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Religious Rituals of the Tawi-Tawi Bajau

H. ARLO NIMMO

An earlier article in *Philippine Studies* (PS 38[1990]: 3-27) examined the social context and some of the principal religious beliefs of the Tawi-Tawi Bajau. This present article continues that study by focusing on the religious rituals of the Tawi-Tawi Bajau. It concludes with a note on the impact of change on the Bajau religious beliefs and rituals.

CURING CEREMONIES

The ceremonies held for the Bajau spirits are numerous and multifaceted. Some ceremonies are unique to certain moorages or kin groups, whereas others are held by all Bajau. But even those held by all Bajau have their individual stamp dictated by moorage traditions, family traditions, and the idiosyncrasies of the officiating *djin*. Participation ranges from a single individual to the majority of the community. In general, ceremonies are conducted to ward off illness or trouble, to cure illness or misfortune, or to give thanks to the spirits for their assistance. In addition, rites of passage, such as birth, marriage and death, demand obeisance to the proper spirits. Consequently, not too many days pass in a Bajau community without a religious ceremony of some kind.

The material objects used in curing ceremonies are predictable. The *djin* usually wears special clothes, i.e., green trousers, white blouse, and turban for men, or yellow sarong and green blouse for women.

This article is based on two years of field research in Tawi-Tawi Province, Philippines, during 1963, and 1965-67, sponsored by the East-West Center, Honolulu; the National Science Foundation, Washington, D.C.; the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, New York; and the Carnegie Foundation, New York. The author gratefully acknowledges the support of these foundations. Data were also collected during a week-long visit to Tawi-Tawi in 1977, and a month-long visit in 1982.

The household's best mats are spread on the floor to accommodate the participants while incense, to summon the spirit world, is always present in a small white bowl or a half-coconut shell. If incense is not available, a smoking coal will suffice. When the djin lights the incense, the ceremony begins. In many ceremonies, (especially to *um-magged*) a green coconut, a glass (or glasses) of water, and a bowl of cooked or uncooked rice are present. One djin told me the coconut and water are gifts from heaven while rice is the favorite food of the spirits. Depending upon the ceremony, additional food may be present. A betel box with the traditional ingredients (frequently replaced by cigarettes now) is usually placed on the mat for the enjoyment of the spirits as well as the participants who share it after the ceremony. Some families have brass urns and bowls inherited from ancestors and associated with ancestral spirits, which are brought out for certain ceremonial occasions. For some Bajau, the ceremonies are often conducted before the *hainan*, an ornately, curvilinearly decorated bar hung to one side of the interior of some houseboats or houses, about three to five feet long and painted in greens, reds, yellows, blues or whites, and associated with ancestral spirits. The prayer posture is the same for all ceremonies. Participants, men and women, sit in a circle around the material objects which are placed on the mats in the center of the boat or room. The djin leads as the participants follow. As he or she appeals to the spirits, hands are rested on the crossed legs with palms-upward. Then, at the appropriate time, hands are turned palms downward, and then again upward. The symbolism of the palms-upward position is to receive blessing from the spirits whereas the palms-downward position is to ward off evil. At the conclusion of the prayer, the hands are lifted to briefly cover the face. A similar prayer posture is used by the Islamic people of Sulu.

Ceremonies always conclude with the consumption of food, beverages, betel, and/or cigarettes. During the ceremony, the spirit (or spirits) has consumed the spiritual essence of the items while the participants consume the material items following the ceremony. The consumption serves to unite the participants with the spirits and to renew ties among the living.

Few Bajau ceremonies are solemn, hushed occasions. Although the participants direct their full attention to the ritual activities, others in the house or boat may be talking in the background while children usually continue their play. Unless such activity disrupts the ceremony, no one is disturbed by it.

If the ceremony is one of thanksgiving for the recovery of an illness, the recovered person is often bathed by a djin in sea water followed by a rinse in fresh water after the ceremony. A brief prayer

may or may not accompany the bathing which is believed to cleanse the person from the former illness.

The simplest Bajau ceremonies consist of small offerings made to spirits by one or two persons, or perhaps a nuclear family. The offerings may be made with a request for assistance, may be payments for assistance or favors granted, or may simply be made to keep one in good stead with the spirits. Sometimes a spirit appears in a dream and asks for an offering. Appropriate offerings are bits of tobacco, betel, food, a cigarette, or perhaps a small white or green flag.

If a fisherman or a family houseboat is passing near an area where spirits are believed to reside, e.g., a cemetery where ummaggged are found or an islet where *saitan* are known to dwell, a small offering may be left to show proper respect to the spirits. As the offering is left, usually a small prayer is uttered acknowledging respect for the spirit. Sometimes a Bajau will seek out such a place if he or she wishes the assistance of a spirit, or if there is need to repay the spirit for assistance already given. The following are examples of such ceremonies. A man caught in a storm while out fishing became frightened and asked the ummaggged of his recently deceased father to help him to safety. The storm eventually subsided and the man made it safely home. The following day he went to the cemetery island where his father was buried and left a small offering at his grave in appreciation of his assistance. One night a woman and her husband were fishing and unintentionally came within a few feet of an islet known to be inhabited by *saitan*. The woman apologized to the *saitan* for the intrusion, and said if they did not punish her and her husband for their transgression, she would bring an offering the following day. They returned home without mishap, so the following afternoon the woman left three cigarettes and two small white flags on the islet. A young Bajau man experienced a string of misfortunes, namely bad luck in fishing, a stolen boat, a quarrelsome wife, and an unusually fussy baby. To seek remedy for his problems, he visited the grave of his grandmother, left a small offering, and asked her to restore normalcy to his life.

Individual ceremonies such as these are conducted for minor concerns. For more serious illnesses or problems, the Bajau call in a *djin* as well as a group of relatives to conduct appropriate ceremonies.

When illness occurs, the Bajau first seek their traditional herbalists for treatment. Each kin group usually has at least one such person, called *a'anambar*, who is knowledgeable in the herbs that are appropriate for certain illnesses. If this treatment is ineffective, or if the ailment is obviously caused by spirits, then the afflicted seeks the

assistance of the *djin* who must conduct the appropriate ceremony to the spirits believed responsible for the illness.

The ceremony most central to Bajau religious concern is the *maggomboh* ceremony. The root word, *omboh*, means "grandparent or ancestor," and the ceremony can perhaps be translated as "ceremony for ancestors." The ceremony is held on various occasions. Sometimes it is held for ancestral spirits, in general, to request that normalcy be returned to troubled times. It may be held to request the protection of spirits during hazardous times, such as a trip to an unaccustomed place. Sometimes it is held to seek the assistance of a deceased relative's spirit who may be causing illness or misfortune. Once a year, the special *pai bahao* *maggomboh* ceremony is held to honor all ancestors and insure the continuance of proper balance and order in the world. Although the object of *maggomboh* ceremonies is similar throughout all Bajau communities, their ritual and content are somewhat varied, revealing the tastes of the officiating *djin*, family preferences, and different local traditions. Excepting the elaborate *pai bahao* *maggomboh*, discussed later, the *maggomboh* ceremony is usually attended by members of the family alliance unit with perhaps a few other closely related persons who happen to be in the moorage.

As noted, the *maggomboh* ceremony is often directed to a general group of ancestral spirits to request that normalcy be returned to difficult times. Such was the situation in the following case which involved the participation of a family alliance unit. A child in the family had recently died, two family members had diarrhea, a strong wind swept through the moorage and lifted the roofs from several boats, the fishing boat of one family drifted away during the night and was found only after a day of searching, and bad weather made fishing difficult for almost a week. Members of the group decided a *maggomboh* ceremony was needed to restore normalcy. A *djin* was in charge of the ceremony which was held in his houseboat. A young coconut, a small bunch of bananas, and a bowl of cooked rice were placed on a banana leaf. Incense was lighted and as family members crowded around, the *djin* addressed the family spirits, requesting assistance in alleviating their problems. Following the ceremony, members returned to their own houseboats. That night, the *djin* and his family slept with the food used in the ceremony placed at their heads. The next morning, family members returned and the *djin* made more requests over incense to the ancestors. The ceremony concluded with the family members eating together. Sometimes family members sleep with the food (usually uncooked) at their heads for two or three nights before the concluding ceremony is held.

A ceremony called *magbusang* is held to remove a disease-causing curse (*busang* means "curse") placed by a specific deceased relative. Some Bajau say such a ceremony may be directed toward a *saitan* believed responsible for the curse, but all such ceremonies I witnessed were directed toward deceased relatives. Reasons for holding a *magbusang* ceremony are as varied as the illnesses being treated. In one case, a man was made ill by his deceased mother because he had not properly mourned her recent death. A child became ill because her deceased brother resented his early death and was jealous of her life. A ceremony was held for a woman who became ill because she had inadvertently offended a powerful *djin*. The *djin* had not wished the illness, but the woman's behavior toward a person of his power had resulted in her condition.

