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“You Will Remember us Because We Have Sung For You”

H. Arlo Nimmo

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Special Report

*"You will remember us because we have
sung for you" **

H. ARLO NIMMO

I

ONE evening about four years ago, I was recording the songs of a group of Bajau youth in southern Sulu. Fifteen of us were crowded into a small houseboat where the best singers of the moorage had gathered to sing into my tape recorder. The evening was a pleasant one. Outside the moon was full and the gentle laps of the high tide splashed comfortingly against the bobbing Bajau houseboats. The singers were extremely cooperative and their songs were good. It was one of those nights when all seemed right with the world—life was beautiful and I could think of nothing I would rather be doing than hearing the songs of these sea-dwelling people who had attracted me to the southernmost islands of the Philippines.

Interest in the tape recorder was waning and voices were tiring, when a young man, about eighteen, asked if he could

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sing a final song. I willingly handed him the microphone and he sang a jaunty, impromptu ballad recounting various events of his young life. Following his mini-Odyssey, he sang a few lines to me and concluded his song with "You will remember us because we have sung for you." I was genuinely touched, blinked a few moist blinks, and told the small group that I would never forget them nor their songs. Within minutes, the crowd dispersed and I was back in my own houseboat recording the evening's events in my journal. I put out my small lamp, lay back to the soothing rock of the sea, and as is still my habit before sleep, began recounting the day's activities. I ended my reminiscence with the concluding words of the young singer, "You will remember us because we have sung for you." While contemplating his song, I realized that the poetic lyrics of these talented singers had never been heard beyond the small world of the Bajau. No writers were ever around to write them down, nor were there tape recorders to record them. Thomas Gray-like, I thought of the possible great singers and poets who may have lived among the Bajau, but who died unknown to the world because their creations were never recorded.

My thoughts then flashed back six months previously to a cocktail party given by American Embassy-types in Manila. I have long considered cocktail parties among the vilest of Western social institutions and consequently avoid them with a passion, but somehow I was roped into attending this one. At one point in the evening, I fell into conversation with a young Filipino graduate student who was working on an M.A. degree in English at one of the Manila universities. Through the clink of cocktail glasses and the suffocating cigarette smoke, he told me that his specialization was Elizabethan literature, specifically Shakespeare. I complimented him on a taste I shared, and we chatted of things Elizabethan for a bit. After exhausting Shakespearean England, I asked him of Filipino writers. With an impatient gesture of his hand, he said there were no such persons—an ultra nationalist of the past and perhaps a few present writers who may someday be significant in a minor sort of way, but for the most part he felt the Philippines had nothing to contribute to world literature. I thought it sad that a man

should think so little of his cultural heritage, but being ignorant of Filipino literature I had no answer for him. More drinks and much innane conversation dragged the dreary evening to a close.

Back in my houseboat in Sulu, six months later, I had an answer for that young man. He did not know the literature of his country because most of it was lost before it was recorded. By the time the Spaniards taught his people to write, they had converted them to Catholicism and convinced them that their indigenous cultures held little of worth. Islam performed a similar job in the south, and the literary history of the succeeding centuries consisted of attempts to imitate alien traditions. But I knew there was good literature in the Philippines because I had heard some of it that night. I drifted to sleep with a vow to record the musical traditions of the Bajau, in order to answer the young man at the Manila cocktail party. I have no idea where he may be now, but I hope he someday reads this paper. This is my belated answer.

II

Sulu, the home of the Bajau, is a sea world. Its little islands stretch like the scattered stones of a brilliant emerald chain across the azure sea between Mindanao and the great island of Borneo to comprise the southernmost province in the Republic of the Philippines. The Sulu Sea rolls to the north of the archipelago while to the watery expanses in the south is the Celebes Sea. Both seas are protectively surrounded by islands of varying sizes and consequently are among the gentlest on earth.

The Sulu Bajau are one of several groups of boat-dwelling peoples scattered throughout Southeast Asia; others have been reported in parts of Celebes, southern Malaya, and the Mergui Islands of Burma. Although the historical relationship of these different groups is still unknown, little doubt exists concerning the close relationship of the several groups of Bajau within the Sulu Islands; these groups all speak dialects of the Samal language, share many common cultural features, and were until recent times predominantly boat-dwellers. Today, most of the

Sulu Bajau have abandoned their boats as living quarters for land-or reef-based dwellings. However, the 1600 boat-dwelling Bajau of the Tawi-Tawi Islands of southern Sulu have carved out a unique ecological niche which allows them to spend their entire lives upon the sea. Among five moorages in the Tawi-Tawi islands and reefs, these sea-dwelling people ply the waters in their small houseboats as regularly and persistently as the fishes themselves.

