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

Aoyama Waka | The University of Tokyo

Living in the City as Sama-Bajau: the Case of Bilaiya's Family

Waka Aoyama¹

Acknowledgment

This manuscript is a direct self-translation of Chapter Six, originally entitled “Biraiya’s family: prayers of a mother and daughters peddling secondhand clothes,” 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 Harvard-Yenching Institute working paper series.

Abstract

This manuscript is a direct self-translation of Chapter Six, originally entitled “Biraiya’s family: prayers of a mother and daughters peddling secondhand clothes,” 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, Biraiya’s household contained three families, including Biraiya’s own one with her husband and unmarried daughters and two families of her married daughters’.

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*

¹ Associate 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

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. Biraiya'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 Biraiya's family belongs to "Secondhand clothes business group" as their main source of income was secondhand clothes business locally called "*ukay-ukay*." In this group, males who were of an income-producing age engaged in selling pearls and shells either in a resort hotel or in the streets, while females peddled "*ukay-ukay*".

Members of this land-based Sama group, originally from Jolo, maintained their way of life as Sama, especially regarding religious practices. They practiced higher work ethics and they more actively participated in the market economy in the larger society than the other three kinship groups we studied in *Hong Kong* area from 1998 to 2000. Moreover, they were good at coordinating resources within each household as well as across the households that comprised this kinship-based group, which made it easier for them to regulate their daily economic activities and achieve a higher standard of living within the research site. They emphatically claimed to us that they were not "genuine" Bajau, or Sama Dilaut. However, they were aware that being called "Bajau" in Davao City could be effectively used in the small businesses they ran, especially in the shell and pearl selling business as the image of "Bajau" provokes beautiful pearls in Sulu in the local context. Thus, male members of this group strategically called themselves "Bajau" to create a better market for their goods and to let them manipulate the price. Female members of this population acquired the fundamentals of business through business projects offered by NGOs where they had chances to participate as the "Bajaus" when they were still in Jolo; applying the knowledge and skills they learned previously, they actively engaged in the business of peddling *ukay-ukay* (secondhand clothes). If the opportunity arose, this kinship-based group did not hesitate to present themselves as "Bajau" to receive aid from the government in Davao City. The language commonly used among the kinship group members was Sinama, while children of school age were also fluent in Cebuano.

1. Navigating across life's troubled waters

The household head was called Biraiya¹, a female and estimated to be in her fifties. As with other Sama-Bajau people living in *Hong Kong*, she had prominent cheekbones and eyes slightly slanted under thick eyebrows. She had a round face, accentuated by her wide lips, full of energy. Her hair, still black but touched with gray, was neatly combed backwards in a bun at the nape. She kept her back straight when she walked and even when squatting. She was proud of her belly, which was plump and adorned with an “*anting-anting*,” a hand-made amulet of green string with knots at regular intervals. Her skin, even the part normally covered by her clothes, was deeply tanned. Every time I greeted her by kissing her cheeks and calling her, “Ina! Mastal!” (Mother! [my] Teacher [of the Sinama language!]), I caught a faint scent of salt mixed with sweat on her skin.

Biraiya was born in Kubigaan Island, Sulu, in the late 1940s. Her parents made a living mainly by fishing and gathering sea food at ebb tide. In the shallow waters of the coral reef, they fished, using “*pasol*” (hook and line) and “*logo*” (fish trap), and gathered sea cucumbers, sea urchins, shellfish and seaweed. They traveled by boat to Tapul, a nearby island, for barter trade with Tausug residents in the island.

(Biraiya, recorded on August 24 and November 16, 1999. Translated from Cebuano into English)

We sold [our catch] in the market. We were able to go to Tapul [Island] as well because we owned a boat. It was a small boat with a sail [without an engine]. We would set the sail when favorable winds blew; we used oars when winds fell. The distance between Tapul [Island] and Kubigaan [Island] was like the distance between here [Davao City] and Talikod [Island]. There [in Tapul Island], the Muslims were our customers. We exchanged our marine products for cassava, coconuts, mangoes, bananas and other things they had. Of course, we could get water and firewood from them, too. Sometimes, we got paid in cash. Tapul [Island] is “bukid” [a Cebuano word meaning mountain], while Kubigaan [Island] is “dagat” [a Cebuano word meaning sea] with little farmland. So, [if you live in Tapul Island] you cannot live without a small boat. Imagine. You cannot walk across the ocean.

Biraiya recalled that during the time of Martial Law (1972 to 1981) under President Marcos, armed conflicts intensified in Sulu, which caused Muslim residents in neighboring islands to flee to Kubigaan Island. Many of these people were politically and economically dominant to the Sama Kubigaan. Incidents of “*tulis*” (a Cebuano word meaning robbery) by the “Joloano” (Tausug) against the Sama Kubigaan increased. These factors forced many of the Sama Kubigaan to leave their home waters for other islands. Initially, Biraiya and her family moved to Bus-Bus in Jolo Island since Jamel (Biraiya’s husband) had relatives there.

(Biraiya, recorded on August 24, 1999)

The Muslims [Tausug] are troublesome. When they could not take money from us, they got us the Bajau [us] into even more trouble. If we resisted, we would get killed. They would get everything they could find in our house. Sometimes they would “holdup” [hold us up] at sea. They would kidnap [the Bajau fishermen] and demand a ransom of 10,000 pesos per head. If we could not pay the money, they [the Bajau fishermen] would get killed. But how could we possibly pay [such huge amount of money]? And that’s why we decided to move somewhere else. We looked for a place where we could seek livelihood without getting involved in such trouble. Everyone [around us] moved away. Some left for Jolo, Manila, Cebu, while others headed for Labuan and Sandakan [both in Indonesia]. All the sisters of Jamel [Biraiya’s husband] are now in Sandakan. I have never seen them again [since her family left Tapul Island], though.

At first, they did everything they could to make their living in Bus-Bus. Jamel began fishing: he stayed in fishing grounds for weeks, dried his catch, returned to Jolo and sold his dried fish to Tausug fish vendors in the public market. Biraiya and her daughters worked as domestic helpers for a Tausug family: they not only served as washerwomen but also as laborers to make dried and salted fish for the Tausug family’s business.

Biraiya and Jamel recalled that there was “CCF” (Christian Children’s Fund, a church-based civic organization from the U.S.A.) providing the “Bajau” with relief services in Jolo in the early 1970s. The CCF was operating various projects,

focusing on education and business projects. Given the opportunity, Jamel engaged in commercial shark fishing, while Biraiya took up weaving mats with other women in the common workplace set by the CCF. Their daughters went to school on scholarships from the CCF.

Before the CCF came, Jamel had never done shark fishing. Neither had he been much aware of the potential economic opportunities of this particular type of fishing until Biraiya suggested it to him. One day she happened to see Laminusa (Sama Siasi) shark fishermen earning a considerable income from selling their catch. She came home excitedly and told her husband, “Look, you can make much more money! Get the proper gear and try it!” Fortunately, the CCF was providing business loans. This enabled Jamel to finance the construction of a boat with an engine and purchase the gear and other needs for shark fishing.

Jamel was born in Kubigaan Island. He was older than Biraiya by about five years. His father was a fisherman who mainly used nets. Jamel was tall. But his age and way of life in Davao City turned his body rather flabby. Yet we could still see traces of the old days of hard work in his broad and well-developed shoulder muscles. Indeed, to us, he was a handsome man, who did not look like any other person in *Hong Kong*. Quiet in nature, he did not tell us much about his childhood. However, when the topic was about shark fishing in Jolo, he always became surprisingly eloquent.

(Jamel, recorded on August 24 and October 22, 1999)

Look carefully. [Jamel told Norberto, one of his grandsons, as he stripped the little boy of the secondhand T-shirt that he wore to show us; it had an illustration of a blue shark against a white background; and the Chinese characters on it read “Osaka Kaiyukan Aquarium in Japan”]. OK, now. [Jamel placed a real fishhook on the fish illustration of the T-shirt spread on the floor]. *First, the shark bites at the bait on the large fishhook* [called “pasid” in Sinama, and “sima” in Cebuano] *tied to the tip of the long-line* [called “palangre” in Cebuano]. *Instantly I drive a large harpoon* [called “sangkil” in Sinama] *into the body of the shark. Like this.* [Jamel demonstrated the action of harpooning the shark]. *Two to three fishermen would go together in a team to catch sharks.* [About the waters near Zamboanga City as their usual fishing

grounds] *The sea was about 100 dupa [fathoms] at the deepest, and we operated shark fishing at the depth 30 dupa and so. In those days, I was the most skillful fisherman in the neighborhood. A shark could be very heavy. It could be 100 kilograms, and sometimes even 200 kilograms. Normally, the three of us needed to carry a shark together and sold it for 7,000 pesos. The price included the capital. Our net income ranged from 3,000 to 5,000 pesos per catch. Our regular buyers were Muslims. When we had borrowed “capital” [operating capital for fishing to finance baits and gasoline] from them, our debts should be deducted from the price and so we would receive 80 pesos per kilo. When we had no debts, we could get paid 100 pesos per kilo. That’s how the price was determined every time. Look [pointing at the dorsal fin of the shark on Norberto’s T-shirt], this part tastes delicious!* [Jaya, his fifth daughter who was sitting next to him during this interview, broke into our conversation and added, “The price of the fin could be 1,200 pesos per kilo!”] *The fins were shipped to Manila. Thanks to those fins, the Muslims were so rich. On our part, we would bring our earnings from the catch to the CCF and pay our loan in cash. Shark fishing was extremely profitable. I do not want you to compare my shark fishing with fishing using “bubu” [fish trap that was often used by other Sama-Bajau fishermen in Hong Kong at the time of our fieldwork]! Bubu is such an unprofitable fishing. Especially, bubu fishing in waters near earns only 200 pesos per operation. At most, it can earn only 500 pesos per operation.*

In those days in Tapul, the standard of living among the people locally called the “Bajau” was improving. Indeed, some of the Muslim neighbors became jealous of them. Biraiya was the president of women’s group, and Jamel, the president of the men’s group, in the CCF project. Both of them garnered trust and respect from their members as well as their neighbors. Their life was becoming financially better, too.

