

THE BADJAO COMMUNITIES IN METRO CEBU AND BANTAYAN ISLANDS: SOME ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA AND OBSERVATIONS*

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This paper is a preliminary ethnographic report. It describes clearly, we hope, some characteristic features of Badjao slum dwellers in the city and province of Cebu. The first part describes the Badjaos living in the slums of Alaska, Mambaling, while the second part is on another settlement in the Bantayan Islands in the northern part of Cebu province. Cebu City, second largest in the country, is the capital of Cebu in Central Visayas.

The data upon which the description is chiefly based were obtained during field observations undertaken in the summer of 1979. A colleague, Nestor Horfilla and four anthropology majors (Homer Bana, Valentina Inoc, Victor Villamera and Basco Fernandez) constituted our research team. The Bantayan settlements, on the other hand, were closely studied by Mary Evelyn Neri who is presently undertaking an in-depth study of their monetized economy for her master's thesis.

The Badjaos constitute the lowest class among the nine Muslim groups of Sulu. They belong to a tribe of nomadic boat dwellers commonly found about the islands of Siasi and Sitankai in the Sulu archipelago. Some land-dwelling and sedentary Muslims do not consider them as Muslims and hesitate to include them in their political organizations.

An interesting group of these shy and gentle fisherman nomads of the Sulu sea presently constitutes an identifiable component of slum dwellers along the shoreline of Mambaling in Cebu City. The purpose of this introductory ethnography is to trigger the acquisition of contemporary and accurate information concerning the Badjao "squatters" which could form the basis of an in-depth study of these people by the junior author.

*We acknowledge with thanks, basic valuable information derived with permission from a documentary paper on the Cebu Badjaos read by Prof. Mohammad Kurais II of the Tawi-Tawi Institute of Technology during the Xth ICAES in India as well as recent socioeconomic facts from the Slum and Resettlement Office of Cebu City. Entry into the Badjao settlement in Mambaling was made possible through the assistance of Mr. Tino, president of the Alaska Beach Residents Association (ABRA). Most important of all, ocular inspection and photography of most households (we have over a hundred slide films) and lengthy casual interviews were actualized with the permission of Jamani, son of Iman Daomani Amansa.

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MAMBALING SHORELINE: THE SETTLEMENT OF THE BADJAOS

Alaska Beach, which forms the Mambaling shoreline, lies about one kilometer from the Ludo factory near Pasil Market. The beach, which forms a bay, is sandy in some parts and muddy in others and is covered with mangroves. Presently, the beach holds more or less 1,000 squatter households, all of which belong to the Alaska Beach Residents Association (ABRA). The houses of the Badjaos are located along the bay and are presently classified as Block 9 by the Slums Improvement and Resettlement Office (SIR).

The Name

Related literature refers to these people as Badjao or Samal. They call themselves Orang Laut, which the Spaniards changed to Lutao. Professor Kurais of the Tawi-tawi Institute of Technology calls them Sama Delaut.

Among the squatters in Mambaling, Cebu City, they are generally known as Badjaos. However, they are also often called "Muklo."

Arrival in Cebu City

Generally, the Badjaos cannot give an exact date of their arrival in Cebu. However, a nephew of the *Imam* (high priest) stated that the first settlers came in 1963, when two boats called *pilang*, landed on the shores of Dulho. This was followed by a series of migrations towards the newly founded settlement. The maritime lanes characterizing Cebu island have facilitated the flow of continuous sea travel.

It is interesting to note that these seafaring ethnic minorities have migrated not only to Cebu but also to Leyte, Samar, Masbate and other parts of the Visayas as well.

Push And Pull Factors Of Migration

The socioeconomic survey questionnaires of the *SIR* indicate practically only one "push" factor away from Richondo, Zamboanga and this is the absence of peace and order in that area. On the other hand, the rich fishing grounds surrounding the Visayas constitute the "pull" variable. However, we know very little about how these Badjao migrants view the city and to what degree they are attracted to Metro Cebu's varied activities and opportunities.

These people are nomadic, but the accompanying romantic notion is difficult to accept. Their patterns of migratory behavior rather suggests economic pressures, such as lessening fish supply.

The Slum Community

The compact settlement personally seen by the authors nestles along the shoreline of Alaska Beach. It is composed of forty-nine interlinked households. The land houses (not boat houses) are built right over the shoreline which is relatively wet during ebb tide and at high tide the water level is from

three to six feet. Six motorboats are anchored at the back and alongside the houses, which are built on stilts. From an inland approach, the left end of the settlement is inhabited by complete families of orientation and procreation. At the right end are families left by the breadwinners.

The community members claim blood ties among each other. In addition, the proportion of adult men to women is fairly equal; thus, it is difficult for a widow to remarry.

Christian Cebuano-speaking slum neighbors in Alaska Beach maintain good relations with the Badjaos. There are as of this writing, three cases of Badjao-Christian intermarriages. Cebuano-wives, however, become assimilated to Badjao lifestyle rather than vice-versa.

Dwellings

All the forty-nine dwellings are identical in form and structure. They are built on tall posts rising from the water and are rectangular in plan. The largest house which is constructed of timber belongs to Doamani Amansa, the imam. It has a room and a separate corner for the comfort room, reflecting a strong Cebuano influence. All the dwellings we observed had one room which serves as sleeping unit and kitchen. The materials are very light and non-durable. Nails are not predominant but wood and bamboo are tied with rattan. They generally look as if they were on the point of collapsing. However, the light build of the small and slender Badjaos may explain how these dwelling units can last for quite a time.

