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Strategies for Maintaining Culture, Identity and Autonomy in Exiled Badjao, a Fishing Population without Fish

A MFS-study in the Philippines

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Abstract

The Badjao are a sea people native to the south western parts of the Philippines. For centuries they have fished, dived and traded in the seas of Southeast Asia. During the last decades, they have suffered hard from conflicts, piracy, decreased fish levels, and over population of people which has forced many Badjao to leave their home seas.

This is a study of a Badjao community with 300 members in Davao City, Mindanao, where Badjao have been living in exile for approximately 50 years. Badjao are called 'Godforsaken' and they have been forced to adjust to new physical and social circumstances with little fish, foreign languages and urban people. However, in spite of the hardships they manage to hold on to their culture; they speak their own language, they build their houses on stilts, and they manage to finance quite expensive wedding celebrations. In short: there are no fish, but there are still Badjao.

The secret behind Badjao's ability in maintaining culture, identity and autonomy is the white pearl. Most Badjao men in Davao City are pearl vendors, seeking out tourist and other visitors in order to sell them home-made, seemingly authentic jewelry. The purpose of this study has been to investigate how it comes that Badjao exiles in Davao City manage to make a living from pearls, and what consequences the pearl vending might have for them in the future. In order to figure this out I have used a combination of participant observation and multi-sited fieldwork, totalling seven months.

I have found that Badjao manage to satisfy tourists' urge for an authentic experience, to meet real people, to meet 'noble savages', and in order to do so they exaggerate their cultural characteristics and try to become 'noble'. They give the tourists exactly what they want: a unique experience and an indigenous product. However, the pearls are purchased in the local Chinatown only minutes away from the most popular resorts.

The same globalization process that in part destroyed Badjao fishing livelihoods, did also bring Chinese pearl sellers to coastal towns in the Philippines. Badjao, I will argue, are not only victims of progress; they can also create their own source of income even if they are living in demanding circumstances. Hence, this essay highlights the way in which indigenous people try to achieve autonomy and self-determination in the direst circumstances.

But it is also important to emphasize the fragility of the pearls. What if the tourists stop coming? What if the local people get hostile to Badjao because of their questionable vending practises? In this context, the pearls can only be seen as a temporary income before a more stable source of income can emerge. In fact, the pearl vending conceals the real problems for Badjao when it comes to indigenous rights and political unity. They need their land, or in this case, their sea.

Keywords: Badjao, Bajau Laut, Sama Dilaut, sea nomads, indigenous people, identity, stereotypes, the noble savage, tourism, authenticity, social poetics.

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1. Introduction

Problem and Background

This study is about the sea nomads Badjao who live in exile in Davao City, Mindanao. The last decades they have suffered hard from conflicts, migration and over-fishing, and they have been forced to leave their home seas. However, many exiled Badjao manage to hold on to their culture and remain independent thanks to selling of cultured pearls to tourists.

The problem of this study is to understand how Badjao manage to make a living from cultured pearls and to analyze what consequences the pearl-vending might give in the long term.

- How come that Badjao manage to make a living from cultured pearls?
- What consequences might this trade get in the future?

The sea nomads Badjao are a people native to the Sulu Archipelago of the south-western part of the Philippines. For hundreds of years they have lived, fished and dived for pearls in the Sulu Sea and the Celebes Sea, being exceptionally well-adapted to a life on the sea (Sather 1997, Blust 2005, Nimmo 2006). They are exceptional divers and known for their fishing and navigating skills. They catch the fish under water, using homemade spear guns, swimming goggles and swim fins (Brown 1994, Schagatay 2011).

For decades Badjao have suffered hard from large-scale migration in the Philippines, over fishing and conflicts between Muslim independence groups and the Philippine army (Blust 2005: 20, Alamia 2005, Nimmo 2006). The coastlines have been occupied by millions of immigrants from the northern parts of Philippines, the seas are exploited by international fishing companies, and insurgent groups make a living from piracy (Alamia 2005, Nimmo 2006). For this reason Badjao have been scattered over big parts of Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei. In the Philippines most refugees live in stilt houses in urban areas of Mindanao, Cebu, Bohol and Luzon; only a few remain nomadic (Nimmo 2006).

Hence, during a short period of time many Badjao have transferred from being dwelling sea nomads to an urban minority, with limited knowledge about city life. A big majority have never been to school, they can seldom read or write, they have no legal papers, and they have no experience of administration and governmental rule. Their Philippine neighbors view them as uncivilized, lazy and dirty. For example, Badjao face discrimination when entering shopping malls and restaurants, their children are being teased in school and they can hardly find a job. They are darker in the skin than the majority population; they have bleached hair which they get because of the salt water and the sun; and they wear colourful

clothes, which make them stigmatized. Their situation is very much similar to the situation of Roma in Europe. Actually they have traditionally been referred to as “sea gypsies” (Pallesen 1985, Blust 2005).

But even if they are facing hardships they manage to hold on to their culture and remain autonomous. They can even arrange quite expensive wedding celebrations – and the main reason for that is that they are selling the white pearl.

1.2 How to name them: Badjao, Bajau, Bajo or Sama?

In Southeast Asia there are three broad ethno-linguistic groups of sea nomads (figure 1): *Moken*, who live in western coast of Burma and Thailand, *Orang Laut*, who live in southern Thailand, southern Malaysia and western Indonesia and *Sama-Bajau*, who live in southern Philippines, eastern Malaysia, and central Indonesia (Sather 2007, Stacey 2007). They have different histories and languages and they became nomads or semi-nomads of different reasons (Blust 2005). However, they have all traditionally been referred to as “sea gypsies” as the Spanish and British colonizers who arrived in the 16th and 17th centuries saw parallels between them and Roma in Europe (Sopher 1977, Stacey 2007).



Figure 1. The expansion of the broad ethno-linguistics groups of Moken, Orang Laut and Sama-Bajau

The Sama-Bajau group is the biggest of these groups and they are spread over a huge area of Southeast Asia. Today there are more than 15 different groups of Sama-Bajau living in Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei

and Indonesia, speaking different Sama dialects (Blust 2005). Historically all Sama-Bajau were sea nomads but today only one group remains partly on the sea, and this group will be in the centre of attention in this essay.

The sea dwelling Sama-Bajau are known under different names or terms, as for example 'Badjao' or 'Bajau' which is a Malay-Bornean word which connotes "man of the seas" (Blust 2005). They have also been referred to as 'palau' or 'lumaan' by their neighbours, both meaning "Godforsaken", as they have lived on the sea and been recognized as backward (Pallesen 1985).

Badjao themselves, in both Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia, prefer the word 'Sama' (Sather 1997: 5), which means "we" (Gusni 2003:5). They also sometimes add 'Pala'u' (living on boats) or 'Dilaut' (living on the sea) to their name (Pallesen 1982, Blust 2005). Those Sama groups who live on islands use to add the name of their island in their name, for example 'Sama Siasi' and 'Sama Tawi-Tawi', but they have not till recently been living on boats (Pallesen 1985, Blust 2005).

Many Sama consider the word 'Badjao' to be stigmatizing and they avoid the term as it has been imputed on them. However, in order to be noticed by authorities, politicians and aid organizations many Badjao villages in Philippines have adapted to the term 'Badjao' and use it in their interaction with local people and authorities.

The most common term used in the scientific discourse for the sea-based Sama-Bajau is 'Bajau Laut'. In Philippines, though, the word 'Badjao' is more common and in Indonesia the word 'Bajo' is mostly used (Blust 2005, Stacey 2007).

In this study, the name 'Badjao' is preferred to Bajau or Sama for two reasons: it is still the more commonly used epithet for Central Sinama-speaking sea peoples in Philippines and it is familiar among the Philippine researchers, media, etc.

2. Theoretical Approach

Previous Research

In this initial section I will make a short review of the research work that other scientists have made about Badjao, as well as other groups of sea people who live in a similar situation, and link it to this present essay on pearl vending.

Compared to other groups of sea nomads, as for example Moken in the south-western coast of Burma and Thailand, little research have been done about Badjao. Actually little is known about Badjao's history before the beginning of the 20th century. However, their neighbours have always known them as boat dwellers and they have been living on boats for as long as they can remember (Sopher 1977, Stacey 2007).

Clifford Sather at the University of Malaysia is one of the few social anthropologists who have made research about Badjao. He has conducted fieldwork among Badjao in north-eastern Borneo and studied their relationship to land-based communities. He has discovered that Badjao are facing fierce discrimination from neighbouring tribes, even from other Sama groups. In Sather (1995) he states that:

Relations between Badjao and more powerful populations ashore (such as the Tausug and Maguindanao in the Southern Philippines) have seldom been founded on mutual respect, and everywhere the Badjao, as a sea people, have tended to be marginalized, excluded from positions of power, despised, and confined to the lowest rungs of the social ladder. (Sather 1995: vi)

However, Clifford Sather has not been studying any Badjao group living in an urban environment, and pearl vending has not been in existence in the areas where he has conducted fieldwork.

The anthropologist Harry Nimmo at California State University has also studied about Badjao over a longer period of time. He began his studies in Sulu Sea in the early 1960s and he has made more than five fieldtrips over a period of 40 years. In the most recent book *Magosaha* (Nimmo 2006), Nimmo describes the changes that have occurred during the last 40 years in the Sulu Sea. *Magosaha* is a description of the traditional culture Nimmo encountered when he began his research in the early 1960s and how the civil unrest has changed their way of living.

Historically, they were a highly mobile people that lead a nomadic lifestyle which depended upon the bounty of the ocean and the use of key resources on land in order to survive (Nimmo. 2006: 21-25).

In the end of the book Nimmo concludes that the boat-dwelling culture he met in the middle of the 2000th century no longer exists in the Philippines – due to significant changes caused by the ongoing civil unrest in the Sulu Sea (Nimmo 2006).