However, their peaceful days did not last long. Later, the peace and security order in Tapul Island and nearby waters began to deteriorate as well. Pirate attacks against “Bajau” fishermen at sea increased. They could not remember the exact year they started having difficulties. Estimated from the ten-year duration of Jamel’s shark fishing, it could be somewhere in the early 1980s. Biraiya told us

about how the situation worsened for them.

(Biraiya, recorded on August 24, 1999)

[Before the social and political disorder spread,] *Jamel's shark fishing was just amazing! He would go out fishing in the sea at three o'clock in the afternoon. He would come back before daybreak. He could catch three sharks, four sharks, five sharks....shark after shark just overnight! He would use "bingwit" [a Tagalog word, which means a large-sized hook for shark fishing in this context] to catch the shark.....Jamel was always accompanied by the first husband of Mara [their eldest daughter]. One day, though, he [their son-in-law] was shot to death [by the Muslims during their fishing operation at sea]. Jamel was merely lucky because he was rescued by Ilongo fishermen whose boat happened to be passing by. Such piracies were rampant in those days. Especially, they were after the boat engines.*

(Biraiya, recorded on September 14, 1999)

*Certainly, there were also Muslims who were kind to us. We could beg them for cash or food when we had no catch. And when they had no fish, we would give them fish for free, too. But there were too many Muslims [Muslim pirates]. They would attack Bajau men and kill them [at sea]. Remember, Jamel was almost killed three times at sea. It was getting harder for us to make a living. We were not sure if we could afford a morning meal. We were not sure either if we could have an afternoon meal, either. Sometimes we were only hoping that we could get something to eat the following morning. Most of the time, we could eat only once a day. That's why we decided to go somewhere else and start business anew. Imagine. If any of your family is killed at sea, it should be hard to get the body back home. But if he dies of an illness at home, you can at least see his body. Here [in Davao City], we can cook "gabi" [taro in English, *Colocasia esculenta*], and we can eat anything we want. We can exchange our "ukay-ukay" [secondhand clothes] for gabi as well. When we were still in Jolo, there was no way for us to trade secondhand clothes for anything. People would react negatively, saying, "they are old!" If we had new clothes, we could pawn them and get perhaps about 20 pesos per item, though.*

The peace and security order continued to deteriorate in Jolo. Piracy against

“Bajau” fishermen increased. To make it worse for Biraiya’s family, the Muslim “haji” who had provided Jamel with capital for shark fishing died, and Jamel could not find his replacement. Two fishing boats Jamel owned were plundered by pirates. With their socioeconomic life destroyed, they decided to move out. Having sold their house to a Muslim family for 10,000 pesos, they left Jolo and headed for Davao City, specifically for Isla Bella. Biraiya had known the place because Sumalaiya, her youngest sister, and her family had already migrated there in 1985 and Biraiya had visited their house from time to time. By 1996, all the members of Biraiya’s family moved to *Hong Kong* in Isla Bella. With no boats and “kapitalista” (business partners/investors) for the type of fishing he preferred, it was hard for Jamel to support his family in Davao City; Biraiya quickly responded to opportunities in the *ukay-ukay* business and eventually took the role as the main bread earner.

Biraiya was a woman with self-confidence. With bright smiles, she was never afraid to face the daily difficulties that happened to her and her family. She told us about the life she struggled so hard to build on her own. She was forceful and often took control of our interviews. Still, she was kind enough to answer any questions we asked. Her motherly disposition came out in the way she treated me, a younger woman about the same age as her daughter: She would pull me into her arms and offer me reassurance when she felt I needed to be comforted. I still remember the concern she showed when I once fell off the catwalk and crashed on my side at low tide when the ground was covered with discarded plastic and metal; or when a Muslim neighbor put a spell on me to make me fall in love with him and become his second wife.

2. Peddling *ukay-ukay* (secondhand clothes) to support her family

2.1 “Use your brain and work hard”

Biraiya’s family was a three-generation family during the period of our observation from 1998 to 1999: the household was composed of Biraiya and her husband, their four daughters, two sons-in-law, and two grandchildren. Biraiya was the primary breadwinner. She also had the most clout in making decisions for the household, though she consulted with her husband when necessary.

This household presented a typical case of the Sama-Bajau households that had experienced a major change in the division of labor between male and female members as they underwent a shift in livelihood from fishing to non-fishing activities in the urban market society of Davao City: Males abandoned fishing in favor of selling shells and pearls while females took up peddling secondhand clothes. Very often, it was the female members of the household who came to provide the primary source of income for the family because peddling secondhand clothes provided a steady albeit small income every day.

Biraiya started living in the area known as *Hong Kong* in 1996. At the same time she started her *ukay-ukay* business. Initially she thought it could be good to sell dried fish, but she decided it would not work after quickly computing the potential costs and profits: the dried fish was originally made in Zamboanga, and therefore, it costs more in Davao City with the transportation and other transaction cost. Instead, she picked up a *ukay-ukay* business from Teresa, a Cebuano woman who was a distant relative of Sumalaiya's husband (named Tirso) living the next door. Teresa was said to be the first *ukay-ukay* vendor in *Hong Kong*. And it was from Teresa that Biraiya learned the necessary skills for her business, including where to purchase the clothes, how to repair and dye them and how to find customers. All this was done through on-the-job training.

The initial capital Biraiya needed for her *ukay-ukay* business was about 1,000 pesos. She borrowed the money from a Cebuano woman who dealt, in informal money lending, locally called the "Five-Six." It was also Teresa who introduced the moneylender to her. A *ukay-ukay* business could be started with minimal resources; it did not demand any operating cost. It yielded a relatively small but steady daily income. Biraiya summed up the idea of the business, saying, "Look for the cheapest stuff, buy it, and sell it at the highest price possible."

Biraiya did not know how to read or write. However, she could make others read and write for her. That was one of her strengths that had to do with her personal background. She was the firstborn of five children who survived childhood. Her mother died of a hemorrhage when she gave birth to Sumalaiya, Biraiya's youngest sister. It happened when Biraiya was in her late-teens, of marriageable

age already, as girls with regular menstruations are considered in their culture. Since then, Biraiya took over the mother's role for her younger brothers and sisters. She grew more responsible and independent. She always worked hard for the family. In the course of her life, she learned to run a business, including how to borrow money and finance investments. She referred to her working experience with the CCF project in Jolo as one of the best opportunities for her to learn business skills.

Biraiya peddled her wares twice a day in public markets. From three or four o'clock to seven or eight o'clock in the morning, she hawked in Bankerohan Market, the largest public market in the City; and from two o'clock to four o'clock in the afternoon, she peddled in Agdao Market closer to Isla Bella. Every time, she held in her hands about five plastic hangers, each holding one article of used clothing. She carried them while walking around in her "tinelas" (flip-flops).

Whenever she had spare time, she peddled in neighboring areas within Isla Bella. She remarked that walking for a few hours really exhausted her. But she would never take rest days.

Her youngest two daughters, Martis and Jaya accompanied Biraiya as her assistants during the daily *ukay-ukay* operations. The other daughters were married and were expected to be independent vendors. For example, Rajema, her married second daughter, started a *ukay-ukay* business separately to contribute to her own family's upkeep.

Biraiya did all kinds of things to sell her old clothes. She dyed the articles herself, and had them repaired by a Cebuano woman who owned a sewing machine. She bought only items that sold well. She believed she should have a variety of items including T-shirts, short pants, children's apparel. "You can attract customers if you have clothes to show," she mentioned. The price of each item was determined on the spot through negotiations with customers; even as Biraiya had already pre-calculated and set the rate of return, ranging from 75 per cent to 100 per cent.

Biraiya and her two daughters earned approximately 200 pesos net profits every day. Rajema earned more or less 50 pesos each day by herself. Maria, her third

daughter, had a snack stall near the center of the public space in *Hong Kong*, yielding about 50 pesos a day as well. Biraiya said to us:

(Biraiya, recorded on October 22, 1999)

Even though I did not go to school, I know how to run business very well. I am always thinking about how to earn more and what type of business to choose to earn more. Anybody can make money so long as she or he has “huna-huna” [ideas].

By contrast, male members of this household, namely her husband and two sons-in-law, were not as gainful as their female counterparts. As mentioned earlier, Jamel used to support his family in Jolo with his fishing activities, particularly commercial shark fishing. However, he had to quit fishing when his family transferred to Davao City mainly because he could hardly find any non-Sama partners who were willing to provide Sama-fishermen the capital needed for fishing operations. The only fishing activity he continued was gathering “*bat*” (sea cucumbers) along the shore in Isla Bella. The sea cucumbers he gathered served as snacks and side dishes for his family. They provided pleasure for Jamel himself as well as his family, but they hardly counted as a significant economic contribution to the household.