Wherever the Bajau are found in Sulu, they represent a minority of the total population. For example, they constitute only four percent of the population of the Tawi-Tawi Islands, and in Sibutu they form about 23 percent of the total Sibutu Islands' population. Within Sulu, the Bajau have always been viewed as an outcaste group by the land-dwelling Muslims, but in recent years as many of these sea folk have abandoned boat-dwelling and embraced Islam, they have become incorporated into the Islamic community of Sulu. Those of Tawi-Tawi, however, are still predominantly boat-dwelling subsistence fishermen who continue to follow their traditional life styles. These are the Bajau who have most successfully retained their oral traditions and the songs presented in this paper were collected among them.

Although extremely mobile, the Tawi-Tawi Bajau limit their movements to a fairly well-defined sea area, about 250 square miles, southwest of the large island of Tawi-Tawi. Within this area are located the five main Bajau moorages, or villages, and the two small cemetery islands where these sea people bury their dead. These seas are characterized by extensive coral reefs as well as numerous small islands which are farmed by the land-dwelling Muslim peoples upon whom most Bajau are dependent for the vegetable portion of their diet.

The Bajau houseboat typically houses a single nuclear family. Although this family does a great deal of traveling among the various houseboat moorages, it always identifies one moorage as its home; or, if the husband and wife are from two different moorages, the family divides its allegiances and time between these two moorages. Frequently, the nuclear family fishes and travels with married siblings of either the husband

or wife to form the second important social unit in Bajau society, the family alliance unit. This unit reveals great structural variation and is very ephemeral since houseboats regularly join and leave the unit. Its primary function is that of mutual aid for fishing, ceremonies, and any other activities which require group effort. Each moorage consists of several of these family alliance units to comprise a group of cognatically related persons, or a localized kindred, with an older man acting as headman. At the larger moorages, several such localized kindreds may be found, and the headman of the kindred which first began mooring there serves as headman for the entire moorage. No formal political organization exists beyond the moorage level to unite the several moorages, but because of the many kin ties and frequent movements among them, the moorages constitute a single, albeit dispersed, Tawi-Tawi community (Nimmo 1972).

III

Bajau culture has songs for almost every occasion. The birth of the Bajau infant is heralded by the magical chants of the assisting shaman. The lullabies of the Bajau mother early become part of the child's daily routine, and when he has mastered the rudiments of his language, he, too, becomes a singer of the several songs sung by Bajau children. Adolescents compose ballads to court would-be lovers or to while away the empty hours of youth. Later, in adulthood, wind and fishing songs are added to the Bajau's musical repertoire, and his more mature mind turns with new interest to the night-long chants which a few of the village elders know. And when he dies, his death is mourned with chants by surviving kinsmen and friends as funeral boats transport his body to the traditional burial islands.

Each Bajau song-type can be recognized by its unique melody; for example, all Bajau mothers sing their lullabies to the same basic melody, all shark fishermen sing shark songs to the same melody, etc. However, within this traditional musical framework, each singer does some improvisation which, of course, varies with the creativity of the singer. The lyrics are, for the most part, original and are not memorized. Certain

stock images and phrases recur in the songs, but each song has the individual stamp of its singer. The originality of the lyrics obviously varies with the artistry of the singer.

Certainly among the most charming of all Bajau songs are the lullabies, or *binua*. Lullabies are sung at any time of the day when needed to soothe the sleepy or fussy baby, but they are most commonly heard in the moorage during the darkening hours of evening. The Bajau baby normally sleeps in a hammock-like cradle suspended from the roof of the houseboat, and as the mother sings, she swings the hammock. Consequently, the sound of the swinging cradle frequently accompanies the song; otherwise, there is no accompaniment. To the Western ear, the songs have a mournful, plaintive quality, and to the Bajau ear, also, the songs recall bitter-sweet, half-pleasant, half-sad images—a lovely, but melancholy sound that drifts over the moorage waters to prick the sympathies and memories of its listeners. The song is addressed to the child, and his name is usually mentioned in the first line or so, but the general text more often consists of the mother's personal thoughts or reminiscences. If she wishes the moorage dwellers to know of some event, she may sing it loudly so that all can hear. The lullaby gives the singer a license to speak of people and events he would not mention in normal conversation. There is also an unspoken concurrence that thoughts sung are not later brought up in conversation. If someone wishes to respond to a musical statement, he should do so through the same medium. As a result, occasionally a repartee of musical comments may drift back and forth across the waters between two boats. More often, however, the mother sings the song to herself, of things personal which she wishes the moorage to hear. She bares a part of herself normally concealed, and her neighbors are sensitive enough to listen quietly, perhaps sympathize, but not mention it in the vulgarities of everyday speech. It is obviously an important safety-valve which allows an individual to express repression in a medium which will not bring about censure. In addition to this mundane, but important, function, the songs are aesthetically lovely and certain women of the moorage are greatly admired for their beautiful lullabies.