Another well-known researcher is Kemp Pallesen, a linguist from SIL International (Summer Institute of Linguistics), who also has been studying about the Badjao since 1960's. He is one of few researchers who have been able to study Badjao in the heart of the Sulu Sea and he did so before the conflicts escalated in the 1970's (Pallesen 1985). Today it is more or less impossible to stay in the region for most outsiders (even for most Philippine citizens), due to the instable security situation (Nimmo 2006). Also Pallesen has been documenting the racism which Badjao is facing. *"It was sad to see how bad Badjao were treated among other tribes in the Sulu Sea, as for example the Tausug and Marano"*, he told me in an interview in Davao City in 2011, *"but they sometimes fought back with their spear-guns"*. Pallesen has not made any research about Badjao's pearl vending either, as he has been focusing more on their language, religion, society and fishing techniques (Pallesen 1972, Pallesen 1985).

Actually, there are few studies available on Badjao living in an urban environment. One good example, though, is the sociologist Regina Estorba Macalandag's study from 2009, which focused on the relationship between Badjao and the authorities in the city of Tagbilaran in central Philippines – where pearl vending is existing (Macalandag 2009). Macalandag presented some political proposals that had been given by Philippine politicians in Tagbilaran in order to get rid of the disturbing elements of Badjao's begging and vending practises in the region. One of these proposals were to exclude Badjao from the public space, and another idea was to transform the Badjao community in Tagbilaran into a tourist attraction, in order to make the attraction more controlled (Macalandag 2009: 26-33). In her work, Macalandag discusses the tensions between Badjao and the state, but she is not focusing on Badjao's relationship to the tourists and the local people in Tagbilaran.

The Swedish anthropologist Lotta Granbom has been studying about the sea nomads Urak Lawoi (a sub-group to Orang Laut) and their relationship to tourists in southern Thailand. Granbom has conducted several fieldworks on the popular tourist island Ko Lanta, where tourism has had a great impact on the local economy as well as on the sea nomads. *"The study shows what happens to them when they are being deprived of their territory and are being forced to abandon their culture, lifestyle and traditional economic subsistence"* (Granbom 2005:1). On Ko Lanta, most Urak Lawoi have lost their traditional land and boats and have therefore found difficulties to maintain their culture. Some of the Urak Lawoi villages in the region have turned into tourist attractions. For example you can read signs as "Sea Gypsy Village" (Hope 2001) and tourist companies advertise the region as a "pristine paradise" where you can get a change to explore the culture of sea gypsies (Granbom 2005: 10-13). These cases shows what can happen if the influence from tourism and the state gets too big. In southern Philippines, however, were my fieldwork has been conducted the international tourism have not yet grown this big - because of the instable security situation.

Cynthia Chou at Copenhagen University has also studied about Orang Laut. She has focused on the interrelations between Orang Laut, the state and local people in Riau in western Indonesia. She writes that Orang laut are recognized as “backward people” by the Indonesian government and local Indonesians, and that they are seen as “alien and dangerous” (Chou 2009). In particular, the Orang Laut interfere with the Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore Growth Triangle which aims to promote economical development in the area – making the Indonesian Government eager to displace people who are living in lucrative areas (Chou 2009). Similar relationships are being highlighted in the Philippines, where Badjao are seen as alien to modernity and pushed away. However, in Riau there has not been any pearl vending in existence among Orang Laut.

There are no studies available on Badjao’s pearl vending in Philippines and their relationship to the tourists that surround them. Therefore, this study on pearl vending can give a good contribution to the understanding of the relationship between Badjao and the surrounding people in an urban environment, and it can help us to understand how Badjao manage to hold on to their culture in an urban environment.

Contextualizing the Pearl Vending

Badjao in Davao City are making a living by selling cultured pearls to tourists. They are seeking deliberately for visitors from northern Philippines, Asia, Europe and North America to find customers of their 'indigenous' jewelry. But why are they successful?

The orientation of this research has been the approach of *Culture and Authenticity* (Lindholm 2008) as elaborated by Charles Lindholm and *Cultural Intimacy* (Herzfeld 2005) as elaborated by Michael Herzfeld. By using their theories I have been able to frame the topic of this essay and to understand the success of Badjao’s pearl vending.

In the book *Culture and Authenticity* Charles Lindholm describes Westerners urge to find authenticity: they want authentic commodities, experiences, cultures and histories. He traces the origin of the urge of authenticity to Jean-Jacques Rousseau who praised the noble savage and criticized the artificial bourgeois of France. Rousseau idealized the natural state, where humans were genuine, noble and innocent (Lindholm 2008: 5-15).

The stereotype of the noble savage is spread mostly in the Western countries where people are increasingly disillusioned with their lives, and they believe that other people, in exotic countries, still have a smooth life, close to nature (Lindholm 2008). They want to go beyond their everyday lives, go beyond the plastic travel packages, and they want to find the genuine product, the genuine people. Or, in Lindholm’s words, they want a 'backstage experience” (Lindholm 2008: 43). For example, tourists pay

thousands of dollars in order to get a chance to meet 'untouched' people of the Amazon and New Guinea. They want to explore the exotic man, the origin of humanity, the innocent child, the 'natural' life, the really real (Lindholm 2008: 8-10).

The idea of the 'smooth life' and 'the noble savage' is possibly more linked to the Pacific Ocean than to any other part of the world. In particular the island of Tahiti has historically been a symbol for the smooth, unstressed and untamed life – due to the sea voyages and travel diaries originating from the area in the 1800th century (Malm 2003). In the book 'The Island of the Black Pearls' (own translation from *De svarta pärlornas ö*, Malm 2003), which gives an anthropological and historical introduction to Tahiti, the anthropologist Thomas Malm also highlights the co-existence which exists between the pearl and the Pacific Ocean (Malm 2003: 192-200). The last decades a lot of people throughout French Polynesia have been able to make a living from culturing and selling black pearls on the remote islands (Malm: 2003: 192-193). Consequently, many westerners recognize the 'sea' and the 'pearl' as characteristics of the noble savage (Malm 2003: 83-95).

Hence, in the context of the 'the noble savage' and 'the urge for authenticity' we can understand the success of Badjao's pearl vending. Indeed, Badjao are not only selling a commodity, they are also selling a symbol, a cultural experience and a glimpse of the 'natural' life. They intend to be noble, innocent and close to nature, but the truth is that they are as calculating vendors as many others. Consequently, in this work I will use the approach of Charles Lindholm to analyse the success of the Badjao pearl vending.

Another useful framework that I have used in this work has been introduced by the social anthropologist Michael Herzfeld. In the book *Cultural Intimacy* (Herzfeld 2005) Michael Herzfeld shows how identities are being shaped from above (by media, governments, lobbyists, organizations) and how these stereotypes are influencing people in everyday life. He also shows that people are not only passive victims of these stereotypes: they can also manipulate and play with them.

Herzfeld depicts a 'stereotype chain' that goes from the political and economical leaders, through media, companies, organizations and general people, down to individuals in everyday life (Herzfeld 2005). The stereotype starts as an 'idea' but during the process it becomes materialized and therefore a reality in many persons life: Greeks become oriental, Africans become black, indigenous peoples become cultural artefacts and Germans get organized. Michael Herzfeld calls the process for *practical orientalism* (Herzfeld 2005: 68-69) and he means that the reason behind the stereotyping is to access resources and political power (Herzfeld 2005). For example, the Bush-administration shaped the stereotype of the 'terrorist' after 9/11 and therefore enabled rough intelligence work – which has been affecting thousands of Muslims around the world.

In the case of Badjao, the stereotype of the noble savage is being nurtured by the big Philippine tourist industry. Tourist companies depict Philippines as a 'cultural mosaic' with colourful people, cultures and festivals. The Badjao are described as 'sea nomads', the Aeta as 'mountain people', the Palawans as 'forest people' (Reyes 2001, Ness 2002). Hence, the tourist industry inspires Westerners to explore the 'authentic' cultures of Philippines and every year thousands of tourists are coming from countries like USA, England, Germany, China, South Korea and Japan (Ness 2002).

Many of the tourists are idealizing the picture of the noble savage – and this stereotype constitutes a playfield in which Badjao can act and use their creativity. Indeed, Badjao are not passive victims of the stereotype – they do also have a possibility to manipulate and play with the stereotype; they can adapt to it and dismiss it. This is what Michael Herzfeld calls for 'social poetics' which can be defined as people's manipulation of the stereotypes being imposed on them (Herzfeld 2005: 32).

In general the tourist literature recognizes indigenous peoples as static objects; they are either viewed as noble savages that are worth paying a visit or as passive victims of rough historical circumstances (Ness 2002). But we cannot forget the underside: that the objects themselves can also be subjects. The 'indigenous peoples' can actually use this epithet and take advantage from it.

Conclusion

The focus of this essay is the pearl vending of Badjao: how come that the marginalized and exiled sea people Badjao manage to make a living from cultured pearls? In this chapter I have introduced two theoretical frameworks that will be used in order to get an understanding of Badjao's vending success.

First we have the concept of the 'noble savage' as elaborated by Charles Lindholm. In short, Badjao manage to sell their products because they are recognized as 'noble' and they manage to satisfy tourists urge to get an authentic experience and an authentic product.

Second, in order to be able to analyze how Badjao manage to adapt to the stereotype of the noble savage in everyday life, I will use the concept of 'social poetics' as elaborated by Michael Herzfeld. The stereotype of the noble savage constitutes a playfield in which Badjao can act and use their creativity – they can either adapt to or dismiss the stereotype. This conscious adaptation and re-transformation is what Herzfeld calls social poetics; and they go from being passive objects to subjects. This framework gives us a tool to understand the complex relationship between Badjao and the tourist industry. In short: I will investigate how Badjao manage to adapt to the tourists urge to get an authentic experience and how they struggle to remain 'noble'.

3. Methodology

Participant observation

In this study, I have conducted fieldwork in Davao City, Mindanao, in the southern parts of Philippines (figure 2). The fieldwork has been conducted on two occasions, in the beginning of 2010 and in the beginning of 2011, during totally seven months.



Figure 2. Davao City on the island of Mindanao.

In the fieldwork I have used a combination of participating observation and multi-sited fieldwork. I have been living in a Badjao village (figure 3, next page) which has approximately 300 inhabitants, of whom only three speak English.

I have tried to take part as much as possible in their daily life and I have learned the basics of their language, Central Sinama.