Both son-in-laws used to work as “*trysikad*” drivers in Jolo. It was part of the business project by the CCF. They also became “stand-by” or practically unemployed since the family transferred to Davao City.

Undati, their second daughter Rajema’s husband, made a trip to Jolo in July 1999. He stayed there for about one month, looking for a job. One of his brothers-in-law, Sibil (Biraiya’s eldest daughter Mara’s husband) went along with him. Sibil was Sama Laminusa, and he was indeed originally from Laminusa Island. Using this connection, Undati and Sibil went to Laminusa Island and found work as porters for two months until they returned to Davao City by the end of August 1999. In September, 1999, Undati asked if Tirso would take him on as a consignee. Tirso was the husband of Biraiya’s youngest sister Sumalaiya. He was running a successful business, selling pearls and shells in a luxury hotel with Guwapo and

others from Group One².

Tirso accepted him; so Undati started his own shell and pearl business. In the first month, he had gross sales of 5,000 pesos: 4000 pesos were the cost of consigned articles and thus paid back to Tirso; and the rest of 1000 pesos was the net profit. Then, the next profit was equally divided between Tirso and Undati. Biraiya explained to us, saying, “the way of sharing the net profit in the pearl and shell business resembles the one in fishing operations: the net profit should be divided by the total number of operators plus one for ‘*makina*’.” Makina is a Cebuano term which literally means “engine” and refers to the owner of the engine of the fishing boat. In this context, it signifies the consignor of the pearl and shell articles. Undati continued to improve his pearl and shell business steadily towards the end of our observation.

Bobby, the husband of Maria (their third daughter), was actively trying to fish at the initial stage of our observation. He often borrowed a small boat with an engine locally called “*pumpboat*” from his relatives. He made trips to Talikud Island (a small island across from Isla Bella) and tried fishing for “*bulinaw*” (anchovy) by using a landing net. His catch contributed to the household upkeep, even if it was purely for family consumption. In July 1999, using 1,000 pesos he borrowed from his relatives, he tried another type of fishing, “*palangre*” (long-line fishing). But the catch was meager: only four kilograms of “*tangigi*” (Spanish mackerel). He eventually quit fishing. Nobody was willing to be his “*pinansyer*” (financier) and his fishing operations were not gainful anyway. Instead, he started trying non-fishing activities. In August 1999, he tried selling tobacco. To start the business, he borrowed 1,100 pesos from his family (Biraiya and other members of the household) and traveled to Cagayan de Oro City on the north shore of Mindanao Island. He needed to meet his brother-in-law who had been involved in the tobacco selling business there. With his brother-in-law’s assistance, he managed to get his business operations started. But he did not last more than two months. He gave several excuses why he was forced to quit: “It rained too much there,” and “The Cebuano security guards bothered me.” Since he returned to Isla

² Introduced in the previous issue of *Hakusan Review of Anthropology* Vol. 17, March 2014, under the title of “Living in the City as the Sama-Bajau: A Case Study of Guwapo’s Family.”

Bella, he lost his motivation to start up a new business. He was often seen playing volleyball in the public space of *Hong Kong* during the daytime.

Mendicancy was officially prohibited under the City Ordinance. However, there were always Sama-Bajau mendicants on the street throughout the duration of our observation. Especially from November to Christmas holidays, the number of the Sama-Bajau engaged in “*mamasko*”(doing “*Pasko*”) increased. *Pasko* means Christmas in local languages including Cebuano. “*Mamasko*” means singing carols for gifts and small change during Christmas. When performed by non-Christians like the Sama-Bajau from Isla Bella, particularly those from *Hong Kong*, however, it took the form of seasonal begging. In this group, Martis and Jaya (their youngest unmarried daughters), and Bobby, enjoyed this practice. Martis and Jaya operated together in pairs, while Bobby preferred walking around by himself. However, the styles both teams employed were similar: they danced and sang while playing the “*kumbu*” (a small drum made out of a discarded PVC tube with an inner tube rubber tire stretched over one side) slung over their shoulders, and asked for small change. They earned from 20 to 30 pesos a day. The majority of the population in Davao City was Christian. And it was not surprising to see non-Sama-Bajau people, especially children, also singing carols for small change at Christmas season. But the meaning of the practice was different for the Sama-Bajau in the research site. They were doing it as a seasonal means of livelihood for their households. Biraiya’s daughters and sons-in-law dressed neatly, knocked on the doors of individual houses in subdivisions and caroled seriously; and they seldom spent the money they were given but always placed the amount in saving boxes made of bamboo tubes.

As we have seen so far, this household was characterized by larger financial contributions being made by the female members. This does not imply, though, that they accepted the less productive status of male members; their sons-in-law who were at an income-earning age were expected to work and earn to support their families. Biraiya always encouraged them to start up a business and she provided initial capital for them. She stressed to us, saying, “We need other businesses to protect us when our *ukay-ukay* business goes down.” Despite all her effort, the businesses her sons-in-law had started were still on a trial basis with no significant contributions to their household while we were there.

Incomes that members of the household earned from different economic activities were collected and redistributed, basically within the household by Biraiya. The average total income per month was estimated to be 8,075 pesos during the period of our observation, meaning that the average monthly income per head was calculated to be 873.0 pesos. This level of per head income was about the same as the level of the poverty line set by the government for Region 11 (Southern Mindanao Region) including Davao City (at that time). While the household could be considered as poor compared to ones in the larger society, it was apparently enjoying a relatively high economic standard of living among the Sama-Bajau in *Hong Kong*.

But compared to Guwapo's household in Group One, the level of income of Biraiya's household was less than the half. No matter how hard Biraiya and her daughters worked, they could not earn more than they could as *ukay-ukay* peddlers. The *ukay-ukay* business provided them with small risk and eventually small return, too: it turned out to be a "flow-type" livelihood they could rely on to meet their needs in daily life. In this sense, Biraiya sounded right when she said, "the *ukay-ukay* business is so much better than (subsistence) fishing!" However, it was also true that this business was not lucrative enough for them to have savings and accumulate capital to increase their economic standard of living in the future.

2.2 "I could not do anything but beg in Manila"

Once Bilaiya visited "Manila," which refers to National Capital Region and its neighboring provinces. It was right after she transferred to Davao, leaving most of her family in Jolo. She made a trip to Manila, taking one of her young, unmarried daughters along. To be precise, she visited two places: Baclaran in Metro Manila; and Batangas City (in the Province of Batangas, Region 4-A, Calabaruzon). She had an aunt from her mother's side who lived in Baclaran. Her plan was to see and stay with her aunt while looking for a job there. However, it turned out to be difficult. Bilaiya recalled:

(Bilaiya, recorded on November 16, 1999)

Smalaiya tried to stop me [from going to Manila]. But I went there with my

daughter, who died during the trip.....While I was in Baclaran, I slept in a church at night and went begging during the daytime. I'll show you. [With gestures to demonstrate how she actually begged] I had a piece of rag wrapped around my head like this, and I asked people for pity. Perhaps I was able to earn as much as 500 pesos every day. But I said to my nephew, "I will go home. I find life here too hard." He took me to the port in Manila and saw me off. I took a ferry by myself and returned home [to Davao City]. You know, you can board a ship alone so long as you can pay the fare.What did I do in Batangas? Well, I myself did not beg up there, but I saw some "Badjau" begging. They were "Sama Palau." Besides, I also saw other "Bajau" who came from Laminusa, Tapul, Jolo and Bato-Bato [Tawi-Tawi Island]. I could not sleep well there because I could only find places near garbage sites or under bridges to lie down. I could not find places to cook myself, and so I had to get ready-made food, cassava and fish, but they tasted terrible."

After a month in Manila, Bilaiya concluded that there was no way for her to earn any income other than by begging, and she decided to return to Davao City. Then, she invited the rest of her family to move in and join her in Isla Verde. They did this, settling in a house in the Hong Kong area. Because she still had some relatives living in Jolo, she always wanted to visit there at least a few times a year. Indeed, she made two trips there during our observation in 1999. Sometimes, she purchased secondhand clothes in Zamboanga City on her way from Jolo to Davao².

During our eight-month observation, the members of this household made seven trips in total. Three of them were trips to Jolo: Bilaiya went there to fetch her daughter Maring; Undate went "home," saying that he would look for a job; and Bilaiya and Jamel went there together to visit the cemetery. The destinations of the other four trips were cities within Mindanao Island, including Bobby's trip to try out his tobacco business in Cagayan de Oro and Bilaiya's trip to accompany a sick neighbor (not a member of the household but a member of the house group) to return home in Surigao. They used ferries and small passenger boats for Jolo and buses for the cities within Mindanao Island. On average, they spent roughly 800 pesos a month on travel expenses, including food.

2.3 Sea cucumbers, eggs and powdered milk

Every morning, around three or four o'clock at the dawn, Bilaiya and her two unmarried daughters had hot drinks and snacks to warm their bodies at home. Most of the time, they had instant coffee (Nescafe) with sugar, and powdered milk if available. Then, they set out to sell ukay-ukay in public markets. Sometimes, they bought sweets such as cakes made of sticky rice, pancakes and doughnuts to eat while peddling in the market. Male members and children who stayed at home had hot drinks and something sweet while waiting for them to come home. They also had some of the snacks that Maring, the third and married daughter of Bilaiya, was selling at her counter in the Hong Kong area: they usually had "*pan de sal*" (bread) with "*bihun*" (stir-fried fine rice noodles) or "*pancit*" (fried noodles). All in all, it cost the household about thirty pesos to afford this first snack ("*painit*") every morning. It was a small place, and when it could not accommodate all of them, some brought food to the living quarters in the house to eat.