Magbusang ceremonies are held in the houseboat, house, or at the cemetery. Offerings include rice, cassava, fish, bananas, coffee, cigarettes, or betel. During the ceremony, the ill person promises to perform certain acts if he is allowed to recover. For example, one man promised the offended spirit that if he recovered, he would travel to Bongao and leave appropriate offerings at a sacred Muslim grave atop Mount Bongao.¹ A woman promised to give up house-living and return to her houseboat if she were allowed to recover. More often, promises of food or tobacco are given.

Typical of the many *magbusang* ceremonies I witnessed is the following summarized from my field notes: A young woman came to G, a *djin*, with a very painful toothache. She had tried the traditional herbal remedies to no avail, and after she suffered several days, her family thought a spirit might be responsible for her pain. The *djin* questioned her about recent deaths in her family and discovered her grandfather had died about two months ago. He asked the patient and her family further questions about her relationship with her grandfather, and especially anything she might have done to offend his spirit. After some discussion, the patient's sister remembered the patient had laughed at a picture taken of the old man shortly before his death. Upon hearing this, the *djin* said the grandfather's spirit was punishing her with a toothache since it is improper to laugh at

1. Throughout the Tawi-Tawi Islands, graves are found that are associated with important Muslims from the early history of Islam in Sulu. Among the best known of these are the graves atop Mt. Bongao, but others are found on tiny islets or in well tended groves on larger islands. Often they simply consist of a pile of white sand, perhaps ringed by stones, with receptacles for offerings. Usually called *tempat*, these sites are extremely important in the religious lives of many Muslim peoples of Sulu. They are much less important to the Bajau, although occasionally they visit them to leave offerings if spirits have directed them to do so.

the infirm and elderly, and especially at deceased persons. The djin recommended that betel nut and food be placed on the grave of the old man, and accompanied the family to the nearby cemetery to do so. With family members in attendance and the patient standing beside him, he told the spirit the young woman had not meant disrespect in laughing at him and offered the betel and food in penance. Further, he requested that the patient be relieved of her pain. The group dispersed and returned to their homes. The next day the toothache subsided and the cure was attributed to the actions of the djin.

Another ceremony for ancestral spirits is called *sinumangit*, or as one Bajau translated it, "feeding the dead." Some claim the ceremony is held when deceased relatives appear in the dreams of the living and request food. Upon awakening the following morning, a djin is contacted. Food is spread on a mat and with smoking incense, the djin calls the spirit who demanded the food. After the spirit has consumed the spiritual essence of the food, the gathered family members consume the material part.

Sometimes the ceremony is held when a deceased relative is believed responsible for an illness or misfortune. It is not clear how this type of ceremony differs from a *magbusang*. Some Bajau claim they are different, but do not know how. Others claim the only difference between them is the names which are used by different people for the same ceremony.

The following is a condensation of a description of a *sinumangit* from my field notes: The *sinumangit* was held because L, the present headman and brother of the old headman who recently died, had a bad cough that would not go away, a cough similar to what the old headman had at his death. The djin at the ceremony decided L's cough was caused by the deceased headman's spirit who was jealous of his title being passed on to his brother. In the center of the room was a mat, upon which was placed a dish of bananas, some cookies, several cassava cakes, several cups of coffee, an opened betel box, and a dish of smoking wood ashes. Clothes of the deceased headman were held over the smoke by M, niece of the deceased who was assisting the djin. After the clothes were smoked, they were placed on the mat beside the other articles. The djin, son-in-law of the deceased man, then began a long prayer asking the spirit to allow L to recover and to allow him to assume the title of headman. He told the spirit L would return to houseboat living and abandon his house if he were allowed to recover. Other members of the family were seated around the mat, and they, too, made brief requests that L be allowed to recover. The spirit of the old headman apparently gave approval of L's succession to his position, since following the prayers, L put on

the clothes of his deceased brother while everyone in attendance was given food to eat. Shortly thereafter, the ceremony ended and the participants dispersed.

If the disease-causing spirit continues causing illness to the living, perhaps eventually resulting in death, the individuals involved feel no obligation to carry out the promise made in the curing ceremony. On the other hand, if the patient recovers, it is attributed to the will of the spirit and the living must perform a ceremony to avoid the return of the illness. Such a ceremony is called a *magjanji*, and like most Bajau ceremonies is somewhat distinctive, but all have the same general function, i.e. to fulfill a promise made to an ummagged or saitan. The nature of the ceremony, of course, depends upon the nature of the promise made in the curing ceremony. In the aforementioned case of the man who promised to visit the sacred grave atop Mount Bongao, all that was required of him was to make the trip and leave the appropriate offerings. Many promise to leave items at the cemetery and consequently many *magjanji* ceremonies are held at the grave of the spirit believed responsible for the illness or misfortune. Items are often left at small islets believed inhabited by saitan in fulfillment of promises to those spirits.

The following is a description of such a ceremony from my field notes: This morning I went to the cemetery at Bunabuna'an with A and his family for a *magjanji*. A's daughter was seriously ill, and the family *djin* blamed it on the spirit of A's father who for some unknown reason was angry with the family. A promised the spirit that if his daughter was allowed to recover, he would leave appropriate offerings at the grave. The child recovered so today we went to the cemetery. Before leaving our boats to approach the grave, the four adult men of our group changed into new clothes. At the grave, the *djin* poured sea water over the grave marker. He then put incense in a half-coconut shell and held it at various places over the grave to attract the spirit. Next, he chanted to the spirit, asking it to send no more sickness to the child, but rather give her good fortune in the future. A small board was removed from the foot of the grave, providing an opening to the interior. Two bundles of betel were placed in the grave and the board was replaced. The child's father then threw several handful of rice over the grave as he told the spirit he had fulfilled his promise of betel, and therefore the spirit should no longer cause illness to his daughter. Before leaving the cemetery, small offerings were placed on the graves of other relatives, unaccompanied by prayer or ritual of any sort.

The nature of the promise made to the disease-causing spirit depends upon the seriousness of the illness. If the illness is relatively

minor, the promise is a small one such as in the preceding illustration. If the illness is serious, however, and perhaps many attempts have been made to cure it, then the ill person promises through the *djin* to hold a more elaborate ceremony if recovery is allowed. One such ceremony is the *magtimbang*, which means "to weigh, or to balance." The ceremony is found throughout most of Sulu, practised by both the Tausug and Sama. Much variation is found among the different peoples, as to why and when it is held. For the Bajau, however, it is held in fulfillment of a promise to the spirits. The spirits involved depend upon which are believed to have granted the recovery. For some it is the *saitan*, for some it is the unmagged, and for others it is *Tuhan*. Regardless of the spirits, the ingredients of the ceremonies are much the same.

After recovery has occurred, the *magtimbang* is held in the early morning. The individual who has made the promise is placed in a sling at the end of a pole usually tied to the rafters of a house or a specially constructed support on a boat, by a rope at the center. At the other end of the pole is another sling into which are placed such items as coconuts, fire wood, rice, sugar, bananas, or water, until they balance the person's weight. A *djin*, or several *djin*, then turns the pole until the rope is taut while chanting to the spirits. He then unturns the pole to its starting position, still chanting. The recovered person is removed from the sling and the items that balanced his weight are distributed to persons in attendance.

The following account describes one of the more elaborate *magtimbang* I saw: The woman featured in the ceremony was dressed in *djin* clothes. A wooden pole, perhaps eight feet long, was hung from the rafters of the house by a rope tied to its center. Beneath, mats were spread on the floor, and directly under the rope, at the center of the pole, was a tray containing three bowls of rice topped by three triangular shaped coconut cakes, a glass of water, and an opened betel box. Hung on the pole at the center were a gallon jug of water and several gold coin bracelets. Draped over the pole on either side of the rope were brightly colored sarongs. A sling made of a new sarong was attached to either end of the pole. The woman was assisted into the sling by a *djin* and his assistant. Her weight was balanced in the opposite sling by a dozen coconuts, two pots of cooked rice, a bunch of bananas, and some firewood. After the balance was achieved, the *djin* and his assistant stood at either sling while another *djin* placed burning incense near the articles on the mat where he sat. The husband of the woman stood next to the *djin* while her father stood next to the *djin's* assistant. Seated around the mat were about twenty men and women. The *djin* and his assistant turned the

rope as they slowly walked in a circle, taking turns chanting prayers. As they walked, several male relatives of the woman came forward and placed peso bills in their shirt pockets. When the rope was taut, the two djin asked the spirits that good health and fortune be given to all at the ceremony. The audience joined by holding their hands in traditional prayer fashion. The rope was then unwound to more chants until it reached its starting position. Several people from the audience came forward to embrace the woman before she was assisted from the sling. The items in the sling, as well as the food on the mat, were distributed to persons in attendance, following which the congregation dispersed.

The *magla'ankuliah* ceremony is not widespread among the Tawi-Tawi Bajau, although a similar ceremony is found among some of the land-dwelling people of Sulu. I witnessed the ceremony only twice, both times at the Tungbangkao moorage in central Tawi-Tawi where it was attended by the family alliance unit of the patient. The ceremony involves the removal of objects believed responsible for illness or misbehavior from the body of the afflicted person. The objects were placed there, of course, by offended spirits. One man told me that nails and bits of glass were extracted from his body by the djin whose ceremony I witnessed.