In *Qualitative Research Methods: A data collector's field Guide* (Guest, etc. 2005) the authors describes the essence of participant observation and the position of the ethnographer:

The method is distinctive because the researcher approaches participants in their own environment rather than having the participants come to the researcher. Generally speaking, the researcher engaged in participant observation tries to learn what life is like for an "insider" while remaining, inevitably, an "outsider." (Guest, etc., 2005: 13)

Hence, it is important for the ethnographer to immerse in the community and come close to people in order to get a clue of what is going on. People tend to say one thing but act in another way (Guest 2005:15). Consequently, by being a participant in field I have been able to identify stereotypes being imposed on Badjao and to analyze how they are dealing with them. Hence, it has made it possible to explore the 'social poetics' of the Badjao vendors.



Figure 3. The Badjao Community in Matina Aplaya

Here follows a list of activities I have made throughout the fieldwork. I have:

- Taken part as much as possible in the daily life of the Badjao village.
- Followed the pearl vendors to Chinatown, beach resorts, super ferries, etc.
- Talked to accessory shop owners in Chinatown.
- Had informal interviews with tourists, holiday celebrators and beach restaurant owners.

'Follow the Pearl'

How do I study the success of Badjao's pearl trade? How do I study the stereotypes that are being imposed on them? How do I study Badjao's relationship to the authenticity-seeking tourist? This seems to require an unrealistic field of study, impossible to work out. In fact, it would have been very difficult to

study all aspects of Badjao's life and interactions with locals and foreigners in order to understand the stereotypes and the 'social poetics' which shape their lives.

Therefore, I have used a multi-sited approach in this study as elaborated by Marcus in 1995, and in order to work this out I have 'followed the pearl' (Marcus 1995). The pearl is the secret behind Badjao's ability to maintain their culture and it reflects the stereotype of the 'noble savage'. It also highlights the inter-relations between Badjao and the tourists, as well as between Badjao and the local people. Consequently, by 'following the pearl' I have been able to seize the purpose of this study without facing an unrealistic field. I have been able to identify the stereotypes and investigate how they work in daily life. Within multi-sited anthropology this concept is called 'follow a thing' (Marcus 1995) or 'the social life of things' (Appadurai 1986). Within Social Anthropology multi-sited fieldwork has gained more and more popularity over the last ten years because it allows the ethnographer to immerse in a particular subject, without being forced to collect a huge ethnographic material (Hannerz 2003).

The 'field', hence, has not only been the Badjao village and the people living there. My field is the career of the pearl, the pearl interaction, the pearl vending, which includes Badjao, tourists, coast guards and local people. The pearl is a window that helps us to understand the relationship between Badjao and the surrounding world. In the career of the pearl the stereotype of the noble savage is being visible and highlighted.

Hence, I have been studying how the pearl is transported through the world system. This approach helps me to get a wider understanding of Badjao's vending and it gives a fuller picture of the vending interaction and Badjao's relationship to the globalized world. In order to get a wider understanding of the commodity chain and the international commerce I have also read economic history studies and books about pearl commerce.

The commodity chain of the pearl goes from pearl farms in China, to Chinese wholesalers, to different Chinatowns around Asia, Europe and Northern America, where they are bought by the sea nomads Badjao (who transform them into their 'indigenous product'), and finally sold to European and Asian tourists searching for 'authenticity'.

Fieldwork in Practise: Interaction with Vendors, Tourists and Local People

In my ethnographic work I have focused on Badjao's interaction with tourists and local people within the pearl trade. I have followed Badjao when they have been buying, refining, packing and selling the pearls. I have also had informal interviews with vendors, tourists, holiday celebrators and coast guards in order

to get a wider understanding of the pearl vending. When I have been interacting with Badjao, I have spoken Sinama. Outside of the community, when I have been interacting with local Philippine citizens and tourists I have been speaking English.

More or less every morning at 5 AM, I left the village with different groups of pearl vendors in search for potential customers of the pearl. For example, we have been visiting beach resorts, super ferries, tourist boats, popular islands and recreational centers (figure 4).



Figure 4. Popular Vending Spots in Davao City

During these journeys I have paid a lot of attention on how Badjao are creating a culturally authentic sales atmosphere and how they try to sell the pearl as 'their' indigenous product (figure 5, next page).

It has been very important to establish intimacy between me and the pearl vendors. As an outsider living outside of the community it would have been very difficult to get a closer contact with the pearl vendors

and to get knowledge about their vending strategies. Therefore I have taken part as much as possible in their everyday life of Badjao (Guest 2005: 14-20).

In the beginning some Badjao vendors saw me as a potential customer and they did not want to reveal the origin of the pearl. They told me that the pearls were coming from isolated islands, local pearl farms or from friends in Zamboanga. But in the end of my first stay in the community in 2010 I finally got to know about the origin of the pearls, when one of the community leaders brought me in to Chinatown.

Chinatown is a part of the city where Chinese wholesalers are selling their products. The prices are in general lower than in other parts of the city and the area is usually very crowded. In Chinatown you can find plenty small boutiques of pearls and other accessories.

Some pearl vendors did also suggest me to establish pearl trade in Sweden using "*Badjao's water pearls*". The idea was that they would supply me with pearls and that I would be a salesman in Sweden. I declined their proposals but the example emphasizes the crucial role the observer has in not only observing but also in shaping information.



Figure 5. Badjao Vendors in Mergrande Ocean Resort

I have also interacted with the tourists in order to discover how they recognize the Badjao and what they believe about the pearl, the prize, the origin, etc. Of course, there have been no secret that I have been studying Badjao as I have arrived on their boats and been in contact with them on the beaches, hotels, etc. But it has not made it more difficult for me to have a discussion with tourists and holiday celebrators; it has rather been easier as they in general have been curious about me and the Badjao.

In the interaction with the tourists I have tried to create a spontaneous atmosphere where the interviewed persons shall feel comfortable enough to speak freely about his experiences. According to the Swedish psychologist Steinar Kvale this is a good approach for a researcher:

"It can be expressed like this: the more spontaneous the interview is, the more likely you are to get spontaneous, lively and unexpected answers from the interviewed person" (Kvale 2007:121, own translation).

I have also tried to make the interviews as informal and open as possible. Kvale states: *"The absence of on beforehand decided rules creates rich possibilities for the interviewer to develop his knowledge, insight and intuition"* (Kvale 2007:82, own translation).

Sometimes I have come in to potentially conflictual positions as some Badjao vendors have expected me to support them in the vending, while I have been interested in the tourists conceptions, not their money. Therefore, I have made sure to interact with the tourists after they have been talking to the Badjao and I have tried not to occupy the tourists too long.

I have also been forced not to tell the tourists about the origin of the pearls. When they asked me if I knew about the origin of the pearls I simply told them that I didn't know the answer. Of course, it would have been devastating for both the study and the Badjao vending if I would have told the potential consumers about the origin of the pearls. Indeed, the 'mystery of the pearls' is also a part of the trade situation, of the interaction between 'the noble savages' and 'the modern tourists' - even if the pearls are being sold in an insincere way.

I have also interacted with local people, as for example holiday celebrators, families, coast guards and beach restaurant owners, in order to get an idea about their conceptions about Badjao and the pearl vending. I have been interested in their attitudes towards the Badjao vendors. Do they also recognize Badjao as 'noble'? Do they know about the origin of the pearl? And what do they think about the Badjao vendors that enter the beaches day after day?

Consequently, the vending interaction between the Badjao and the tourists and the general public, which can have both idealizing and conflictual elements, which displays both the noble savage and feelings of dislike, has been the centre of my field study. Hence, by following the pearl I have been able to analyse Badjao's relationship to the surrounding world and understand how they can be successful in the pearl trade.

Ethical Considerations

The American Anthropological Association (AAA) has made an ethical guideline for social anthropologists. An anthropologist in field shall not harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of the people with whom they conduct research. And in order to follow this policy the anthropologist has to 1) explain the work and the purpose of the study 2) give the informants the possibility to cease their participation in any stage of the study 3) ask the informants if they want to be anonymous 4) tell about possible implications if they decide not to be anonymous and 5) present the work for the informants when it is finished (AAA Ethics 1998).

More or less everyone in the Badjao village knew that I was a researcher making a study about their livelihood and culture. In the beginning many people recognized me as a missionary (because all other Westerners living in the community have been missionaries) but as I improved my language skills I was able to inform them about my purpose of staying there. I have also informed all tourists, coast guards, etc. that I have been studying about Badjao's livelihood and their relationship to the modern society.

I have also told the informants about the essay and asked if they want to participate, which they have all agreed on. I have personally decided that all people shall be anonymous in the study as individual names are not important. What are important are the general ideas, conceptions and thinking of a larger number of people, among vendors, tourists and local people. I have been interested in what we can call the paradigm of the pearl. I have also shown drafts of the final version of the essay and I will bring copies when I return in 2012.

When it comes to the long-term livelihood of Badjao, there is one particular question that I have been forced to take into consideration. If I unmask Badjao's strategies of gaining wealth in the modern society, wouldn't this lead to a possible harm to their livelihood? Wouldn't this mean that tourists stop buying their pearls because they cultured Chinese products? And wouldn't this give the authorities a reason to assimilate them completely, because their 'exotic culture' is a play with stereotypes anyway?

This is a serious remark, which I have to deal with carefully. There is a risk, of course, that this essay might harm the pearl vending of Badjao, and that shall not be a consequence. Therefore I have decided not to publish this essay on Internet, as it would have made it easy for Philippine tourists and Philippine authorities to find information on the Badjao pearl vending on search engines. Instead, this essay is meant to be kept within a scientific and anthropological context, available for researchers who are focusing on indigenous peoples, identity, autonomy and Southeast Asia.

It is also important to keep in mind what this essay particularly emphasizes is not that indigenous people are aware of business strategies, but the necessity of land and self-dependence when it comes to the future of indigenous cultures. Without independence, no creativity.

4. Strategies for Maintaining Culture, Identity and Autonomy in Exiled Badjao

Badjao – an Introduction

In Southeast Asia there are three groups of people that have traditionally lived as sea nomads: Moken, Orang Laut and Sama-Bajau. However, they are not related to each other linguistically or ethnically and they have become nomads due to different reasons (Pallesen 1985, Blust 2005).

