besides, she did not know how to access the school and its related social services because she did not speak the Cebuano language very well. Indeed, she had no particular plans for her children and grandchildren. She was only hoping that they would find a job to feed themselves somehow. She could hardly imagine any other livelihood other than selling pearls and peddling second-hand clothing for the younger household members.

Magsahaya's narratives on education for the children were fairly common to those shared by members of other households in this group. Parents said they wanted to send their children to school, and their children were eager to go to school. Yet, very few children were enrolled in formal education. In such an environment where few individuals had completed the first grade in a local school, it should be difficult for one to imagine the expected return from investment in

education. Kintarya, a daughter of Magsahaya (Magsahaya's maternal cousin), estimated age 13 years old, shared her thoughts with us.

(Kintarya, recorded on August 21, 1999)

*Nobody (in this neighborhood) goes to school. [We asked her why] Because we will be beaten<sup>15</sup> if we do not know how to write. [We asked her where such things would happen] In the "payag" (referring to a hut that CSSDO, or the City Social Services and Development Office, built for its daycare service in the public space of Hong Kong). I do not know the name of the teacher (who she claims has beaten her fellow Sama Dilaut children), but the teacher was Bisaya (Cebuano). You know, even our fathers have never beaten us, she (the teacher) beats us when we cannot understand what she teaches. Even she (the teacher) demands so, we do not even know how to write.....[We asked her if she still wants to go to school, given such situation] Yes, I want to go to school if I will not be beaten. ....Because, I think, if I go to school, perhaps I will learn how to read.*

Now, lack of schooling does not necessarily mean that female children in this group would marry very young right after having their first menstrual period. In most of the weddings we had attended, the estimated ages of the brides were 16 years to 17 years old.

(Kintarya, recorded on August 21, 1999)

*[We were talking about becoming "dalaga," or young women at a marriageable age] Yes, she (referring to Amelita sitting next to her) has had three times (of period) already. She (referring to Acelda also attending there) has it more regularly now. But I have had it only once. Everybody else has it more regularly, though..... We will not (marry) yet because we are still too young, even though we all have periods now. We can get married when we reach the age of Angiya<sup>16</sup> and Acelda now, but we are still too young to marry.....When we grow up, our parents will perhaps find our marriage partners. Acelda is looking for her marriage partner by herself, though. Well, she is old enough anyway. ....[We asked her if she wants to marry a Sama man] Yes, then, perhaps we would not quarrel much, for we would understand each other rather easily. ....I know how to prepare meals. I know how to cook rice. I have learned it from my father. One of these days, I could get married, too. Who knows? Of course, I also know (how to weave mats). Acelda can also weave mats. We have learned it from adults. We have also learned how to wash clothes, iron<sup>17</sup> them.....*

With the decline of fishing in this group, children came to have fewer opportunities to learn fishing-related skills and knowledge from their parents. Yet, Jakmud and his male playmates were still often seen playing with miniature versions of “*panaq*.” They often gathered in the kitchen space of Magsahaya’s house. They would look into the water under the house through the gaps in the floor, searching for small fish swimming beneath. If they found any, they would bring out the miniature “*panaq*,” which actually looked more like a simple slingshot, to shoot at the fish. We have never had a chance to see their catch during our observation, though.

During the daytime, most of the children in this group were naked or half-naked. Nakedness made it easier and more comfortable when they played around their houses. They would sit on the uncut bamboo catwalks. From there they would dangle themselves just for fun. They would dive into the water when the water level rose towards high tide. Then they would swim around, yelping with delight. To me, they looked like a group of young dolphins with brown skin. Most of them had golden hair, naturally burned by the wind and sun.

Acelda and her peer girls of marriageable age seemed to care more about their personal appearances. Some of them had their hair permed, while others had their teeth capped with gold or decorated with star-shaped stickers. There was a Sama individual, who was called “*bayot*<sup>18</sup>,” in the neighborhood, and he offered such personal services for reasonable fees. Acelda and her friends as an age- and gender-based group were often seen to stick together, betting on cards among themselves, and observing adults gambling at a counter held in the public space of *Hong Kong* every day. Most of the time, they would also be taking care of a younger sister (s)/brother(s) who they held under their arm(s).

### **3. Being called the “Bajau” now and in the past**

#### **3.1 Prayers not heard by God**

The scope of “*kampong*” that Magsahaya belonged to was the largest one in *Hong Kong*. The number of its member households was 27, which was just as many as Kapirin’s group

(Group Four). Most of them were relatives, huddling in the same corner of the research site. Nevertheless, many of them showed higher special mobility than their fellow Sama-Bajau in the other groups. Therefore, even if we could count the structures of their housing rather fixedly, the composition of each household remained elusive in our eyes, constantly changing. Such elusiveness and fluidity apparently led to their weakest socioeconomic and political presence among the Sama-Bajau in Isla Bella.