The following is a description of one of the ceremonies I observed: M's youngest son, about two years old, had been sickly for the past two months. He and another son, about a year older, who had been particularly unruly for the past week, were taken to M's uncle, a djin, shortly after dawn this morning. About a dozen people, relatives of both the mother and father of the children, were at the houseboat for the ceremony. Seven white plates of rice and a dish containing smoking wood embers were placed on a mat in the center of the houseboat. M and his wife sat opposite the djin, each with a child in lap. The djin began the ceremony by speaking very softly. As he spoke more loudly, he asked the saitan to allow the children to return to normal, and then examined closely the palms of both children. He told the parents the illness was in the older boy and this was affecting the behavior of both children. He took the older boy and placed him in his lap. After massaging the boy's chest briefly, he began sucking loudly on the right side of the chest. After several moments, he stopped and spit a wad of red fibers into a half-coconut shell. He announced the fibers were placed in the child's body by the saitan and were responsible for the abnormal behavior of both children. Now that they were removed, the children would recover. The rice was then eaten by all present, following which everyone dispersed. The father gave the djin a peso for conducting the ceremony.

The Bajau at the moorage of Tungkallang perform a ceremony I never saw nor heard of elsewhere. I witnessed the ceremony only twice, and it was apparently an approach to the *saitan* unique to the *djin* of one kin group. The ceremony was attended by members of the family alliance unit. The ceremony consists of transferring the disease-causing *saitan* from the ill person into a specially carved wooden image, called *ta'u ta'u*, which is sometimes armed with miniature weapons, e.g. guns and knives. The image is then placed in a special tree with other such images. The tree where the *ta'u ta'u* is placed is considered very dangerous because of the presence of the many images. The explanation I received for the ceremony was quite simple. The *saitan* causing the illness was transferred from the patient to the *djin*, then to the *ta'u ta'u*, and then to the tree where it was left with other *saitan*. The weapons on the images protected them from harm, although why the invulnerable *saitan* needed protection seemed no inconsistency to the Bajau.

The following account from my field notes describes a ceremony in greater detail: For several days, H has been ill. Her old mother, a *djin*, has decided it is because she walked too near a tree believed to be inhabited by *saitan* while she was collecting firewood from the beach. Thus, a *ta'u ta'u* ceremony was held to rid H of the *saitan* causing her illness. Eight adults and a few children gathered at H's houseboat shortly after sunrise. H sat with the *djin* on a mat covered with small containers of food, cigarettes, and betel. Smoking incense was in a half-coconut shell. Placed between them was a crudely carved wooden, anthropomorphic image, about two feet long, and similar to markers found on some Bajau graves. It was asexual with legs, but no arms or facial features. Attached to its torso were two small swords. A girdle of green cloth was tied around its waist. The ceremony began with the *djin* calling to the spirit and asking it to allow H to recover. She massaged H's body vigorously as she spoke to the spirit. After several minutes of massaging, she closed her eyes, gave several convulsive shudders and picked up the wooden image. After shaking for several minutes, she relaxed and asked one of the men in attendance if the boat was ready. He replied affirmatively and we crawled onto the deck where a fishing boat was tied. Seated in it were two men with gongs who started playing after being told to do so by the *djin*. The *djin* got into the boat, still holding the *ta'u ta'u* carefully, along with five other persons, including myself, the husband and brother-in-law of the patient. The ill woman remained behind. I was told that I should not look backward, spit, urinate, defecate, speak loudly, or laugh enroute. Two of us paddled the boat while the musicians played and the brother-in-law of the patient

danced. We left the moorage and paddled for about a half-mile before we reached our destination. We moored the boat at the beach, disembarked and followed the djin down a path for perhaps a hundred feet until we reached a large tree. As the gongs continued, the djin spoke to the ta'u ta'u, flattering it and asking it to remain in place, as she put it carefully into a crotch of the tree. She also placed several small green and white flags in the tree as well as small offerings of rice and cassava. About two dozen ta'u ta'u were scattered throughout the tree. Some were carved in greater detail with specific facial features and sexuality. Many were armed with small swords or guns, and green or white cloth was tied around most of them. Some had obviously been there for some time, being engulfed in the growth of the tree. In addition to the ta'u ta'u, a species of green lizard, a foot or so in length, also inhabited the tree. I was later told they were friends of the saitan. Unlike most Bajau ceremonies, the brief ceremony at the tree was very solemn. No one spoke but the djin. After the brief ceremony at the tree, we left in silence and returned to the moorage.

As all people, the Bajau occasionally have disagreements which result in family rifts. Kinsmen are important to all aspects of a Bajau's life, and to sever ties with relatives because of disagreements is undesirable since it disrupts the normal flow of social intercourse and makes the ancestral spirits unhappy. Consequently, efforts are made by less involved relatives to restore harmony to the kin group. Once the quarrels are breached, harmony is formally restored with a *kipalat selamat*, or peace-making ceremony. Although the ceremony is also conducted to restore goodwill between nonkinsmen, the cases I witnessed involved only kinsmen.

Family feuds are not uncommon among the Bajau. Most are resolved easily after the heat of the argument has dissipated, but others may last for several weeks, months, or even years. Unless the rift has seriously disrupted the social and economic activities of the groups involved, little effort is made to bring about reconciliation between the quarreling parties. On the other hand, if the disagreement has seriously hampered normal social or economic intercourse, less involved persons try to bring about a reconciliation. These individuals meet with the disputing parties to discuss the grievances of each. Several meetings and perhaps several months may pass before a reconciliation is achieved. When both parties are ready to set the disagreement aside, the negotiating group arranges the *kipalat selamat*.

The ingredients of the ceremony are similar to other Bajau ceremonies. Mats are spread on the floor of the house, or boat, hosting the ceremony. In the center of the mats are spread the usual parapherna-

lia—a glass of water, a green coconut, rice, and incense. A djin sits before the incense while the quarreling parties sit on either side of him. Other persons, closely related to the disputants, complete a circle around the mats while other family members crowd in to observe. A djin begins the ceremony by commenting upon the renewed friendship and asks the disputants to shake hands in traditional Sulu style. All persons involved in the quarrel shake hands with one another, often displaying great emotion as they embrace. Next, the djin lights incense and asks the family spirits to witness the reconciliation and bless all with good fortune. Following the brief ceremony, food is served and the entire group eats together with the djin and the disputants.

The following field notes describe a kipalat selamat ceremony I witnessed: I and his brother-in-law G quarreled several months ago over the division of fish they caught on a fishing trip. The quarrel did not go beyond their immediate nuclear families, but the two families have refused to associate with one another despite the fact that they live as neighbors within a section of the moorage. For the past several weeks, the respective sisters of I and G have attempted a reconciliation, doubtless spurred by the approaching wedding of the daughter of one of the sisters. They were successful and the kipalat selamat today sealed the reconciliation. The ceremony was held at one of the sister's homes and although the two women were responsible for the reconciliation, they had little participation in the ceremony. As we approached the house, I heard gongs and drums. Musicians were playing on the deck and three young women were dancing. I was greeted by several women cooking in the outdoor kitchen. We were a bit late and the ceremony was about to begin as we entered. I was invited to sit next to the djin conducting the ceremony. On either side of us were I and G, the brothers-in-law whose disagreement was being reconciled. They looked sheepish and were not participating in the banter and chatter of the assembled group. The rest of the people in the circle were all men. Women and other men crowded into the room to observe while the wives of I and G were seated directly behind them. In the center of the circle on mats were a platter of cooked rice, three coconuts, a glass of cooking oil, a glass of water, a dish of salt and small peppers, and several peso bills. The djin signaled the beginning of the ceremony and announced that I and G had overcome their differences and were friends again. He gave a short lecture on the importance of relatives getting along with one another and then asked the two men and their families to shake hands. They did so with much embracing and shedding of tears while the rest of the audience voiced their approval. Everyone then

returned to his place and the ceremony resumed. The djin lit incense and said a prayer to ancestral spirits. I could not understand all of it, but what I heard was the usual request for good health and good fortune. Following the prayer, the djin told I and G to drink the water and eat the rice in the center of the mat. Women brought in food and everyone ate. After a half-hour or so of eating and socializing, the group dispersed.

Certain Bajau men know chants called *kata-kata* which are used in healing. The *kata-kata* are long, memorized chants which may take up to three or four nights to complete with two hours of chanting per night. Considered extremely sacred by the Bajau, and belonging to the domain of the ancestors, they must be chanted perfectly without mistake lest the spirits be offended. Most of the men who know *kata-kata* are djin, although not all. I met no women who knew the chants. All *kata-kata* chanters paid to learn the chants and insisted upon a small payment before chanting them; otherwise all involved would have misfortune. The texts of the chants usually deal with heroes who travel to faraway places, experience unusual events, and encounter strange people. An evening of chanting typically consists of several unrelated stories. They are extremely difficult to translate because of the occasional words and phrases which the chanter himself does not understand, usually explained as words or language of the ancestors. Additionally, lapses in the chanter's memory may result in confusion. Some of the land-dwelling Sama of Tawi-Tawi tell the same stories as folk literature and do not regard them as sacred.² But to the Tawi-Tawi Bajau, they are sacred, powerful chants that have the ability to heal.