One of the finest singers I met among the Bajau was a young mother named Gumba, who was about 23 years old when I knew her. It was dusk when I first arrived in her home and as I was anchoring, I heard her singing to her baby. I did not yet know Samal well enough to recognize her words, but I had acquired enough Bajau musical taste to know that the woman had a beautiful, strong, clear voice. Her lullabies are among the most beautiful I heard in Sulu and the following examples are hers.

My daughter I sing a song of sleep to you.
I am weary, but still I swing your cradle.
When the moon came out tonight, it shone like a bright coin.
The mountain on Siasi is very small—
 there the Chinese are flying kites.
Siasi is very, very far.

Sleep soundly like a bird, my child.
I sing a lullaby.
We sail all our lives and our bodies become weary.
It is to you I am singing, my daughter.
We suffer from great poverty, but it is our fate to lead this kind
 of life.
We do not have fine mats to sleep on nor robes to wear; we
 sleep with nothing.
You are a beautiful child, but you are also a fickle child;
If I should die, you probably would not cry for me.
Mount Bongao is very small, and atop it is a tree that gives
 eternal youth.
Should I die while you are still young, I hope you have a good
 life.

Songs called *lia-lia* are commonly sung by small children. The Bajau offer no translation of *lia-lia* other than a type of song sung by small children. It might be called a "spite song" or an "anger song" since it is usually sung during these moods. If a child becomes angry at a playmate, parent, or anyone, he often retires to a secluded spot to give vent to his displeasure through song. One day I was in the houseboat of a young Bajau father, interviewing him about a particular fishing technique. He was repairing a fish net as he patiently answered my questions, while one of his sons was sitting at the prow of the boat. His wife and other children were absent. As we were talking,

a group of children waded past the boat through the low tide waters and told the boy that they were going to the land village to buy some candy. The child asked his father if he could have some money to join his friends. His father replied negatively. Several times the child asked for money, but consistently got a negative response and finally told his friends to go on without him. We continued our interview, while the boy sat at the prow of the boat watching his playmates go to land as tears welled in his eyes. Then with muffled sobs and tears rolling down his cheeks, he began to sing a *lia-lia*. I did not record his exact words, but I recall that the song scolded his father for failing to give him money for candy. He sang that other children in the moorage were given money by their fathers, but he was not. Furthermore, he was very angry at his father and did not like him when he was unkind to him. The musical admonishment went on in such tones for about five minutes, until the child's attention was caught by something else and he left the boat. The song was sung quietly, but yet loud enough for us to hear. When the boy began his song, the father smiled at me and nodded toward his son to call my attention to his words. He continued to talk to me about fishing, although I am certain that he heard all of his son's words.

As the mother who sings lullabies, the child who sings *lia-lia* has a license denied him in speech. He may *sing* comments about his friends, his parents, or anyone in the village which he would *say* only at the risk of punishment. Although a Bajau child has a good deal of freedom, it is early instilled in him that he should not speak disrespectfully to his parents or older persons. But there are times in the business of being a child when these adults frustrate one's desires. Since one cannot hit them or speak badly about them without punishment, a way to retaliate is through song. And Bajau children use their unique song tradition in this way. Parents usually pretend they are not listening to the songs, indeed sometimes children seek lonely spots where no one can hear them, but if they are within listening range, the adults usually hear each word the child has to say.

The following two examples illustrate the *lia-lia* song type. Unlike most of the other Bajau songs I collected, these were not recorded. An angry child was usually not willing to accommodate a nosey anthropologist with his strange gadgets, so I wrote down the *lia-lia* as I heard them, and consequently will not vouch for their perfect accuracy. Nonetheless, the following translations convey the general tenor of the songs.

Lia, lia, lia.

I am angry at you, mother.

You will not let me play on the beach.

Other children have good mothers who let them play there.

But my mother does not like me.

I wish I had another mother.

I wish I could go away.

Lia, lia, lia.

I don't like the children at this moorage.

Tomorrow I will go away from this moorage to Luuk Tulai.

My father is a handsome man;

He is better than the father of the other children here.

Tomorrow he will take me to Luuk Tulai,

because I do not like the children here.

Lia, lia, lia.

I am angry at you Kandaian.

You are not my friend.

I will sail away from here,

and I won't see you anymore.

Tenes-tenes is another song-type widely sung by Bajau children, although it is not exclusively theirs, being sung also by teen-agers, young adults, and occasionally older adults. It is a very versatile song-type and is sung on many occasions. While at play, a child may burst into a *tenes-tenes* song, singing about whatever comes to his mind or eye. While fishing, sailing, or paddling, a young man (or woman) may use the same song tradition to sing about the travels he has made, the fish he has caught, or the scenery he sees. At evening in the moorage, a teen-age boy or girl may sing *tenes-tenes* to tell of his or her amorous feelings for someone. And occasionally the medium is used by a singer who wishes to vent his spleen about some grievance he has suffered.