Sama-Bajau is the largest group and they are today spread over big parts of Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei. They live scattered over a vast maritime zone of 3.25 million square kilometers in extent (Sather 1997:2). For centuries, Sama-Bajau groups have been involved in fishing, pearl diving and trading. They are skilled harvesters of coral reefs and have traded fish and pearls for other crops, as fresh water, cotton, rice and cassava (Sather 1997).

It is estimated that there are between 750 000 and 900 000 speakers of Sama-Bajau in Southeast Asia (ibid.), but it is very difficult to make an accurate estimation and other researchers, like Kemp Pallesen, believes that they might be more than one million. They are divided in to more than 15 different groups of Sama who are spread over a huge area of Southeast Asia – but the highest concentration can be find in the south-western Philippines (Blust 2005). Some of the groups have been living on land for centuries (as for example Sama Malaysian and Yakan), while other still live on traditional house boats (Blust 2005). Some groups of Sama are well-educated and have high political positions, but a majority are living on stilt houses along the shorelines of Mindanao, Borneo and Sulawesi (Pallesen 1985, Blust 2005). Badjao, or Bajau Laut, is one of the largest Sama-Bajau groups and is the only group that partly is still living on boats (Blust 2005). According to Summer Institute of Linguistics International (SIL) there was approximately 90 000 speakers of Badjao's dialect Central Sinama in the Philippines in year 2000 (Ethnologue 2000). However, other groups are speaking the same language and many Badjao have also fled in to Malaysia. Another problem is that many Badjao tend to report that they speak "Bahasa sug" (or "Sulu language") which is taken to mean the "Tausug", rather than "Central Sinama", because of existing Tausug ethnic-superiority and chauvinism (Alamia 2005). Hence, it is very difficult to estimate the number of Badjao in Philippines and Malaysia today. It is clear, however, that only a few remain nomadic (Nimmo 2006).

Historically, all Sama-Bajau have been sea nomads. The earliest mention of maritime peoples identifiable as Sama goes back to the 16th century (Sather 1997). It is also known that they played a key role in the lucrative spice trade in which they transported spices from the "Spice islands" in Moluccas to the Straits of Malacca in the 16th and 17th century – which explains their huge geographical expansion (Blust 2005: 14-15). They were also employed as navigators and divers in the Sulu Sultanate, which was a Tausug

kingdom in the south-western part of Philippines for several centuries. Even if they played an important role in contributing to the welfare of the sultanate they had a low social and political status (Blust 2005).

The origin of Sama-Bajau is still a mystery. They are mostly spread and divided in the Sulu Sea of the Philippines, but their language is much more related with the Malaysian than the Philippine languages. Sama themselves believe that they come from the Straits of Malacca, but no linguistic and ethnical signs prove this (Blust 2005). The linguist Robert Blust suggests that Badjao originates from the south-eastern part of Borneo in the Barito River Basin (Blust 2005).

The Sama-Bajau group is recognized as one of the Muslim tribes of Southeast Asia. The Sulu Sea was influenced by Islam in the beginning of the 14th century when Arab traders arrived to the area. Today most Sama are Muslims, but many Badjao are still following animistic beliefs as their nomadic lifestyle has made it more or less impossible to be a practising Muslim (Blust 2005). Of this reason, Badjao have been despised and discriminated by other Muslim groups (Nimmo 2006). In southern Philippines there is a popular folklore which says that Magindanao look down on Tausug, that Tausug look down on Badjao, and that Badjao look down on the fish.

In fact, Badjao's connection to the sea is also more than physical: they have a marine cosmology based on belief in, and causal relationship with, the spirits who inhabit the sea (Stacey 2007: 32-34).

Diaspora – the Escape from the Sulu Sea

As mentioned before, the Sulu Sea in the southern parts of the Philippines is the centre region for the Philippine Sama-Bajau groups, where they are in majority. But since the invasion of the Spanish conquerors (1600s -1900s) and the Americans (1900-1950) the region has been extremely troubled and other Muslim tribes (including some Sama tribes) have fought against the colonial powers. Some parts of the region, for example the island of Jolo, were never fully controlled by any colonial power (Nimmo 2006).

In Mindanao and in the Sulu Sea there are still active Islamist separatist groups fighting for an independent Islamic Province in Mindanao. One of these groups is the infamous terrorist listed group Abu Sayyaf which has carried out several assassinations and kidnappings throughout Mindanao and the Sulu Sea. They are fighting against the Armed Forces of Philippines and raise money through kidnapping and piracy (Alamia 2005, Kerry Lynn Nankivell/James Boutilier 2007: 116-125).

There are also intense conflicts between different tribes and clans in the region. For example, we can mention the Maguindanao massacre in Mindanao in November 2009 when 58 people (including 34 journalists) were killed in a caravan attack. The victims were on their way to file a certificate of a political candidate when they were kidnapped and brutally killed (Jimenez-Gutierrez 2010). The rebel group who

carried out the massacre belonged to a powerful family clan claiming royal ancestry and have been struggling for power in Maguindanao for centuries. The Maguindanao Massacre is the largest massacre of journalists ever and the killings got huge attention around the world (Jimenez-Gutierrez 2010).

Badjao and most other Sama groups have not participated in these conflicts, but they have suffered from them (Pallesen 1985, Nimmo 2006). The last decades they have been victims of piracy and open violence and the discrimination from other groups has been intensified (Nimmo 2006). With no overall security Badjao have been easy targets for well-armed rebel groups, hostile neighbours and insurgent groups that use piracy as a kind of fund-raising. For a long time Badjao have been displaced by more dominant Muslim tribes as Tausug, Maranao and Maguindanao (Pallesen 1985, Nimmo 2006). There are even rumours of pirates throwing fish bombs in to Badjao's houseboats.

One important reason to the conflicts in the southern Philippines is the migration policy of the Philippine government. Over the last 50 years millions of Philippine citizens from the northern and central parts of the Philippines (Luzon and Visayas) have been encouraged to settle in the south, due to over-population (Nimmo 2006). The migration waves have led to great tensions between immigrants and native Muslim tribes, as well as to a decline of natural resources (Nimmo 2006).

Due to the conflicts, as well as over-population, racism and declined fish levels, thousands of Badjao have spread over big parts of the Philippines and to Malaysia and Brunei (Blust 2005). Today you can find Badjao in coastal pockets of Mindanao as well as in urban areas of Manila, Cebu, Tagbilaran and Iloilo. Badjao are living as refugees in their own country but most exiled Badjao continue to build their houses on stilts, they speak their own language and they try to make a living from the sea. In most places where they have settled, they have been forced to learn a new language and to find alternative sources of income as fishing is not enough.

The Badjao is said to be one of the most marginalized indigenous groups in the Philippines. The anthropologist Clifford Sather has stated that *"the Badjao, as a sea people, have tended to be marginalized, excluded from positions of power, despised, and confined to the lowest rungs of the social ladder"* (Sather in Bottignolo 1995: 23).

The Badjao Community in Matina Aplaya

This study has been conducted in Davao City, which is located in the Gulf of Davao in the southern part of Mindanao. It is a modern city with more than one million inhabitants – and a majority of them are immigrants from central and northern parts of the Philippines (Ullman 2008).

Badjao have been living in Davao City for more than 50 years, when they arrived on their houseboats originating from Zamboanga in western Mindanao, and they have established four larger communities (figure 6):

- *Isla Verde* is in the heart of the city and close to the harbour. This community is shared with other indigenous Muslim tribes and inhabits more than 2 000 Badjao. This community was established in the 1960's.
- *Boulevard* is placed at the mouth of the large Davao River. This community was established a few years ago and inhabits approximately 150 Badjao.
- *Matina Aplaya* is placed in the outskirts of the city. This community was established in the beginning of the 1990's and inhabits more than 300 people.
- *Sta. Cruz* is placed south of the city, and inhabits approximately 600 people. This community was established 50 years ago and is the most rural Badjao community in the area.



Figure 6. Badjao communities in the Davao Gulf

Totally there are more than 3 000 Badjao living in the Gulf of Davao but the number increases every years as new refugees arrive from Zamboanga. There are also other Sama groups in the city who have escaped from the Sulu Sea, for example Sama Siasi, but unlike Badjao they have not till recently been living on boats.

The Badjao community in Matina Aplaya was established for approximately 20 years ago, when a small piece of coastal land was donated by a local church. In the beginning only a few families were settled in

the village but as more immigrants arrived from Zamboanga and from other Davao communities the village has grown. In Matina Aplaya, Badjao used to live on a sandbar on the seashore and they were surrounded by healthy coral reefs, but due to rising water levels, over-population and decreased levels of fish, they are today living door to door with the larger Davao population and they have become an urban entity, with limited access to natural resources. *"Before it used to be a lot of fish here"*, one of the community leaders said, *"But today we have to find other coral reefs. It is too crowded here."*

Still today, after decades of co-existence with the majority population of Davao City, there is a great distinction between Badjao and their neighbours, when it comes to settlements, clothes, language, traditions and livelihood. In fact, Badjao can hardly find a job and they are seen as dirty, noisy and uncivilized. Until recently they were not even allowed to enter restaurants and shopping malls. *"I am still not going to the mall"*, one older Badjao man said, *"if I went there they would stare at me and probably ask me to leave"*. However, it is also important to stress that Badjao themselves are reluctant to interact with their neighbours. *"I am Sama, so of course I have to speak Sinama"*, one man explained. The ethnical positions are fixed.

Demographics

In the Badjao community of Matina Aplaya there are approximately 300 inhabitants, living in stilt houses (figure 7, next page). The number of inhabitants is increasing every year as new settlers arrive from Zamboanga, but reverse migration do also exist. Of these 300 people only four persons have been in high school (two have graduated) and more than 60% of the population is under 20 years old.

The family is the stronghold of the Badjao's economy. All family members will work together to make an income and run the household. In general, women are responsible for cooking, washing and taking care of the small children, while the men are supposed to provide for the families living. But it is also common that women have their own businesses, typically in clothes and food products, and men are also cooking and taking care of children.

