Defying Poverty, Reclaiming Identity: Marriage Practices and Family Prestige among the Badjao of Cebu City, Philippines

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Abstract

The Badjao, regarded as one of the most marginalized indigenous groups in the Philippines, are commonly identified by mainstream society as street beggars, particularly in urban areas. Despite enduring extreme poverty and widespread social discrimination, the Badjao continue to uphold traditional values centered on family honor and pride. This ethnographic study examines the courtship and marriage practices of a Badjao community in Cebu City, Philippines and their role in preserving familial prestige. This study reveals that bridewealth remains a central element of Badjao marital traditions. Even amid economic hardship, families maintain this practice as a symbol of dignity and social status. For the groom's family, offering bridewealth secures respect and enhances community standing; for the bride's family, receiving it affirms reputation and honor. The case of the Badjao highlights how indigenous communities preserve cultural values, navigate adversity, and assert their cultural identity despite persistent social and economic marginalization.

Keywords: Badjao, bridewealth, courtship and marriage practices, family prestige, cultural identity, indigenous peoples

Introduction

Marriage is a fundamental institution of society. Its implications extend across the biological, social, economic, legal, and emotional spheres of human existence. Traditionally, scholars closely examine marriage in relation to the legitimacy of children. For example, the Royal Anthropological Institute (1951, 111) in *Notes and Queries* defines marriage as "a union between a man and a woman such that the children born to the woman are recognized as legitimate offspring of both partners." However, marriage goes beyond simply legitimizing offsprings. It regulates parental roles, sexuality, and handing over of properties and knowledge from generations to the next (Gilliland 2020, 182). Further, with its complex system of rules and rituals, it serves a symbolic function of family status and prestige which traditional societies uphold with high regard.

The importance of marriage lies on its role in establishing the family. Modern societies recognize the fundamental function of the family in the development of human societies. Auguste Comte (1858, 502) considers the family as the "true social unit" from which tribes, nations, and even the whole human race could be conceived as the gradual development of it. The United Nations (1949, Art. 16) affirms marriage as a right and the family as the foundation of society. In this sense, the importance of marriage as an institution is sociological.

Courtship and marriage in indigenous societies involve practices and rituals imbued with meaningful gestures and elements. These include the practice of giving bridewealth. This custom developed as marriage became more institutionalized and the status of women in societies improved (Hoult et al. 1978, 33). However, as indigenous peoples have become more integrated into the modern society, they started to abandon such value systems and traditional practices. Faced with social and economic difficulties, they struggle to preserve courtship and marriage practices, including the practice of giving bridewealth.

Today, indigenous peoples confront the rapidly changing social, economic, and environmental conditions. The study of Hall and Fenelon (2009) highlights how indigenous communities struggle to sustain their cultural identities and practices amid the pressures of globalization. The authors also explore social movements of indigenous peoples against the challenges of neoliberal systems around the globe. Further, indigenous groups are greatly

affected by the changes in the natural environment. A finding from the International Labor Organization (2017) illustrates how the present socioeconomic conditions of indigenous communities make them more vulnerable to the harmful effects of climate change. Limited access to financial and material resources heightens these challenges. Nonetheless, in spite of these constraints, indigenous peoples continue to devise survival and adaptive strategies, demonstrating resilience while striving to preserve their cultural traditions.

Given their disadvantaged socio-economic situations, indigenous peoples struggle to maintain their traditional cultural practices. Customs which require financial resources, such as courtship and marriage practices, are particularly vulnerable. This raises a critical question: Are these practices, together with the cultural values they embody, destined to disappear? This study argues otherwise. Despite unfavorable conditions, indigenous peoples actively strive to preserve traditions which uphold family honor and pride. Defying poverty, they reclaim their cultural identity, ritualized by traditional courtship and marriage practices.