The name *tenes-tenes* has no meaning to the Bajau other than a name for a song-type. The word *tenes* appears in their language as a name for brief-type, men's underwear, but the song-name appears to have no relationship to this meaning. The length and tempo of the song depends upon the mood or message of the singer, but all *tenes-tenes* follow the same general musical pattern and each begins by announcing a color for the song, e.g., "This song is of blue colors," "This song is of green and red stripes like the sail," or "My song is of the colors of the sunset." The colors have no particular symbolism, nor are they consistent images throughout the song. Rather, they seem simply a pleasant image within the mind of the singer which he attempts to convey to the listener.

The *tenes-tenes* sung by a young child is most commonly a series of remembrances or images which come to his mind as he plays. One day I was wandering about the exposed moorage reef, and came upon one of my young friends, a girl about 8 years old, playing by herself as she loudly sang a *tenes-tenes*. No other children were around, so I asked if she would sing into my recorder. She said yes, so I hurried to get my recorder before any other children came, having learned that a group of children at a recorder tend to shout and giggle more than anything else. The following is one of her songs I recorded, and although the presence of the recorder introduced an artificial aspect to her singing, the song nonetheless well represents the sort which children frequently sing.

My song is of blue colors.

Yesterday my father went fishing, and caught many fish.

Tomorrow we will sail to Lioboran, and my father and brother
will fish there.

The trees on the island are very tall.

I often remember my friends who live in Luuk Tulai,

I hope you are enjoying my song.

My mother has wavy hair and yesterday she bought a new
sarong.

When I grow up I shall have a lover and be married.

This is the end of my song.

The *tenes-tenes* sung by teen-agers are the most colorful. During paddling or sailing, teen-agers often sing duets back and

forth to one another, or one person may sing while others interject musical comments to his song. Young people sometimes sing to themselves when they are fishing alone to help pass the lonely hours. Some of the best musical improvisation I heard, however, was during the song fests which Bajau youth periodically arrange. These fests are impromptu affairs which occur when several young people are gathered in a boat, usually during the evening hours. One begins singing, others join in, and soon young people in neighboring boats come to join them. At such occasions, someone usually furnishes a *gabbang*, a xylophone-type instrument made of bamboo slats which are played with two rubber-tipped mallets. While someone plays the *gabbang*, usually a girl, the others sing—never in unison, since each song is the unique creation of its singer. Songs at such fests usually have a romantic flavor for it is a time when a youth may appropriately tell his love to his peers. The following song by a young man, about 16, is an example:

My song is of the many colors of the sail.
As I left home this morning, I was talking to a certain girl.
We have been in love since we were very small, and now she is
almost a woman.
Once I lay next to her, and lay my legs over hers.
I told my mother that she should go to the headman, so that we
could be married.
My sister is wearing a sarong as she is playing the *gabbang*.
My sister and I were invited to sing and play at a wedding.
This will be my last time to sing, because I am very tired.
I will even go to the spirit world with my lover after we die.
I have given much food to my lover.
Someday I will marry her.
My lover is almost crazy in her love for me.
The home of my lover is far away, but I will sail there.

Although this particular singer's girl friend was not present at the song fest, it is not uncommon for a young man or woman to sing of his or her feeling toward someone present. The name of the individual is not mentioned and often the feelings are expressed in stereotyped images and phrases, but nonetheless everyone knows what is being said and to whom. Not only does the song allow the singer to express his infatuation to another individual, but it also serves to announce his feeling to his peers.

As with other Bajau song traditions, the musical statement would never be said so publicly in speech.

Young people often sing *tenes-tenes* while at work. One evening while torch fishing with a group of Bajau, I heard a teen-aged boy and girl sing *tenes-tenes* to one another as we paddled the shallow waters in search of fish. Their songs consisted of stock phrases and images of love and romance. Personal names were never mentioned, but everyone knew the young people were expressing their romantic feelings about one another. On another occasion, I was paddling with some teen-aged boys in four different boats to a neighboring island. During the entire trip the boys sang *tenes-tenes* which ranged from love affairs to fishing experiences. Some of the songs were solos while others were musical repartees with the entire group participating. And on a more tragic occasion, I listened to an imprisoned young Bajau man, accused of killing his mother- and brother-in-law, sing *tenes-tenes* throughout an entire night to tell the community of his remorse for his dreadful deed.