Kata-Kata are used in a variety of contexts. Most typically, they are chanted in the presence of an ill person whose illness is believed to be caused by the presence of ummaggged or perhaps a *saitan*. The words themselves have power and healing properties, and after being in their presence for several hours, the spirits believed responsible for the illness will leave and recovery will occur. The ceremony begins with the gathering of members of the ill person's localized kindred in the presence of a djin. Bowls of food, usually rice, are placed on a mat between the djin and the sick person. The djin then lights incense, invites the spirits to participate, and chants in a slow, evenly

2. *Kata-kata* are also found among the Bajau of Semporna, Sabah and Sitangkai. In Semporna, they are told primarily for entertainment [Clifford A. Sather, "Seven Fathoms: A Bajau Laut Narrative Tale From the Semporna District of Sabah," *The Brunei Museum Journal* 3 (3, 1975): 30-40] whereas in Sitangkai they are used in curing rituals [H. Arlo Nimmo, "The Shamans of Sulu," *Asian and Pacific Quarterly* VIII (1, 1975): 1-9] but also sometimes recited for entertainment.

modulated voice. He seldom chants for more than two hours a night during which he takes breaks to rest his voice and/or drink water. However, it may take several nights of chanting to discourage the disease-causing spirits. The ceremony is very sacred and the audience is very attentive. Talking among members is in a whisper and only when necessary. Fussy babies and noisy children are removed from the ceremony, since interrupting the chant will bring illness and other misfortune to the offender.

The following is a summary of a ceremony I witnessed at a moorage in eastern Tawi-Tawi: K invited me to attend a *kata-kata* ceremony in his houseboat this evening. When I arrived after sunset about ten men and women were seated on mats in the houseboat. The ill woman for whom the ceremony was being held, K's sister, was lying at his side looking very ill indeed. K told me earlier that many treatments had been tried on her, and tonight he was going to chant *kata-kata* to see if that would drive away the stubborn *saitan* causing her illness. K was dressed in his *djin* clothes, and the others were dressed in better clothing than they normally would wear to a ceremony. K began the ceremony by lighting incense and speaking to the spirit, asking it to refrain from bothering the woman. He then began chanting. His intonation and rate made it difficult to understand the words even though my mastery of Sama is such now that I can generally follow the gist of most conversations. He chanted for about forty-five minutes before he stopped to smoke a cigarette and drink water. There was virtually no conversation during the entire period he chanted, quite unlike most Bajau ceremonies where people are constantly chattering while the ceremony is conducted. After his break, K chanted for a half-hour before stopping for the night. He concluded the ceremony with another appeal to the spirits, and told the group if the woman was not better the next day he would chant the following evening. No food or drink was present. After the conversation, the group dispersed. For two more evenings K chanted. The procedure was essentially the same as the first evening. After the third evening, the woman showed signs of recovery, so it was deemed unnecessary to continue the *kata-kata*.

The *malud* ceremonies must be included in a discussion of Tawi Tawi Bajau religion, even though they were held only by members of one localized kindred. As noted earlier, three brothers who learned Arabic chants, from their father, were regarded as *imam*. They officiated at certain life cycle ceremonies for their localized kindred and occasionally conducted *malud* ceremonies for ill persons within their kin group. These ceremonies, commonly held by Muslim peoples of Sulu, consist of the recitation of Arabic chants throughout the night

in the presence of the afflicted person. Sometimes they are held in fulfillment of a promise to spirits (always Allah for the Muslims) who have allowed recovery. The ceremonies I witnessed among the Bajau were all done for curing, although I was told they are sometimes done in fulfillment of a promise to a spirit. The *malud* I witnessed began after sunset. The usual lighted incense, food, cigarettes and/or betel were offered to the spirits as they were invited to the ceremony. The ill person was present as were other concerned relatives. The brothers then took turns chanting, sometimes holding a battered copy of the *Koran*, as they recited the chants from memory. The longest ceremony I saw lasted about three hours with occasional breaks. People came and went throughout the ceremony. A final invocation to ask the spirits to allow recovery concluded the ceremony. Saitan were believed responsible for the illnesses treated in the ceremonies I saw, but I was told that *malud* can also be held for Tuhan or ummagged.

Only two ceremonies involve the participation of the entire moorage, namely the *pamatulakan* and the *pai bahao maggomboh*.

During times of great illness believed to be caused by saitan, the *pamatulakan* ceremony is held to rid the moorage of its misfortune. A boat, varying in size from a foot to perhaps six feet in length, is constructed by members of the various families in the community. Several families may make the hull, others the sail, and still others the oars. Frequently ta'u ta'u images equipped with miniature guns and/or bladed weapons are also made and placed on the boat. The women of the moorage prepare food to place upon it as well as small flags of white, green and yellow—favorite colors of the saitan. When completed and loaded with food, betel, and cigarettes, the boat is pulled through the moorage at dusk by a *djin*, or perhaps several *djin*, who call to the saitan believed to be causing the illness. After canvassing the entire moorage and attracting the disease-causing spirits, the boat is taken to the open sea where it is set adrift with its undesirable cargo.

The following account from my field notes describes a ceremony I observed at the Tungkallang moorage: Today several *djin* of the moorage had a meeting and decided a *pamatulakan* should be held to rid the moorage of the saitan responsible for the misfortune of the past few weeks. It had been unusually cold, rainy and stormy making it difficult for fishing. In addition, many people were suffering from colds and two children in the same family died last week. Last night two women had a raucous quarrel that eventually involved several members of their kin groups, and this morning a boat was missing from the household where I have been staying. Old M, the most prominent *djin* in the moorage, is overseeing the project and has

instructed several different families to make the different parts of the boat. My household is responsible for the hull, perhaps because the head of the household is a respected boat-builder. A neighboring family will make the sail, another family the outriggers, and another the oars. In the late afternoon, the parts were collected and assembled by three male *djin*. The assembled boat, very crudely constructed, was about three feet long. Four women, representing households different from the ones who built the boat, brought small amounts of food, betel, cigarettes and small flags of green and white to place in the boat. The *djin* then changed into their *djin* clothes and pulled the boat through the low tide waters visiting each houseboat as they took turns chanting invitations to the *saitan* to board the boat and enjoy the gifts on board. After the entire moorage was visited, they tied the boat to a fishing boat which they paddled about a half-mile to sea where they set it adrift on the current of the rising tide. They then returned to the moorage, changed into their normal clothes, and resumed their usual activities.

The most extensive of all Bajau ceremonies, the *maggomboh pai Ba-hao* ("new rice *maggomboh*"), ultimately involves the participation of all Tawi-Tawi Bajau as well as their kinsmen from outside the area. The ceremony is held each year during the dry rice harvest, usually July or August, and appears to date from a time when rice was more central to the Bajau diet than it is now. Several Bajau told me they could not eat rice from the new harvest until the ceremony was held. Each household-head acquires dry rice from land-dwelling Sama farmers or from the Bongao market place. A container is made from the bark of a tree called *kayo omboh*, "tree or wood of the ancestors." The bark is cut into strips about eight inches wide and joined to form a circle about twelve inches in diameter. One end is laced in wide webs with rattan. The shaft and leaves of the rice are placed in the bottom of the container, and it is then filled with the unhusked rice. The rice is then placed at the bow of the houseboat, or in a specially prepared part of the house. That night members of the household sleep with their heads directed toward the rice. The following morning the rice is husked, cooked, molded in a white bowl into a conical shape, and taken by family members to a central houseboat or house where other relatives have assembled with their own bowls of rice. The bowls, sometimes as many as twenty or thirty, are placed on the deck of the boat or floor of the house, after which a *djin* conducts a brief ceremony to call the ancestral spirits to partake of the rice and to bless the living with good luck and health. Taking small portions of rice from each bowl, the *djin* mixes them in an empty bowl and offers the combined rice to all the children present. Each family then

takes its own bowl of rice home to eat at the next meal. Not all families hold the ceremony on the same day, and a family may participate in any number of ceremonies conducted by relatives. The ceremony serves to reinforce ties among all living kinsmen, to remind persons of their deceased kinsmen, and to socialize the children into the kin group. Bajau claim that if the ceremony is not held, illness and death will occur, or great storms with rough seas, strong winds and heavy rains will visit the area.

If one were able to map out all maggomboh pai bahao ceremonies of any one season and the individuals participating in them, he could arrive at the Bajau kinship universe. Some Bajau travel south to Sitangkai to participate in the ceremony with kinsmen there, while the Sitangkai Bajau occasionally travel to Tawi-Tawi for the same reason. Similarly, Bajau living near Semporna, Sabah, participate in some of the Sitangkai ceremonies with people from Tawi-Tawi. Groups participating in the ceremony compromise the *bangsa*, or ethnic group, delimited by these Bajau, namely the Bajau of Tawi-Tawi, Sibutu, and Semporna.