Intra-household financial safety nets such as income redistribution and informal moneylending were rarely observed in Magsahaya's group<sup>19</sup>. They would seldom take collective actions against outsiders. They had the least contact with outsiders among the Sama-Bajau in the research site. Even when they had a seriously sick person, those who directly offered assistance would be limited to close relatives (often blood-related ones). Since any of the household members in this group had little surplus, even if assistance was offered, it was usually limited and not enough to cover their needs.

During our research, many individuals from the other groups overtly and covertly advised us, saying "Magsahaya and her fellows (who belonged to Group Five) are living in the poorest-looking houses, but they must have much jewelry. They just keep it secret. So, don't be deceived by what you can see there." Accordingly, I tried to observe more attentively, not only when observing their ordinary days but also on the special occasions they held such as weddings. So did my research assistant, Claire. Yet, throughout our eight-month observation, we only came to the following conclusions: 1) Members of Magsahaya's group did have jewelry; but 2) the jewelry they had consisted of only tiny pieces that looked much cheaper than that owned by the other groups with higher community status (whether pawned or not).

In November 1999, Ignorasi, one of Magsahaya's nephews, became ill. He was temporarily taken under the wing of Magsahaya's household, which eventually increased financial pressure on the household. Magsahaya showed us receipts recently issued by Davao Ros-Ver Pawnshop. The items that they had pawned included Abelita's wrist watch for 600 pesos, Balsani's necklace for 850 pesos, Magsahaya's necklace for 900 pesos, a piece of earring for 300 pesos, and another unknown item for 650 pesos. The total debts from the pawn shop reached 3,300

pesos. Although the dates of redemption varied, all of them were due within the next year.

In Magsahaya's group, it was normally observed that once they had an ill member in the household, it could easily lead to a secondary crisis (often in form of a sharp drop in food consumption) due to the sudden increase in medical expenditures. The number of gainful members also decreased, for aside from the ill person, the person(s) who would attend him/her would temporarily reduce, or even stop his/her economic activities. Thus, the level of disposable income per head in the household tended to decline while they were attending the ill member. As we have just seen, when Ignorasi fell ill, Magsahaya and her household members pawned the jewelry for cash, but it was not enough to cover the expenses the following month. So, she resorted to asking her elder brother, Kanon, but he declined her request. She shared the episode with us.

(Magsahaya, recorded on November 22, 1999)

*I ended up quarreling with two elderlies in their house. I mean, Kanon and his wife. I knew that they had a certain amount of money that they had earned from begging, and so I asked them if I could borrow some money. But they refused. That's why I quarreled with them. They were hiding the money. Actually, they asked Makabista, or their daughter, to keep the money for them. So, behind the back of Kanon and her wife, I resorted to Makabista for the money. She lent the money to me while the two elderlies were out. When the two elderlies came home to find that the money was gone, they were furious. But I needed the money so badly for my sick nephew. I pitied him so much. His son was crying helplessly, "My father was very sick." .....*

Her narratives might make you think that her group somehow had a surplus. Yet, the truth is that the money Majyarya surreptitiously borrowed from Kanon's household was only 500 pesos.

Magsahaya's group did not function much in its religious aspect, either. Many of the religious rites and communal meals that used to be seen as social events were rarely seen during our observation. Although we were able to meet a few "*djin*" (spiritual medium) and "*panday*" (traditional midwife), most of them reported that they would play such roles only for particular households, but not for large-scale social events that should involve the entire group. Indeed, we had little opportunity to observe such social events, except for weddings and burials. This does

not mean, though, that they had fewer sick persons. Actually, they had more. They just lacked the communal coping resources for such crises.

One of the “*djin*” we met was Idol, who lived next door to Magsahaya’s house. He served as a religious leader for the entire group, and his wife named Tamsin (Magsahaya’s aunt on her mother side) was a “*panday*.” They lived in a thatched house with a “*nippa*”-roof and walls, which was relatively well-maintained in this neighborhood. There was a wooden chest below the wall that had no windows. The chest (“*ba’ul*”) kept a green jacket that Idol would wear when he performed religious rites as a “*djin*.” The only religious rite that Magsahaya’s group performed together during our observation was “*pag-hinan ni Tuhang*,” which was meant to strengthen Tambashi’s spiritual power. The cost for the rite was shared by each household according to its financial capability. Indeed, Magsahaya’s household was exempted from making such a contribution, given that they had even more economic difficulties than the rest of the group.