Sometimes, *tenes-tenes* occurs as a long narrative ballad in which the singer relates an actual incident which has happened in Sulu. This particular type of *tenes-tenes* is most highly developed among the land-dwelling Samal of Sulu, the most talented of whom travel up and down the archipelago performing at weddings, circumcisions and other celebrations. These balladeers are for the most part young people, in their late teens or early twenties, male or female. Their songs are based upon actual Sulu events which have sparked their creative minds to musical expression. The listeners realize that the singer has altered the event somewhat for the sake of art, but nonetheless much of the ballads is taken for fact and serves as an important news media in a society which has few newspapers, radios, or other disseminators of current events. This particular type of *tenes-tenes* is not highly developed among the Bajau, although a few youth among them sing the musical stories.

During my first trip to Sulu, a pirate named Amak was captured after having harassed southern Sulu for almost two

years. A young Bajau man, about 15, saw Amak's body after a shoot-out with the Philippine Constabulary officers, and, with other stories he had heard about the pirate, composed the following *tenes-tenes*. He is the only Bajau I met who sang this particular type of *tenes-tenes*. This song is short compared to some of the *tenes-tenes* of the professional, land-dwelling balladeers who may keep an audience's attention for one, two, or even three hours.

My song is of the many colors of the sail.

The home place of Amak, the pirate, is at Paranang in the forest.

On his way home from Bilatan, Tahanan was robbed by Amak. Amak took money only from the home of Tahanan, and not from the other houses in the village.

Tahanan gave Amak more than 100 pesos, but he wanted more. Tahanan said that he had no more money.

Amak put his gun in the window and shot Tahanan while he was in the doorway.

Amak then went to his house in the forest and slept peacefully with his companions.

While Amak was sleeping, the Philippine Constabulary rangers surrounded him.

A sergeant and a captain were the leaders of the troop.

All the rangers from Batu-Batu had gone to Paranang to kill Amak if they could find him.

In all, there were 19 rangers who attacked Amak.

As the rangers approached the camp of Amak, they walked very quietly.

Amak heard a barking dog, so he slowly came out of the house. He did not know the Philippine Constabulary rangers were near.

Amak's brother saw the rangers and told Amak they should run away.

However, Amak told his brother that the rangers were American soldiers who would not harm them.

Then Amak saw that they were Philippine Constabulary rangers. He was naked and took cover in the house and began to fire at the rangers.

Captain Tanang was the leader of the rangers.

He was so close to Amak that Amak almost stepped on his hands. But the captain did not move.

Amak loaded his rifle and began firing at the rangers.

Amak was killed and taken by the rangers to the jeep and then taken to Batu-Batu.

The body of Amak was very white.
He had curly hair and was blind in one eye.
At about 2 a.m., the rangers threw Amak's body on the wharf
at Batu-Batu.

The body was then placed outside the Philippine Constabulary
camp.

Dew fell on the body since it was not covered.

At nine the following morning, a picture was taken of his body.
Before taking the picture, the Philippine Constabulary officer
placed Amak's rifle, cutlass, and bullet belt next to his body.

In the afternoon the body of Amak was carried by Tinah on his
shoulders.

But Amak was so heavy he was dropped in the middle of the
road.

Amak was taken to his home place at Paranang.

No one likes to pass Paranang Island because it is the home of
pirates.

The body of Amak was beginning to rot, so the imam bathed him
and buried him.

Amak smelled like a dried fish.

The imam did not offer prayers for him because he was afraid
the Philippine Constabulary would not like it.

He only bathed him.

Amak's two widows were crying in the door of the house.

They sang mourning songs all night long.

When Amak was alive he did not eat and became thin like an
American's son.

He wore cutex on his finger nails.

Amak went to Borneo with his companions.

They met some Chinese at sea.

Amak and his gang robbed the launch of the Chinese.

They also stole some goods from a Malayan ship.

They went on further where they met an Indonesian boat.

The smoke of the boat is like the smoke of incense.

They fired machine guns at the Indonesian boat, but it outran
them and went to Borneo.

Later the Indonesian navy caught some pirates and took them
to Borneo where they cut off their hands and ears to mark
them as pirates.

The British cut off the heads of pirates to warn others.

The punishment was for offences these men had done against
the Chinese and Malaysians.

I would find it difficult to choose a single Bajau song-type
as my favorite since I find many of them delightful, but certain-

ly high on my list would be a type which the Bajau call *kalangan baliu*, or "Songs of the wind." These songs are almost the exclusive reserve of the men. They are sung during the idle or lonely hours of fishing and sailing trips, usually at night. When heard over the dark waters, the songs have a lonely, melancholy air to the Western ear. Most often a man sings his songs alone to the night and the sea, but sometimes he may sing duets with a sailing companion or a friend within hearing distance in another boat. Although the singer frequently uses stock phrases and images, the songs are not sung from memory, but rather are creations of a mood. Despite their appellation they are not sung to call the wind, and I met no Bajau who seriously believed that the songs could bring the wind. The literary form they approximate most is the Japanese *haiku*—a brief vignette of a single image or a series of images, unconnected except in the mood of the singer. Themes and images reflect the sea home of the singer (Nimmo 1968).

