

## Culture Change in A Philippine Folk Society\*

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Robert Redfield states that "After the rise of cities men became something different from what they had been before."<sup>1</sup> This difference is the result of a process of forceful change emanating from urban centers which eventually imposes a new way of life upon surrounding pre-urbanized or primitive peoples. Redfield traces the effects of this process in a continuum from folk society to urban society.

This paper discusses briefly a Philippine folk society of Barandias, Bukidnon and the change which is taking place in that group because of contact with people representing a more urbanized society.

### Social Background

The barrio itself is composed of twelve or thirteen thatched houses located on a hill about one hundred fifty yards from an unsurfaced road which connects a government settlement to the west with the national highway which is twenty miles to the east.

Although there are only a few houses, fifty Manobo families claim Barandias as

their home. Since Manobos are not traditionally village dwellers, few houses are actually needed. The barrio functions as a center for social activities. Most of the other houses are scattered around the area in or near the fields.

1. *Economy.* The Monobo's life and economy is based on kaingin or swidden cultivation. Each February when the constellation Orion is on the eastern horizon just after sunset, the head of each family selects a spot in the forest to be cleared for planting the season's rice crop. The trees are cut and burned in preparation for planting which takes place in April or May. Agriculture of this type utilizes only the simplest of tools, namely the bolo or machete, the axe, and the digging stick. The axe is used in falling trees for the clearing; the digging stick is used to make holes in the earth for the seed, and the bolo is the tool of versatility used in most other tasks such as building the field house and the fence, weeding, planting and digging yams and sweet potatoes.

The agricultural cycle which begins with the clearing in February continues with the planting of rice and corn. This is followed by the construction of a field house usually on a high and prominent location from which the entire field can be guarded from intruders, monkeys, and rice birds. The construction of a fence, enclosing the field, is necessary since wild pigs and deer may destroy a crop before it is harvested.

\* Since 1955 my wife and I have spent a number of years residing in the barrio of Barandias in Western Bukidnon on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines. Our work there has been under the Summer Institute of Linguistic of Sta. Ana, California, and we have been analyzing and learning to speak Manobo, the local language, and translating portions of the New Testament into it. This community is a small segment of a language group which has been called Western Bukidnon Manobo, to distinguish it from other Manobo language groups on Mindanao.

<sup>1</sup> Redfield, Robert. *The Primitive World and Its Transformations*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963) p. ix.

Corn is harvested in July and supplies food until the rice is harvested in November. Sweet potatoes and cassava are planted during the summer months in anticipation of the period between February and July when the corn and rice is exhausted and food is scarce.

The lack of surplus is a result of at least two factors. The first is the inefficiency of technology employed. The use of more advanced tools and methods such as the plow and the water buffalo and fertilization will doubtless yield more food. The second factor is the apparent lack of motivation to work. This requires more study, but on the surface it appears that this lack of motivation is related to the custom of freely sharing one's goods and produce with others. The result of this is that an individual does not generally apply himself since, if his crop is small, he can theoretically always ask for food from his relatives. If he does apply himself and raise enough for his family, his relatives "borrow" it from him. The over-all result is that many man hours are spent idly, and every year from February to July no one has enough to eat.

Traditionally, the produce of the field is rarely sold, especially within the group. During the harvest ceremony in which the shaman offers the first fruit of the field to *Ibabasuk*, the spirit who governs agriculture, I once heard him promise the deity in a prayer that they would not sell the rice but it would be given away to anyone who asked for it.

There is, however, a crop which is raised almost exclusively for market. After rice is harvested from a clearing, abaca is often planted. This crop has become an important part of the economy since the fiber is a year-round source of money for the group. Economic dependency on urban centers has developed because of the fact that all of the abaca fiber is sold to Chinese traders or their agents who

do business in Malaybalay, the capital of the province, or in Cagayan de Oro City in Misamis Oriental on the coast. Money earned from the sale of hemp is spent on products which are offered by local merchants, who, in turn, depend on Malaybalay for their source of supply. These products, with the exception of salt, have only recently become a part of the Manobo's inventory of necessities. A typical list might be: matches, salt, sugar, canned fish, soap, ready-made clothing, and kerosene, not to mention public transportation.