They normally started preparing the first meal of the day when Bilaiya and her daughters returned home around eight o'clock in the morning. Partly because of the cooking facilities required firewood and charcoal, it took them more or less two hours to cook. A typical breakfast included "*sinanglag*" (pan-roasted cassava. "*Sanglag*" means to roast in Cebuano) sometimes cooked with coconut milk, rice which the younger generations preferred as staple, and fish as a side dish. They did not eat meat much. Pork in particular was avoided as because it was a taboo. They did not eat eggs by themselves; they ate eggs only when cooked as part of other dishes such as stir-fried vegetables. Boiled root crops like "*gabi*" (taros) and boiled "*saging*" (Saba banana, or plantains) were often added. Fish was cooked to make "*tinola*" (broth-based simple soup), "*paksiew*" (fish cooked with vinegar and spices),³ deep-fried or grilled on charcoal. Vegetables were usually stir-fried. The basic spices this household used were similar to the ones Tisoy's household in Group One used, including "*kamatis*" (local tomatoes) and "*sibuyas bombay*" (local onions). Their "*sawsawan*" (dipping sauce) was soy sauce with fresh chilies and lots of sliced green mangoes. For drinks, they had tap water, sometimes with ice and other times without it. They normally had two meals a day: one at breakfast and a similar meal served sometime after four o'clock in the afternoon.

Between the meals, they often had snacks. They enjoyed fresh fruits, biscuits as well as “*bat*,” or sea cucumbers that Jamel collected from the shores of Isla Verde. To eat sea cucumbers fresh, they soaked them until they released their grit, scraped the skin by using a knife and cut them in round slices of about five-millimeter thick.

The kitchen was built outside the house. It served as the dining quarters for the household as well. Two to three people sat together around a large plate or bowl with food in it. Each one of them had a small plate on which they put the food they took from the shared plate or bowl, according to how much they wished to eat. Seated on the floor, they ate the food with their right hands. While Bilaiya preferred to eat silently, her daughters, sons-in-laws and grandchildren were always joyfully chatting and laughing during their meals.

The timing and contents of their meals were closely related to the operations of the ukay-ukay business that Bilaiya and her daughters engaged in. To get food, they needed to earn cash first. Only after they got money could they go and buy groceries they needed for their immediate meals. Unlike Group One, the income flows of this group (Group Two) came in small amounts each day. This pattern of earnings was reflected on the cycle of consumption and expenditures in this household.

Bilaiya and her daughters preferred peddling in the public markets rather than peddling in the street. This was not only because they could meet more potential customers there; more importantly, they had “suki” (regular customers) to interact with every day. “Suki” in this context refers to Cebuano vendors who had booths to sell fresh produce within the public markets. Bilaiya somehow established reciprocal relationships with them; sometimes, she sold clothes to them and she bought vegetables and/or fish from them; and at other times, she was allowed to trade clothes for food. In any case, the price, or the rate of exchange, was implicitly set at a special discounted price for “suki.”

Everyone could potentially cook. Since females members were busy with their peddling business outside, we often saw Jamel, Bobby and other male members preparing meals at home.

As mentioned earlier, the income flow of the household was small and unpredictable every day. Controlling the consumption and expenditures principally by herself, Bilaiya tried to stabilize the financial status of the entire household and even out the redistribution of income among the household members as much as she could. Take food consumption for example: Every day, they spent 45 to 50 pesos on cassava (equivalent of three cellophane bags, each of which contained roughly 1.5 kilograms), 35 to 36 pesos on rice (about two kilograms), 10 pesos each on fruits and vegetables. They could purchase one bundle of green vegetables for five pesos, and “Stanfilco” bananas⁴ or other kind of overripe or bruised fruits for 10 pesos early in the public market, just enough for the entire household. They spent about 40 pesos on fish. They could find fish priced from 30 pesos upwards, but sometimes they could find less expensive types of fish or get a discount to buy up to two kilograms for ~~the~~ forty pesos⁵. For spices, they spent about 11 pesos on salt, sugar, coconut, chili, soy sauce, cooking oil and others. Every week, they bought five to six eggs for 20 pesos. When their married daughters became pregnant, they did not hesitate to spend another 80 pesos a week on powdered milk, hoping it would improve the nutrient status of the expectant mothers and the babies.

The number of the members of the household ranged from eight to eleven during the period of our observation except for the final month, December 1999, when the family of their second daughter went to live in their own house and started running a more independent household by themselves. Accordingly, the average monthly expenditures on food including staples per head changed over time. However, the change was rather slight. Each member of the household regardless of age and gender seemed to always have enough food. Indeed, we rarely saw or heard any of them suffering from hunger. They seemed healthy most of the time with nobody suffering any type of chronic disease, except for Bilaiya who sometimes got ~~too~~ exhausted from working too hard and sleeping too little.

The sanitation that their accommodations afforded never went beyond the poor conditions of the infrastructure in Hong Kong. Yet, Bilaiya and the rest of the household members went to great efforts to keep themselves clean: they changed clothes a few times a day and took baths, washing themselves with soap and fresh

water. They could not help lice and fleas, but none of them suffered skin diseases like scabies that were rather common among the Sama-Bajaus in Group Three and groups lower in community status. On the whole, they stayed healthy. The illnesses we recorded included intestinal parasites in Bilaiya's grandchildren ~~had~~; for which they were given medications.⁶

They visited medical institutions twice: first, when Jamel went to a cooperative hospital near Isla Verde when he had accidentally dropped a knife on his foot and needed medical attention; and second when Rajema had a free checkup at a private clinic downtown, whose doctor they had known for some time, after she delivered a baby at home.

They spent on medical expenses according to their needs: the highest expenditures reached 500 pesos per month, while the lowest: 45 pesos. The average health expenditure per month was 105.6 pesos⁷. They had faith in western medicine as they had seen it work effectively and it had improved their physical conditions. Indeed, they considered it necessary to go to hospitals and buy medication when necessary, and they did not hesitate to spend money for such needs. They also stored some medicines at home; a practice that was not normally observed in households in lower community status in the Hong Kong area. For example, they always had "Alaxan" tablets (painkillers). Sometimes, they bought "Paracetamol" tablets from pharmacies outside Isla Verde to treat fever. When they needed to purchase medicines, they always asked for generics, which were cheaper than branded ones. A tablet of Paracetamol cost them only a few pesos.

2.4 Bamboo saving boxes and heaps of second-hand clothes

Not far from the highway (Quezon Boulevard), across a wooden bridge over the water along the side of Magsaysay Park, is an island known as Isla Verde. On this island, beyond areas inhabited mainly by the Maranao population, is a small community near the shore known as Hong Kong. A common scene in Hong Kong is many catwalks built with coconut lumber or bamboo poles tied together with widths varying from 30 to 50 centimeters. The catwalks extend along the public space, long enough to reach the shore on the other side. They serve as the main street in the community.

Bilaiya's house stood along this main street, almost in the middle but slightly closer to the land side (towards the highway) than the sea side. It was a stilt house built over the sandy ground. It had no rooms, or one could say, only one room, about 20 square meters in space. The house had a nipa-thatched roof, commonly found in other houses in the neighborhood. The walls were plywood, weather beaten to grayish colors; unpainted, blistered, and stained but still looking durable.

Since the house was located closer to the land than the sea; when the tide was out, there was no water left under the floor. However, when the tide was in and full, the water level rose high. Bilaiya and her family had a raft which they used to move around the water in the Hong Kong area. They used to own a boat with an engine but they abandoned it some time ago.

The house had a balcony with a built-in bench in front. The floor was made of bamboo slats. When seen from the front, the house had no windows on the left side. The other side had a roofed balcony, about five square meters. It served multiple-purposes such as cooking and dining, washing clothes, bathing and other personal hygiene. It was always very sunny. In contrast, it was always dim inside the house due to the plywood walls shutting out the sun. Yet, the breeze could come in and out through the back windows, doors as well as through the bamboo slat floor. It never became unbearably hot inside the house.

In those days, no household in the Hong Kong area had a private faucet as a source of water. Bilaiya's household needed to purchase water for drinking and other daily use from Asis's Store, a *sari-sari* store located at the entrance of the area whose owner was Tausug. Every day, they needed to make several trips to the store to buy water which they paid for every time in cash. Any member of the household who was available would take ~~the role~~ on this task: they would walk on the catwalks for about 20 meters to the store, fill the plastic containers with water from the faucet installed outside for the customers, and then walk back again to the house, carrying the containers.

They had three sources of energy: a kerosene lamp used to light the living space at night, and firewood and charcoal that were used for cooking in the hearth. Every

day, they spent roughly 15 pesos on water (equivalent to 60 gallons as 1 gallon of water cost 25 centavos), 20 pesos on charcoal (equivalent to 20 small packages as 1 package cost 1 peso each), and 10 pesos on kerosene. All of the three sources were purchased from sari-sari stores within or near the Hong Kong area.