Bridewealth as a Symbolic Gesture

"Bridewealth" and "Dowry" are often confused as one reality. Though they are similar, they represent distinct practices. Goody and Tambiah, in their work *Bridewealth and Dowry* (1973, 1), clearly distinguish dowry from bridewealth as "a type of premortem inheritance to the bride." Dowry is considered as "part of a familial or conjugal fund, which passes down… from parents to the daughter. It is thus part and parcel of the transfer of familial property" (Goody and Tambiah, 1973, 17). Bridewealth, by contrast, is a "transaction between the kin of the groom and the kin of the bride." It passes from the kin of the groom to those of the bride. It forms a societal fund, a circulating pool of resources, which corresponds to the movement of rights over spouses, usually women. Bridewealth is offered to the bride's family before marriage, while dowry is given to the groom's family.

Bridewealth is also referred to as "bride price" or "indirect dowry" (Goody and Tambiah 1973, 2). However, some scholars prefer to use the term "bridewealth" and avoid the term "bride price," since the latter risks purely commercial connotation (Dalton 1966). In this paper, I treat bridewealth not on

its economic value, but rather on its symbolic function. It is a symbolic gesture "to indemnify the girl's family for the loss of her services, as an earnest of good intentions on the part of the groom and his family, [and] to solidify the new affinal bonds created by marriage" as Dalton (1966, 732) describes it.

Recognizing various interpretations, Bossen (1988, 132-138) reviews theories of bridewealth. He explores the meaning of the practice going beyond purely economic exchange, to include its function as a symbolic compensation for the upbringing of the bride and as a ritual mechanism for alliance between families. In this present study, bridewealth is understood in its symbolic value in obtaining and maintaining social status within the community. Its giving enhances prestige of the groom's family, while its reception secures good reputation of the bride's family (Gilliland 2020, 195).

The amount of bridewealth differs across cultures. In matrilineal societies, the payment tends to be higher. This is required to discourage bride removal, because people in such societies are reluctant to allow women to marry out and leave the natal home (Goody and Tambiah 1973, 4). In some cases, the parents may require the would-be husband services to win permission to marry their daughter. This may be in form of manual labor. Families spend years to secure and save money to be used as future bridewealth for their male children. In some cultures, the bridewealth could be delivered in a series of installment (Bossen 1988, 133).

This paper focuses on the practice of giving bridewealth as part of the courtship and marriage system of the Badjao of Mambaling, Cebu City, Philippines. The Badjao may be regarded as the most marginalized among the indigenous groups and the most discriminated among the Muslim ethnic groups in the country (Macalandag 2009, 2; Nimmo 1968, 35). Uy and Neri (1979, 185) observe that some Muslims do not consider the Badjao as part of the Muslim community and exclude them from political participation. Identified as street beggars and mendicants, they are stigmatized in the broader society, especially in the cities (Toohey 1998). They are considered outcast, described as the most exploited and the least developed group among the Samals (Neri 1979, 42; Bracamonte et al. 2011). Yet, despite this dehumanizing situation, the Badjao persist in upholding the value of family honor, a principle that remains central to their cultural identity.

This study demonstrates how the Badjao sustain the values of family honor and pride through traditional courtship and marriage practices, despite their poor economic and social conditions. It seeks to address the following questions: What motivates the Badjao to enter into marriage? How do they see marriage as a custom? How do they consider bridewealth in relation to their status in the community? Finally, how do they manage to maintain the practice despite persistent poverty?

I have been conducting fieldwork and immersions in the Badjao community of barangay Mambaling in Cebu City since 2004. This ethnographic study draws on data gathered through personal interviews and participant observation. Informants came from various ages and social positions, including Badjao community elders, married couples, and single young people. I employed a reflective approach, acknowledging my personal experiences during fieldworks (see Mascia-Lees and Black 2000). Salzman (2002, 806) describes this postmodern approach to research as "the constant awareness, assessment, and reassessment by the researcher of the researcher's own contribution/influence/shaping of intersubjective research and the consequent research findings." I also adopted a dialogical approach, allowing informants to speak for themselves through direct quotations throughout the paper (see Berry and Black 1993; Tedlock 1979). In this way, the voices of the informants are presented in active dialogue with the researcher's own understanding and interpretation of data.