2. *Religion.* Manobos are traditionally animistic. They recognize and pay respect to a pantheon of spirit deities which are patrons of the elements and processes of nature. There are about fifty spirit deities, of which the most important are *Ibabasuk*, the patron of agriculture, and *Manawbanaw*, the god who dominates a complex interrelated system of taboos.<sup>2</sup> The Manobos recognize a myriad of other spirit beings whose influence controls every aspect of their society. Serious illness is attributed to spirit activity in response to a broken taboo or to the desire of a spirit or the soul of an ancestor to communicate a need to a living person. The society has a group of religious specialists or shamans. The function of a shaman or *baylan* is to communicate with the unseen world by means of a familiar spirit in order to interpret the message intended through an illness. Animal sacrifice is the usual remedy for serious illness as well as the means for obtaining the favor of the gods or spirits for planting, marriage, a hunting expedition, or similar activities.

A recurrent theme in Manobo religious thought and ceremonies are the legendary happenings which are related in a long epic song called the *ulagingen*. This epic tells of the struggles of an early band of Manobos during an extended period of

<sup>2</sup> Elkins, Richard. "The Anit Taboo, A Manobo Cultural Unit," *Practical Anthropology*, Vol. 11, Number 4, (July-August, 1964) p. 185-188.

drought. During their wanderings in search of food the gods pitied them, granted them the gift of immortality, and took them to heaven through a hole in the sky.

3. *Authority.* The solidarity of the community is rooted in kinship relations.<sup>3</sup> The family and extended family ties are strong, and leadership of the group is rooted in these ties. A leader is traditionally the head of an extended family group and is called a *datus*; however, not only the family patriarchs but also the shamans assume this title.

Traditionally, authority for governing the group has rested in a council composed of these *datus* or family heads. Membership in the council of *datus* is based on a man's ability to judge and upon his age as well as his rank in the group. No member of our local council was younger than forty-five. Also, not every older man was automatically a member of the council. A man had to have the ability to settle disputes and to give sound advice. The authority of the council has been strong and not often defied. Meetings are called whenever a need arises, and these meetings sometimes last for several days. Marriage arrangements, punishment for taboo-breaking, problems concerning land ownership, and settlement of inter-family quarrels are matters which come under the jurisdiction of the council. Younger members of the society have had little voice in these group affairs and defer to their elders as a matter of course.

### The History of Change

The history of change in this society began a number of years before World War II. At that time the nearest road was sixty miles away. The authority of outside law and government had not yet af-

fecting the group except for an occasional patrol visit of the Philippine Constabulary usually commanded by an American officer. His task was to suppress vendetta and feuding between the various *datus*. During this time the *datus* were persuaded to stop their revenge killing, to live in villages, and to send their children to school. It was during this period that the Manobos in the Barandias area built houses together and established a *barrio*.

The war itself was instrumental in accelerating acculturation because so many lowlanders fled to the interior in order to escape Japanese control, and they were protected by Manobo *datus*. After the war when the Philippines gained independence, many people in the northern and central islands of the Philippine archipelago began to migrate into Mindanao in order to find a new life for themselves. Many filed claims to homesteads in the vast areas of public land which heretofore had been under the control of the cultural minorities. At the same time, the government became interested in the development of these areas in order to contribute to the recuperating economy of the country and to relieve the pressure on the overpopulated areas in the north. Part of this program included attempts to bring tribal cultures into the mainstream of Filipino life through community development, education, and by extending civil law and authority into these areas.

In Barandias a pseudo-leadership was set up at the instigation of government representatives. This leadership, based on the model of *barrios* or villages in a municipal district, consisted of a *barrio* lieutenant, his assistant, a councilman for education, and a councilman for health and sanitation. This *barrio* council, as it was called, was "elected" at a meeting of all the people in the village. Those "elected" were actually picked by the council of

<sup>3</sup> Elkins, Richard. "A Matrix Display of Western Bukidnon Manobo Kinship," *Philippine Sociological Review*, Vol. XII, Nos. 1 and 2, (January-April, 1964), 122-129.

elders and were all young men who had been to school and knew something of the trade language and the customs of the lowland officials. It was generally taken for granted by the government officials who visited occasionally that the barrio council was in fact the ruling authority of the group. Actually the authority in most matters remained with the traditional council of elders.

Acculturation was highly accelerated when the Philippine government included the area in and around Barandias in a settlement project. This program called NARRA (National Agricultural Rehabilitation and Resettlement Administration) recruited settlers in the northern islands offering "land for the landless". A landless lowlander family could obtain on credit a farm plot of sixteen acres, food for the first year, house-building materials, a water buffalo, and farm implements. Thousands of families came to Bukidnon and the population of Barandias increased in a few years from fifty Manobo families to one hundred and fifty families of varied language and cultural background.

