

Lived Experiences of Badjaos in Cebu City: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

Holistic awareness of the Indigenous Peoples' (IPs) biological, social, cultural, religious, linguistic, behavioral, and economic features remains a core element in fully understanding their beings. This study utilized transcendental phenomenology (TPh) to analyze and present the Badjaos' lived experiences and challenges. The 20 respondents were purposively selected through the inclusion and exclusion criteria. They all lived in a Badjao community in Cebu City. Informed consent of the local chief executive and the chieftain of the Badjao tribe; and other ethical considerations were secured and followed. Researcher-made-open-ended questionnaires, written in Cebuano and had an English translation, were used. In gathering the data, a semi-structured and face-to-face interview with a Badjao interpreter who was both fluent in the Badjao dialect and Bisaya was done at the respondents' abode from Badjao or Cebuano dialect to the English language. Eventually, the transcripts were then divided into categories; codes were formed in accordance with frequencies of the contexts; and themes and sub-themes were then grouped, re-grouped, and finalized. The findings revealed that in terms of lived experiences in Cebu City, the Badjao participants' narratives formed the following themes: Religious Veneration, Earning a Living, and In-Group Socialization. While their perceived challenges encountered were: Discrimination; Overpopulated Households, and Low Income. Therefore, it is recommended that respect to the Badjaos and other cultural minorities be afforded; and the government should conduct sustainable livelihood training and technical vocational programs.

Keywords

Badjaos, Sea Gypsies, Lived experiences, Challenges, Transcendental phenomenology, Cebu City, Philippines

Introduction

Holistic awareness of the Indigenous Peoples' (IPs) biological, social, cultural, religious, linguistic, behavioral, and economic features remains a core element in fully understanding their being. There are more or less 370 million Indigenous Peoples worldwide and are tagged for about 15% of the world's poorest persons (Ullah, 2016). With the mantra of "Leave No One Behind," the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights great significance in spreading awareness of the IPs' cultural and social features, promoting the IPs' rights, and economic upliftment. In the Philippines, a common geographical distinction is made between Igorot (Tagalog for 'mountaineer') on Luzon, and Lumad ('indigenous') for those in Mindanao, with others in Luzon and the Visayas using their collective name, such as the Manobo, Mangyan, etc. Luzon's ten upland tribal groups are identified: Ifugao, Bontoc, Kankanay, Ibaloi, Kalinga, Tinguian, Isneg, Gaddang, Ilongot, and Negrito. Ifugaos of Ifugao province, Bontocs of Mountain and Kaling-Apayao provinces, and Kankanay and Ibaloi of Benguet province were all wet-rice farmers who have for centuries worked their elaborate rice terraces (Molintas, 2004). The other concentration of indigenous communities is in the central and southern Philippines. The Lumad tribal groupings of Mindanao include Ata, Bagobo, Guiangga, Mamanwa, Magguangan, Mandaya, Banwa-on, Bukidnon, Dulangan, Kalagan, Kulaman, Manobo, Subanon, Tagabili, Takakaolo, Talandig, and Tiruray or Teduray. Approximately 11.3 million IPs population and 81 percent belong to low-income class (National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, 2013). The reasons identified include societal discrimination, inequalities, illegal land dispossession, abusive governance, armed conflict, hegemony, and territorial displacement (Macalandag, 2009). Although most indigenous communities live in isolated rural areas with a great variety of social organization and cultural expression, a growing number are migrating to cities in search of better livelihoods and social services. Many are driven from their traditional lands by militarization, tribal conflicts, and the expansion of large-scale development projects, which frequently bring little or no benefits to local communities. Many indigenous women, unable to secure employment with the mining companies and leave to find work in urban areas, suffering extreme poverty in cities like the northern city of Baguio or the capital city, Manila (Navarro, 2015). They often face poverty and exclusion due to their limited formal education, and their skills may not be suited to an urban context. In Baguio – where indigenous people make up over 60 percent of the population – it is estimated that some 65 percent of indigenous migrants, working as vendors in the city streets, where they are regularly pestered by police as part of the government's anti-peddling drive, suffer extreme poverty (minorityrights.org, 2017). A cluster of 18 indigenous communities, known as Lumad civilians, have been caught in the 50-year conflict between the military and the New People's Army (NPA). This has forced the Lumads to migrate to other islands, abandoning their ancestral lands, in their quest for a greener pasture and a peaceful environment (Salvaña, 2017) locally. Gera (2015) explained that the diaspora of ethnic and indigenous groups, who may have been displaced or voluntarily resettled outside of their traditional domains, also contributes to the fragmentation of collective ethnic identity and thus constitutes another constraint to proportional ethnic identity representation. National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (2013) discussed that the term Badjaos is a Malay-Bornean word that implies "man of seas." The Badjaos are called as "Sea Gypsies or Skilled Fishers,"