In addressing the seemingly contradicting perspectives of the informants, I adopted a perspectivist interpretation (see Maquet 1964). This approach highlights the value of narratives and ideas shared by informants without disregarding their differences. In narrating their personal experiences, I employ the "life story technique" (as used in Declore 2004), which allows more nuanced understanding of individual actual lived experiences. One limitation of this study is the lack of updated baseline data on the Badjao communities. This challenge of gathering clear statistical data on the indigenous groups in the Philippines is recognized by government and non-government agencies. This is due partly to logistical difficulties, language barriers, fear of discrimination, fluidity of ethnic identities, and others (World Bank 2024, 18). I relied more on the limited demographic data provided by national and local government units, non-government units, and from earlier studies. Another is the language barrier. To address this, I sought the help of Cebuano-speaking Badjao individuals in the

community, including Badjao high school students and church volunteers, during interviews to ensure accurate communication and interpretation.

This ethnographic case study does not aim at generalizing its finding to other Badjao communities in the Philippines and in other parts of Southeast Asia. Neither, this study utilizes theories to analyze the case at hand. Rather, as an ethnography, it presents specific empirical narratives and lived experiences of this people, the Badjao of Cebu City, and how they struggle to preserve elements of their culture in the midst of the urban environment.

To put the study in context, I start with the discussions on the historical and social backgrounds of the Badjao people.

The Badjao of Cebu

The Badjao are regarded as the maritime boat dwellers of Southeast Asia. Their precise origins remain uncertain. Scholars noted that during the early period of history in this part of the globe, dwellers abandoned the land to live on the sea in boats (Nimmo 1968, 32). The reasons for such movements are still unsettled. Nimmo (1968) provides prevailing theories that could explain such movement. Some scholars argue that harassments by a powerful group led to such movements. While others speculate that these people simply expanded their hunting and gathering activities to the seas which eventually led them to take such way of life.

The Badjao people are identified with various names. In Indonesia and Malaysia, outsiders generally call the group *Bajau* or *Baju* referring to both the nomadic (sea dwellers) and sedentary *Sama* speakers. In the Philippines, the term "*Badjao*" is commonly used, particularly for the boat-nomads and former nomadic groups, while the more sedentary group is called the "*Samal*" by the neighboring Tausug and Christians (Mahali 2008, 154). The Badjao are also identified as *Samal*, *Orang Laut*, or *Lutao*. Lutao belongs to the Samals, specifically the sub-ethnic group called the Badjao (Saco 1999, 4-5). Despite the various names given to them by the outsiders, the Badjao do not call themselves by such identifications. Rather, they identify themselves according to their place of origin, such as Sama Zamboanga, Sama Sitangkai, Sama Siasi, and others (Jubilado et al. 2010, 85). In this study, I will refer to the present and former boat dweller group as *Badjao*, since the use of the term has already been

established in the literature and, according to Nimmo (1968, 37), this name does not have offensive connotation.

Earliest Badjao communities are scattered around the islands of Mindanao. Nimmo (1968) identifies the different communities of Badjao in Mindanao. He mentions at least two main groups – the southern Badjao and the northern Badjao. The southern Badjao are those in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi islands; the northern Badjao are in Basilan, Zamboanga, Davao, and Surigao. They are further subdivided into different smaller sub-groupings. Though kinship ties and intermarriage are common among closely located communities, kin ties are insignificant between the southern and the northern groups (Nimmo 1968, 37). Group distinctions are also based on the type of fishing boats and nets they use. Today, Badjao communities are scattered in various coastal areas in the Philippines.

Aside from changes in livelihood (i.e. from fishing to begging and selling fashion accessories and rags in public areas and touristic sites) noted in earlier studies (e.g. Bracamunte et al. 2011; Macalandag 2009; Toohey 1998), the Badjao are able to maintain their culture. This is manifested in the continuous use of Samal language (Sinama) or one of its dialects according to Nimmo (1968, 35). Some can speak or, at least, understand Tagalog and Cebuano. Despite geographical variations and exposure to dominant Filipino communities especially in the cities, the Badjao continue to wear their colorful clothing, practice cultural values and celebrations with traditional music, dances, and other performative expressions. These shared cultural elements bind together these seemingly homogenous, yet diverse Badjao people residing throughout the Philippines and in Sabah, Malaysia (Jubilado 2010, 89).