From the standpoint of the Manobo *datus*, this was cultural catastrophe. During the initial stages they resisted the settlement program vigorously, resorting even to protests to the President of the Republic. Although first choice of farmlands was offered to Manobo families who entered the NARRA as settlers, few took advantage of the opportunity. The younger men were anxious to try farming with the plow and welcomed the chance to own a water buffalo, but the council of *datus* strictly forbade any to become involved with the NARRA. Later in the program most of the younger men joined the NARRA against the wishes of their elders.

### Factors Which Influence Change

1. *Caste System*. One of the strongest influences for change among younger

people has been a type of caste system which developed with the association of Manobos with lowland Filipinos. No caste system exists within the group, but a caste system is being imposed upon Manobos by settlers in which the Manobo is assigned to the lower level. When interaction between Manobos and lowlanders occurs, Manobos are forced to assume a level lower than that of the lowlander.

The caste system is a strong influence for change since it has produced emulation and cultural borrowing, especially among younger members of the community. The guitar or ukelele, the cigarette, (Manobos traditionally chew tobacco and betel nut) shoes, sunglasses, and permanent waves are items recently observed among the young people.

A high degree of mobility between the two levels is possible. Lowland Filipinos seem anxious to assimilate groups such as the Manobos. I heard a settler suggest as a solution to the assimilation problem that "we send soldiers to the Manobo villages and force them to come and live near us so that they will become like us."

The caste system has become a problem because the younger men with some education are considered by outsiders to be superior to the older people who are illiterate.

2. *Education*. The introduction by the government of education in the area has been an influence for change. Barandias has only recently had a school, but in years past a few children were sent to live with relatives in areas where schools exist. Also, some of the younger adults have attended school for a year or two. The program of community development, of which the local school is the center, helps through its instruction to internalize in the Manobo student the values of general Filipino society.

3. *Civil Law.* Philippine law is a factor for change. A statute exists forbidding the cutting of forests in making the annual clearing. This has not been strictly enforced and is often ignored. However, younger Manobos realize that alteration of the old way of farming is inevitable unless such legislation is changed, and this is extremely unlikely.

4. *Contact.* Another factor which, together with increased contact, tends to accelerate change is the custom of reciprocal sharing of goods with anyone who asks for them. Within the group or extended group this custom has been advantageous since it has served as a group "insurance plan". However, in increased contact with more urbanized people, the Manobo finds that sharing does not work because although he gives freely, the settler does not. The lowlander demands money or kind for his goods. Since the Manobo can no longer escape contact with more urbanized peoples, it is inevitable that his economic values will change and become like those of the lowlander. As Redfield says, "The necessary condition of peasant life is that the system of values of the peasant be consistent, in the main, with those of the city people who constitute, so to speak, its other dimension of existence."<sup>4</sup>

When the Manobo begins, through the contact situation, to acquire a "trading spirit" within the group so that he is able to keep any surplus he produces and exchange it for other goods, there will be increased motivation to work and produce. Closely related to this is the fact that he can no longer legally practice kaingin farming but must soon resort to the water buffalo and the plow. With this improved technology he will be better able to produce a surplus to be used for trading.

<sup>4</sup> Redfield, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

5. *Christianity.* A further influence for change is the establishment of a Manobo Christian church. This church which consists of about thirty members is the outgrowth of our own work of Bible translation. My informant, Francisco Polenda, a man in his thirties, became a convert to Christianity during the initial translation of the Gospel of Mark. The church is composed mostly of younger people and is a direct result of his influence. Although Christianity has offered little real competition to the traditional religion, it has been strongly resisted by the older people in their attempt to preserve the old moral order.

#### The Shift of Authority—A Result of Change

The leadership in the community has shifted from the *datus* to the barrio council which formerly was a pseudo-leadership with little function or power. The shift has come about because of the need for a versatile system of government which could function for both Manobos and lowlanders. The old Manobo power structure which is extremely ethnocentric and oriented only to Manobo culture and moral values could not effectively function cross-culturally. The barrio council is now composed of both Manobos and lowlanders, all of whom are younger men with some education. The *datus* still function as a governing body, but their jurisdiction is limited to problems involving only Manobos, such as marriage arrangements and religious matters. The barrio council handles law enforcement (civil law), community improvement, and an increasing number of problems over land ownership.

The barrio lieutenant is Francisco Polenda, my informant and the leader of the Manobo church. The prestige which he gained by acting as my informant helped to make him eligible for this position on the barrio council. Aside from this he

has a keen mind and an intense desire to learn. During the time he and I were working together he taught himself to read English using my dictionary and books. At present he is avidly studying Philippine civil administrative code in order to aid in solving the problems which constantly confront the barrio council.