I shall never forget the moonlit night when I first heard the Bajau wind songs. I was with a flotilla of about 20 houseboats enroute to our home moorage after having sailed to a neighboring island for water. Our trip was timed so we would return at night in order to take advantage of the currents and the cooler temperature. Lacking a wind, we paddled across the main channel which separated the water island from the reef where our home moorage was located. As we reached the shoals of the reef, the men abandoned the paddles and mounted the prows of the boats with their long poles to pole through the shallow waters. Women sat at the back with steering paddles while most of the children were sleeping. The night was bright and from my boat I could see the entire flotilla silhouetted by the full moon. As the men noiselessly stepped up and down the graceful prows with their long poles, their movements reminded me of a midnight sea ballet. The only sound was the gentle splash of the poles and the muffled scrape as they occasionally rubbed the keels. Then someone began to sing a wind song. He was answered by someone else. Others responded and for about an hour, the night was punctuated by the melancholy

songs of the men, accompanied only by the quiet ripples of the disturbed waters.

Changing, shifting winds.
Tell Salamdulila,
Do not forget me.

White sails.
Sailing from Kangan.
A smooth sea.

The whirling wind strikes the prow;
The flying wind.

If there is illness in my body, it leaves when I remember my
lover.
But it is sometimes painful to remember.

White sails.
Sailing to Sitangka.
Single file.

O south wind,
You bring the dark clouds.
Like a ripe jackfruit are you: on the surface alike and smooth,
but inside, varied and many.

Now comes the east wind.
It is a good wind.

O wind,
You blow the waves—and my heart—into a thousand pieces.

Another song-type sung even more exclusively by the men is the *kalangan kalitan*, or "shark song." During certain seasons of the year, the Bajau fishermen, alone or in pairs, seek sharks in the waters of the open sea. After having baited large steel hooks, the men shake coconut shell-rattles in the water as they murmur a dirge-like chant to attract the shark. The songs are usually brief and tend to flatter the shark in order to attract him to the hook.

Datu Shark,
Your fin is handsome and looks like a flag in the sea.
I have thrown my baited hook into the deep sea especially for
you.

Come and take my gift.
I am shaking my rattle to call you.
I know you are under my boat, waiting to take my bait.
Come now and take my bait and hook.

If a Bajau were asked if the songs had any magical qualities, he would probably respond negatively, and say that he sings the songs only because it is tradition to do so. Nonetheless, few Bajau would fish for shark without using the songs. It is significant that musical, magical fishing aids of this sort are used only in shark fishing, the most dangerous of all Bajau fishing.

One of the most delicious of Sulu's sea foods is a reef-dwelling crustacean, called *kamun* by the Bajau. Light pink in color, it is about 5 to 10 inches long, with large front claws and numerous smaller legs on either side of its body. Certain reefs are known to be inhabited by the *kamun*, and Bajau fishermen, especially boys, periodically visit the reefs at low tide to seek it.

The animal lives in the natural holes of the reef floor, and almost always a male and female are found together. Bajau fishermen prepare a special baited noose which they slip into the *kamun* hole. When the *kamun* takes the bait, the noose springs to catch its head and claws. It is then pulled out by the fisherman. The male is usually the first to be caught, and normally the female is reluctant to take the bait after her mate has disappeared. During these periods of waiting the fishermen sing comic songs, called *kalangan kamun*, to coax the reluctant female:

Kamun, I give you food.
You catch my bait as it comes inside.
Kamun, I am giving you food, so why don't you take it?
Kamun tell your mate: "Do not talk anymore. Here is our food. We will go together through our door."

Kamun, I have given you all kinds of food—even cassava.
Many of your friends already have nice white rattan around their necks.

I brought this rattan all the way from Palawan for you.

Kamun, come and take my bait.
Your husband has already taken it and likes it.
You take it too, and join your husband.

Illness is a crisis which also calls upon Bajau musical traditions. Several curers know Arabic chants which came to Sulu with Islam, but a more ancient tradition of chants in Samal, the Bajau language, is also used by curers. These chants, called *kata-kata*, and known by only a few of the older men of the community, are reserved for cases of critical illness or extreme crisis. Some of them are incredibly long, sometimes lasting three hours a night for a five night period, and unlike the lyrics of other Bajau music, they are sung from memory rather than improvisation. Furthermore, the chants are performed only by specialists who must be paid for their services in order for them to be effective. The chanters paid to learn the chants and in turn sell them to apprentices.