Material Culture

One is struck by an extreme deprivation of material culture. A few households have a small trunk. The majority possess cheap eating utensils, a frying pan (*carajay*), several pots, and a grater. They have generally scanty clothes but the women wear malong. During our visit, one adult female wore a wristwatch, the rest had no adornment.

Economic Activities

As a nomadic and marginal people, the Badjaos in the slums in Mambaling engage in two major activities from day to day the whole year through, namely: (1) fishing (2) and bartering or marketing their catch of fish, seaweeds and seashells. During the weekdays, most if not all, male heads of the households go out to the open sea to fish without competing with the Cebuano-speaking fishermen. They claim to use traditional tools like hand arrows, hook and line, nets and traps but not dynamite. The boats used for deep-sea fishing are powered by engines and are said to be registered officially.

The best fish caught are sold immediately and according to informants, part of the sales is used to purchase small and even rancid fish because these are extremely cheap. Their staple food, which is camote or cassava, is likewise bought immediately from their proceeds.

Women of advanced age including children go to the central business district to beg from the people and in return receive loose change. These adults beg from market vendors while children go scavenging for fruits and other foodstuff. This is a coping mechanism reflecting poor economic conditions and depression.

Widows, with the assistance of their children, meet incoming vessels which dock at the Cebu waterfront. Aboard their boats, they would await passengers who would throw coins for them to retrieve underwater.

TWO BADJAO COMMUNITIES IN BANTAYAN ISLAND

Bantayan Island lies off the northern coast of the province of Cebu. The island being hostile to many forms of vegetation except for coconuts and a few others, the main form of economic subsistence of its inhabitants is fishing. Its strategic location is such that its traditionally-rich fishing grounds lead naturally to other equally rich fishing grounds in Samar and Leyte, Negros and Masbate. It is perhaps for this reason that the island has attracted the Badjaos, a people whose entire life and ritual has always been dominated by the sea and its resources.

The two Badjao communities are found in the municipality of Madridejos, one of the three municipalities in the island, specifically in the two barrios of Lawis and Malbago. All the Badjaos in these communities originally came from Zamboanga. The Malbago Badjao community was formed between 1970-1971 by Badjaos who transferred from the slums of Alaska and San Roque, Mambaling, Cebu City. The Lawis community was formed as recently as February, 1979, barely seven months ago, with Badjaos migrating directly from Zamboanga and settling in Lawis.

All told, the two communities number between 50-60 families. The average number of children for each family is five: but the mortality rate is highest among infants and children due to malnutrition and insanitation.

Economy

The Badjao has known no other means of subsistence apart from fishing, and these two communities are no exception. The men go out to sea in motorboats in search for any or all of the following:

1. a specific type of shell (gold leaf oyster) whose shell alone, minus the meat, sells at ₱15-₱20 per kilo
2. sea cucumbers
3. big-game fish

These resources are obtained by virtue of the Badjao's diving skill and then sold to middlemen (either Christian or Chinese) who in turn sell these in the export market for Japan, thus earning a neat sum in the process.

But the sea may not always be bountiful or the weather may not permit going out to sea, as every Badjao knows. It is then that the Badjao is practically forced to borrow from middlemen who are only too willing to offer money in return for the promise of more things to sell. Begging is rarely resorted to. However, some women do it during Christmas.

Religion

The Badjaos have been referred to as the least Islamized of all the Muslim ethnolinguistic groups, and as such, practice a religion which is a syncretistic blend of Islam and native folk religion.

Among the Badjaos in Bantayan, the place of worship in each house is indicated by a piece of wood placed horizontally across two wooden supports. This "altar" is covered by a piece of cloth which is removed during times of prayer. Prayers are always sung.

Further study will make it possible to pinpoint the Islamic features in the religion of the Badjaos in Bantayan. This initial report will only venture to say that Islamic features seem to be most pronounced in the area of death and burial practices.

Housing

Each household lives in a simple one-room house made of nipa and bamboo. Some interesting features of Badjao houses are:

1. house located by the seashore and is always raised on stilts, an accommodation to the tide's rising and falling.
2. the absence of windows;
3. the house interior is very simple, with the kitchen area designated by the presence of a clay pot (*kalan*).

Relations With the Christian Majority

1. There is occasional barter, with the Badjaos exchanging their fish for the coconuts and rice of the town citizens.
2. As a whole, the group's presence is tolerated by the predominantly Christian population of the town, but there have been many instances of discrimination with the Badjaos accused of petty theft. Many also feel that the Badjaos are a nuisance only when they go around begging and that although they "may be potentially dangerous, they are rather wise, meek and useful."

CONCLUDING NOTES

We are hearing, rightly of course, a crescendo of voices from anthropologists and other social scientists in the Philippines that developmentalists and planners, both in the national and regional levels pay more attention to

the grassroots, the slum dwellers, scavengers, and the ethnic minorities. In addition, rural-urban migration should be under control to raise the level of living of the urban dwellers as well as harness regional development. All these concerns necessitate complete ethnographic data to warrant analytic studies and consequently propose the required policy changes.

By way of concluding, this preliminary report is intended to achieve such a goal.

INDICATION OF AVAILABLE LITERATURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN CARLOS

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