who used to live in coastal settlements in the Sulu Archipelago of the Philippines, particularly in Jolo, Tawi-Tawi, and Sitangkai, have relocated in Davao, Surigao, Zamboanga, Basilan, Bohol, Cebu, and Manila because of the rebels who robbed their boats and constant armed conflict. By tradition, the Badjaos are sea nomads who travel by boat to search for livelihood from one island to another. It has been five (5) decades since Badjaos resettled in Cebu City, the coastal areas that the Badjaos used to anchor their pump boats are already made as reclamation properties. The endless urbanization forces them to adapt and cope; otherwise, socio-economic displacement could hit hard on them and bring entailing issues. The Badjao tribe socialized into their neighborhood and immersed themselves in school; however, the members of the larger society had disrespected them (Macalandag, 2009). This display of the dominant class' superiority against the minority social groups gives birth to Cultural Hegemony Theory as advocated by Antonio Gramsci (Fry, 2003). Cultural hegemony is a phenomenon where the majority groups impose their superiority upon the minority. As a result, the minority develops an inferiority complex whereby they no longer do something about it. Instead, they think there is no way to get away with it, Molintas (2004). In society, hegemony becomes present when the minority accepts the unpleasant societal interactions of the majority groups. Baffoe (2013) argued that marginalization and discrimination are caused by a lack of knowing and understanding other people. Understanding the nature of a group or an individual is necessary to stop judging others based on one's standard. Ergo, this study is conducted to ascertain: 1) the lived experiences of the Badjaos; and 2) the challenges they encountered -- to spread awareness about them and celebrate harmony amidst diversity and provide accurate data to the appropriate authorities in the government in aid of policy formulations and interventions to uphold the IPs rights as guaranteed by the Phil. Constitution and other pertinent laws.

Methodology

This study utilized transcendental phenomenology (TPh) as this sought to analyze, present and comprehend the Badjaos' lived experiences. TPh postulates setting aside all preconceived ideas to see the phenomena through and from the lenses of the subjects, thereby allowing the true meaning of phenomena to naturally emerge with and within their own identity and concepts (Moustakas, 1994). The 20 respondents were purposively selected through the inclusion and exclusion criteria. They all lived in a Badjao community in Cebu City. Informed consent of the local chief executive and the chieftain of the Badjao tribe; and other ethical considerations were secured and followed. Researcher-made-open-ended questionnaires, written in Cebuano and had an English translation, were used. In gathering the data, a semi-structured and face-to-face interview with a Badjao interpreter who was both fluent in the Badjao dialect and Bisaya was done at the respondents' abode. From Badjao or Cebuano dialect to English language. Eventually, the transcripts were then divided into categories; codes were formed in accordance with frequencies of the contexts; and themes and sub-themes were then grouped, re-grouped, and finalized.

Results and Discussion

After the Badjaos' responses of their lived experiences in residing in Cebu City had undergone the transcendental phenomenology analysis, these three (3) main themes, **as described in Table 1**, had surfaced: 1) Religious Veneration, 2) Earning a Living, and 3) In-Group Socialization. The sub-themes, frequency, and percentage are presented as well in the same table.