Sarbayani, a more renowned repositor of *kata-kata* among the Tawi-Tawi Bajau, was one of my personal friends. Because of our friendship, he told me that I could record his *kata-kata* the next time he was called upon to chant. Several weeks after his promise, a man of the moorage became critically ill after a long period of slow dissipation. Most of the traditional curing methods had been used on him to no avail. As a final attempt to dispel his illness, my friend was asked to chant. I knew the ill man's family fairly well and they were not adverse to my recording the session.

When I arrived at the houseboat of Sarbayani, the atmosphere was hushed. I realized that the session must be extra special since I had yet to attend a Bajau ceremony where the attention of all was directed to the ceremony. Almost always children are playing in the background and adults are chatting at the side while the ceremony is performed. This was not the case tonight. Sarbayani was dressed in his finest clothes. Sitting next to him on the household's finest mat was the ill man, and sitting around them in circular fashion were kinsmen of the patient. Sarbayani's family had left the houseboat for the ceremony. My entrance was acknowledged by silent nods. Apparently they had been waiting for me to begin the ceremony, for after I was seated, Sarbayani lighted incense and placed it in a small bowl between him and the patient. As he spread his

arms with palms upward over his crossed legs, the rest of the company followed suit. Then for several minutes he asked the spirits to acknowledge the power of the *kata-kata* and to take pity on the ill man and allow him to recover. Then he began the chant.

Each word was stretched to incredible lengths and the stanzas seem to display the extremes of the tonal scale. Because the words were so distorted and my knowledge of the Bajau language still somewhat limited, I could understand only a few words. Only later, after many laborious hours in transcribing my tapes with Sarbayani, did I understand the story. Sarbayani chanted for about two hours, stopping a couple of times for a drink of water. Hardly a sound was made by the audience. When he stopped for the night, another petition was made to the spirits believed responsible for the illness, and the small group disbanded. For three more nights the same procedure was followed, each night being a continuation of the chant which Sarbayani began the first night. Space does not allow for reproduction of the entire text, but the following excerpt conveys the general tenor of the *kata-kata* chants:

Datu Amilebangsa ordered his followers to prepare food in preparation for a long journey.

The followers asked: "Where are we going?"

Datu Amilebangsa said: "We are going to visit a place.

Even if we are drifted, we will be able to locate the place.

You prepare the food while I go to my mother and father to ask their permission to make the voyage. If they give me permission, we shall leave; if not, we shall not leave."

The followers finished preparing the food.

The name of their boat was "Galila."

Datu Amilebangsa went to his parents' house to ask their permission to leave.

He said to them: "As you know, the female child usually stays at home, but the male child often travels and leaves home.

I want to travel."

His full name was Amilebangsa Sahaia.

His parents said: "If you are seeking a wife, you cannot leave since you already have a betrothed in this place. Her name is Gimbaiansampaka-Tapanggamban-Mpaka."

Amilebangsa said: "I am not seeking a wife, since I already have a fiance here."

Amilebangsa's followers came to him and asked: "When will we leave?"

Amilebangsa said: "We shall leave now. My parents have given me permission to do so, so long as I am not seeking a wife."

After they began to sail, Amilebangsa said to his followers: "To which place do you prefer to go, the nearest place or the furthest place?"

His followers said: "Let us go to the furthest place. If we are going to a very near place, we do not want to go."

Amilebangsa said: "If we leave now, there is no wind. If you want to leave now, put up the mast."

Amilebangsa then spoke to the wind and asked it to blow.

He said: "If my father and mother have power, the strong winds will now blow."

After he spoke the winds began to blow immediately. His boat went so swiftly through the sea it was like a sword cutting the water.

Amilebangsa told his followers that he would sleep. He said: "When we reach our destination, do not go near the shore because a woman there will use her magic to cast a spell on you."

Amilebangsa then went to sleep. The boat sailed for three days and three nights until it finally reached its destination.

When Amilebangsa awakened, they had reached their destination. They saw many people on shore, men and women, picking up shells. Eva-Eva Dendda and Misa-hela, two women, were surprised to see the boat and said: "Whose boat is that? It looks like the boat of Amilebangsa."

Misa-hela said: "Oh you, in that boat. Who is the owner?"

Amilebangsa's followers said: "The owner is inside the boat."

The two women said: "That is the boat of Amilebangsa."

The followers of Amilebangsa said: "You are right. This is the boat of Amilebangsa, but he is not here."

Eva-Eva Denda told Misa-hela to go into the boat to see if the men were telling the truth.

The two women then went into the boat without an invitation from the men.

On the deck, they did not see Amilebangsa. Eva-Eva Denda told her companion to go below deck to see if there were anyone there. When Misa-hela went below deck, she saw Amilebangsa sleeping.

Eva-Eva Denda and Misa-hela said: "Why are you sleeping?"
When Amilebangsa awakened and saw the two women he was surprised and said: "Why did we anchor at this shore?"

The two women said: "Why do you speak like that? If your reason for coming here is to seek women, you will find no other women like us."