LIFE CYCLE CEREMONIES

Like most people, the Bajau call upon religious specialists to assist them through the transitional stages of the life cycle. For the Bajau, these stages include birth, an ear-piercing ceremony for young girls, incision for adolescent boys, marriage, and death. The scheduling of these ceremonies is determined somewhat by Bajau fishing cycles which result in the gathering of large numbers of houseboats in certain moorages at certain times of the month. After several days of intensive fishing, families rest from their activities to hold ceremonies. At such times, incision, wedding, curing, and ear-piercing ceremonies may be held on the same day or within days of one another. The elaborateness or simplicity of the ceremonies depends upon the affluence and personal preferences of the families involved.

As with curing ceremonies, the paraphernalia used in these ceremonies become predictable after witnessing several. Prior to the ceremonies, participants are bathed in sea water poured from a white bowl, and then rinsed in fresh water. I was consistently told that sea water was used simply because it was more available than fresh water and had no special significance. They are then dressed in their finest clothes and frequently make-up is applied to their faces, specially for incision and wedding ceremonies. Umbrellas are always held over them as they move from place to place. Drums and gongs provide music, and often women and occasionally men entertain with dancing. Boats or houses hosting the ceremonies are decorated with brightly

colored hangings, sarongs, flags and even fish nets. As with curing ceremonies, confirmed house-dwellers frequently return to their boats for life cycle ceremonies, believing it is more satisfying to the spirits to have the ceremony in the boat. Firecrackers are often exploded at weddings and incisions to add to the festivities. Incense, or coals, in a white bowl or half-coconut shell, is used to invoke the spirits for the ceremonies. Cooked food is usually served to those most immediately involved in the celebration, and at some of the larger weddings and incision ceremonies, uncooked rice and sugar may be distributed to all families in the moorage.

The degree of religious concern during these ceremonies ranges from a mere nod to spirits during the ear-piercing ceremony to a constant concern with spiritual matters throughout the funeral activities. Threads of commonality run throughout ceremonies of the same type wherever they may be performed, but as with curing ceremonies, each is somewhat distinctive, reflecting family traditions, village differences, or the idiosyncracies of the *djin* conducting the ceremony.

Most Bajau ceremonies reveal similarities to those of other Muslim groups of Sulu, such as the Sama of Siasi, the Jama Mapun, the Tausug, and the Yakan.³ These similarities reflect not only an ancient common cultural tradition but also the more recent influence of Islam.

Pregnancy and birth are times of potential hazard to the mother and child. Death during childbirth is common among Bajau women, and the infant mortality rate is extremely high. Several mothers I interviewed could not remember the precise number of their children who died in infancy. By far the greatest number of these deaths is attributed to the actions of spirits, and consequently, pregnancy and birth are times when special attention is paid to spirits. It should be noted that the Bajau have many naturalistic explanations for the difficulties of pregnancy and birth, but those most difficult to control are those caused by spirits.⁴

If a woman does not become pregnant within a reasonable time after marriage, a *maggomboh* ceremony may be held to request assistance from the ancestors. Other than its rationale, the ceremony is no different from those described earlier. If the expectant mother is experiencing difficulties, other ceremonies, such as a *magbusang*, may

3. Dolores Ducommun, "Sisangat: A Sulu Fishing Community," *Philippine Sociological Review* 10 (3 and 4, 1962):91-107; Eric Casio, "Folk-Islam in the Life Cycle of the Jama Mapun" in *The Muslim Filipinos*, eds. Peter G. Gowing and Robert D. McAmis (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1974); J. Franklin Ewing, "Some Rites of Passage Among the Tausug of the Philippines," *Anthropological Quarterly* 31 (2, 1958): 33-41; and Inger Wulff, "Features of Yakan Culture," *Folk* (6, 1964): 53-72.

4. H. Arlo Nimmo, "Bajau Sex and Reproduction," *Ethnology* (1970): 251-62.

be held to request the spirits, either ummaggged or saitan, to refrain from the problems they are causing. In addition to these ceremonies, a host of superstitions prescribe proper behavior for pregnant women. For example, a pregnant woman should not laugh at a deformed person or her child will be born with the same deformity, or if she sees clouds pass over a full moon, she should bathe immediately. Some pregnant women believe they should refrain from eating sweets which are believed to harden the fetus and make delivery difficult. As with many life cycle ceremonies, some families believe the houseboat is the appropriate place for birth, even though the family may be full-time house-dwellers.

The actual birth is attended by a midwife and assistants who are always relatives of the mother, perhaps her mother and sisters, as well as a male or female djin, who is also usually a close relative. As delivery becomes imminent, the midwife assists in the physiological process while the djin offers prayers and food over incense to the various spirits in attendance. The prayers usually consist of chants repeated over and over requesting that the delivery pain be eased, the birth be safe, the mother be allowed to recover and have many more children, and the child be healthy and have a long life. The prayers continue after the infant is born and during its first bath, often in sea water followed by a rinse in fresh water. Cooked rice is offered to the spirits by the djin, and then those persons in attendance eat it together, including the newly born infant who is given a few grains. Amulets are usually placed upon the infant, although sometimes this is not done until some danger to the child is sensed. Such amulets are special bracelets and necklaces appropriately prepared by a djin. A black spot is frequently placed in the center of the infant's forehead as a protection against malevolent spirits. Usually a gift is given to the midwife at this time. To not do so would bring illness to the child. The afterbirth, believed to be the undeveloped twin by some Bajau, is placed in a coconut shell and disposed of by the father, either by burying it on land or in the reef under the house or boat of birth. Some say that by placing it in the sea, the child will become a good swimmer. When burying the afterbirth, the father should look neither left nor right, lest the child become cross-eyed. One family told me fish should not be roasted in the houseboat of birth for a week lest the infant suffer illness. Some Bajau think the hammock-like cradle of the baby should be pink or green, colors believed to protect it from otherwise harmful spirits. Boughs from citrus trees are often placed over the house or boat of birth to keep away evil spirits that might prey upon the infant. After the umbilical cord falls from the child's stomach, it is tied to the cradle. When it falls from the cradle, its

disposal depends upon the sex of the child. In the case of a boy, it is taken to the open sea and thrown overboard so the child will become a good fisherman. In the case of a girl, it is placed in a *pandan* tree, the leaves of which are used for mat-making, so she will become a good mat-maker. Children are usually not named until they are several weeks, or months, old. Some parents say it is bad luck to name a child too soon while others say the child will die if named too early.

A special ceremony, called *magtabok*, is held for young girls when their ears are pierced. Sometimes the ceremony is performed when the child is only a few weeks old, whereas other families may wait until the child is four or five years old. Seldom is the ceremony delayed beyond that age. It is the least important of all life cycle ceremonies in terms of the attention it receives. The rationale for performing it varies from family to family. Some claim it is important to hold the ceremony when a child is young so earrings or plugs may be inserted to protect the child from malevolent spirits. Two of the ceremonies I witnessed for infants were held because the children were sickly and it was believed the ceremony would aid their health. Others claim the ears are pierced strictly for cosmetic purposes so the child may be adorned with earrings to make her more attractive. Most Bajau would agree, however, that certain types of earrings can be worn as amulets, although not all are worn for that reason.

As with most Bajau life cycle ceremonies, the elaborateness of the *magtabok* depends upon the family hosting it. For some it may be a very simple ceremony with only the child's parents, a *djin*, and perhaps an older woman versed in the proper method of piercing the ears. Sometimes the latter two persons are one and the same. The child is first bathed in sea water, followed by a rinse in fresh water. She is then dressed in new clothes and sometimes make-up is applied to her face. The *djin* gathers several strands of the child's wet hair, puts them to his mouth, and blows on them as he offers prayers. He then makes a brief invocation to family spirits over incense, asking for good health and fortune for the child. The person in charge of the operation rubs the child's ears between his/her thumb and forefinger until the lobes are numb. Then, at the appropriate time, a large, threaded needle, or perhaps a threaded piece of fire-hardened wood is passed through the lobe. String is left in the hole to prevent it from healing shut. The child usually cries during the operation, as may the female attendants who sympathize with her pain. Following the ceremony, specially prepared food is offered to the spirits, after which those in attendance eat it. Such a simple ceremony may last no more than fifteen or twenty minutes and be attended by only three or four people. More elaborate ceremonies involve the participation of many more

people. Boats may be specially decorated and paraded throughout the moorage as musicians and dancers perform upon them. Following the ceremony, the family may distribute food to the entire moorage as the little girl is paraded around the moorage in the decorated boat. The most elaborate ceremonies I witnessed were held in conjunction with other ceremonies and were usually for older girls, whereas the simpler ceremonies were held alone, and usually for younger girls.