Most Badjao men get married when they are between 16 and 19 years of age and most girls get married when they are between 14 and 16 years old. The marriages are family arrangements made by the parents and other relatives of the wedding couple, but couples are rarely forced to marry against their will (Pallesen 1970: 123-142). They get married either to a person living in Matina Aplaya, or in other Badjao villages in Davao City or even in other cities. It is uncommon that Badjao marry a non-Badjao but when it happens it is very likely that the couple will settle in the Badjao village, and their children will learn both Cebuano and Sinama.

Schooling

In Philippines schooling is not obligatory, but encouraged. In the Badjao community in Matina Aplaya less than 5 % of the children go to school, most of them girls, and they are in general several years older than their classmates. Many parents distrust the school because they think that the school intend to change the culture and the identity of the children. Schooling is also difficult for Badjao children because education is only given in Cebuano and Tagalog. Another problem is that there is little time for schooling as older children have to provide for their families income or work in the household. Some of the children who go to school have also reported that they are being teased by their classmates because they are Badjao. Most of the children who go to school have one parent who is non-Badjao. It is very uncommon that a child with two Badjao parents goes to school.



Figure 7. A Typical Badjao House in Matina Aplaya

Religion

In the village of Matina Aplaya approximately 50% are Christian and 50% follow their traditional animistic believes. In Davao City there are a lot of Christian churches and missionaries and they have focused on Badjao and other non-Muslim tribes in their mission. *"In the beginning we stayed in the Badjao village in two years and they did not recognize our mission, but then one of the leaders approached us and listened to us"*, one former missionary told about his mission. *"It was very difficult, but finally more and*

more Badjao were baptized". However, in other Badjao villages in the Gulf of Davao as well as in other parts of the Philippines, the percentage of Christian Badjao is very high. *"This is to a large part because the community was begun by a Christian church"*, one of the missionaries told me.

Today a handful Badjao men in Davao City are pastors and they normally get a good support from missionaries and churches. *"For some pastors it is only about business"*, one Badjao leader said. But many pastors must do additional work to meet their needs; their pastoral incomes are not sufficient to support their families. Many of them are in fact dedicated to serving their congregations.

In Matina Aplaya, the missionaries finally left because they recognised that the gap between the Christians and the non-Christians grew bigger and bigger *"We stayed in Matina Aplaya for ten years and more and more people converted into Christianity"*, the former missionary said. *"But finally we decided to leave as the Christians got more power than the non-Christians"*. In general, the Christian Badjao' get a higher status in the Philippine society than the non-Christian.

However, it also seems that many of the Christians in Matina Aplaya have preserved parts of their animistic believes. *"Sometimes, when a family member gets sick, some Badjao go back to their traditional religion"*, one Badjao man said. *"They think it is important to appease the spirits"*. In general, syncretism is common among all Sama groups, not only the Badjao (Stacey 2007). Many Badjao in Muslim areas claim to be Muslims, but it often amounts to a very thin veneer of Islam covering their traditional animistic beliefs (Stacey 2007). The same is often true of Christians; their Christianity is a thin covering, and their underlying animism remains untouched.

Livelihood

In the Badjao community in Matina Aplaya there are three main sources of livelihood: fishing, vending of clothes and pearl vending.

The traditional livelihood for Badjao is fishing and they catch the fish with spears, harpoons, net and hooks. Today approximately 25 % of the male population get their main income from fishing, but the fishing is getting more and more difficult due to decreasing numbers of fish. Big fishing boats from northern Philippines and Taiwan get most of the fish on deep water, sparing little for Badjao and the coastal reefs. Most fishermen prefer spear-fishing but it depends on the weather conditions. *"When the weather is good we go spear fishing, otherwise we use the net or hook"*, one fisherman explained. Today most young men has abandoned the fishing and started to sell pearls.

Another source of income is vending of second-hand clothes, which almost exclusively is done by women. They go to the market in early morning where they buy and sell clothes. In the afternoon they repair the clothes and go vending in their neighbourhood. They can make a profit of 5-15 pesos per each piece of

clothing. Some of the clothes come originally from Western aid organizations and can be bought for a low price in the city market.

Some children are also making an income from recycling. They walk along the seashore and on nearby streets in search of plastic bottles, metal, electrical waste, etc. which they can sell to a local recycle station. One child can make between 5 and 10 pesos a day.

During Christmas many Badjao are also making an income from playing music on the beaches and in the streets, and from begging. In Davao City it is a tradition for neighbouring mountain tribes to visit the city centre for begging, playing music and dancing during Christmas. Badjao do also take their share of the generosity and most children and women use to spend the last weeks of the year on beaches or in the city centre asking for money and food. In the peak season one child can make more than 100 pesos a day.

The most important and lucrative source of income, though, is the pearl vending, which is performed by approximately 75% of the male population. (In the other Badjao communities in Davao City the percentage may be even higher). They buy the pearls on strings in Chinatown (cultured pearls from China) and make their own pearl jewelry by using fishing wire and copper locks. In the morning they take their boats looking for tourists, holiday celebrators and other potential customers trying to sell their 'indigenous' product.

From now, the pearl will be in the centre of our attention in this essay.

The White Pearl – History and Vending

For centuries natural pearls have been considered as one of the most valuable jewels in the world. The Latin word for pearl literally means 'unique' and this is one of the reasons behind its popularity – pearls indicate exclusivity and authenticity. The pearl has also been considered a perfect wedding gift as it symbolizes purity and innocence (Ward 2000).

The pearl has been an important part of Badjao's culture and identity for a long time. Only a few decades ago many Badjao men were professional pearl divers and they could earn a lot of money by finding big, natural pearls. One of the community leaders of Matina Aplaya told me that his *"grandfather once found a pearl which he sold for a big amount of money to a Chinese trader"*. It is still common that grandmothers give pearl jewelry to their oldest granddaughter, and some jewelry have been inherited for generations. *"There are still natural pearls in this village"*, one of the community leader's wife told me.

Large-scale fishing, dynamite fishing and coral reef bleaching have, though, resulted in a decline of natural pearls and today it is very rare to find pearls in the wild. Today you are more likely to find natural pearls on existing jewelry in ship wrecks than in molluscs (Ward 2000).

In the beginning of the 20th century two Japanese scientists called Mise and Nishikawa discovered a technique how to stimulate pearl production in molluscs (Ward 2000). Like natural pearls, cultured pearls grow inside of a mollusk, but with human intervention. A shell is carefully opened and an object is inserted. Mise and Nishikawa took patent on their discovery in 1908 and since then the technique has become more and more sophisticated. Today it is possible to produce more than ten pearls in one mollusc and it is possible to control the size and the form of the pearl (Ward 2000).

There are two kinds of cultured pearls, fresh water and salt-water pearls, and the salt water pearls tend to be bigger and more expensive (Pearl Guide 2011). Each pearl begins its existence when a piece of grit or other particle makes its way into the shell of a marine or freshwater mollusk, for example oysters and clams. A defense mechanism kicks-in and coats the particle with layer after layer of a substance called nacre, which eventually forms a pearl (Ward 2000).

The discovery of how to culture pearls revolutionized the pearl market. Of course many people around the world dismissed the cultured pearls, but many designers took the possibility to make new styles of jewelry (Ward 2000). Today the cultured pearls are making up more than 99% of the market; they have different sizes and shapes and different prizes (Pearl Guide 2011).

The pearl production is more or less limited to China, where approximately 96% of all pearls are being produced. Japan is also an active producer but they are focusing on high quality pearls (Pearl Guide 2011). There are pearl farms also in other countries but most of them have been transformed in to tourist sites (Pearl Guide 2011). One example is The Pearl Farm Resort on Samal Island across from Davao. It was an active pearl farm prior to World War II.

China's first large cultured pearl farm was built in Hepu in 1958. Located in the Guangxi Province in southern China it is a place ideal for pearl culturing (Ward 2000). The pearl production is very labor intensive – employees will manually put sand corns into the mollusks, feed the mollusks (wait for two years or more), open the mollusks, organize the pearls after size, shape and colour and finally string them (Ward 2000).

When the pearls are packed they will be sent to Chinese wholesalers and distributed around the world. Most European and American accessory shops are buying pearls directly from China, but the price might

increase times four or times five till it finally is being sold to the customer. Actually, only the pearl strings in Europe and in the United States tend to be more expensive than Badjao's jewelry.

It is no coincidence that China is leading the pearl production. First, they have a long coastline ideal for pearl production. Second, they have the technological knowledge that other countries in the region lack. Third, they have access to cheap labour and can therefore easily compete with Japan and United States. (Pearl Guide 2011)

Chinese wholesalers are also controlling the international trade. Many pearls find their way into Chinatowns around the world, where they in general are much cheaper than in other accessory shops. In Chinatown you can find plenty small boutiques of pearls and other accessories (Pearl Guide 2011).

Hence, the commodity chain of the pearl takes form. It goes from pearl farms in China, to Chinese wholesalers, to different Chinatowns around Asia, Europe and Northern America, where they are bought by the sea nomads Badjao (who transform them into their 'indigenous product'), and finally sold to European and Asian tourists searching for 'authenticity'.

For Badjao in Davao City, the cultured pearls have proved to be an important income. The present type of pearl vending (with cultured fresh water pearls originating from China) is approximately 15 years old in Davao City. During the first years they bought the cultured pearls from friends in Zamboanga city, but in the beginning of the 21st century Chinese traders' established pearl accessory shops in Chinatown in Davao City, which created an explosion of pearl vending.

The pearl originates from the labour of the poor, it walks through the world system, are being bought by the stigmatized sea nomads Badjao, and ends as an indigenous product in the hand of tourists. It is a chain driven by tourists urge to find the genuine product – The White Pearl.

The result is fascinating: The chain makes it possible for a majority of an urban minority of 'sea gypsies' to make a living from mass-produced cultured pearls.

Pearl Vending in Davao City

The Badjao vendors are using fishing wire and copper locks to make their own jewelry, which they buy on strings. The jewelry has a big variation in style and labour; some jewelry is being made in a couple of

minutes while other is carefully made in a unique style. The jewelry is being made both by men and women, but is sold exclusively by men.