In the case of the Badjao of Cebu, scholars trace their origin in Richondo [Rio Hondo], Zamboanga. Moving backwards, the Badjao of Zamboanga are said to come originally from the island of Basilan. The exact date of the earliest group of Badjao who came to Cebu could not be determined. However, ethnographic accounts trace the arrival of the group in 1963, somewhere on the shores of the present-day *barangay* Dulho, Cebu City (Uy and Neri 1979, 185). Though the Badjao people are typically known for their nomadic lifestyle, their movements to other parts of the country (and parts of Sabah, Malaysia) during this period were triggered by political factors (Bracamonte et al. 2011, 288). Hussin (2010, 4) highlights this perspective

attributing to the push factor caused by the worsening political instability in southern Philippines, the so-called “Moro Wars”.

Hussin (2010, 4) further argues that the violence in neighboring places led to the influx of countless distressed people, mainly the Tausug, towards Zamboanga and Tawi-Tawi where the Badjao traditionally inhabited. Eventually, these areas were becoming increasingly Tausug who came to dominate the trade and business activities in these places (Hassan 1978, 4). This situation, then, caused a crisis which led the Badjao being marginalized and pushed out from their homeland. Aside from the domino effect of armed conflicts, unregulated and illegal fishing within the Sulu Archipelago by more dominant groups curtailed the fishing and foraging livelihoods of the Badjao. These circumstances pushed the Badjao farther to travel to other places to seek alternative settlements and other forms of livelihood, movements which Toohey (1998, 161) considers a form of “forced migration.”

The exact number of Badjao in specific locations in the Philippines is difficult to obtain due to the group’s nomadic behavior. However, according to the 2020 census of population by the Philippine Statistics Authority (2023), there are recorded 69,644 Sama Badjao; 67,902 Badjao; and 6, 963 Sama Dilaut/Laut in the country. It can be said that Badjao families have members residing in different places scattered around the Philippine coastal cities and municipalities (Toohey 1998, 161). Thus, these statistical figures may not be accurate because of the constant movements of the group.

In Cebu City, the Badjao community is located in Sitio Alaska, Mambaling, now called the New Alaska Beach Association (or sitio NAMBA), few meters away from the South Reclamation Project (SRP) along the SRP road. The area is densely populated both by the Badjao and non-Badjao. In the 2020 Census, there are recorded 967 Badjao households in Cebu City. Together with the other informal settlers, they live in shanties and government/NGOprovided housing along the muddy and trash-ridden shoreline of SRP coastal road. Before the present location, the former settlement of the Badjao spread through the costal sea itself. Bamboo pillars, extending around 10 to 15 feet from the muddy seabed, supported Badjao shanties, while bamboo and coconut planks served as pathways connecting households together. Sometime in 2005, a huge fire totally destroyed the said settlement. The community was resettled in the present location along the cemented seawall.

Among the Badjao, the sea has long been the source of subsistence and sustenance. Fishing, pearl diving, and boat making are their traditional forms of livelihoods. Today, fishing and pearl diving has become less productive, partly because of restrictions, particularly in places designated by the government as marine protected sanctuaries. Boat making has become less viable as the price of construction and raw materials continues to rise. Faced with this situation, Badjao women and children have resorted to begging to supplement or even become the main source of income (Toohey 1998, 116). Many Badjao kids are into soliciting money with their envelops inside public jeepneys. Others perform music with the beats of their homemade drums. With the revival of antimendicancy laws (Cebu City Ordinance 1631 of 1996; PD 1563 of 1978), it is now illegal to give money to the Badjao begging in public places. These sifting socio-economic conditions have contributed to the further exclusion of the Badjao from the wider society. Some factors even involve state instrumentalities (Macalandag 2009, 26).