An ear-piercing ceremony of the simpler sort may pass almost unnoticed by most of the moorage, but such is never the case with the *magislam* ceremony held for males during their adolescence. Although the word *magislam*, "to become a Muslim, or to make one a Muslim," is obviously of Islamic origin and is the same name used by the Muslim people of Sulu for a similar ceremony, the Bajau ceremony most likely predates Islam in Sulu. Genital operations for males are found among both Muslim and non-Muslim peoples in insular Southeast Asia, and appear to be an ancient cultural practice. Furthermore, unlike the Muslim operation, the Bajau operation is not a true circumcision in that the foreskin is not removed, but rather merely incised. Some Bajau told me a comparable ceremony was held for girls, but I never witnessed such a ceremony nor interviewed anyone who could describe it. One man told me it consisted of shaving the pubic hair prior to the wedding ceremony, but this was denied by other informants. Some Muslim groups of Sulu apparently once performed such a ceremony for young women and possibly the tradition of those ceremonies inspired the stories I heard among the Bajau.

Some *magislam* ceremonies are very elaborate and families save for years to finance them whereas others are much simpler and demand a more modest outlay of money. The ceremony is the highlight of a young man's life and announces to the moorage that he has reached manhood and is ready for its responsibilities, including marriage. Frequently, brothers and/or cousins share the same ceremony. As the ear-piercing ceremony, the *magislam* is usually held at a time when other ceremonies are scheduled in the moorage, such as weddings or curing ceremonies. As most Bajau life cycle ceremonies, it is usually held at a place and time when many houseboats are fishing in the area.

Whether held by itself or as one of several ceremonies, it is a time of festivity and celebration. Moorages hosting the celebration greatly increase in population at such times. For example, the little moorage of Lioboran normally has about 20 houseboats, but during an elaborate *magislam* celebration the number grew to 160. For adults it is a time to see old friends and relatives. For adolescents it is a time to size up potential sexual and marriage partners. For children it is a time for play with many new playmates.

After the family decides where and when the ceremony will be held, word is passed throughout the Tawi-Tawi Bajau community. A day or two prior to the ceremony, the host family decorates its houseboat and plays music on drums and gongs. At the more elaborate ceremonies, the musicians may go to a nearby beach or exposed reef to play. As boats begin to arrive for the ceremony, more musicians join the group and additional boats of kinsmen may be decorated. Children and adolescents join the musicians on the beach to play games while adults visit back and forth among their houseboats, usually laden with catches from recent fishing activities. If it is an elaborate celebration, the family hosting the event may distribute gifts of uncooked rice and sugar to all the houseboats present. More often, however, such gifts are limited to close relatives directly involved in the affair. The young man being honored has no special role in these activities and is usually indistinguishable from other adolescents at the gathering.

During the evening and night prior to the ceremony, dancing is performed on the beach, reef, or perhaps the large deck of a house where the musicians are located. As the sun sets, lanterns are placed on poles as young girls begin the dancing. Their dances are followed by the women of the community who in turn are followed by men. After the dancing, adults and children retire to their houses or houseboats while the adolescents and unmarried adults stay on to court would-be lovers and sing songs throughout the night.

Early the next morning, the magislam ceremony is held. The young man is bathed in sea water from a white bowl by a *djin* who asks the spirits to give good fortune and health to the youth while male relatives play drums and gongs, and female relatives dance. An umbrella is held over the young man during his bath and frequently fire crackers are exploded to add to the festivities. Following the sea bath, he is rinsed in fresh water, and then taken to the house or houseboat where the ceremony will be held. Within the dwelling, the young man is dressed for the ceremony. His costume is frequently very elaborate consisting of a new sarong (or perhaps trousers), a new shirt, and a special head gear sometimes decorated with flags, made of peso bills. If someone in the family has a wrist watch, he most likely will wear it. His face is sometimes covered with rice powder with his hair line and eyebrows outlined in heavy black charcoal. Lipstick may be applied to the lips and dotted on the face in some of the more elaborate preparations. Sun glasses and nail polish often complete his costume.

Prior to the minor operation, a ceremony is held for the ancestral spirits. If the celebration is near one of the burial islands, this ceremony may be held at the grave of family members. More typically,

however, it is held in the houseboat. For most boys, this is their first active participation in a religious ceremony. Incense is lighted as bowls of food, usually rice, are spread on a mat. The youth sits with the djin on mats while close relatives gather around. The djin again asks the benevolence of the spirits, and the operation takes place. Typically, the youth sits astraddle a large gong. The djin raises the youth's sarong and places his penis on the knob of the gong. Then he slips a piece of bamboo between the glans and foreskin of the penis and makes a small incision with a knife or a piece of split bamboo. The nature of the incision varies. Sometimes it is a mere knick in the foreskin whereas at other times a considerable incision is made so that the foreskin hangs on either side of the glans. Ashes are rubbed into the wound and the penis is wrapped in a white cloth. Following the incision, the youth again sits with the djin in front of smoking incense and bowls of food. The djin asks the spirits for benevolence, good fortune, good health, and long life for the youth. Following the prayer, the djin and the young man eat some of the food and then share the remainder with relatives in attendance. When the food is finished, people leave and the ceremony is concluded. Games and music may continue throughout the day as houseboats leave for their home moorages.

The Bajau marry young, often at fourteen or fifteen years of age. It is not uncommon for parents to arrange marriages between their infant children. If the families remain amiable, and if the young people have no objections, the wedding, or *magkauwin*, takes place at the appropriate time. Boys never marry before their magislam, nor girls before their first menstruation.

Parents choose their children's spouses from relatives and close friends. Ideally, one should marry a relative. The only taboo relatives beyond the nuclear family, parents' siblings, and grandparents are patrilateral parallel cousins who are considered more closely related than other cousins because "their fathers have the same semen." Also, marriages between couples (nonsiblings) who have nursed from the same woman are considered incestuous. However, even marriages between patrilateral parallel cousins and couples who have nursed from the same woman are permitted if a simple ceremony is held to erase the incest associated with such a union. The couple go to the open sea with a djin who, after asking the ancestral spirits to approve of the marriage, throws certain valuables, such as a gong, coins, or jewelry, into the sea. If the ceremony is not performed, it is believed the children of the marriage will die and the area will be visited by storms, droughts, tidal waves, and other catastrophes. If a couple marries without performing the ceremony, they are drowned by the

community. No Bajau I knew, however, could remember of such punishment ever being executed.

When a bride is approved by the family, relatives of the young man's parents meet with the proposed bride's family to discuss the potential marriage and the bride wealth. At this meeting, called *magpahanda*, the young man's family leaves a decorated box or trunk, called *ba'ul*, containing items of value such as jewelry or new clothes, with the proposed bride's family after suggesting a price for the bride wealth. The proposed bride's family then discusses the offer and returns the *ba'ul* and its contents to the young man's family with their answer. The young couple and their parents are never directly involved in these meetings. Several meetings may be necessary before the amount of the bride wealth is agreed upon.

After the amount of the bride wealth is negotiated, another *magpahanda* is held. Those relatives of the young man involved in the negotiations visit the family of the proposed bride to give a portion of the payment, usually cash. The money is placed in a *ba'ul*, typically a cardboard box wrapped in a brightly colored fabric. At the home of the bride's relatives, the young man's relatives are served refreshments and the container is placed in the center of the circle of participants. Traditionally, betel was offered to the group by the host, but now cigarettes are usually passed around and the group smokes together. The payment is then formally presented to representatives of the family of the bride-to-be. The amount is usually discussed and the date for the payment of the remainder is decided. After further conversation, the group disbands. A second meeting is held shortly before the wedding to pay the balance of the bride wealth.

The wedding takes place any time following this meeting except during the month of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting, an obvious Islamic influence; however, some Tawi-Tawi Bajau even marry during this month. The length of the engagement period is determined by the length of time it takes the groom's family to accumulate the bride wealth. This may be as short as a few days or as long as a year. The young man's parents as well as their siblings contribute to the bride wealth. The amount varies greatly, depending upon the affluence of the families involved, but typically it consists of about ₱100, two or three one-hundred-pound bags of rice, a fifty-pound bag of sugar, and several cartons of cigarettes. In addition, a small house-like structure, called a *maligai*, filled with small gifts, is given. If it is the second or third marriage for the bride, the amounts are smaller. Sometimes during this engagement period the young man stays at the house or boat of his future bride, especially if there is some doubt about the compati-

bility of the two. Ideally, sexual relations do not occur between the young couple during this period, but in reality they usually do. If personality conflicts develop, the wedding will be called off.