Their house had no electricity. Neither did ~~they~~ it have any electric appliances except for a broken rice cooker. Nonetheless, the living space was far from empty; it was flooded with many things. The upper half of the back wall had built-in shelves where folded cardboard boxes, old and half-torn, were piled up with some clothes and other things between them. Next to the shelves hung the fishing gear Jamel had used for his shark fishing: a heavy kerosene lamp about 50 to 60 centimeter high; and a giant hook whose color had turned deep, dull silver, telling of its memories of being cast into water so many times. On the floor was Maring's "*maleta*," a suitcase made of synthetic resin, which was covered with faded flower-patterned cloth. In most cases, such suitcases could have been wedding gifts as we observed and heard was a common practice in Isla Verde. But this one had nothing to do with Maring's wedding; it was purchased and given to Maring by Bilaiya. The suitcase was bulging with ~~so~~ many clothes forcedly packed in.

A few nails were hammered into one of the posts, serving as hooks to hang gold-plated watches. Below them placed against the post were ~~also~~ two bamboo cylinders, both lacquered and about 35-centimeter high. The narrow slit holes near the top told us that they were saving boxes. On rear side of the left wall, we could see a large poster of a smiling young man who we guessed must be an idol of Bilaiya's unmarried daughters. The rest of the same wall, however, had nothing on it; its lower side was simply covered with *nipa* as it served as a place for the household members to pray.

Along the wall, a few hand-woven mats, which having been used so long had lost their original bright colors, were folded and piled. Scattered around the mats were many pillows whose fillings had grown thinner and matted from the sweat they must have absorbed from their owners night after night. There were also several layers of cardboard, which they placed under the mats to protect them from the cold air coming in through the bamboo slat floors at night. Although we had never heard anyone complain or do anything about it, bedbugs infested the mats, pillows

and around the nails on the floor, and feasted on their human counterparts at night. Most of the household members slept on the floor with their heads towards the wall with no windows. The exception was the infant; a hammock-type cradle⁸ Jamel made for his newborn grandchild was hung from the ceiling in the farthest side of the living space.

Every time I went into their kitchen, I could find something to eat. There were three thermos bottles to keep hot water in, small packets of instant coffee and sugar, leftover roasted cassava, or sometimes even sea cucumbers. The kitchen area was always animated with household members preparing meals. It was well maintained for one in the Hong Kong area: as they repaired the house, they repaired the kitchen, too. They spent 1,500 pesos each in July and August in 1999 in replacing the bamboo floors. Jamel did the carpentry for the household.

Despite the scattered clothes on the floor, the living area did not look messy. For one thing, most of the clothes were for their ukay-ukay business: clothes they could not sell on the day and left set on the hangers stuck in the shoulder bag; clothes newly purchased and unsorted that did look like truly secondhand ones with wrinkles and fraying edges; clothes already sorted out and ready to be taken to a repair shop; and clothes freshly dyed orange or yellow hung neatly on the clothesline in the veranda. In addition, there were many plastic bags filled with clothes, hanging from the beams of the ceiling. The ukay-ukay clothes were overflowing into their living space.

2.5 Changing values in school education

Bilaiya's household spent nothing on education during our observation. The only child who was at school age then was Roman (estimated age: eight years old). Neither his grandparents (Bilaiya and Jamel) nor his parents (Rajema and Undate) were particularly interested in sending him to school. Roman himself did not express his wish to go to school, either.

Such indifference to school education could be partly related to their own experience. Bilaiya and Jamel never received formal education. They did not know how to read or write. The four daughters who lived with them were estimated to be

between ages 16 to 28 at the time of our research. The elder two had gone to elementary school for two years as CCF scholars in Jolo. They had ~~a little~~ some skills in reading and writing. The younger two daughters, who had never had a chance to go to school, were illiterate. So were their two sons-in-law who never went to school.

Bilaiya believed that cultivating a sense of business at an early age, rather than just going to school, was necessary for her children to become independent and economically secure. Her philosophy was partially proven by her daughters. For example, her eldest daughter, Martha, who lived in a separate house in the neighborhood, had two children, Danny and Marisa, both elementary school students. Danny and Marisa took it for granted that they should help their mother's ukay-ukay business and they peddled secondhand clothes every day while going to school. Bilaiya recognized their effort, yet she also reminded her daughters and grandchildren of the unpredictable nature of the ukay-ukay business in the future; she expected them to take any job so long as they could earn enough to feed themselves.

In contrast, the younger generations in this house group began to think differently about school education. For instance, the youngest sister of Bilaiya, Smalaiya, was a very much education-minded mother. She was married to Temi, who was described as "half-Bisaya (Cebuano)" with positive connotations of educational attainments higher than those of the "Bajau" in general. She experienced living in a "Christian" (Cebuano) neighborhood before. Smalaiya had all of her children in school during our observation, and indeed one of them was in high school.

This group's orientation towards education stood out in the area so that it attracted attention from outsiders. The City Social Services and Development Office (CSSDO) came and built a hut in the neighborhood. The hut was meant to be a school for "Bajau" children. Jamel was hired by the CSSDO as a carpenter to renovate the hut for 5,000 pesos. A Cebuano woman called Nina, began to visit the neighborhood. She came from Karitas, a NGO of the Catholic Church. She offered to help. She also utilized the hut when she visited the area to distribute school supplies to families with school-age children. Since the hut was so close to their houses, Martha and Smalaiya's children found it easy to access such services and

assistances provided by the outsiders.

It was crucial for the Sama-Bajau children in Hong Kong area to receive pre-school education if they, or their parents, wished to access formal education in schools, which were only available outside the Hong Kong area. Theoretically speaking, they could go to school with absolutely no prior experience of using a pencil to write at home. But once enrolled in formal schooling, they would find it almost impossible to catch up with other non-Sama-Bajau children—because most of non-Sama-Bajau children went to pre-school where they acquired basic skills and discipline such as writing and drawing, and following the teachers' instructions in the classroom.

The language problem should also not be ignored. The languages used for instruction were basically Filipino, a national language (technically identifiable with the Tagalog language) and Cebuano, a lingua franca in Davao City, while they were in lower grades. In higher grades (grades four and up), the students learned to speak and write formal English as well. So the main concern for the Sama-Bajau children there was their proficiency in the Cebuano language, which played an important part in relationships with non-Sama-Bajau classmates.

The preschool education services in the hut provided by the outsiders did not last long, but it left a lasting impact on the children as well as their mothers beyond the time framework of their projects: the “Bajau” children and their mothers in this particular neighborhood of the Hong Kong area became more interested in school education. In other words, they consciously or unconsciously, began to see the value in education. As a matter of fact, after the CSSDO left the area, more children and mothers continued to express their wish for school education. Later on, Smalaiya, who had been always passionate about educating her children in school, became the first “Bajau” mother in Hong Kong area to send her child (the eldest son) to college⁹, the highest educational level that most of the residents in depressed areas like Isla Verde could possibly imagine.

3. Do not be afraid to take a chance

3.1 Jewelry and prayers to support the household activities

Bilaiya and Jamel considered eight households including their own as the members of their “*kampong*” in the Hong Kong area. Those households were mostly related by blood, including their married daughters², Bilaiya’s younger sisters² and brother²s. The only exception was the household of Jaime (half-Cebuano and half-“Bajau”) and Gemma (Cebuano), with which the rest of this group had a close socioeconomic and emotional relationship in daily life as we will see later in this chapter. Those households did not necessarily live side by side, yet their houses were built in shouting distance.

Bilaiya’s house was the center of this group, both physically and emotionally. The house served practically as a common room for its members. Aside from the household members, many of the other households’ members kept coming in and out: the daughters who were married and independent; their husbands and children; young nieces and nephews; and other relatives and neighbors. Very often we observed them eat and nap inside the house. The veranda, facing the public space of Hong Kong area, gathered many neighbors who were not counted as the members of the group. They would sit there and chat for a while.

Although there were always many people in Bilaiya’s house, their households’ management in daily life was quite independent. The member households of this group mostly engaged in the same businesses, peddling ukay-ukay and selling shells and pearls. However, they did not cooperate to purchase clothes or pearls by bulk, which I imagined could have helped them negotiate the price and/or quality of the commodities with their sellers, nor did they sell the commodities together so that they could offer their potential customers more choices in terms of quality and quantity. Each household operated their business quite independently; we did not observe any direct redistribution of profits or compensation for loss among the eight households in this group.

The expenditures of Bilaiya’s household were relatively large in the Hong Kong area. They spent almost 8,000 pesos on basic needs such as food, utilities and medical expenses every month. Besides, Furthermore, they spent money on social and religious events, and on housing. Our observations and calculations suggested that their expenditures constantly surpassed their earnings. Such deficits were

financed by borrowings and appeared as debts, roughly 3,000 pesos a month, in our records. And it was in trying to deal with these debts that more cooperation could be seen among the member households of the group.

Bilaiya's household had several sources for raising cash according to necessity, urgency and opportunity. When they needed a small amount of cash for groceries and other daily commodities, they asked other member households to lend money, normally less than 50 pesos a day. Such small-scale borrowing was not always recorded in any manner, and most of the cases we could not be sure if and when the money was returned at all. Yet, this type of borrowing occurred bi- and multi-directionally and reciprocally among the member households all the time; it may have balanced out among them in the long run. When they needed cash of more than 50 pesos, however, Bilaiya no longer depended on other member households; she tried to make the maximum use of the borrowing capacity of the household, bringing jewelry and watches to pawnshops such as Hellen's and Diamond Pawnshop, both owned by a Cebuano and located downtown.