With their boats, Badjao men are also into transporting people and goods between the huge ships anchored on the sea and the mainland ports in Cebu. Some are into selling cheap fashion accessories and fake pearls on the streets and in public places. Mothers usually with their little kids recently have started selling rags and souvenir items in different touristic sites in Cebu City and Lapu-Lapu. In the late 90s, Saco (1999) records around 36 percent of his respondents living with a monthly income below 1000 pesos. Twenty years later, the income of a Badjao household averages from 500 to 2,000 pesos a week (Abelgas 2018, 158).

The historical and social background underscores the marginal position of the Badjao people within the wider society. Despite this disadvantaged situation, the group continues to uphold key cultural traditions. Courtship and marriage practices remain important in maintaining social identity, with the giving of bridewealth as a symbol of family pride and prestige.

Courtship, Bridewealth, and Prestige among the Badjao

Though arranged marriage is not absolutely practiced, early marriages are prevalent among the Badjao youth of Mambaling. Marriage typically begins with courtship. Courtship starts with a "love affair." *"Mag-uyab-uyab man na una... Magholding hands, unya makit-an man na sa mga tao, dayon matsismis"*

(First, they start as lovers, holding hands, until people notice them, rumors would then spread around the village), narrates Desa, a Badjao high school student. Malinowski (1929, 84) reports a similar account among the Trobrianders.

After both parents of the lovers discover the relationship, the man's parents and his kin, together with the elders, meet with the female's parents for the initial negotiations. If both parties agree for a marriage, initial plans follow. This time, the girl's parents make the demand, *sukat*. After the negotiations between the parties, the amount of *ungsod* (bridewealth) is then determined. Aside from cash, the female's parents also ask for the needed items such as sacks of rice, kitchen utensils, food, drinks, and other things needed for the coming days of engagement and marriage celebrations.

The parties with the elders then fix the date of the formal engagement. At least two days before the engagement, an announcement is made to the community about the upcoming event. Days of celebrations follow that would usually last for three days. On the engagement day, a ritual is initiated. The parents and relatives of the man visit the female's family and offer *panyam* (bread made from rice) with bottles of soft drinks. The food is then shared with the community.

During the engagement proper, the kinsmen of both parties with the elders finalize the date of marriage. During this time, the man's party offers the *ungsod*. Around the year 2004, the amount of *ungsod* would usually reach up to 20, 000 pesos in cash. This includes the budget for the expenses during the days of celebration. For example, *"ang 10 mil maoy igasto sa engagement ug kasal ug sa mga pagkaon, dayon ang 10 mil adto na sa ginikanan sa bae"* (10,000 pesos is spent for the food and other expenses during the engagement and marriage, and the remaining 10,000 pesos would then go to the girl's parents), explains Airal. In 2025, *ungsod* could reach around 100,000 to 80, 000 pesos, depending on the social status of the would-be wife. For single women who have already children, the bridewealth is lower depending on the number of children. This could reach as low as 8, 000 pesos. Badjao men could have multiple wives depending on their economic capacity. This amount could not be taken back by the husband in cases when a marriage ended because of separation or death.

During the wedding gathering, the community celebrates together with the couple. Dances dominate the party atmosphere. Traditional music and songs resound through the village - *dalling dalling*, *duldang duldang*, *pakiring pakiring,* and others*,* collectively called *sangbayan* (Jubilado 2010, 99). Of these, the most popular would be what is commonly known, especially by outsiders, as *Dayang-Dayang*, which the Sama-Badjao in the neighboring Sabah would call, *Pakiring-Pakiring*. In recent years, some Badjao marriage celebrations are now using electronic sound system and musical instruments instead of the traditional gongs. Jubilado (2010), in his study in Tawi-tawi and Sulu, even noted that organizers of wedding parties are even hiring singers and performers from other parts of the country. He also narrates that others are also employing computers and YouTube to play their traditional music. Despite integrating these model technologies, the value behind the celebration, promoting pride and honor of the newlywed and their kins, remains.