In May, 1998, Magsahaya and her household members performed “*pag-mboq*,” in which they made offerings to their ancestors for the restoration of health. The offerings were 20 pesos worth of bananas, the maximum that they could afford at the time. In the same month, there were other religious rites and burials that the group which they belonged to held and they actually participated in, but no expenditures related to those social events were recorded as they were unable to make any financial contribution. In the same month, they also prepared for “*pag-mboq pay*” (a rite to offer rice to the ancestors) together with Kanon and other several members from the group. However, they had to give it up when they discovered the quality of the unhusked rice they obtained through much effort from a Cebuano-owned store too poor for the rite. They had no more budget to buy rice again.

One day in October, 1998, before we started the intensive observation of Magsahaya’s household in May, 1999, Kanon (“*djin*,” or a spiritual medium for the group) passionately and thoroughly explained to us about how they used to celebrate each one of the religious rites we have mentioned above. However, there were also times when he deplored the fact that they would no longer pray to “*mboq*,” saying “Illness is surely caused by the ‘*saitan*,’ but God would

not hear us even if we pray (through their ancestors).” He even said to us firmly, “If I ever get sick, I will put this green cloth around my head in order to heal myself. It should be much better (than celebrate rites for their ancestors).”

### **3.2 Sensitive relations among the Sama Dilaut in *Hong Kong***

The Sama Dilaut group that Magsahaya belonged to had few economic relations with the rest of the Sama-Bajau groups in *Hong Kong*, even though they had relatively more interactions with Papa Melbasa’s group (Group Three in our study). Both of the two groups claimed to be Sama Dilaut from Zamboanga City. However, we observed a certain emotional distance between the members of the two groups, which was almost unnoticeable to outsiders.

One of the occasions that we felt such distance was a wedding of Papa Melbasa’s grandchild. As is the case with other weddings held in *Hong Kong*, practically all the neighbors were invited to join the event, especially to perform dances on the makeshift stage in the public space. Dressed up as much as possible and in full makeup (with white powder all over the face, rose-red blusher on the cheeks, and heavy rouge on the lips), women and children from Magsahaya’s group also joined the gathered audience around the stage. Nonetheless, while many guests from other groups, regardless of age and gender, went up on stage and danced, one after another, those from Magsahaya’s group just kept watching them without approaching the stage to dance. They looked reserved.

One morning, Kanon came home angry. He told us that he was insulted by Sama Dilaut women from “Pastor Joseph’s group” (part of Papa Melbasa’s group, or Group Three, at that time) while he was begging on the street. According to him, those women said to him, “Stop begging. It’s such a shame to see a Bajau begging.” Furious, he shouted before us, “Just because you run small businesses [other than begging], and just because your lives have been improving a little bit, what do you think you are? [“you” here refers to those women who insulted him]. I used to have my own business like you! I used to make a living by fishing!” To our surprise, then, several women from Group Three came over to the front of his house, and started cursing him out. Kanon and his household members immediately reacted, and counter-accusations between the two parties now involved their neighbors from both sides. The bluster did not last long; it lasted perhaps only five minutes or so. No physical violence happened. All that my research assistant and I could do was to hide in his house and to watch it, speechless. Later, Magsahaya explained to us about the mishap.

(Magsahaya, recorded on November 21, 1999)

*Those women were so rude to Kanon. They said to him, “You and your fellows are different from what we are. You are begging [but we are not].” That’s why Kanon got angry. Those ones [from Group Three] are better off than we are…… He (Kanon) used to swim [in order to operate spear fishing]. But he can no longer do it. He complains that his heart feels heavy when he breathes. Others [referring to those from Group Three in particular] gossip about our begging. Indeed, they speak better Bisaya (Cebuano). But you know, even if they have more money, some from their group still go begging. We go begging because we are poor, you can see it, right? [She implies, “But they are not begging out of their poverty”] ……… You should not believe what they say. Even if they are peddling second-hand clothing, as long as they are “Bajau” [like us], they will go begging…… They (Group Three) receive money. Maybe not much money. [We asked, “you mean the money they get from the church led by Pastor Joseph?”] No, not that money. What I mean is that they help one another. Anyone can get help from other members in their group…… Unlike them, we do not help mutually in our group. I hesitate to ask my neighbors for help, even though we belong to the same group. I should feel ashamed if I asked my neighbors for help like those from “pikas” (the other side, Group Three) would do. If I ever did so, they would spread gossip about my behavior. It should be better to ask Bisayan neighbors for help, for they would not spread gossip. Here, even my relatives would gossip about me if I asked them for money……*