Bilaiya saved money whenever she could. When her bamboo-tube saving box became heavy with coins, she split it open and spent the money to purchase jewelry. She preferred gold jewelry, especially rings, bracelets and earrings. Indeed, she transformed cash into jewelry any time she could. One day, before we began the monthly household records, I bought her hand-woven mat, an exquisite work with seven different colors, for 2,000 pesos in cash. With the money, she immediately went to a pawnshop and bought a golden ring with a large white pearl for 1,600 pesos. She then said to us, "This is our savings for rainy days. We can pawn this one (the ring) to get cash at any time we need." In this household, it was primarily Bilaiya who decided which article and when to pawn, as she watched carefully the needs of individual members life. She was especially concerned with her daughters, both married and unmarried ones, who lived with her: for her daughters, Bilaiya stood as the safety net, both emotionally and economically.

As a matter of fact, when Maring (the third daughter) had miscarriage in August 1999, Bilaiya decided to pawn a pendant of Jalmaida's (the youngest daughter) and raised 2,000 pesos, of which 900 pesos was immediately spent on medical expenses. The rest of 1,100 pesos was offered to Bobby (Maring's husband) as the

initial capital for his tobacco business. Another example is when Rajema (the second daughter) gave birth in October 1999. She had often said to us, “I will buy a few pieces of jewelry if I get pregnant, and I’ll pawn them when I deliver my baby.” And she acted on what she said: she brought her necklace and pendant to a pawnshop and received 1,900 pesos. Other examples followed: in November 1999 when Maring’s ring was pawned to raise 1,000 pesos; and in December 1999 when Bobby’s ring was pawned to finance 2,000 pesos for the construction of Rajema and Undate’s new house.

Even though Bilaiya was an independent-minded ~~person~~ woman, there were also times when she could not cope with the household’s financial shortfall all by herself. She then resorted to her youngest sister, Smalaiya, whom she had brought up by herself after they lost their mother. Smalaiya’s husband, Temi, was engaged in selling shells and pearls at a hotel, earning a relatively higher income. Temi and Smalaiya’s household was indeed the most economically secure in this house group. In other words, their household served as the main financial safety net in this house group. No major crisis occurred to them during our observation. One time, Bilaiya couldn’t come up with enough money to make a trip to Jolo. The trip was meant to visit the cemetery where their ancestors were buried: it was very important for the members of this group to visit there and ask their ancestors to spare them misfortunes and bring them good luck, at least once a year. Then it was Smalaiya who pawned her ring and donated 4,000 pesos to Bilaiya and Jamel, who immediately set out for Jolo with the money. Direct cash transfers among households like this case were only observed among those related by blood in this household.

The sole household which was counted as a member household, yet which was not related by blood, was Jaime’s and Gemma’s. Their house stood right next to Bilaiya’s. No direct cash transfers happened between the two households. However, they collaborated closely to receive ~~livelihood~~-business loans that the CSSDO introduced for “Bajau” women in the Hong Kong area. It was a micro finance program based on the Grameen Bank method, which offered a group lending scheme to women. Five “Bajau” women formed a group to alternately receive loans of 4,000 pesos each, but the entire group shared the responsibility to insure payment of the loans in this case¹⁰.

Initially, Bilaiya was not invited to participate in the CSSDO loan program. But she pushed Gemma and Tirang, her Cebuano neighbors who were identified by the CSSDO as potential beneficiaries of the program, to take her in as a member of their group. Eventually, Bilaiya became not only one of the recipients of the loan but also the leader of their group. It was Gemma who supported Bilaiya as the secretary of their group. Bilaiya and the rest of the members referred to Gemma because, having attended some high school, the highest educational attainment among the Cebuano women married to the “Bajau” in Hong Kong area, Gemma could read and write both in the Cebuano and English languages for her group members.

Bilaiya’s house group was not particularly active in local politics. We did not observe them working hard as a group to wrangle favors from local political leaders. But whenever they saw any opportunity such as aid projects and assistances by the government or by NGOs, they responded positively and quickly. As Bilaiya herself explained to us, this group nurtured the ability to receive aid from the outsiders since they participated in the CCF project back in Jolo. From the perspective of the outsiders, this house group must have been more identifiable and approachable since the member households centered around Bilaiya as their leader with her open-minded and strong personality. This preexisting informal organization should have helped the outsiders reduce the expected cost of policy implementations¹¹.

It was also Bilaiya who took the lead in social and religious events in the household as well as in the house group. She was both “*panday*” (traditional midwife) and “*djin*” (spiritual medium). She provided female members with care and assistance during ante- and post-natal periods. She also diagnosed the potential causes of illness members suffered and offered prayers when necessary. Such care she provided seemed effective in terms of moral support, considering this group had access to health services located outside the community and used them frequently according to their needs.

Their house had a “traditional” structure, which one could find in the previous literature on the Sama-Bajau: it was a one room affair with no windows on the

wall of one side. Bilaiya and her house group had faith in “*Tuhan*” (God), though in varying degrees among individual members. They also believed their ancestors influenced their everyday lives.

It was after we finished our eight-month household records in 1999 that we found a small altar hung from the ceiling near the *nipa*-covered, dark corner of the window-less wall in their house. The altar was built with thin wooden sticks. It had a roof made of patched-together rags in white, yellow and green colors. It looked like a miniature mosque in a way. They called this alter “*lumaq-lumaq*¹².” Bilaiya told us that this was the place where the spirits (“*mga angeles*”) dwelt in. The angels in this context referred to infants, or babies; and more precisely, they referred to her own twin babies she lost many years ago. They died so soon she didn’t have time to name them. The altar was dedicated to their souls.

It was not easy for me to identify their religious orientations, which changed dynamically in Davao City. When asked, they sometimes answered that they called their “*Tuhan*” (God) Allah, but at other times they answered that they did not. As far as we observed, we never saw them perform “*Shahadah*” as Muslim do. But it was obvious they had stronger Muslim orientations than the three other groups in the lower community statuses in the Hong Kong area. Confused, we asked them about their religious life when they were still in Kubigaan. Bilaiya narrated to us about practicing “*mag-mboq*”:

(Bilaiya, recorded on December 2, 1999)

We lived in a nipa house in Kubigaan. There were no divisions [inside the house]. If we had rooms inside the house, we would be punished [by the spirits of ancestors]. Well, there were times we made divisions in the house for changing clothes [meaning occasions like weddings when they needed a place for a bride to change or wait for the ceremony]. In the place for prayers, we did not have a “kaban” [wooden trunk], but instead we had suitcases. Inside the suitcases were ordinary clothes, not special clothes for the djin, though. When we performed “mag-mboq” in the space for prayers, we would place “pay” [unhusked rice] and young coconuts, which we purchased from the public market [as offerings to the ancestor spirits]. We did not perform mag-mboq if it was not needed [we performed it only when necessary]. If

anything bad happened, we performed [pakan] sumangat [feeding the ancestor spirits ceremony].

Then she started narrating her days in Jolo, recalling “*Hari Raya Puasa*” (the celebration at the end of the Ramadan month of fasting):

(Bilaiya, recorded on December 2, 1999)

It was the day of the Hari Raya Puasa when we left Jolo for Davao. We used to enjoy Hari Raya so much. When Hari Raya comes around, everybody, not only children but also we ourselves, put on new clothes. If we had only old shoes, we did not celebrate Hari Raya. We would be ashamed if we could not afford new shoes after working so hard for the entire year. Every thing should be new to prepare for the Hari Raya because that's the meaning of the celebration after all. The Adults would enjoy gambling, while children went to movies. We had so much food as well.....Well, over here [in Davao], we have no place to celebrate the Hari Raya like we did before.....

As a matter of fact, there was no mosque for Sama-Bajau residents in Isla Verde at the time of our observation. But there was a mosque for the Sama Laminusa who distinguished themselves from the rest of the Sama-Bajau. It was rather difficult for us to understand the religious orientation of Bilaiya's household members in terms of institutional affiliations. The Sinama word “Tuhan” [God] was often used in daily life. Similarly, the rites they performed to prevent the “*saitan*” (spirits) from bringing them misfortune were mentioned from time to time. Bilaiya mentioned:

(Bilaiya, recorded on December 2, 1999)

We should revere “mboq” and “Tuhan.” Otherwise, the fate will get back at us. If we bow our heads [meaning “to pray”] in front of mboq and Tuhan, it is not too difficult for us to treat sick persons.without God's help, we cannot even earn money.....Without God's protection, we would have been killed [and could not have survived] by now.

The generation of Bilaiya and Jamel's parents was said to perform many different kinds of religious and social rites from small-scale (attended only by household

members) to large scale (involving other relatives and neighbors)¹³, which other Sama-Bajau can identify as their “traditions.” The only rite we could observe in 1999 was a communal eating, as part of the “*pakan sumangat*” (feeding the ancestor spirits).

They performed the *pakan sumangat* because Gemma, who was counted as a member of Bilaiya’s house group, fell ill and dreamed of her grandmother who asked her for food. Bilaiya’s household contributed 900 pesos and all of them participated in the rite. The offerings to the dead should be abundant, including cooked cassava and rice, charcoal-grilled fish, young coconuts, bananas and other fruits, cigarettes, etc. The rite was led by Omar, a middle-aged man from Jolo. He was not a member of Bilaiya’s house group, but he lived in the Hong Kong area. Omar was born lame. He spent the whole day alone, begging from a hand made cart that was pulled by a fellow Badjau to any busy street downtown. But Bilaiya and her house group members believed that Omar had supernatural, spiritual power to heal the sick that none of the household members had. Thus, they invited him when they had a house group member who suffered from a prolonged illness.