Badjao are almost exclusively selling fresh-water pearls. However, most men will have a few salt-water ("South Sea") pearls hidden at the bottom of their pearl boxes for special customers. They rarely sell any because most tourists don't have enough money in their pockets while on the beach, but perhaps once or twice a year they will sell a salt-water pearl - and it's considered a big windfall.

Badjao are using their boats in order to find potential customers. *"We go to the beach because the pearl belongs to the sea – here we can find our customer"*, one pearl vendor said. Early in the morning, around 5 AM, they leave the community heading towards beach resorts, super ferries, tourist boats, recreational centres and popular islands. *"The boats give us freedom"*, one vendor said, *"using the boat we can reach places that we otherwise cannot reach"*.

When they see potential customers they will display the pearls still sitting on the boat and if they get a positive reaction they will go ashore. If they are vending below a ferry they will use a rope to haul up the pearls.

When vending Badjao are bringing shells, plastic pearls and lighters in order to show the authenticity of the pearls. *"Many tourists think that we are selling fake products, but we can use fire and show plastic pearls to prove they are not"*, one of the vendors said. They use to scrape the pearls against their teeth to prove that they are not made of plastic or glass; it is an organic product.

The pearl vendors do also bring their children, mostly boys, when vending. The children use to stay on the boat while their fathers, older brothers, brothers-in-law or uncles enter the beach for vending. But it also common that the children go vending on their own using their father's jewelry and some of the teenagers do also have their own pearls. *"When there are white people on the shore I use to give my pearls to my son"*, one of the vendor said, *"it is easier for him than for me"*.

In the Magsaysay Park or Sasa Ferry Terminal it is also common that Badjao children dive for coins while passengers on ferries throw coins to them (figure 8). *"I use to enter the ship for vending while my son stays in the water"*, one of the informants explained. *"A child can earn more 30 pesos in two hours of diving"*.



Figure 8. Diving Badjao Children in Davao City

The best period for vending is in December during Christmas and during the summer months of March-May, when many people are free from work and school. *"In Christmas many Badjao are happy",* one informant said, *"because people buy pearls and they give us food on the beach".* *"However, it is difficult to be a pearl vendor in August and September",* one man said, *"because then there are big waves and few people on the beaches".*

It is also very common that Badjao take passengers on their homemade boats. Local people tend to not appreciate the pearls, but many of them love the boats. *"If you have a big boat you can earn more than 1000 pesos during a busy day",* one informant told me.

"I love the boat", one visitor from Manila said, *"I can't swim, but I have never been on such a small boat before".*

During some months of the year some Badjao vendors are also travelling to other cities of Mindanao or they even go to other islands for vending. *"If there are no Badjao and no Chinatown, we can make good business",* one of the pearl vendor said. *"I use to go to Pantukan City on the other side of the gulf when there are no people here in Davao",* one man said, *"because people do not dislike us over there".* On those vending journeys the Badjao men use to stay in cheap apartments and prepare their own food, but they can also stay in temporarily shelters in the streets. On these occasions they are not using their boats, but they are walking around the beaches and hotel resorts. The vendors can stay away for one

month or more, just like the fishermen used to do. *"When we come back we use to buy a big fish in the market and celebrate with our family"*, one of the informants said.

Badjao are also vending in their own village when they are having guests. Almost every week they are being visited by student groups, missionaries and non-governmental organizations, and many pearl vendors will offer their pearls when the formal meeting is over. Sometimes they are successful but they do also evoke irritation among the visitors. *"Many people that visit us love us and the village"*, one of the pearl vendors said. *"But sometimes they get irritated and leave."* He also said: *"There is no idea to try to vend in the neighbourhood, because people there don't like us and they have little money"*.

In the center of Davao, one Badjao pearl vendor from Isla Verde has even been able to establish a pearl shop in the high class Insular Hotel. His shop is called 'Sulu Pearls' and he is has an exclusive right to sell pearls in the hotel.

Some pearl vendors with a Christian belief, including pastors, are also selling pearls in the seminars which they use to attend, either in Davao City, Cebu or Manila. *"It is my work to sell pearls"*, one informant explained. However, this practise evokes anger among other people in the community, as well as in the seminar. *"When the seminar had finished he built himself a new house"*, one of the older men in the Badjao community said, *"I don't like it"*.

When Badjao are vending they usually go in family groups. The groups consist of sons, fathers, uncles and brother-in-laws, who corporate in the vending. If all persons in the group have been able to sell pearls they will keep the profit individually, otherwise they will share the money within the group so that all families will get enough to eat. *"It is good to vend with family members, because we will cooperate and we will not fight"*, one young man said. *"If I would go with my friends it would have been more difficult"*.

Different 'groups' of pearl vendors do also have different locations, different 'territories' where they are vending. For example, some groups do everyday go to the Recreational centre in Mergrande Ocean Resort while others go to Times Beach and some go to Sasa Ferry Terminal. *"We have not agreed in any way, but this is how we do. We have our favourite spots and it would seem very strange if I one day go the harbour instead of to Times Beach"*, one informant said. Some of the pearl vendors have specialized on foreign ships and have even learned some Russian and Japanese during the trade.

When vending Badjao do also follow an informal code of behaviour. For example you shall not interrupt a vendor in his interaction with the customer – unless you have a different product that might be of interest for the customer. But there is also competition among the vendors, and they try to leave the

village as early as possible in the morning to be the first who encounter the customers. There is also a lot of jealousy and suspicion among the pearl vendors. For example, one day when a Badjao vendor took a lot of passengers on his new-built boat, another vendor asked me if there was a text on the boat which advertised the boat trips. Indeed, there were no such sign but the fact that the man was more successful in taking passengers than the others, made the other men to feel both jealous and suspicious.

In general, conflicts are very rare among the pearl vendors. *"We very seldom gets angry on each other"*, one pearl vendor said. *"It is more likely that women will take the fight"*. During my stay in the community I have seen two conflicts among women, one physical, both related to pearl vending. I haven't witnessed any fight among men.

The Badjao vendors have agreed upon minimum prices. A typical set of pearls (a necklace, a bracelet and a pair of earrings) shouldn't be sold for less than 500 pesos, and small bracelets bought from Chinatown shouldn't cost less than 20 pesos.

Trade is also very common during the vending. For example the vendors can exchange pearls for mobile phones, old fashioned cameras, plastic bottles, clothes and food.

If they manage to make a profit almost all of the money will be invested in a new stock of pearls. *"It only costs ten pesos to go to Chinatown"*, one vendor said. *"If I sell pearls I will always go there, because if I have no stock I will have a serious problem"*.

The Customer and the 'Noble Savage'

"The price depends on the customer", one informant said. *"I have to listen carefully. If the customer is interested, I will give a higher price. If he is not very interested, I will offer a lower price"*.

One day I followed a Badjao family fishing and vending on Talikud Island across of Davao City. After some hours of fishing we settled on a nearby beach where we cooked and ate our newly caught fish. In the same time a group of tourists were walking on the beach and one older man said: *"you have a beautiful life"*. After eating two younger men in the family took their boxes of pearls and went after the group...

These people can be said to be ideal customers for the Badjao. *"Some people get really excited when they meet us"*, one pearl vendor explained. *"They try to talk to us and ask us questions, but we don't know English. However, they will get a remembrance – the pearl"*.

The Badjao vendors have clear ideas of what kind of people who they should look for when vending. *"We want to find people who are interested in pearls and who are interested in us – and you can see it in their eyes"*, one informant said. *"Local people they do not like us, but foreigners like you"*, the informant pointed at me, *"they love us!"*. White people attract a certain attention among the Badjao vendors, as they are seen as the best consumers. *"We always try to get in contact with white people"*, one informant said, *"but unfortunately we don't meet them so often."* White people are called for 'Melikan' (from: American) - no matter nationality.

For Badjao it is also important to find customers who don't know about the origin of the pearl. *"There is no idea to try to sell to local people; they have no money and they do probably know that the pearls come from Chinatown"*, one informant explained. *"But tourists and people from Manila, Cebu and Iloilo they don't know about the origin of the pearl, so they are good customers"*, the informant explained.

When it comes to men contra women there is no question that women are much better customers than men. *"If there are women on the beach, all of us will try to sell to them, because they like pearls"*, one of the informants said.

Many tourists confirm that they are attracted of Badjao. *"You get interested when you see the boats coming, when you see the fishing equipment and the bleached hair children"*, one female tourist said. *"They look so special, so different"*

"These men have natural, well-trained bodies", one man said. *"They would be models in the Western world, don't you think so?"*. Later, when one of the Badjao men lighted a cigarette, he said. *"Is he smoking! I can't believe that!"*

"I have read a little about the sea gypsies", a tourist from Czech Republic said, *"they used to be boat nomads, right?"*

"I really get happy when I see people like them. They have a simple lifestyle, they eat natural food and they know how to survive from the nature", one tourist said. *"There are still people untouched by civilisation!"*

"Is that the spear-gun?", one man said when he saw the fishing spear. *"Are they really catching fish with this one? It looks so old and exotic. Please, ask them if I can try it!"*

The pearls are also of great interest among many of the tourists. *"The pearls are really simple and beautiful"*, one woman said. *"Not many people in Germany have pearls"*, she said.

When we were vending below super ferries a lot of people gathered on the bulwarks to watch Badjao (and me). Several of them thrown coins or food, others grabbed their cameras and some hauled up the pearl boxes watching the exotic pearls with interest and eventually bought some. On the Internet there are many uploaded videos made from super ferries displaying Badjao when they are vending and begging on their home made boats. Most of these videos depict Badjao as a wonderful, peaceful and trustful people (World News 2011).

For many of the customers the vending is not only about buying a genuine product, it is also about making good business. The concept of many consumers of the pearl is that pearls are precious and rare, and they think that Badjao have some kind of 'privileged' access to pearls. "*Badjao are pearl divers, right?*", one informant said. "*They are people of the sea and they are having pearls, it is natural!*" Many tourists also think that pearls are very expensive in their own countries and that they by buying from Badjao don't need to go through a chain of middlemen. And this is actually true: in western countries the cultured pearls will be much more expensive.