Such a conflictual relationship between the two groups (Group Three and Group Five), on the other hand, seemed to reflect a sense of intimacy between them. They were both Sama Dilaut, though their places of origin scattered in Zamboanga City. Indeed, a noticeable change occurred in their relationship during our observation in 1999: more from Magsahaya’s group came to approach the Christian church led by Pastor Joseph (Group Three) for help in the face of hardship. More specifically, most of the problems they consulted the pastor and other junior leaders in the church on were related to illness. Some went there when they had diagnoses from doctors but had no money to buy the prescribed medication, while others did so when they saw doctors but returned home without clear diagnoses. Some also came to the church, complaining that they were not given sufficient care at the medical institute and that they could not be healed there. Moreover, many could not even afford to see a doctor, or any other medical professional. With no choice, they would appreciate the kindness of those who “came over” to their corner, or

at least to *Hong Kong*, to cater to their needs. They gradually found Pastor Joseph and his church accessible to them.

Magsahaya and her neighbors initially had negative impressions against the church, saying “The God Pastor Joseph and his members worship is different from ours.” Nonetheless, by the end of our intensive observation (November, 1999), Magsahaya began to go to the church. At the time, she was neither baptized nor recognized as a formal member of the church, and thereby, she had no access to various resources (livelihood assistance, educational assistance, etc.) for the followers of the church. But, of course, the church was open to her at any time as the church should be so to any individuals. The church would hold a faith-healing meeting after Sunday worship. Sama Pastors and “*Milikan*” (a Sinama word which literally means “American,” but refers to Caucasians in general) would perform laying on of hands to help the sick. Sometimes, medical missions came to dole out medications such as antibiotics. Following Magsahaya, Ignorasi who had been suffering from chronic asthma went to the church. Actually, he was taken in to stay in the church for a while: he was given medication, and Pastor Joseph and other followers prayed for him.

During our observation in 1999, nobody other than Magsahaya and Idol in the household went to Pastor Joseph’s Church regularly. Nonetheless, we sometimes heard Jakmud humming the hymn, so “American” in melody but all Sinama in lyrics So long as we knew, Jakmud had never attended Sunday Worship or Bible school. But he eventually picked up some “Sinama songs” coming from the church, and learned to sing them without knowing that the songs were called hymns.

It seemed that economic predicament was pressuring Magsahaya and her group members to resort to other groups within the Sama-Bajau community in Isla Bella. Especially, resorting to the Christian church led by Pastor Joseph (Sama Dilaut) for help and support was often observed among the members of Magsahaya’s group. Since her group lacked any surplus to share among its members to cope with stress, both economically and emotionally, and had only limited access to social services provided by government agencies and NGOs, they needed to approach the church in search of the resources that they needed for daily survival. To be noted,

such contacts were made rather individually, not as a group.

### **3.3 Limited access to credit market and social services**

During our observation in 1999, the monthly average expenditures on basic needs (food expense, light, fuel and water expenses, and medical expense) in Magsahaya's household recorded approximately 4,000 pesos. This amount might be overestimated, given that their responses may include the items that they wished to spend on but eventually failed to do so, and also that it was simply impossible for us to observe all the consumption behaviors of each member day to day. Assuming that the monthly average expenditures in Magsahaya's household was around 4,000, it could be computed that the household income would meet only two thirds of the expenditures; they needed to finance this gap by debts.

The behaviors that I most frequently observed to make up the income-expenditure gap in Magsahaya's household was to charge cassava (their staple) at Asis's Store, a Tausug-owned convenience store in *Hong Kong*. They were allowed to "borrow" one to two packs of cassava (one pack weighs about 1.5 kilograms and costs 15 pesos) at one time under the condition that they should pay back within two days (otherwise, they would not be allowed to "borrow" again). When they pay back the debts, they should pay one peso a day as interest as well.

Asis's Store would also operate as a kind of pawnshop for the Sama-Bajau in *Hong Kong*. They would accept articles such as "*habul*" (blanket) and "*malong*" (a traditional tube skirt made of multi-colored cotton cloth), which pawnshops outside the community would not accept. They would take in these articles for about thirty pesos per piece. The interest rate would follow the local practice called "five-six" (five per cent per month). However, customers like Magsahaya would often fail to redeem the articles once pawned.