As mentioned earlier, Bilaiya’s house group considered it very important to visit their cemetery in Jolo once a year, preferably in December. During our observation period, Bilaiya and Jamel made a trip there using the money contributed by Sinitiana and other relatives. The trip was meant to place a grave marker, or “*sunduk*,” for the dead, which they wanted to do for quite some time. When they visited Jolo in December 1999, Bilaiya and Jamel made a grave marker with the names of the dead inscribed, placed it on the grave, purified it with fresh water, talked to the dead and offered food, cigarettes and other things. In doing so, they communicated with the dead and asked them for protection, saying, “Do not bring us misfortune. Do not bring illness to our children.”¹⁴

When Gemma became deathly ill, Bilaiya was extremely helpful despite the fact that they were not blood relatives. At first, it was rumored that Gemma was suffering from kidney stones. Later, though, it was discovered that she had cancer of the uterus. Her husband, Jaime, “half-Bajau, half-Bisaya” as he described himself, hesitated to admit her to the government hospital¹⁵ in Davao City, saying that he did not know how to read and he was not comfortable with the Cebuano

language (lingua franca in the city). Instead, Jaime and Gemma decided to resort to Gemma's mother who lived in Surigao City. Since neither of them had any relatives in Davao City, they asked Bilaiya to accompany them on the trip. In December 1999, Bilaiya brought them safely to Surigao City where she performed "*mag-ubog*" to ask their ancestors to heal Gamma as well¹⁶.

3.2 Do not call us lazy

This house group (Group Two) maintained a loose relationship with Tisoy's house group (Group One) in the previous chapter, which was effective when activated. Temi and Jaime owed Tisoy their business permit to sell shells and pearls at a booth in a resort hotel. This relationship may appear vertical wherein Tisoy acted as their boss and wielded the authority to collect "fees" from them. Yet, there were no dominant-subordinate relations involved among them. Beyond the business, the contacts between the members of those two groups were rather limited. The only time we witnessed a direct interaction between them was when Jinny's (Bilaiya's younger sister)'s young granddaughter accidentally drank a small amount of kerosene: Aida (Tisoy's wife) and Amesa (Tisoy's aunt) were urgently called for assistance.

Bilaiya's house group had even less relationship with the other three groups in the Hong Kong area. Whenever they heard of a death in those groups, they did not feel obliged to contribute to the burial. The rare occasions we observed them in contact with those groups were the times whenever a female member had a miscarriage or birth at home; midwives who were older and considered more experienced than Bilaiya were called for assistance from Group Three and Group Five. Each time, fifty pesos cash was paid to the midwife as a token of gratitude.

Although there were no religious and social events that involved the entire Sama-Bajau residents in Isla Verde, weddings were exceptions. Normally relatives of the groom and bride from other Sama-Bajau communities outside Isla Verde, including those outside Davao City, gathered to attend the three-day celebrations. Bilaiya was always very ready when asked to help the bride with makeup or to lend gold jewelry as part of the bride's attire, regardless of the group the bride belonged to. Bilaiya and her house group members knew that they were

recognized as a “better-off” group among the Sama-Bajau in Hong Kong area: they were the only “Bajau” who owned a snack bar¹⁷; they were good at running a business; and they made more money. Even though there was not much transfer either in cash or in kind between this group and the others in everyday life, weddings were the exceptions and they were generous to others. Otherwise, they could be labeled as “*kuripot*” (stingy) by their neighbors.

However, Bilaiya and her household members, like Group One, did not hesitate to express a critical view on the attitude of the groups in lower community status. For instance, Bilaiya commented on the fact that the “poorest” group in Hong Kong area was not able to receive micro finance from the CSSDO. She said to us with a tone of disgust:

(Bilaiya, recorded on September 22, 1999)

There are many “Bajau” neighbors who are afraid [to ask for a loan], saying “we would be eaten up by snakes” [meaning that they would be punished] if we could not repay the debt. I am not worried about such things at all because I have experienced programs like this one [the CSSDO loan] before and I am familiar [with them]. This one is just like the one in Jolo [referring to the CCF project]. They [other Bajau] say, “Let’s not try this [the CSSDO loan], or we would be eaten up by snakes,” but you should not be eaten up by snakes if you do business seriously. Pay back your debt as you are supposed to, and you will be just fine. Perhaps, they believe that they need to repay 8,000 [pesos] if they borrow 4,000 [pesos]. And that’s what they are afraid of. But it could not be true, don’t you think so? Well, those who are not running any business should not apply for the loan in the first place anyway.

“Those who do not use their brains” should not be respected from the perspective of Bilaiya and her household members. They believed in the value of hard work. At the same time, however, they were aware of the fact that inequities could recur from generation to generation. Bilaiya said to us:

(Bilaiya, recorded on February 5, 1999)

No matter how small, you should do business. It’s so much better than go begging..... Well, no matter what, it’s always like that if parents are rich, their

children are rich, too. The children will inherit their parents' wealth. The children use the wealth to grow even wealthier.

She also warned us not to be fooled by the looks of the other Sama-Bajau, saying:

(Bilaiya, recorded on May 8, 1999)

[Referring to the Sama-Bajau in the lower community status in the Hong Kong area] *They are lazy, but the thing is, they are not poor. They are saving money by eating rotten fish [that they are able to get at discounted prices or they are given for free of charge in public markets]They did "mag-mboq" [for their ancestors] all the time, and I wonder if they could ever understand the meaning of the Hari Raya. Those "Bajau" are different from us."*

Bilaiya visited the Christian church of the *Sama Dilaut* in the Hong Kong area whenever when meetings were held for the micro credit program by the CSSDO. The church was under the *Sama Dilaut* pastor named Joseph who belonged to Group Three. We will detail this in the next chapter. Bilaiya recognized Pastor Joseph as a leader and respected him. She admired his attitude and intelligence, narrating to us, "He represents his group to the outsiders very well. Being the leader of the church, he leads a decent life."

3.3 Grab an opportunity whenever possible

Bilaiya and her house group were never actively involved in local politics in Isla Verde¹⁸. They were not under the protection of the former Barangay Captain and other Maranaos when they resided in Japan Pikas before. We often heard them mention, "the government will not help us." "The government" in this context refers to the *Barangay* as the local administrative unit closest to their everyday lives. They meant that the Barangay officials were mostly ethnic Maranao who did not share the common interests with this group and that such officials would not bother to help them. The "*purok*" leader who was appointed by the Barangay for the *Purok* Four, which included the Hong Kong area, was a land-based Sama who was not related to Bilaiya's house group in any way so they could not rely on him, either.

While they had little personal relationships with local politicians and officials, they did not hesitate to grab any opportunity whenever it was offered. As we described earlier, the CSSDO micro credit program and educational assistance provided by the concerned individual from the Karitas were such examples wherein they demonstrated their eagerness to take chances for a better quality of life. The CSSDO was a government agency in charge of social services and development at the city level, and they were careful enough to keep their position rather neutral regarding the potential conflicts of interests among different ethnic groups at the Barangay level. The contract workers the CSSDO assigned to work for the Sama-Bajau in Isla Verde were Christian Cebuano females in their twenties, whom Bilaiya and her household members found friendly and approachable.

Bilaiya and her daughters usually purchased secondhand clothes from Cebuano retailers on Oranguren Street. They had “*suki*” (regular customer) relationships with a few Cebuano female shop owners who were kind to the Sama-Bajau peddlers. The transactions were primarily made in cash. However, when they bought a relatively large amount exceeding 500 pesos, part of the payment (about 100 pesos at the maximum) could be collected after they completed the sales of the items. In other words, Bilaiya and her daughters were permitted to have consignments, an advantage that most of their fellow Sama-Bajau *ukay-ukay* vendors of a lower community status did not enjoy.

They had no other socioeconomic relationships beyond the *ukay-ukay* business with those Cebuano female retailers, however. For example, they could not borrow cash from the store owners; they sought other means to finance their needs and wants. As we have described earlier, first they would pawn as much as possible. If they were still short a certain amount, they would resort to informal finance, specifically to a money lender who was a Cebuano woman living in the adjacent block within Isla Verde. During our observation period, it happened only once that they borrowed 1,000 pesos in May 1999. The interest rate was 20 per cent a month (locally called “Five-Six”).

By the nature of the peddling method, for most of the Sama-Bajau vendors, the transactions with the customers in their *ukay-ukay* business tended to be sporadic without regular customers (“*suki*”). Nonetheless, as we have seen earlier, Bilaiya

and her daughters had “*suki*” who engaged in selling fresh food in booths in the public markets. The two parties did not barter the clothes for the food; Bilaiya and her daughters offered their *ukay-ukay* items at special prices for such vendors and they were offered food at discounted prices in exchange. It did involve cash transactions after all.

The pearl and shell business that a male member (Undate, son-in-law) started in September 1999 turned out to be rather stable mainly because he was able to get consignments from Temi, his fellow “Bajau” vendor who belonged to the same house group on a regular basis. Yet, he did not have regular customers; he needed to look for potential customers all the time and when he found one, the transaction between him and the customer was done in cash because most probably they would never meet again. The tobacco selling business that Bobby tried lasted too short for us to observe its operation in detail. But we can safely say that no relationships with regular customers were developed during that period.

As compared to the groups in lower community status, this group did not avoid contacts with non-Sama-Bajau population; they negotiated with outsiders to make the most of any opportunities that arose. Such attitude was observed not only when they negotiated the prices with their potential customers but also when they talked to the workers from the CSSDO and other local government agencies on the conditions of aid projects. This open mindedness was partly related to their experience with the CCF project in Jolo. But there was another significant factor enabling them to be open to non-Sama-Bajau outsiders in Davao City: younger generations of this house group were fluent in the Ceubano language, a lingua franca in the Visayas and Midanao. This was not only because they grew up in Davao but also because some of them were married to the “half-Cebuanos” (people born to Cebuano and Sama couples). As we will see later, their children were using the Cebuano language in the household as well.