The Badjao boats are also a big source of fascination among many tourists. One American tourist said that "*this is the most fascinating boats I have ever seen, and it is impressive that they are exclusively made by a hammer and a saw*". Also the Badjao village in Matina Aplaya in considered as a fascinating place. "*It is one of the most energetic villages I have ever seen*", one British visitor said, "*the children are full of life and the houses are beautiful. I would like to stay here for a while*".

Here we can see that Badjao successfully adapt to the stereotype of the noble savage – which romanticizes the uncivilised man, who has the goodness and innocence of one not being exposed to the corrupting influences of civilization. He is close to nature, have a good health, and act in a spontaneous, free way. Badjao give the tourists exactly what they want: beautiful pearls, exotic boats, fascinating fishing equipment, swimming children and a feeling that you see something genuine, something very old and traditional. They are selling a cultural experience, the idea of the authentic. They appear to reflect the human beings as they were before civilization, before advertisement and before mass-production.

The tourists believe that they are buying an 'authentic commodity' and they get what Charles Lindholm calls a 'backstage experience' (Lindholm 2008: 43) – they meet with unique people and get a authentic commodity. It is in this context that the success of Badjao's vending can be understood – they are seen as noble savages who sell an authentic commodity.

But is this true? Are Badjao noble savages, untouched of civilisation and un-corrupted? Of course the answer is no. The stereotype of the noble savage creates a play-field in which the Badjao vendors can act

and use their creativity: Badjao are buying cultured pearls in Chinatown, they transfer them into their 'indigenous' product and sell them to tourists on homemade boats. They are selling a cultural experience, the idea of the authentic.

This is what Michael Herzfeld calls 'social poetics' – Badjao embrace the stereotype of the noble savage, they play with it and they shape themselves after it. Indeed, Badjao are selling pearls because it works, not because they are having a pearl fetish. If there would be no pearl consumers, there would be no old-fashioned boats on the beaches, no visible spear-guns and no indigenous jewelry. The same thing can be said about the diving Badjao children in Magsaysay park. They dive for hours and meet the expectations of authenticity-seeking tourists, but if there would be no desire to watch the children, they would not be diving like savages for hours. In fact, Badjao are playing with the stereotype of the noble savage and they exaggerate their cultural characteristics in order to adjust to it. In other words: the genuine aspects of their culture are exaggerated and "performed" for the benefit of customers.

In short, Badjao embrace the stereotype of the noble savage and shape them after it. They search deliberately for tourists and the nobler they are, the more successful they will be.

But the the Badjaos' appeal to the tourists does also have a limit. For example, if the Badjao vendors become too intrusive or if they break the solitude of the tourists, they might be seen as disturbing elements and therefore be refused. *"Let me walk"*, one tourist said when he was encountered by pearl vendors on Talikud Island. Indeed, for some tourists Badjao are eyesores who destroy their feeling of seclusion. Some of them have spent a lot of money to get isolation on a faraway island and they do not expect to meet Badjao. *"It is impossible to hide from them"*, one man on Talikud Island said, *"I have stayed here in one week but they come every day"*.

The Badjao vendors are also seen as intrusive. *"He asked me over and over again if I wanted to buy pearls, but I didn't want to"*, one man said. In general most Badjao do not seem to care about a refusal and they do not let it affect them in a negative way. *"I keep trying"*, one vendor said. When asked how it feels to be rejected he answered that *"it is okay, because I do not take it personally. But I know when I have to stop, otherwise the tourist will be frustrated and angry."*

Consequently, Badjao do always have to be careful, because the line between being trustful and manipulative, noble and dirty is very fine.

Potential Conflicts with the Local Community and the State

One day I was following a group of vendors to Magsaysay Park in Davao City. We were sitting next to a statue close to the entrance of the park, when I heard a voice: *"Look, the Amerikano is sitting with the 'Bad-jao'"* (In Tagalog and Cebuano all white people are called 'Amerikano' regardless of nationality.)

Badjao are facing a lot of discrimination in the Philippine community. *"Can you really live in their community?"; "Don't you get sick?"; "Can you eat cassava?"; "Where do you wash up?".* These are some examples of reactions I have met among Philippine citizens during my fieldwork. Badjao are generally seen as lazy, uncivilized and dirty. *"They have strong and healthy bodies";* one woman said, *"but still they don't work, they are so lazy!"*

"They have money but still they don't send their children to school"; another person said, *"It is very difficult for me to understand".*

Many local people are also critical towards Badjao's pearl vending. *"It is a shame that they are selling pearls";* one person said. *"They are fooling tourists and they are not doing a real work. That is not good".* Many locals know that the pearls are coming from Chinatown and they get irritated when Badjao come to the beaches day after day. *"Always when I come here with the family I meet Badjao";* one man said. *"They keep asking but we don't want to buy their pearls".*

Many of the beach restaurant owners are also angry with the Badjao vendors. *"They are intrusive and disturb the visitors";* one restaurant owner in Mergrande said. *"Me and other restaurant owners are planning to pay a security guard to keep them away – this is private ground".*

In Davao City there are also another Sama, group, called Sama Siasi. They speak a similar dialect as Badjao and they do also originate from the Sulu Sea, but they do not traditionally live on boats." In this group a large percentage of the children are in school and many adults are having full-time jobs. No one in the Sama Siasi community is selling pearls. *"We don't want to be a part of that stereotype";* one person explained when I visited their community. *"We have normal job and we fish, but unlike Badjao we are not selling pearls and we are not begging. We don't like it".*

In some places of Davao City Badjao vendors are facing physical restrictions when vending, in kind of guards. For example, in Sasa Ferry Terminal and some hotel resorts there are armed guards who prevent Badjao from entering the shore. I have even seen guards pointing with their firearms against the Badjao vendors who are being chased away. Some vendors have also been imprisoned for a few days. *"The Badjao are disturbing the boat traffic and the passengers";* one coast guard explained in the Sasa Ferry Terminal. *"And we can't have Badjao children diving under big ferries, it's unacceptable and dangerous".*

Here we can see that Badjao are facing different kinds of stereotypes in Davao City. They are not only seen as noble savages, which is a Western concept; they are also seen as dirty, uncivilized, manipulative, non-cooperative and lazy.

In fact, people in general think that Badjao should be assimilated and forced to have a modern life; they cannot walk barefoot in the streets or live on stilt houses, because Davao City is a modern city with shopping malls and a modern population. "*Philippines is a growing and modern economy*"; one official civil servant told me when we talked about Badjao, "*it is a shame for our city to have their dirty villages in town*". In short: the authorities and the local neighbours in the Davao City recognize Badjao as 'dirty savages'.

In Philippines the government has largely ignored Badjao, even if they have been facing difficulties for decades (Alamia 2005). In 2005 a massacre of eight non-Muslim Badjao fishermen were carried out by the dominant majority of non-Sama Muslims in the Tawi-Tawi region of the Sulu Sea. The only survivor was a nine year old boy – but the government did not respond (Alamia 2005). Many exiled Badjao have got little or no support from the government and they have often been forced to leave their stilt villages (Alamia 2005).

The fishing rights of the Badjao have, to date, not yet been specifically and officially recognized or protected under any enabling law involving minorities or indigenous peoples. The Philippine government has not yet signed the ILO 169 convention, which is the only international law that give rights to indigenous people. However, they have signed their own law – The Indigenous People's Rights Act, IPRA (GLIN 2011), which is aimed to protect indigenous people and their rights (Alamia 2005). But in practise, the law plays a very limited role and is often ignored. Indigenous people all over Philippines have been moved from their native areas due to national financial interests. They have also been forced to learn new languages if entering the education system: all public education is given either in Tagalog and English or possibly in Bisaya, never in local native languages.

Badjao are recognized as dirty and uncivilized and they are largely ignored. Alami, an attorney and representative for the organization 'Lumah ma Dilaut Centre for Living Traditions' (lumah ma dilaut means "house on the sea"), does even talks about a "statistical genocide", as Badjao are completely forgotten in the statistics made by the Philippine government (Alamia 2005). They are seen as backward and alien to modernity (Alamia 2005).

We can see, hence, that Badjao manage to meet the criteria for both the noble and the dirty savage. In fact, many locals as well as national media and the government, recognize Badjao as a disturbing element in the urban environment and they recognise them as manipulative. What authenticity-seeking tourist see as a 'true' experience or a 'real' thing becomes in the eyes of coast guards and locals an eyesore and a sign of messiness and untruthful bargain. The tourists and visitors from Manila might watch the diving Badjao children with fascination, but the guards and locals will consider them as dirty and noisy.

The Badjao village does also reflect both the stereotype of the noble and the dirty savage. For the locals and the government the village is seen as a dirty, noisy place with sanitation problems. But for tourists it might be seen as a cultural artefact with fascinating houses and colourful people. Hence, the village can both be seen as an excluded village of poor fishermen as well as a factory of high cultural capital which is able to communicate with people on the other side of the globe.

The conceptions of the local people are – as well as the concept of the tourists - flexible. In fact, Badjao have managed to get access to some establishments which they would legally not enter. One example is the Davao Fish Port Complex where Badjao have established friendship with the guards and the local officials and therefore can sell pearls for fishermen from all over the world. *“Cebuanos love when we are taking part in local competitions (as for example boat racing and swimming and volleyball tournaments)”;* one Badjao vendor explained, *“that is why we can sell pearls in the fish port - we have many friends there”*. Indeed, in the minds of some people they changed from being evil to noble.

Also the local authorities in Davao City will recognize Badjao in different ways, depending on the situation. Most of the year, Badjao are seen as disturbing elements in the urban environment – they are begging, they interrupt the traffic, they ask for health care, etc. - but on some occasions they are praised and appreciated. One example is the annual Kadayawan cultural festival where Davao's 'indigenous tribes' perform their music and dances for cultural demonstrations and celebrations. The festival is very tourist-focused and requires a close co-operation between the indigenous peoples and the authorities. In this case Badjao get noble also in the eyes of the authorities.

Chinatown – the Pearl Port

The pearl is Badjao's main source of income but it is also their secret. When asked about the source of the pearls they will most likely answer *“Badjao diving”, “isolated island” or “friends in Zamboanga”*. They will never answer Chinatown. *“Many tourists ask about the origin of the pearl, but we won't tell them”,* one Badjao vendor explained. *“This is our pearls”*.

