

Foreword

This Field Report is the result of field research undertaken among the Badjaw of Sulu in 1976. It is published ahead of the monograph on the same cultural community. This is meant to provide preliminary data to students, laymen and scholars alike.

Studies of this kind are necessary to develop understanding among us. In spite of our diverse cultural orientations, resulting from difference in environment, we share similar heritage, practices, values and family organization.

For our purposes however, it would be best to simplify matters. The best way would be to grasp Badjaw humanity through painstaking study, taking into full consideration the fact that the Badjaw is at par with his compatriots. It is by no means an idealist position; it is merely a restatement of belief in cultural equality.

Few studies dealing solely with the Badjaw have been done. Among the few researches, majority have been done by foreign scholars. This development underscores the fact that foreign students are much more interested in studying our people than we are. This Report then assumes a contrary position inasmuch as it is a concrete step in correcting such an obvious error on our part.

F. Landa Jocano
Curator

INTRODUCTION

Along the coasts of the Sulu archipelago can be found clusters of communities inhabited by highly mobile people who live in stilt-houses and boat-dwellings. A lot of names has been used to refer to this cultural group. Historians, anthropologists and writers call them *Badjaw* or “sea gypsies”. To the Tausug and other Samal groups, they are known as *Luwaan*, *Pala-u* or *Samal Pala-u*. *Luwaan*, to the Badjaw, would mean *cuspidor* or “spit out”. These terms carry a pejorative connotation and are entirely unwelcomed to Badjaw ears. *Pala-u*, on the other hand, may have come from the Siamal word *laut*, meaning ocean; *Samal Pala-u* then means Samals of the ocean. *Pala-u* is also used to refer to a Badjaw houseboat.

Some Badjaw however claim that they are Samal. This may be due to the fact that they speak the Siamal dialect which is similar to that spoken by the Samal of Tawi-Tawi. Furthermore, they share ethnogeographical affinity, both inhabiting the same general area and possessing cultural practices of similar character.

For the sheer lack of thorough studies on the Badjaw, it becomes necessary to make further research on this group to shed light on its origin and reveal the wealth of its indigenous culture.

This is especially necessary today when there is a noticeable encroachment of various cultures on the body of Badjaw lifeways and beliefs. Even fishing, the main feature of Badjaw economic life, is alleged to be gradually declining, with more and more of the erstwhile fishermen being involved in land-based economic activities. Faced with this cultural and economic situation, concomittant social changes are likely to be felt, making research on the Badjaw a compelling necessity.

Any research on the Badjaw must be premised on their being considered as a cultural community distinct but equal to any other group. Furthermore, the basis for any inquiry must take heed of the virtual need to regard the Badjaw as a component of the entire Filipino society. Thus, understanding the people becomes synonymous with knowing the dynamics of a particular society in transition. It may even be a guide to knowing the specific character of similar cultural groups.

This report is one attempt aimed at showing a general description of the various aspects of Badjaw life based on the field research conducted by PCAS Museum researchers in the different areas of Sulu in 1976. Photographs of community life supplement the brief ethnographic account.

Jose B. Sabalvaro
Mashur Bin-Ghalib Jundam