No stores other than Asis's Store, whether located in Isla Bella or in downtown, would accept ordinary clothes for a pack of cassava or for a small amount of cash. In other words, Asis's Store would widely accept Sama-Bajau customers with poor credibility ratings including the poorest ones like Magsahaya and her household members, but at the same time, the amount of cassava

or cash the store would lend to each of them would be also limited. This means to say that when members from Magsahaya's group needed a larger amount of cash in order to start up a shell and pearl vending business or to finance medical expenses, they would bring in their jewelry to downtown pawnshops owned by Visayas. This would happen, though, only if they had any valuable articles to pawn. Actually, in the case of Magsahaya's household, there was very little left to pawn by the end of our observation in 1999.

Just as Magsahaya's group had limited access to the credit market outside *Hong Kong*, they also had limited regular relationships with non-Sama traders in their livelihood. For example, Balsani would purchase pearls for his business downtown from Maranao traders. The transactions were done in cash. With no consignments allowed, his stock of pearls was always limited to more or less 500 pesos in total value. His stock was too small to generate enough income to support the household with fourteen members. He also lacked regular customers for his pearls as he worked as a peddler, which made his expected income contribution to the household even more unpredictable and unstable.

Aside from their limited relationships with non-Sama populations, Magsahaya's group was rather passive regarding aid and assistance from outside the Sama-Bajau community. Unlike Group Two (Bayrang's group), they would not approach the government agencies or NGOs to look for help. Instead, they would wait to be approached by aid agencies, murmuring to us a complaint that the government assistance would seldom reach them. It seemed to us that they were just hoping to be found and helped someday.

At that time, I was not in a position to act as an intermediary between Magsahaya's group and any outsiders who were willing to help. Indeed, I avoided acting like one. However, there were times when my research assistant and I proposed livelihood projects which were to be financed by aid agencies. We were getting tired of hearing their constant daily pleas. . Many women would come to us, saying "We are hard up," "Give me medicine," "Give me a job," "Repair our house," "You are my friends, so you should help me," etc. Elders and children would also approach us, saying "Give me food," "Give me change," and so on. What we could do was to bridge their needs/wants and resources available outside the community. Doling out was the last

thing we wanted to do, concerned that “our (adopted) daughter Lydia” might learn how to do that from her fellows and grow up to be a beggar.

My research assistant, who used to be a community organizer working with an NGO for the urban poor, was also concerned about the well-being of Lydia. So was a friend of ours who was working as a leader of a health-cooperative movement both at home (the Philippines) and abroad. They planned a small livelihood project of mat-weaving for mothers, and suggested it to Magsahaya and her fellows. However, they dismissed the suggestion out of hand. Magsahaya, a cousin of Magsahaya’s on her maternal side, explained to us.

(Magsahaya, recorded on August 30, 1999)

*Just boiling leaves of “romblun<sup>20</sup> is already a lot of work, you know. Then, the leaves need sun-drying, and being stripped into long and thin pieces. Weaving mats is quite a chore. [We suggested that they should be paid 50 pesos a day with free meals, provided that they work under the livelihood project] .....Uh, but we won’t be able to weave mats without purchasing materials from Bankerohan Market. [We responded by saying that we would prepare the materials for them] Hah? If you could do that, why don’t you weave mats by yourselves? In that case, you should make mats by yourselves [throwing us a reproving stare]. It takes me two months (to weave a mat). [Showing one of the mats she wove to us] These ones are meant for my daughters. When they get married, I will make them bring two mats each. This one [pointing at a double-sized colorful mat] costs more than 500 pesos (for materials). Dye cost so much. A spoonful of the dye cost as much as 10 pesos. The mat has six colors. Do you want to buy it? It’s only 1, 000 pesos. That (selling the stock) would be so much better (than weaving new ones for the suggested project). (Weaving new ones) would make my body ache. If I damaged my back, I would not be able to move for three days. ....Other than me, well, Kintarya (an aunt of Magsahaya’s on her maternal side) also knows how to weave mats, but she is sick. Lankatiga does not know how to weave mats...Damdanya, well, she knows how to weave mats, but she would not like to stay at home, just weaving mats, which would prevent her from going outside (mainly to public markets). You know, we have so much to take care of at home. [We said that we understood that, and indeed, that we were willing to pay her and her fellows everyday]. Even if you pay us, what you are saying is impossible. [What if we asked younger ones like your daughters?] That’s even more impossible. Those girls are always wandering in town. I do not think that they would ever think about staying at home and weaving mats.*

Magsahaya’s group showed the most limited relationship with Barangay 23-C, where they

belonged to as its residents, among the five groups we observed in Isla Bella. One of the few documents we found was a certificate issued to Idol by Barangay, which permits him to “receive charity” (meaning that he could go begging in public). The certificate was issued in 1997 under the name of Barangay Captain with his signature. Idol explained to us that the “paper” would prove him to be a “government-approved” mendicant so that he would not be arrested while begging on the street. He treasured the certificate, and kept it in a plastic case.