### Reaction to Change

"The impact of civilization upon the primitive societies results in part in the stimulation of new ideas, new religious, and ethical conceptions. Not all primitive peoples helplessly accept the conqueror's ways, or passively die out, or go down fighting with the spear or the gun. These are common endings of their stories, but there are many cases of moral regeneration, of fresh leadership. In 1819 the Paiute prophet Wodziwob preached the coming end of the world, the destruction of the white man, and the return of the Indian dead."<sup>5</sup> "These movements are sometimes seen as wish fulfillments, as projections of a hope of escape from frustration and despair."<sup>6</sup>

Because of the suddenness of change it was perhaps inevitable that the Manobo religious leaders would respond in an extraordinary manner as a desperate attempt to restore the former status quo both in religion and in the control the society had over the younger generation. In September, 1959, datos from all over Western Bukidnon gathered in Barandias to revive the institution of the *lantung*. The primary meaning of the word *lantung* is a wooden beam laid on the floor in the center of a house as a room or area divider. From this the meaning is figuratively extended to designate a high chief or datu who acts as a mediator between cultural groups. At this gathering in 1959 the high datu of Barandias, Ramon Lumansay, was chosen

as *lantung* and his inauguration was solemnized by the sacrifice of a water buffalo and by the celebration of a *kali-gaan* ceremony in which certain events of the *ulagingen* epic are ceremonially reenacted. The revival of the *lantung* was an attempt to set up again an almost-forgotten power structure in order to strengthen and help ensure the longevity of Manobo culture and customs among the younger people. Datu Lumansay has often spoken to me of his sorrow over the lack of interest of his own children in the old ways.

In 1961, the chief shaman of Barandias received a special revelation from the gods which was reminiscent of the vision of the Paiute Wodziwob. According to the prophecy the conditions were again in effect which ushered in the "golden age" spoken of in the *ulagingen* epic. The people were no longer required to make animal sacrifices to appease the spirits. Rather, the singing of the epic had magical powers which would obtain for them the benefits of sacrifice and would prepare them as well for immortality and the journey to heaven through the hole in the sky. This journey was to take place on a certain day in December, 1963. At this time all of the dead Manobos would return to life and drive out the settlers. Great giants would appear and eat up any who were not believers. The faithful would be made immortal and go to heaven.

Most of the families in Barandias became involved in this movement. A few of the shamans refused to join, realizing that in doing so they would renounce their power and traditional function. The Christian converts also remained aloof and some paid for their nonconformity by losing their share of the family lands, by being ostracized, or by becoming the object of sorcery.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

When the "Day of Doom" dawned, several hundred people gathered in Barandias to await the great event. As the day wore on the unseen world appeared to take no notice and nothing happened. In the days that followed, many lost their enthusiasm, however, even today, after two years, the movement still survives. Some have recently become disenchanted with the shaman because of his "theological" uncertainty and especially because of his insistence that the taboos, including incest regulations, be abrogated.

Kroeber in his discussion of the Ghost Dance cults of the American Indians a century ago says that, "Analogous stirrings, upheavals, and outbreaks are on repeated record from South America and South Africa, in Nigeria and New Guinea, wherever Caucasians have sufficiently crowded natives as to their land, subsistence, folkways, or religion. Usually the revolt—or the attempted escape into the miraculous—comes after the invaded culture has had its really mortal wound, when the natives as a mass begin to despair of its survival. Until then, they are troubled by the progressive disintegration of their fortunes and institutions, but not yet driven to relying on the supernatural for hope fulfillment."<sup>7</sup>

### Summary

In a period of a few years the influx of people representing a more urbanized culture has initiated change in Ma-

nobo society which has greatly affected the economy, the authority structure, and the old moral order. Leadership has temporarily been placed in the hands of younger men. This disenfranchisement of the traditional council of elders has had a disturbing effect upon the society. A messianic cult based on a legendary epic has arisen which is an expression of hope in despair over the disintegration of the traditional way of life.

The survival of Manobo culture in western Bukidnon is not likely. The old way of life is gone and will never again be possible. Assimilation into the mainstream of Filipino society may take many years, but it is, nevertheless, inevitable.

The shift of leadership from that based on the traditional social structure and religion to that which derives its authority in the civil government is permanent. The shift from the authority of the elders to the younger men of the barrio council is probably only temporary. In the future when the present generation becomes the older generation the community will look again to the elders for its leadership. These elders will be men with the benefits of at least a limited education and will possess something of the value system of lowland Filipino culture.

It is unlikely that the group will be able to accept change and still retain something of its cultural identity unless a new moral order is infused into the society. This new order must be acceptable and tenable in the framework of a new way of life.

<sup>7</sup> Kroeber, A. L. *Anthropology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1948), p. 439.