Amilebangsa said: "Since the time I left the stomach of my mother, I have never seen such greedy women. I hope you will not be angry with me, but my reason for coming here is not to seek women. I already have a fiance in my home place. The name of my fiance is Gimbaiansampaka-Ta-panggamban-Mpaka."

The two women said: "You cannot fool us with such talk. We know that your reason for coming here is to find women. You will find no other women around here like us,"

Amilegangsa said: "You are very greedy women. Do you want to live or die?"

The two women said: "You make it very difficult for us to entice you."

Amilebangsa said to his followers: "Give me my kris."

After he got his kris, the two women left the boat crying. They said: "It is very difficult to tempt Amilebangsa."

After sailing for three nights and three days, the boat reached another island. The people on this island saw the boat approach and were very curious as to whose boat it may be.

The story continues in this Odyssey-like fashion to recount the adventures of Amilebangsa and his crew. The text itself deals essentially with secular events, and has little blatant religious reference although Bajau cultural values are laden throughout it. Nonetheless, the *kata-kata* are among the most sacred of Bajau oral traditions.

As most people, the Bajau react to death with great sorrow. Persons less closely related to the deceased perform much superficial mourning out of respect for the deceased and his family, but for the immediate family of the deceased nothing is feigned in their grief at the loss of a beloved member.

As soon as a death is learned, the women of the moorage break into a wailing, dirge-like chant. With other members of the moorage, they crowd around and within the death boat

while the deceased is wrapped in a shroud of white cloth. Normally, the corpse is kept at the moorage the night following death and is transported to the burial islands the following morning. From the time of death until burial, women wail their mournful refrain while men attend to the other funeral business. Almost everyone of the moorage visits the funeral boat to pay his respects to the corpse before its internment, and it is during these visits to the corpse that songs are addressed to it.

The songs almost always flatter the deceased and express great sorrow over the death. Usually they are short statements which punctuate the wail which most persons chant while in the presence of the corpse. Most of the songs spring from genuine grief, but some are inspired by the belief that if one does not show proper sorrow at death, the spirit of the deceased will return to haunt the offender. Consequently, even if an individual openly disliked the deceased during his lifetime, he will mourn dramatically at his death. In fact, the loudest mourners, excepting the immediate family of the deceased, are usually those who were not on friendly terms with the deceased during his lifetime.

Mourning is an exhausting, and sometimes violent, business for the Bajau. As soon as the death is learned, the chants and songs begin, and for those intimately related to the deceased they do not end until the corpse has been buried, a period of usually no more than two days. The mourning demands are so strenuous, that usually after this period, the mourners are exhausted and purged of emotion, and glad to have the corpse in the grave so they may again take up the routine business of living. Besides the stated cultural function they serve, i.e., appeasing the spirit of the deceased, the songs seem to serve most importantly in purging the individuals of their grief.

I recorded the following songs in my notes as I heard them. I never attempted to tape-record funeral songs. Some of the Bajau probably would not have minded, but I could never completely throw off my own cultural cloak and impose a tape recorder into those sessions of sorrow and pain. The following

songs were all written down during the funeral of a man, about 34, whose sudden death was attributed to the anger of spirits:

His brother-in-law who sincerely loved him:

You were my brother-in-law; my best friend.
When you were alive, we often fished together.
You were always generous and always gave away more fish than
you kept.
How shall we continue to live now that you are gone?

His wife:

My father is dead.
My mother is dead.
My sister is dead.

My brother is dead.
And now my husband is dead.
How, then, can I live?

A cousin with whom the deceased never got along:

You were the best fisherman.
Everyone in the moorage loved you.
I respected you more than any man I know.
You were a good father and husband.
Now you are gone, but I will see that your wife and children
are fed.
You and I were like brothers.

His aged mother:

You are gone now, and I am alone.
But you are not alone.
With you in your grave are your father, brothers and sister.
And soon I, too, shall join you.

IV

My intent in this paper is not to imply that every Bajau is a singer of beautiful songs. Such is not the case. Some can carry a tune no better than I, others lack imagination to compose lyrics, and still others are totally bored with the entire business of singing. But as a people—and this is pure impres-

sion on my part—I think they are among the more musical of the world. Songs are demanded at all stages of the Bajau life cycle and one never outgrows the need or obligation to sing.

At present, the musical traditions of the Bajau of Tawi-Tawi are still strongly intact and a vital functioning pattern of their culture. Probably, though, as Islamic and Western influences continue to reach the Bajau, the song traditions will be lost or altered in imitation of these imposing traditions. I, an admitted romanticist, will be sad to see them go, but will live with the consolation that I once heard them and recorded them.

Indeed, I will remember the Bajau because they sang for me. And, hopefully, a bit more of the world now knows the beauty of their songs.

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