As they kept complaining to us that the government would not come to help them, my research assistant and I made a list of the households under Magsahaya’s group with their consent, and visited CSSDO for consultation. To avoid unnecessary conflicts with their Maranao neighbors, my research assistant, who was also working as a treasurer with the Maranao-dominant Barangay 23-C at that time, obtained permissions from Muslim leaders in advance. In response to our request, a CSSDO officer herself together with her staff visited *Hong Kong*, particularly the corner where Magsahaya’s group huddled. The CSSDO officer told us that she was always concerned about people in this corner, but the catwalks built rather high over the shore made it impossible for her to reach there, far from the main bridge of the community.

Indeed, CSSDO had offered assistance to the “Bajau” in Isla Bella for some time. As the officer visited, though, she was shocked to learn that their targeted group did not exactly cover the poorest segment in the community, and rather, that it covered the better-off ones instead. After her visit, she immediately came up with a new project on poverty alleviation for Magsahaya’s group. It included supplies of food, materials for building houses, assistance for livelihood (such as peddling secondhand clothes), and literacy programs for adults and preschool children.

Although the livelihood program was what Magsahaya and her group members always wanted, it did not live long. The assistance was offered in the form of micro finance (based on so-called “Gramin Bank schemes”) and, somehow, it was open to females from groups other than Magsahaya’s. Then, as it always happened, those who were able to gain the loan were mostly members from groups with higher community statuses among the Sama Bajau in *Hong Kong*. CSSDO still managed to involve twenty-two households from Magsahaya’s group, but they found it hard to keep working on with Magsahaya’s group: women from the group would

neither attend meetings nor understand Gramin Bank schemes (group-based lending was applied in this case). After rumors circulated that if what the program offered was not a grant but a loan, and then if one failed to pay back, one should be punished, the program died out. Even then, Magsahaya kept complaining to us.

(Magsahaya, recorded on November 22, 1999)

*I want you to offer me capital for my secondhand clothing business. I will pay you back 10 pesos every day. No, I did not meet them [referring to CSSDO staff]. They had never come back since they visited us last. It seems that others [referring to females from Group Two and Group Three in our study] have received some money from them, like 1,000 pesos, 2,000 pesos.....But we have not received any money at all. Damdanya was the only exception [to have received the loan] among us.*

As far as we knew, the CSSDO officer was a thoughtful person with rich experience as a professional. Given that she was so busy covering many barangays all over the city, though, it was hard enough to design a feasible livelihood project for the “Bajau” in Magsahaya’s corner without a baseline data to evaluate and build the capability of this group to accept such projects. CSSDO continued to send staff to *Hong Kong* even after the livelihood project ended, but they did not bother to visit Magsahaya’s corner any more.

On the other hand, Magsahaya and her fellows also had their own perspectives. They said that if the government would not come to help, they would rather rely on support and assistance that those who approach them would offer. Aside from that, they also added that there were things that they needed more help with than livelihood; namely, health problems that they faced every day.

For instance, Idol had been suffering from leprosy. The Community Health Center (Barangay 23-C) provided him with medication free of charge (donation from The Nippon Foundation). His daughter, Lankatiga, was supposedly in charge of giving him the medicine three times a day. As his symptoms worsened, he almost lost his nose with some secretions oozing out from the reddish spot. The barangay health worker, who once helped him go for a checkup, had been concerned about his condition, but could not visit him in *Hong Kong* due to the physical

difficulties of reaching the area. Besides, she was paid only 300 pesos as honorarium from the barangay, which she said was not sufficient enough to risk her own health and security.

Instead of the reluctant government agencies, one day, a “Milikan” (Caucasian person) visited Idol and took him “somewhere outside” Isla Bella for treatment (Magsahaya and others did not know exactly where he was taken). When we met him in the area, he claimed to be an evangelical missionary. At that time, it was rather rare to see such missionaries come over to Magsahaya’s corner. However, if we look at other groups like Group Three in our study, Cebuano and foreign missionaries constantly visited Pastor Joseph’s church, which was located very close to Magsahaya’s neighborhood. The church was now imagined as a place where pastors, together with the congregation, would help to heal personal and familial anxieties such as physical and mental pain caused by sickness, and other problems that could not be solved by themselves whether they had money or not. During our observation in 1999, members of Magsahaya’s group would not visit the church yet; after we left the area, though, one after another began to go to the church, and accepted Christianity. Later, the church would grow to be a contact zone where the Sama-Bajau residents and non-Sama-Bajau visitors would meet and get together.