The Badjao consider *ungsod* as the price amount of the mother's effort in bringing up her daughter since birth. *"Ang ungsod mao ang gigastos sa pagpadaku sa bae sa iyang inahan. Mao ni ang bayran sa laki,"* explains Randy. According to Tampakan, an elder in the community, the man has to compensate the mother's efforts for him to be able to take the girl he wants to marry. It is ritualized through the giving of *ungsod*.

Marriage is a family responsibility among the Badjao of Mambaling. Parents have to secure the amount of money to be used as *ungsod* for their sons' future marriages. For this reason, parents have to work hard to secure and save money. They engage in boat-making, selling of goods, and even selling their own boats used for their livelihood for this purpose. Further, others would borrow money *"mangutang"* from their neighbors or from loan sharks. *"Ulaw man gud sa ginikanan kung dugay maminyo ang ilang anak nga laki"* (It is a shame for the parents if their sons would marry late), Desa, a Bajao lady explains.

In the mid-2000, early 20s is the marrying age among the Badjao men of Mambaling. For the girls, first menstruation marks the suitability for marriage, regardless of age. Thus, a girl could marry at an early age of 13. For the Badjao, a young adult man who is not yet married in his marrying age is considered a *subol atoa* (an old man). In the same way, a young woman who is still single at a marrying stage of her life is regarded as *bodjang atoa* (an old lady). These

single adults and their families would become the objects of ridicule and gossips in the community.

Marriage is a sign of prestige. Having their sons marry at an early age signifies that the family can afford to pay the *ungsod*, thus considered as industrious and rich by their neighbors. Thus, such families enjoy a high status and good reputation in the community. On the other hand, if parents are not able to send their son for marriage despite marrying age, people consider the family lazy and poor. The family would then become the subject of *tsismis* (gossip) in the community. This results in dishonor and shame for the family. An informant recounts an incident when two families quarreled in public. One party shouted at the other, *"Kanang inyong anak tigulang na wala pa na minyo kay wa mo'y kwarta!"* (Your son is already very old, but could not marry because you have no money!). To avoid such a shameful situation, parents would do anything for their sons to secure the amount of money as *ungsod* for the latter's future wives.

Let me present another perspective from Ama Tampakan, one of the elders in the community. He shares, *"Sa panahon namo, tigulang naman mi maminyo. Seguro mga lapas baynte"* (During our time, we married late, maybe over twenty years old.). *"Karun lang man na sayo sila mangaminyo"* (It is only now that they marry early.). This statement seems to invalidate the earlier account from my other informants. Further, he argues that the purpose of giving *ungsod* is not only to protect and enhance the pride of the men's family.

What is equally important, he explains, is on the part of the girl's parents. It is a great shame for the family if their daughter would simply go with a man without even receiving *ungsod*. *"Makaka-ulaw sa amahan ug inahan sa bae ug mukuyog lang sa laki nga way ungsod."* The focus is diverted to the honor of the girl's family. Families should then make sure that their daughters should at least receive *ungsod* and marry before leaving their homes to go with men.

Thus, giving and receiving of bridewealth do not only secure honor and prestige for the men's family, but also protect the dignity of the girls' family. The practice of bridewealth giving and receiving has been a part of Badjao culture, reflected in one of its legends which plays a significant role in tracing the group's ethic identity (see Nimmo 1968, 39-40). Let me share personal stories of courtship and marriage from my informants.

Love Stories

Randy, a Badjao young adult, used to accompany me around the community every time I came to visit the place. For several months, he disappeared. I later learned that he just got married to a girl from the neighboring island of Leyte. Randy was 18 years old when his parents arranged his marriage with the daughter of a family friend. Initially, he was against the plan, but eventually gave in to the will of his parents. *"Di man akong kabubuton ni kuya, ila man ni. Ako na lang sad dawaton"* (That was not my will, but my parents. I just had to accept it.). Randy, together with his parents and some elders from Mambaling, left for Leyte for the initial negotiations. Later, he came back home to Cebu and stayed for some days before going back to Leyte for the engagement and wedding ceremonies.