Table 1. Lived Experiences

Main Themes	Sub-themes	Frequency	Percentage
1.1 Religious veneration	Praying to God	18	90
1.2 Earning A Living	Fishing	12	60
	Shells Craft Designing	5	25
	Fish and Fruits Vending	3	15
1.3 In – group Socialization	Playing Sports	12	60
	Community Service	8	40

Theme 1.1: Religious Veneration

Table 1 showed that 18 respondents had expressed that the first thing they had done after waking up was thanking their known God, Tohan for all the blessings they received. They also prayed for their departed loved ones to have eternal repose of their souls; asked forgiveness of their sins; and invoked Tohan's presence as the respondents continued to strive and toil to provide for the needs of their families. The Badjaos have revered prayers and relayed their intentions to Tohan by facing the "Baul" -- a small cabinet that contains the remains of their deceased relatives and ancestors -- uttering Badjao rituals while offering food, cigarettes, and coconut wine. The Badjaos admitted that their religious/spiritual rituals are often not respected by others as it is totally different from those religious practices and dogma of their neighboring communities. The Badjaos pronounce that their faith is unshakable as they strongly believe that it is their only greatest treasure and source of strength at all times. Jumala (2013) explicated that the Badjaos' religious rituals link the living with the dead ancestors not only for veneration but also for health matters and a form of countering the vagaries of nature of precluding the misfortunes. It's crystal clear that their ancestors had engraved to everyone's soul how vital to always call for help, guidance, wisdom, and miracle healing to their God (Tohan), regardless of the problem. The participants stated that:

Participant 2 (P2): "It is part of our culture to do the religious rituals and glorify our Almighty God, Tohan."

P4: "Acknowledging Tohan to be the provider of all the blessings and safety of our tribe is the first I do every day."

P5: "We, the Badjaos, had been through a lot of downs, good thing Tohan is always there for us. Hence, it is only right to praise him always."

P6: "Life has been so tough on us (the Badjaos). However, we are always reminded that Tohan will always be there and shower us with the blessings we need when we pray. That's why we must do the rituals to honor our God."

P10: "Since I was young, I have been taught to always be grateful for the gift of life from Tohan. So, praying to Him is what I prioritize when I wake up."

Theme 1.2: Earning a Living

Table 1 also exposed that after doing religious rituals, all participants have toiled to earn a living which varies from fishing, shells craft designing, and fish and fruit vending. The Badjaos' livelihood is traditionally and totally dependent on sea resources. Since time immemorial, they have lived, dived, fished, and rarely set foot on land; thus, they are called sea gypsies and nomads. The Badjaos got an average of 500 to P2,000 Philippine pesos (Php) per week, and it is expected to feed an average of 7-8 members per household. National Commission on Indigenous People (2013) confirmed that 90 percent of cultural minorities are poor, and Badjaos are one of the poorest. Given this meager income to provide their families' basic needs, other family members have resorted to shells craft (burloloy or native accessories) designing, making, and selling. Others also engaged in selling fruits and fish in a market adjacent to their community. No doubt, fishing remains the Badjaos' core source of bread and butter and is only augmented by other forms of livelihood to cope with their families' daily provisions. The participants expressed that:

P1: "Fishing is already synonymous to our breathing... though, we ear small amount from it, but it is what we (the Badjaos) are good at."

P6: "Life in the sea is difficult, but we must endure the strong winds, wavy oceans, and sleepless nights just to get fish and feed my family."

P11: "Sometimes, I feel so bad having a minimal income, but at least the sea is there that gives us food to eat."

P12: "There are 11 members of our family composed of 2 generations...I must make and sell shells, craft accessories, and sometimes fruits to provide our needs."

P15: "Despite the support of the government through Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) and the income of my husband in fishing, we are tightly stretched in buying our daily basic needs... that is why I help my husband financially by selling fish and burloloys (shells craft accessories) in the streets or our local market."