### **3. 4 Being “*pobre* (poor)” as their only weapon?**

Magsahaya and Abing claimed to be Sama Dilaut who had experience of living in boats in the past. They came originally from the same area as Group Four (Kapirin’s group ) in our study. Nonetheless, they insisted that they should be considered as a different group: Although they both spoke dialects of the Central Sinama Language, their ways of life differ from each other. Magsahaya and Ahad explained to us that because back in Zamboanga and Sulu, they lived in boats and practiced no Islam, they were called “Luwa’an” (literally means “outcast”) by Muslim groups, mostly Tausug, who were numerically and politically dominant. In Davao City in the late 1990s, we seldom heard such derogatory term for the Sama Dilaut being used, but among those who shared common historical background like Tausug and other Muslim groups from Zamboanga and Sulu, the term still lingered in their memories.

In a wider context of urban centers other than Davao City in the Philippines during our observation in 1999, “Badjao” was a common term that people in general used to refer to the Sama Dilaut living in the city. In the process of interactions with such non-Sama populations in the city, the Sama Dilaut seemed to have accepted “Badjao” as an autonym that they would use towards non-Sama populations. Indeed, the term covered not only the Sama Dilaut but also other Sinama speaking groups (land-based Sama). In this sense, the Sama Dilaut and other Sama groups came to share the common social label as the “Badjao” in contemporary urban Philippines.

In the case of Magsahaya’s group, they practiced neither Islam nor Christianity in 1999. In Davao City, they would rather call themselves “Sama” to Muslim populations, particularly those who were from Zamboanga and Sulu, while they would simply call themselves “Badjao” to Christian populations. In general, though, when they went begging, they would call themselves “Badjao,” regardless of the ethnicity of the person(s) they approached for begging on the street. Abing gave us a few words on this matter.

(Abing, recorded on October 21, 1999)

*Those who would give us alms would show the same attitude as you do towards us. I mean, they would pity us because we are poor. You are in the position to give us alms because you are people of good will.....*

Aware of being seen as the poorest of the poor in the city, the self-pity that Abing presented in his narratives was commonly shared with other members of Magsahaya’s group. As they had limited communal resources and limited access to resources outside for coping with stress, it seemed that they eventually learned how to manipulate people by using their “plight” to get some food and/or a small amount of cash for their daily survival. Our estimation based on the data collected, though, revealed that such resources that they could individually earn from begging alone were not sufficient even for their daily survival. Moreover, this group was the least organized, and had no leaders whom outsiders could easily identify. In the meanwhile, as the church headed by Pastor Joseph (Sama Dilaut) from Papa Melbasa’s group (Third Group in our study) grew to be more and more organized, as missionaries and other concerned parties from outside continued to bring in more resources, members of Magsahaya’s group gradually

and individually began to be attracted to the church towards the end of our observation in 1999.

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<sup>1</sup> Most of the Sama-Bajau in *Hong Kong* area used neither “*apilyedo*” (surname) nor middle name (typically surname as well) unlike the Cebuano speakers, the majority in Davao City. When asked their surnames, they often answered by using the given names of their fathers. I have changed the personal names that appear in this paper for the protection of their privacy.

<sup>2</sup> Its scientific name is *Vitex parviflora*, and it is a plant species of the Verbenaceae family. This tree is commonly found in the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. It is known for its strong and durable wood.

<sup>3</sup> At the time of our research in 1999, it cost about 200 pesos to make such a spear gun. This means that the capital that one needs to start up “*panaq*” fishing is much less than one needs to start up “*bubu*” (fish trap) fishing or “*plangre*” (long-line) fishing, given that “*panaq*” fishing can be operated by using a small boat without an engine.

<sup>4</sup> Out of the twenty-seven households in total, none owned “*bubu*,” two owned “*palangre*,” and thirteen owned “*panaq*.” Likewise, six owned fishing boats, all of which had engines.

<sup>5</sup> Although the Sama-Bajau in Isla Bella often referred to the Tausug as “Joloano” or “Sug” as well, we use the term Tausug in order to avoid confusion in this paper.

<sup>6</sup> I will translate the Cebuano word “*mangayo*” and the Sinama word “*angamu*” as “to beg” or “to go begging” hereafter. During our observation, we often heard Cebuano people use a phrase like “those who are begging at street corners” to refer to the Sama Bajau in town. In such a phrase, the Cebuano word “*magpakilimus*” was more commonly used instead of “*mangayo*.” The root word of “*magpalimus*” is “*limus*” (alms), and “*magpa*” is a prefix to mean a causative action by the actor of the verb. Therefore, “*magpakilimus*” conveys a sense of causing those who see miseries of others to pity and eventually give alms to them.