Randy's father is a fisherman and had been working hard for Randy's future marriage. Randy helped his father in fishing and boatmaking to save money to use as *ungsod* for his future wife. Randy's family paid around 20,000 pesos as a bridewealth for Vina. Ten thousand of which were spent for the food and other expenses during the days of celebration. The remaining amount was given to the girl's family. Vina was only 15 years old during that time. After the marriage, the couple settled with Randy's family in Cebu City.

Another love story is the one of Maria, also my close friend in the community. Maria was only 16 years old and a high school student at Gothong School in Mambaling at the time of her marriage. She wanted to finish college and hoped to get a decent job in the future. I was not able to visit the community for some weeks, until I learned that Maria would be marrying soon. The next time I met her; she was already married to Daloy.

Maria was very proud to show me the pictures of their wedding ceremony. The photos show people bringing baskets full of *panyam* (homemade rice bread). Colorful decorations hung over through the wooden pathways to the platform where the community held the celebrations. People were dancing moving towards Maria's house. She also showed me the photos of the engagement celebration and the wedding ritual. On the photos, she wore a white wedding gown. Her face was covered with thick white make-up, as though her face was covered with flour. After their wedding ceremony, Maria transferred to Daloy's house, where they lived together with his family. I learned that some

few years back, the marriage ended in separation. Maria has now been remarried to a Cebuano, while Daloy to another Badjao lady.

Another young Badjao man, Randy (a different person from the earlier mentioned), also narrated to me his love story with Camela. They were married in 1996. The *ungsod* during that time was cheaper. He only paid around 3,500 pesos for Camela, not including the expenses during the celebrations. He also offered the usual gifts *pandigalu*, which included two sacks of rice (one sack is shared with the community), *panyam*, and soft drinks. Unlike the other couples I have mentioned earlier, Randy and Camela got married in their 20s. Camela was 20 years old, while Randy was 22 years old during that time.

Conclusion

Marriage is a symbolic and a functional social institution. In traditional societies, gaining a higher social status, enjoying privileges, and securing economic benefits are prevalent reasons for marriage. This paper presents how an indigenous community is able to preserve the value of family honor in the midst of socio-economic difficulties and modernity. In particular, this study illustrates how the Badjao of Cebu continue to uphold family prestige and honor, despite their impoverished condition. This preservation is ritualized in the traditional courtship and marriage practices through the bridewealth system. For the Badjao, bridewealth is the price offered by the man and his parents to compensate the labor of the mother in bringing up her daughter since birth.

Two perspectives emerged in this study. The first focuses on the honor and pride of the man's kin. Being able to give bridewealth and send their son for marriage is considered by the community as a manifestation that the family is well-off and industrious. Such families earn a good reputation. Parents do their best to secure the money to be used as bridewealth for the future marriage of their sons. They engage in different income generating activities and would even barrow money from neighbors and loan sharks for this purpose. On the other hand, having a son who is still single at his mature age is a cause of shame. People look down on families who are not able to send their sons for marriage. This could mean that the parents are either very poor or lazy to able to produce the amount needed as bridewealth.

The second perspective focuses on the part of the girl's family. Bridewealth is an essential requirement before parents let their daughters go with the would-be husband. It is shameful for the parents if their daughters would simply to go with a man without receiving *ungsod*. Such families would be subject to gossips which could lead to social shaming and discrimination. This perspective, then, highlights preserving the honor of the Badjao families and their daughters.

Looking at these two perspectives, we see two equations. On the part of the man's family, being able to give bridewealth means gaining a higher social status; on the part of girl's party, receiving *ungsod* before letting their daughters go with a man protects the family from shames and social discrimination. Thus, despite their dehumanizing socio-economic conditions, the Badjao of Cebu strive to preserve and uphold family reputation—traditional values that modern societies have slowly taken for granted. The Badjao highly value family honor, even defying poverty just to preserve their identity in the community.

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