Many tourists doubt Badjao's stories about the pearls, but due to Badjao's limited knowledge in English it is very unlikely that a deeper discussion will take place. The tourists do also get confused when Badjao manage to prove the legitimacy of the pearls by showing real shells and by directing a flame towards the pearls. *“They seem to be real but I can't really understand where they are coming from!”*, one tourist said. *“They can't be real, or can they?”*.

Badjao are reluctant to tell anyone about the origin of the pearl. It doesn't matter if it is their trusted missionary or a temporary visitor, they will hardly tell about the origin of the pearls. *“The pearls are*

probably much cheaper, but I know it will help them so I bought the pearls anyway”, one missionary visiting the community said. *“When I asked them about the origin of the pearls they gave very evasive answers, like ‘from a Sama friend on Samal Island’, the missionary explained. “They clearly didn’t want to tell me”.*

Also for me it was difficult to get a clue about the origin of the pearls. When I first arrived in Matina Aplaya in February 2010 I immediately recognized that most men were selling pearls, but it was difficult to figure out where they came from. And as my knowledge in their language was limited I could only talk to a small number of young men that spoke some English. In the beginning they explained that *“Badjao are diving for the pearls”* and that *“they are coming from friends in Zamboanga”.*

In the beginning I used to follow a young pearl vendor who had been in high school. One day I followed him and another Badjao vendor to the centre of Davao City. We were supposed to meet some relatives of them in the Badjao community in Isla Verde and they were also planning to buy pearls. Suddenly the Badjao vendor changed his version about the origin of the pearl: *“We buy the pearls here in Davao”*, the man said, *“but we are the only one who can buy them, it is a secret”.* They told me to stay in Magsaysay Park while they entered the city. *“If you go there it will be very expensive”*, he explained. *“But I can buy you some cheap pearls if you want to”.* He was very eager to get me into pearl business and he told me about a Canadian that had bought a lot of pearls from him a few years ago, but I declined.

My host in the community, a fisherman and one of the community leaders, told to me from the very beginning of my stay in the community: *“don’t buy any pearls”.* *“If you want some we can give you pearls, but don’t buy from anyone in the community”.* In the end of my first stay in the community he also brought me to Chinatown and showed me the accessory shops, full with pearls and shells – accessible for anyone.

The Stereotypes in Badjao’s Daily Lives

The stereotypes being imposed on Badjao have a great impact on their daily lives. The stereotype of both the noble savage and the dirty savage constitute a context in within Badjao have to act and respond to in order to be successful in everyday life. Consequently, when Badjao are interacting with tourists they are dressed in their traditional clothes, they speak their own language, they pose proudly with their fishing equipment, and they display their 'exotic' pearls. But when they are interacting with locals and the authorities they are hiding their cultural characteristics and are trying to be formal. They wear modern clothes, they speak Cebuano or not at all and they try to hide their bleached hair. One exception, of course, is the annual Kadayawan cultural festival when Davao's "indigenous tribes" perform their music and dances for cultural demonstrations and celebrations. In this case Badjao are encouraged to display their 'indigenous' culture.

Actually, Badjao's dualistic interaction with the surrounding world gives interesting implications. In some families the boys are out in the harbour diving for coins, while their sisters are dressed in formal clothes on the way to school. Sometimes they are "very much Badjao" and sometimes they are "very little Badjao".

Here it is possible to make a correlation Herzfeld's work 'Cultural Intimacy' about Greece. Herzfeld describes how the Greeks might be seen as both 'Oriental' and 'European' (Herzfeld 2005). Hence, they are both seen as relaxed, spontaneous, open-minded and a little lazy as well as rational, economical and educated. Herzfeld shows that the Greeks have been able to choose what stereotype they want to use, adapt to and manipulate. One day, they can sell watercolour paintings on Crete and the next day they can invest on the Athens Stock Market.

The Greeks and the Badjao have not themselves created the stereotypes of the Orient and Europe, of the noble and the dirty savage, but they can play with them and write their own 'social poetics'.

Herzfeld's concept of identity, stereotypes and social poetics gives us a tool to understand the complex relationship between Badjao and the surrounding society. In fact, Badjao are facing different kinds of stereotypes which they have to deal with in everyday life and they have to adapt to these stereotypes in order to survive culturally and as human beings. And if they adapt too strongly to one of the stereotypes they might be excluded either by the Philippine majority population or by the healthy tourists. It takes sensitivity and creativity to be a Badjao pearl vendor.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The puzzle in this study has been: How come that Badjao manage to make a living from mass-produced cultured pearls in the middle of a new and challenging world? The answer is that Badjao, a tribe of sea nomads, have managed to attract authenticity-seeking tourists and satisfy their desire to meet the noble savage. In fact, these tourists are not consumers of the pearl; they are consumers of Badjao's culture.

In order to do be successful Badjao are using a great creativity; they buy cultured pearls in Chinatown and sell them as their 'indigenous' product to authenticity-seeking tourists. They use their inherited skills as diving and floating and make a living from the field of cultural idealization. In Michael Herzfeld's words they are skillful 'social poets'.

In this way the exiled Badjao manage to survive as ethnic group. There are no fish, but there are still Badjao. They can barely go fishing but they can make a living from the idealization of their culture – because they can manipulate the stereotypes being imposed on them. In this way Badjao can remain closely attached to the ocean, they can preserve their language and survive as an ethnic group.

Without the tourism it might have been difficult for Badjao to stay close to the ocean and remain independent. They would have been forced to be much more active in the local economy; to take low-qualified jobs, to enter the school system, to master a new language, etc.

In fact, the tourism makes the stronghold of Badjao even stronger. The tourism gives them a reason to maintain their boat and diving skills and even to exaggerate their cultural characteristics.

The Importance on Self-Governance

One thing we can learn from this example is that people who are living under challenging circumstances might be able to face these challenges - if they get the possibility to do so. In the case of Badjao there have been no governmental intervention or support, no one have been telling them how to live or not to live, but they have been free to act and have therefore been able to combine skills with opportunities and managed to create a new income. For instance, if Badjao would have been deported to land or refused to take part in the informal economy the result might have been devastating, with huge social problems as a consequence. The Badjao in Matina Aplaya have been fortunate as they own their land through a local church – but in other parts of the Philippines Badjao's housing situation is very insecure.

This study emphasizes, hence, the necessity for indigenous people to preserve some of their independence. Indigenous people cannot be forced to act, but if they are having space and opportunities they can use their own creativity and skills, and act within the demanding circumstances. In short, if you give them

independence and room they will respond with creativity. We have seen that the 'social poetics' can be a powerful tool in the hands of marginalized people.

One more thing we can learn is that the world system is very hard to foresee. Even the most victimized people can suddenly gain from conjunctures in the globalization process. In this case Badjao earn money with relative ease; actually much more than the Chinese workers who manually culture, select and wrap the pearls. Badjao are not only passive victims of the globalization process, they are also subjects who can invent their own way of living and challenge the will of local authorities.

However, I can see some serious problems with the pearl vending that we have to take into consideration. These concerns will be discussed in the final section of this essay.

Concerns about a Future Pearl Vending

I have three serious concerns about the pearl vending and, hence, the future of Badjao in Davao City.

First, what if the tourists stop coming? Badjao have specialized on tourists searching for authenticity, but what if there will be no one seeking for the noble savage? Actually, the intense conflicts in the western parts of Mindanao have resulted in a significant decline of tourism in Davao City. For example, we can mention the Magindanao massacre in 2009 where 34 journalists and 24 political workers were killed. Today many embassies and travel companies suggest people not go to any part of Mindanao, including Davao City. Hence, if Badjao get too dependent on the pearl trade they might face crucial problems in the future as there might be no pearl-consumers.

Second, there seems to be a correlation between the 'noble' and the 'evil' savage. In fact, the more adapted Badjao become to the stereotype of the noble savage, the more detested they will be among locals and the government. Many Badjao vendors have already been excluded from islands, hotels and beaches, and politicians have even raised suggestions to deny Badjao access to public space. The pearl vending will make it more and more difficult for the Badjao to be accepted in the majority society; the children will be teased in school, they will not get a work and they will never get any legal papers. In fact, a continuing pearl vending might make the chasm between Badjao and the local people even bigger, and result in negative political consequences. Two possible consequences are that the politicians initiate assimilation programmes and force Badjao to settle on land. This parallels the situation of Roma people in Europe.

Third, the pearl is an obstacle for political unity, for real change. The pearl conceals the real problems for Badjao, when it comes to their right to fishing grounds, governmental support and their right to remain autonomous. For decades Badjao have been ignored by the Philippine government, exposed for violence and plundering from hostile neighbours and unable to feed themselves from the sea because of over

exploitation of the natural resources. The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 has been largely ignored.

In this context, the pearl can be seen as a breathing apparatus that only for a short period of time conceals the lamentable situation of the Badjao – as cast away without any sea, safety or political power.

In fact, Badjao are continuing to sell their pearls without being aware of their rights as indigenous peoples of the Philippines. Of course, they can keep selling their pearls, but they should start to plan for a livelihood beyond the pearls, beyond the tourism, beyond the 'social poetics'. It is up to them to decide if they want to have closer ties to the local economy and become employees or if they want to keep making a living from the sea.

I think that the history has taught us that integration with the majority population is likely to lead to segregation. If adapting Badjao will be given the most low-qualified jobs, they might be forced into prostitution and they might lose their belonging to their ethnic group – which is still strong in other parts of Philippines and in parts of Malaysia and Indonesia. The key here is political unity. Badjao need to be united and get a common voice when speaking to the local government in Davao City, as well as national and international actors. They need to find a solution which gives them a sustainable livelihood without interfering too much with the general public in Davao City.

A well known foreign aid doctrine says: if you give a person a fish, he will not be hungry today, but if you give him a fish net he will not go hungry for the rest of his life. But what if there are no fish? What if there are no tourists? We can't force tourists to encounter the dangers of Mindanao, but we can give Badjao privileged access to fishing grounds. Indigenous people's can survive if they have basic resources, such as land, or in this case a living ocean.

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