<sup>7</sup> One peso is equivalent to 100 centavos. Centavo was the smallest unit of currency used in daily life then.

<sup>8</sup> As is usual with members from Group Two and below in community status in our study, Lasa had no birth certificate: She was not registered as a citizen of the Philippines at National Statistic Office (NSO). However, like other Sama Bajau children, she would obtain her birth certificate later when she needed one to go to school.

<sup>9</sup> See the results of our eight-month household survey in Appendix Three.

<sup>10</sup> Later we learned that Abing sold the boat for 6,000 pesos in June, 1999, but we were not able to identify who bought it.

<sup>11</sup> We also observed them sell such fruits in small quantity to their Sama-Bajau neighbors in the public space of *Hong Kong* if they were given more than enough for their own immediate consumption.

<sup>12</sup> Carmencita was presumed to be around thirteen years old at that time. She had her first menstrual period just before our interview.

<sup>13</sup> It is an abbreviated name of the local bus company, Bachelor Tours. However, I assume that she used it to refer to a bus in general because Bachelor Tours did not serve from Davao to Cotabato at that time. If she took a bus, it was presumably Weena Express, another local bus serving in Mindanao.

<sup>14</sup> It is the largest government hospital in the region, which was founded in 1917. Since then, its capacity has been expanded, and the building renovated and rebuilt several times. It has been renovated and renamed as Southern Philippine Medical Center (SPMC) on November 19, 2009, by Republic Act of 09792. For details, see the website of the SPMC (<http://spmcdoh.gov.ph/20-services/clinical-medical>) and JICA ([http://open\\_jicareport.jica.go.jp/pdf/11558699\\_01.pdf](http://open_jicareport.jica.go.jp/pdf/11558699_01.pdf))

<sup>15</sup> The Cebuano word that Carmencita used here was “*mamonal*.” The root word of “*mamonal*”

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is “*bunal*,” and it means to beat with something such as a cane, whip, and so on. So long as we investigated, we could not get enough evidence that any teacher and staff from the CSSDO (City Social Services and Development Office) had ever beaten a Sama Dilaut child in the research site. Carmencita’s narratives here, like other narratives in this book, shared her image of studying in the hut, reflecting the fact that she and other children from this particular group were practically excluded from the chance to access to it.

<sup>16</sup> By then, Angiya had married twice, and separated twice. Her first marriage was arranged by her parents, but as she refused to sleep with the groom on the first night, it became a case that should be settled between her relatives (represented by her uncle Kanon) and the groom’s parents. Angiya was finally returned to her parents when the dowry (6,000 pesos) was refunded in full to the groom’s parents.

<sup>17</sup> Although Carmencita used the word “iron,” none of the households in this group owned an iron. However, some of the mothers often asked us to employ them as “*labandera*” (laundry woman), saying that they could wash clothes and then iron them to complete such job. So, we suppose that Carmencita and other kids heard our conversation to pick up the vocabulary.

<sup>18</sup> “*Bayot*” is a Cebuano word which means a “male who looks and acts like a female,” and “male homosexual.” The word here was not necessarily used as a derogatory term, but as a way of describing the person’s characteristics. In the Philippines, males working in the personal services of the beauty industry are often considered “*baklat*” (a Tagalog word for “*bayot*.” Its equivalent term in Sinama is “*bintut*.”)

<sup>19</sup> However, small children were exceptions. Babies and toddlers were seen to be supported by the entire group as much as possible. They were often given food by members of other households in the group. Children who were considered too young to beg alone were also allowed to ask for food openly, going around his/her neighbor’s households connected by catwalks.

<sup>20</sup> “*Romblun*” refers to a type of Pandanus (any of various Old World tropical palm-like trees having huge prop roots and edible cone-like fruits and leaves like pineapple leaves, from BISAYA Com. <http://www.binisaya.com/cebuano/>). According to Magsahaya, “*romblun*” has larger leaves (thin and long) which are good for making decorations and mats. The color of the leaves is relatively light, and therefore, easy to dye. In the Cebuano language, “*romblun*” and “*pandan*” are two different words. The latter means *pandanus* (fiber from leaves of *pandanus* trees; used for woven articles such as mats, from BISAYA Com.) Nonetheless, in Magsahaya’s understanding, “*romblun*” is a Cebuano word while “*pandan*” is a Sinama word, and both of them refer to the same type of plants.