A Bajau wedding is one of the most colorful ceremonies in Tawi-Tawi. The day before the wedding celebration begins, when many houseboats have congregated in the moorage, several boats belonging to relatives of the groom sail to Bongao to purchase goods. The boats are brightly decorated with flags, colorful sarongs, white string fishing nets, green nylon fishing nets, and lighted lanterns. Musicians play gongs and drums while girls and women dance on the prows. During the early morning of the first day of the wedding celebration, boats of the bride's relatives, decorated in similar fashion with dancers and musicians, parade throughout the moorage, visiting relatives and picking up paraphernalia for the wedding. The next morning, shortly after dawn, when the groom's boats are spotted coming from Bongao, the bride's boats go to the edge of the moorage three abreast with musicians playing inside and women dancing on the prows. When the boats are about a quarter of a mile from the moorage, the bride's boats move forward slowly to meet them. When the boats meet, a mock battle ensues as the passengers throw sugar cane, fire crackers, bananas, and similar items at each other amidst much laughter and joking. When very near, the boats stop and the center boat of the groom pulls away from the others and gently touches its prow to the prow of the forward boat of the bride as the loud music, exploding fire crackers, shouting and dancing reaches a crescendo. The bride's boats then turn around and lead the groom's boats into the moorage. Once inside the moorage, the wedding boats disperse and travel throughout the moorage waters for an hour or so, playing music and collecting items for the wedding. The relatives of the groom then distribute rice and sugar to the moorage households, each receiving about two pounds of rice and a pound of sugar, if the bride wealth is large. Otherwise, only close relatives receive the gifts. The musicians retire to the reef or shore where they play the rest of the day and most of the night.

At dusk of the first day's celebration, everyone in the moorage gathers on the reef or beach, dressed in finest clothes and jewelry to participate in the *tagungi'ian*, the celebration held the night before the wedding. The relatives of the bride spend the evening seeing that every adult is supplied with cigarettes or betel. While the musicians play, men and women gather in groups to gossip and joke, children wrestle and play, while the teenage boys play volley ball, wrestle, or tease the girls who coyly hang around the male groups. As darkness descends, kerosene lanterns are hung on poles above the musicians,

mats are spread, and the dancing begins. Normally the dancing is begun by women or girls, singly or in pairs, with men dancing later in the evening; men and women never dance together.

While the dancing takes place, young unmarried couples may seek the privacy of nearby bushes for sexual encounters. It is a night of general license, and not infrequently fights break out between men, as well as between women, who carry the relaxed mood too far. Eventually the adults wander back to their boats, leaving the night to the young people who play music in shifts until dawn. The bride and groom are usually not present during the night-time activities. In fact, beyond the actual wedding ceremony, the bride and groom have minor roles in the two-day celebration.

The following morning at dawn, three boats are again decorated, one each for the bride and groom, and the third for the wedding ceremony. The bride and groom are paraded throughout the moorage in their special boats, eventually arriving at the home boats of their respective future in-laws where they are bathed in sea water by a djin, followed by a rinse in fresh water. As they are bathed, umbrellas are held over them while dancers perform to drums and gongs and a djin chants to ancestral spirits to protect their health and insure good fortune. Following their baths, they enter the houseboats where they are dressed in new clothes and family jewelry. Then rice powder is applied to their faces with the eye brows and hairline outlined in black. Lipstick and sometimes red dots may also be applied to their faces. Each wears an elaborate head dress, often decorated with jewelry and money.

When the toilet of each is finished, usually around noon, the groom is carried on the shoulders of male relatives to the wedding boat or house where his bride is waiting, but separated from him by a curtain. Sometimes the final cash portion of the bride wealth is given to the bride's family at this time in a specially decorated box. The groom sits on mats with his father, future father-in-law, and a djin while other close relatives cluster around. The djin lights incense, takes the groom's right hand in his own over the incense, covers their hands with a cloth, and recites a prayer to ancestral spirits while asking their blessing. If the djin knows Arabic prayers, he may recite some at this time. He then taps on the curtain and with much laughter and joking tries to pull it from the hands of the women who hold it to hide the bride. Finally, the curtain is removed to reveal the bride. The djin then directs the groom to move behind the bride. He next takes the right forefinger of the groom and touches it to the center of the bride's forehead and then above her right breast, following which he seats the groom beside

the bride. Throughout the entire ceremony, the bride and groom are very solemn and never smile, appropriate behavior for a Bajau wedding couple.

The newlyweds are then carried to the nearby exposed reef or beach on the shoulders of male relatives, followed by the male attendant of the groom and the female attendant of the bride who have been with them throughout the morning. On the reef, they are placed on mats near the musicians, surrounded by most of the moorage dwellers. First, the bride's attendant dances with a woman from the crowd. Then the bride and groom dance together. Finally the groom's attendant dances with a man from the crowd. After the last dance, the bride and the groom are carried to the boat where they will spend their first night, and all festivities cease. Boat decorations are removed, the musicians retire, and the remainder of the afternoon is like any ordinary afternoon in the moorage. It is not unusual for two or even three couples to be married at the same time. They are usually close relatives to one another, and although the general celebration is held in common, ceremonies are conducted separately for each couple.

Sometimes if a couple do not want to wait until money is available for the bride wealth, or if their parents disapprove of the match, they elope to the boat of the headman where they spend the night. The following morning, their families meet with the headman, decide upon a suitable bride wealth, and the wedding is solemnized. There may be some music, dancing, and decorated boats, but most commonly an elopement passes with little fanfare. No stigma is attached to an elopement. It is simply a quicker and simpler way of getting married. In fact, some parents prefer that their sons elope, since the bride wealth involved is considerably less. Some Bajau claim that if a star appears close to the moon, an elopement will soon occur.

Death is a common occurrence in Bajau moorage. Although well aware of some of the natural causes of death, the Bajau nonetheless attribute most deaths to the actions of spirits who may even be responsible for those deaths which appear to be the result of natural causes. The majority of the dead are infants who die from various stomach and respiratory disorders. Among adults, tuberculosis, malaria, accidents and childbirth are common causes of death.

As soon as death occurs, female relatives of the deceased wail a mourning refrain which is soon picked up by the other female mooragers. Those closest to the deceased, male and female, fall into fits of grief, kicking, screaming, flailing themselves, and breaking objects within reach. Often they must be restrained by others to prevent their personal injury or the destruction of property. Such fits may last an hour or so during which the persons mourn themselves to exhaustion.

Shortly after the death, an older relative of the same sex as the deceased, familiar with the procedure, washes the corpse, usually with sea water followed by a rinse in fresh water. The bathing, usually done under a canopy of white cloth, is mostly ritual, but must be done to prevent the spirit of the dead from returning to haunt the living. The hands are crossed over the stomach and white cloth is stuffed into the body's apertures. Perfume or powder is sprinkled over the corpse and money may be placed on the body of an adult, a common explanation being that it is his or her share of the family's wealth. The body is then wrapped in several new sarongs and a clean white cloth, and placed in the center of the boat or house while relatives and friends gather for the wake, or *tinulkinan*, which lasts throughout the first night after death. A mirror is sometimes placed on the chest of the corpse during the wake to keep away evil spirits who are frightened when they see their image in the mirror. As long as the corpse remains in the moorage, Bajau do not fish since to do so would invite illness and additional death. One family told me that if fish is roasted within a week after a death, the person who roasts the fish will also die. Other preparations of fish present problems. Rice powder, or any available white paste, is often applied to faces of children during times of death to protect them from potential danger.

Throughout the night, mourners visit the corpse, singing songs to the deceased and occasionally falling into fits of mourning.⁵ If the deceased is an adult member of the community, most of the moorage visit the corpse. However, if the deceased is a child, mourners are generally limited to close relatives. The wake is not considered particularly sacred, and considerable talking and sometimes joking occur among those not engaged in singing. There is no fear of the corpse itself, although the spirit is believed to be potentially malevolent at this time. Thus, most of the songs sung to the spirit are flattering and recall its life experiences and good times with the singer. Persons who have been on unfriendly terms with the deceased often display the greatest grief since it is believed the spirit may seek revenge by visiting them with illness or death. The singing continues throughout the night as mourners come and go.

The following morning, boats are prepared for the journey to one of the two burial islands where all Tawi-Tawi Bajau are buried. Burial elsewhere is unthinkable to the Bajau who often explained to me that the bones of their people should not be scattered. If the deceased is

5. H. Arlo Nimmo, "A Functional Interpretation of Bajau Songs" in *Directions in Pacific Traditional Literature*, eds. Adrienne L. Kaepler and H. Arlo Nimmo (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1976).

a small child, possibly only one or two boats of close relatives may go, but if the deceased is a well-known and respected adult, a large flotilla may accompany the body to the cemetery. For example, the body of an adult man, killed while dynamiting fish, was accompanied by seventeen boats. Sometimes funeral boats are decorated with banners and sarongs while musicians and dancers perform throughout the journey to the burial island. More commonly though, boats are undecorated with no music and dancing, although mourning songs are sung to the deceased throughout the journey. Depending upon winds and currents, the boats normally reach the cemetery islands from the distant moorages by late afternoon or sunset. From nearby moorages, the trip only takes an hour or so. When approaching the cemetery islands, one should not point at them. To do so may bring bad luck or even death.