Theme 1.3: In-group Socialization

Table 1 further revealed that after the Badjaos have done their bread and butter, they have socialized exclusively in the community where they belong. The participants narrated that it is one of their ways of unwinding to avoid stressors. They acknowledged that playing sports – volleyball and basketball – and doing some community services, as commanded by their chieftain for the advancement of their collective interest, already become cultural. They consider it as quality time spent serving their fellow Badjaos and strengthening the bond among their folks. When the participants were asked why they only socialized within their community, they replied that though they have been in Cebu City for 5 decades, they still feel the noticeable unacceptance of the majority group. They admitted that they were not able to integrate with mainstream societies socially. Ferguson (2012) illuminated that social integration is a phenomenon where an ethnic minority, indigenous peoples, refugees, and underprivileged sections of society were incorporated into dominant societies. The Badjaos, however,

contended that being a societal outcast may be difficult, but it did not hinder them from living their lives meaningfully as they deeply possess containment; and cherished the companionship of their friends and loved ones – after all, for them, this matters most. The Badjao participants recounted that:

P6: "Everyday, I always look forward to being with my friends, playing basketball with them, and serving the community."

P14: "Since I was young, I always love the camaraderie shown by my fellow Badjaos. We have been like brothers and sisters... that is why I love to serve the community and play whatever games we could play during socialization hours."

P16: "Never did I feel disappointed to be socializing with my fellow Badjaos... being with them is what matters most for me..."

P17: "I have been accustomed to the marginalization shown by the larger societal groups; it does not bother me at all. I respect their choices. I am contented serving my community and solidifying our camaraderie by playing games."

P19: "Socialization with my Badjao peers gives me incomparable happiness... it is what it is. We (the Badjaos) have already accepted the fact that to be socially accepted and integrated into the mainstream societies may take a while longer, or it may not happen at all."

After the Badjaos' statements, on the challenges they encountered in residing in Cebu City, had undergone the transcendental phenomenology analysis, these three (3) main themes, as elaborated in **Table 2**, had come out: 1) Discrimination; 2) Populated Household; and 3) Low Income. The sub-themes, frequency, and percentage are presented likewise in the same table.

Table 2. Challenges Encountered

Themes	Sub-themes	Frequency	Percentage
2.1 Discrimination	Societal Outcast	15	75
2.2 Overpopulated Household	Sickness Transmission	19	95
2.3. Low Income	Poor Nutrition	16	80

Theme 2.1: Discrimination

Table 2 unveiled that 15 or 75 percent of the participants have felt that one of the problems they encountered was being marginalized and discriminated by the dominant societal groups. The Badjaos have considered themselves to be a societal outcasts. Mehan (1996) illuminated that such acceptance and tolerance are a by-product of the dominant voices' impositions. It becomes the fruits of the Badjaos' beliefs, which further promotes rationalized and unintentionally permitted exclusion. The prejudices against the Badjao often stem from the preconception that all nomadic people are by nature shiftless, rootless, irresponsible, and unreliable (Macalandag, 2009). The Badjaos are definitely caught in two (2) opposite situations: where if they would insist

on social acceptance, it may just lead to graver chaotic social circumstances; and if they would embrace the marginalization and be still with their in-group socialization, it is as if they have consented the exclusion. Neither ways have its ups and downs; the Badjaos lamented, however, that they prefer to have peace and harmony than to be persistent for acceptance of the mainstream societies. Though they hope that one day, the marginalization, discrimination, and social exclusion will be lessened if not be gone. The participants narrated that:

P13: *"I am used to being mocked by others because of being a member of the Badjao tribe. At first, it hurts, but as time passes by, I am immune to it..."*

P15: *"Though discrimination is not good, I have to embrace that I do not have control over other people's behavior. I just let them be... and hopefully someday they will realize that we are all Filipinos and humans after all."*

P16: *"Discrimination in the school was one of the reasons why I stopped studying..."*

P18: *"I know that we are just migrants here in Cebu City, and we (the Badjaos) have a tiny population over the more dominant groups; however, I still hope that the marginalization and societal exclusion be gone someday as it hinders us from more promising socio-economic opportunities."*

P19: *"I feel that my tribe (Badjao) is being discriminated against; however, its gravity has decreased compared to those years way back in the 1990s. I am optimistic that someday our being as Badjaos be fully understood and embraced."*