Bilaiya’s house was surrounded by other Sama-Bajau dwellers: They did not have non-Sama neighbors living next to them. Thus, they had limited relationships with non-Sama-Bajau. As less contact lead to less conflict, it may be said that they were in peaceful relations with the other ethnic groups. In Bilaiya’s case, it was only when she operated her *ukay-ukay* business that she crossed the boundaries to visit

Maranao-inhabited areas in Isla Verde to look for potential customers.

There was a public elementary school in a Maranao-inhabited area along the shore. It was the only school in Isla Verde. Bilaiya's grandchildren, more specifically Martha's children, were enrolled in the school. They enjoyed going to the school, while other Sama-Bajau children and parents in lower community status hesitated to approach the school, typically saying "we would be bullied by Maranao children."

3.4 We would not mind being called "Bajau"

Bilaiya and Jamel called themselves Sama Kubigaan. They said they were called "Samal" by Muslim Tausug. It was after they transferred to Jolo when they came to accept being identified as "Bajau" because the CCF workers always called them so. The name of "Bajau" was commonly associated with the image of people living in houseboats at sea. But so long as Bilaiya and Jamel could recall, none of their ancestors ever lived in a boat. In other words, they were always land-based Sama. They added that "the genuine Bajau" (Sama Palau, or the Sama living in the houseboat) was a different group from what they were. Bilaiya narrated to us:

(Bilaiya, recorded o November 16)

Those who would take their children along to the sea should be them [Sama Palau]. We never take our children to the sea. If ever we take them to the sea, they will vomit [because they get seasick easily]. They [Sama Palau] lived in boats, but we always lived in the house [on the land]. Over here [Hong Kong area], there were many of them [Sama Palau] living in that direction [pointing to a corner far from the public space]. Kapirin's group [Group Four in our research]? No [they are not Sama Palau]. They are Sama Tibanban, or they may be Sama Margos [Sama Margos sa Tubig]. Papa [Melbasa, Group Three in our research] is Sama Taluksangay. Us? Well, maybe we are Sama Kubigaan, or we are Sama Jolo [where they spent the longest time before moving to Davao City].....

Her narrative indicated that she distinguished her group from the rest by two categories: first, whether they were sea-based or land-based; and second their

place of origin. Yet, she did not stress such differences among her Sama-Bajau neighbors as much as the members of Group One in the previous chapter. And she did not mind that most of non-Sama-Bajau outsiders simply identified the entire Sama-Bajau residents in Isla Verde as the “Bajau” and therefore called them so. She knew the name of the “Bajau” could be useful to get assistance from the government, other agencies and concerned individuals. Her daughters, nieces and nephews, and grandchildren adopted the same attitude. They were glad to dance on the stage at any time when the CSSO staff request them, saying “Please show us your “Bajau” dancing.”

Here is a voice from one of her nephews, Gino, the eldest son of Smalaiya and Temi:

(Gelly, Smalaiya’s eldest son, recorded on October 22, 1999)

My father [Temi] is Bajau. But he does not speak the Sinama language at home; he uses “Bisaya” [the Cebuano language].....[when Gino went to Surigao City for higher education] My classmates were all “Bisaya,” and so I made myself Bisaya, too.I was born in Busbus [in Jolo] and grew up in Surigao [City]. Any good memories from my childhood? I have fond memories of Christmas, for everybody in our family looked so very happy at Christmas.If I could graduate from school [meaning college], I would like to look for other jobs. But if it’s impossible, I would not mind becoming a pearl vendor.....Are you asking whether I consider myself as Cebuano or not? No. I am always Bajau. You see, I am living here [in Hong Kong area], and that’s why [he considers himself as Bajau]. But I do not quite understand what “mboq” is. To tell you the truth, I have not been able to clearly choose a religion for myself. It’s true I attend religious rites performed in this neighborhood. The latest “pag-hinang ni Tuhan” we celebrated here was around 1998 [one year before this narrative was recorded]. It was celebrated in the house of my grandmother’s [Bilaiya’s in this context]. But I also go to Catholic church.....In my future, well, I want to go abroad and work there so that I can help my younger brothers and sisters [by sending remittances home], right?

Children with Cebuano or Cebuano-blooded parents in this house group were

using the Sinama language, yet they were also using the Cebuano language at home. Those who attended school were good at switching from one language to the other according to the situations they were in. They could take on different ethnic identities as the situations demanded as well. But such art of code-switching in language and identity, however, would not necessarily guarantee the children decent employment in the local market of Davao City when they grew up. Aside from the lack of formal education, they did not access networks that could connect them to the mainstream society, say the Christian Cebuano, in the given context. Obviously, multiple identities combined with multilingualism do not automatically create space for these children to participate in the surrounding society.

¹To protect their privacy, all personal names were changed.

²As we have described earlier, secondhand clothes (*ukay-ukay*) came from Zamboanga City to Davao City via Labuan Island, Malaysia. Given this commodity flow, the prices of secondhand clothes were lower in Zamboanga City than in Davao City.

³“*Tinola*” is prepared with local tomatoes, onions and salt. To make “*paksiew*,” vinegar, pepper, garlic and ginger are also added. Put in another way, it costs more to cook the latter.

⁴This variety of banana is produced primarily for exports. Not as popular as other bananas produced for local consumption, they were actually cheaper than other variety of bananas sold in the market.

⁵The fish we were often served in this household included “*pirit*” (mackerel), “*tamban*” (sardines), and “*bilang-bilong*” (moonfish). Sometimes, we also ate more expensive ones, “*isda sa bato*” (reef fish) such as “*mul-mul*” (parrot fish), served in smaller portions.

⁶The poor sanitation inevitably made it difficult for them to rid themselves of such parasites permanently.

⁷The level of medical expenditures we have written here tends to be underestimated; it does not reflect most of the donations they were able to secure from “outsiders,” including the amount we contributed to the household when Bilaiya became ill and needed cash to buy her medicines in November 1999.

⁸The cradle was hung by the strings tied around the beams of the ceiling. At the top it had three bamboo strips tied together in parallel with space in between, and the lowest one had two strings on each side to support a stick. The sticks served to hold a wide cloth in which the infant was placed. This structure allowed the cradle to sway naturally as the baby moved or cried inside it. This type of cradle is called “*duyan*” in the Cebuano language.

⁹Smalaiya’s eldest son, Gino, entered Surigao State College of Technology in Surigao City, where he stayed with his paternal Cebuano (Christian) grandmother. He chose a two-year program of refrigeration, but he eventually dropped out early in his first semester. He was still an exception in the Hong Kong area in those days where very few children were able to reach and complete secondary education (high school) in the first place.

¹⁰According to Bilaiya, five groups, or a total of twenty-five Sama women, were selected from Isla Verde to be the beneficiaries of the CSSDO loan program. Every week, they were required to repay 80 pesos, of which 50 pesos would go to the CSSDO capital, 10 pesos to personal savings of the beneficiaries, 10 pesos to insurance, 10 pesos to the operational cost of the program (recorded on November 16, 1999). We validated the

information with the CSSDO later to find that the weekly payment was officially stated as 130 pesos with the payment period ranging from six months to one year and the interest rate set at two per cent a month. They added, however, the actual operation of the loan was rather flexible.

¹¹Outsiders, however, were not always attracted to this particular group because they were aware of the minimization of policy implementation costs. For instance, the Cebuano woman who came from the Karitas as we have mentioned earlier in this chapter, considered Bilaiya's group as "typical (poor) Bajau" and started helping this group mainly because of the easier access from the "land" (the city proper) and the relative ease in communication with the Cebuano language. As we talked to her, we learned that she not aware of the different social strata existing among the Sama-Bajau residents in Isla Verde, wherein Bilaiya group was actually ranked the highest in Hong Kong area.

¹²"*lumaq*" in the Sinama language means a house.

¹³Bilaiya and Jamel listed the following rites that they used to perform with their relatives and neighbors in the local residential community: "*pag-hinang ni Tuhan*," "*pag-timbang*," "*pag-islam*," and "*pag-patulak*."

¹⁴Bilaiya called this rite "*pag-titi*."

¹⁵This hospital refers to Davao Medical Center, which was more commonly called the "Regional" among the residents in Isla Verde. At that time, only one relative was allowed to accompany the patient inside the hospital. This prevented Jaime from bringing in another person as his interpreter (Sinama-Cebuano or English). He also did not find anybody to help him fill in the forms, being illiterate. Indeed, there were social workers available for the underprivileged like him, yet there were simply so many patients that he did not expect them to pay personal attention to him.

¹⁶In regard to this series of events, no cash transfer was involved between Bilaiya's household and the household of Gisa and Jaime; Jaime shouldered all the travel expenses and food including Bilaiya's. Gisa went to her rest in Surigao City at the end of December 1999.

¹⁷There were three stores in the public space of the Hong Kong area in those days. The other two were variety shops (*sari-sari* stores) owned by Tausug males. Both of them were related to a former *Barangay Captain* (ethnic Maranao) through marriage.

¹⁸Nobody from this group voted in elections during my fieldwork from 1997 to 2000. None of them had official birth certificates except for the children of Smalaiya's and Martha's who were enrolled in a public elementary school.