After reaching the burial island, the boats are anchored off-shore, and unless it is still very light, the graves are not visited since it is believed spirits are at the graves at night. During the night, mourning songs continue while the women wail their endless refrain. Sleepers never direct their heads toward the stern of the boat lest they be the next to die. The following morning at dawn, part of the funeral party goes to the cemetery to prepare the grave. At the grave, ideally a coffin is made from the houseboat of the deceased if he or she were an adult. In reality, a small piece from the boat is usually left with the corpse rather than destroy the houseboat to build a coffin. Children's corpses do not demand a part of the boat. All corpses are normally wrapped in mats before interment. A Bajau may be buried in the graves of either his father's or mother's relatives, or with his affinal relatives, depending upon his relations with them during his lifetime.

The graves, normally covered by a roof of corrugated tin supported by four corner poles, are decorated with elaborate wood carvings, mostly abstract and curvilinear. Carved anthropomorphic figures, bird-like figures, and white cloth canopies are found on the more elaborate graves. A family grave is covered with boards over which a thin layer of sand is sprinkled. When a new burial is made, the boards are removed and the grave rearranged to make room for the new corpse. Old, deteriorated grave goods are thrown away, while those still useable, such as bottles or toys, are often taken by the grave-makers. However, goods belonging to recently interred bodies are never removed, but simply rearranged. Old bones encountered while preparing a new burial are often identified by name, cleaned, stacked in a pile until the grave is completed, and then replaced. Recently interred corpses are not disturbed unless absolutely necessary. All persons

who assist in making the grave and handling the corpse are given a small piece of the shroud to tie around their wrists to protect them from any illness the disturbed spirits may attempt to inflict upon them. The preparation of the grave is not a particularly solemn occasion and joking and laughing often occur.

When the corpse is lifted from the funeral boat to be carried to the grave, siblings, parents, children and the spouse of the deceased pass twice under the corpse as they scream and weep. The corpse is then carried to the grave followed by the wailing mourners. As it is lowered into the grave, mourners sometimes jump into the grave or attempt to tear down the grave structure in their grief. A djin told me the corpse should be placed in the grave so that its head is directed to the east. Grave goods, placed with the corpse, include clothing, household goods, fishing equipment, food, bottles of water, cigarettes and bottles of the mother's milk or a cradle bar if the deceased were a child. Some of the articles are frequently broken to release their spirits. Some Bajau say the articles are left to assist the spirit in the spirit world, whereas others say they are left to rid them from the household where they will remind survivors of the deceased. Shortly before the grave is covered, a ceremony called *magsangbaihian* is held. A djin steps into the grave, kneels over the head of the corpse, and opens the wrapping around the nose. After placing a coconut shell of incense nearby so the smoke enters the nostrils of the corpse, he recites a prayer asking the spirit to refrain from sending illness or bad luck to the survivors. The board covering is then placed over the grave and covered with sand. If the deceased is an adult, sometimes a small boat or even the prow of the houseboat is placed atop the grave. The final rite is a libation of water poured over the grave by the djin as he or she again asks the spirit to refrain from harming the survivors. The mourners then return to their boats.

After the initial grief displayed at death, further mourning is fairly ritualized. By the time the corpse is buried, the survivors are weary of the mourning ritual and the presence of the corpse. Most Bajau are reluctant to mention the name of a recently deceased person. Some say it is impolite because it reminds survivors of their loss, while others say it may call back the spirit. Several Bajau told me that ideally the houseboat of the deceased should be abandoned after his or her death. I never saw this happen, although I did see several houses abandoned after the deaths of family members, some claiming house-dwelling was responsible for the deaths. A bereaved spouse has no formal period of mourning, but he or she generally waits about a year before remarriage.

CONCLUSION

A great deal has happened to the Tawi-Tawi Bajau since the 1960s when the bulk of the preceding data was collected. In the early 1970s a civil war began in the southern Philippines which lasted over a decade. The war was an attempt on the part of certain Filipino Muslims to achieve greater autonomy from the Philippine national government which they long viewed as repressive. Although the Tawi-Tawi Bajau were not directly involved in the conflict, they like most people of Sulu, suffered from it. As fighting intensified in the Jolo area, many Tausug and other refugees fled to the relative peace of the Tawi-Tawi Islands. At about the same time, the Tawi-Tawi and Sibutu Islands were separated from the northern Sulu Islands to form a new administrative unit called Tawi-Tawi Province with its capital at Bongao. This brought an influx of administrators, civil servants, and entrepreneurs to the area. In addition, large numbers of Filipino militia were stationed in Bongao to fight the rebel forces in southern Sulu. One result of that tumultuous decade was a great increase in population in the newly formed Tawi-Tawi Province. Accurate census figures are unavailable for the area, but when I was in Tawi-Tawi in the 1960s, Bongao was a sleepy little port town of about 5000 people, the largest community in southern Sulu. When I returned in 1982, Bongao was a bustling city of an estimated 80,000 people. Some of the outer villages experienced similar population growth, especially those on the reefs of south-central Tawi-Tawi which had previously been Bajau moorages. The chief attraction to these reefs was the cultivation of the seaweed *agalagar*, introduced as a commercial crop in the mid-1970s. Its ease of cultivation and financial rewards attracted many people to the reefs where it thrived which, unfortunately, were also the reefs where many Bajau lived. The combination of the invasion of aggressive outsiders and the continuing conflicts of the civil war frightened many Bajau from Tawi-Tawi. Precise figures are not available for the current number of Bajau in Tawi-Tawi, but in 1982 I estimated that probably two-thirds has either left the area for eastern Borneo or been killed in the conflict.⁶

These events have obviously had their influence on the religion of the Bajau. Perhaps the most important change is that the Bajau have a greater identification with the Muslim people of Sulu. As the Philippine militia sought to defeat the Muslim rebels, they were indiscriminate in their often ruthless treatment of local people. Consequently,

6. H. Arlo Nimmo, "Recent Population Movements in the Sulu Archipelago: Implications to Sama Culture History," *Archipel* 32 (1986): 25-38.

the Bajau viewed themselves as part of the repressed Muslim population of Sulu. Despite their non-Muslim religion, the Bajau always identified as Muslims to outsiders, a view not shared by the Muslims who regarded them as "pagans." But under the repression of the Christian Filipino government, Sulu Muslims began to perceive the Bajau as fellow sufferers and a bond of brotherhood evolved that was not there before as Bajau lived more intimately with Muslims. Some Bajau sought security in Bongao where they live near Muslims while others remained in their home moorages which were invaded by Muslims for the cultivation of agalagar. I did not investigate the ramifications of this greater intimacy on Bajau religion during my short summer visit in 1982, but some results were evident. Some Bajau were attending the mosques of their Muslim neighbors, some intermarriage with Muslims had occurred with the resulting children being raised as Muslims, and the language of the Tausug (the dominant Muslim group to invade the area) was spoken as a second language by many Bajau. The end result was a greater acculturation to Islam throughout all of Bajau culture.

Islamic influence on Bajau religion has been noted in the previous discussion. Certain Muslim words were borrowed to apply to native Bajau concepts. For example, *saitan* is a group of malevolent spirits, *djin* is a shaman as well as the spirits he sometimes calls to assist him, *magislam* is the ceremony for initiating boys into adulthood, and *imam* is the title given to certain men who use Koranic chants for curing. Thus, the current acculturation to Islam among the Bajau in Tawi-Tawi is the continuation (albeit at a greater tempo) of a process that began many years ago.

Another influence on Bajau religion in recent years is Christianity. Some years prior to the civil unrest in Sulu, Catholic priests established a small school at a Bajau moorage near Bongao. The school was destroyed during the hostilities, but many of the Bajau from that area began mooring near the Catholic hospital in Bongao. Education was the major activity of the Catholics, but through their educational programs they also introduced Christian concepts to some of the young Bajau. A few Bajau youth were attracted to Catholicism in earlier years, but with the growing anti-Christian sentiment in Sulu as a result of the civil war, most Bajau saw little advantage in becoming Catholic. Consequently, the Catholics converted few Bajau, but their teachings doubtless influenced them, especially in the realm of curing where they introduced Western medical concepts through their hospital where many Bajau seek treatment. During the mid-1960s, a Samal evangelical minister resided in the same village where the Catholic school was located. He held services in his home which a few Bajau youth at-

tended, but his Christianity was so blended with Sulu religious beliefs that his influence on the Bajau world view was negligible, if not nil.

The Bajau who left Tawi-Tawi for eastern Borneo have probably formed moorages near land-dwelling Samal, similar to their arrangements in Tawi-Tawi prior to the civil war. Most likely, they have retained much of their traditional religion since they are removed from the influence which are changing the Bajau who remained in Tawi-Tawi.

It seems inevitable that the Tawi-Tawi Bajau will become incorporated into the Islamic culture of Sulu. They will be the most recent Sulu community to join the ranks of the Muslims, but many preceded them, such as the Bajau of Sitangkai who have become Muslims within the past thirty years. Indeed, the many communities of Sulu represent a continuum from the least acculturated to the most acculturated to Islam, all sharing in varying degrees a substratum of indigenous religious beliefs. The religion of the Tawi-Tawi Bajau is, therefore, important in that it provides a glimpse of the indigenous religion of Sulu before the arrival of Islam in the Philippines.