Theme 2.2: Overpopulated Household

Table 2 also displayed that 19 or 95 percent of the participants believed that one of the problems they encountered was overpopulated households. They thought that such problem bothered them for years because once a family member got transmissible illnesses, such as Rhinovirus (colds), Flu virus, tuberculosis, etc., it would most likely spread to other family members considering that, according to the Badjao chieftain Asamsa, the Badjaos got the average of 7-8 members per household. Therefore, it could be expected that once a member gets an illness, the transmission is difficult to control. The phenomenon of extended family ties – wherein the parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren, and relatives living in one house -- is one of the cultural traits of the Filipinos. Salvaña (2017) discussed that sickness is pervasive among the Badjaos because of poor sanitation and overpopulated household. In most cases, the Badjao children were worst affected by it. The participants explained that:

P7: *"I, my parents, offsprings, and grandchildren live in the same house. We are all 13 in the household. I view this to be a challenge only once somebody gets colds and flu as this would easily contaminate others."*

P10: *"There are 14 family members in our house; this is difficult for me not just because we have no privacy but also when sickness has struck us."*

P13: *"There was a time when all of my 12 family members got a cough. I could not help but feel pitiful for my 10-year-old grandchildren as he has difficulty in breathing."*

P16: *"So long as nobody got a transmissible illness, our situation, despite our financial scarcity, is fine. But illness is inevitable; that is why it makes me so worried, for it has been a trend that once somebody catches flu, it is transmitted to other family members."*

P17: *"There was a time that I got tuberculosis from my sick father. It was tough, for I lost our income for several months during the medication period"*

Theme 2.3: Low Income

Table 2 furthermore showed that 16 or 80 percent of the participants believed that one of the problems they encountered was having a low income. Though the Badjaos' income would differ from one initiative, a number of family members doing a livelihood, skills, location and the amount of time being spent in fishing and other means of earning a living, based on the data given by the chieftain and the office of local chief executive, the Badjaos got the average of 500 to P2, 000 Philippine pesos (Php) per week. It is expected to feed an average of 7-8 members per household. Based also on the records of the Barangay health clinic, it showed that 4 of 10 Badjao children have poor nutrition that belongs to wasted and severely wasted nutritional status. Tampubolon & Herlina (2017) found a positive correlation between the low nutritional status of children and the parent's income in Central Tapanuli North Sumatra. The Badjao participants admitted that their income played a huge role in the poor health of were many times which they could only have 1 to 2 meals daily, and the dish was often dried fish. Nonetheless, they still expressed gratitude to the government for giving them the monthly financial aid through 4Ps; the civic organizations that gave them random food packages; Ramon Aboitiz Corporation for the educational and financial help; the Foundation of Missionary Sisters, who also provided them with can goods and rice occasionally. The participants' actual and more relevant statements were:

P3: *"My wife and I oftentimes had challenging situations in budgeting because I am the only breadwinner in the family through fishing. Oftentimes, I earn 300 to 500 daily, but I have to feed 10 family members."*

P6: *"I have a 5-year old daughter when times get rough; my wife only gave our daughter porridge throughout the day/s or week/s....until we could afford to have balanced nutritional meals for our sons and daughters."*

P12: *"There was a time when all of my 12 family members got a cough. I could not help but feel pitiful for my 10-year old grandchildren as he has difficulty in breathing."*

P5: *"My family is a 4Ps beneficiary; we are so grateful to the government for giving us the P500 per month per household and P3000 for one school year or 300 per month per child for educational expenses for 10 months every school year. There were also non-government and civic organizations that occasionally donated canned goods and foods."*

P16: *"I and my wife's income are always deficit over our expenses. We are beyond grateful that the government gave us financial aid and to different organizations also who generously share food packages for our community."*

Conclusion

The findings revealed that in terms of lived experiences in Cebu City, the Badjao participants' narratives formed the following themes: Religious Veneration, Earning a Living, and In-Group Socialization. While their perceived challenges encountered were Discrimination; Overpopulated Households; and Low Income. Therefore, it is recommended that respect to the Badjaos and other cultural minorities be afforded; and the government should conduct sustainable livelihood training and technical vocational programs to the Badjaos for them to have other income avenues that would hopefully aid them in addressing their overpopulated household and low-income challenges.

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