

Social Integration Of Badjao Migrants In The Local Community Of Barangay Malitam, Batangas City, Philippines

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Abstract: This paper aimed to find out how Badjao migrants are socially integrated into the local community in terms of local community's accommodation of the Badjao migrants and Badjaos' acculturation of social life in the local community. Descriptive research design was employed. Key informant interview and focus group discussion were used to gather data. The social integration centered on the accommodation of the Badjaos by the local community and the acculturation by the Badjaos of the social life in the community.

Keywords: Badjao migrants, social integration, accommodation, acculturation and local community

INTRODUCTION

The Badjao group is one of the 13 Islamized groups indigenous to Mindanao (ADB, 2002). Panaguition (2010 cited by Bracamonte 2010) describes the Badjaos as basically nomadic and extremely mobile. Traditionally, Badjaos travel by boat from one island to the next in search of livelihood or food. They are thus considered the most sea-oriented people found in the maritime region stretching from the coastal areas of Zamboanga Bay to the Sulu Archipelago of the Philippines. Popularly known as "Sea Gypsies," the name Badjao is a Malay-Bornean word which implies "man of seas." The location and accessibility of Batangas City play a significant role on the influx of internal migrants. Batangas City is located in a rapid growth area that attracts investors. The case of the Badjao migrants in Barangay Malitam, Batangas City typifies the rural-urban migration that captures the "push" and "pull" factors. It also showcases the attendant problems of the migrants' failed integration into the mainstream community. This is particularly true for IP groups which have an entirely difficult cultural system than that of the mainstream community. As a result, the IP migrants suffer from discrimination and deprivation of basic and welfare services such as health, education, and livelihood. They also experience disintegration of their culture. This article aims to find out how Badjao migrants were socially integrated into the local community of Barangay Malitam, Batangas City in terms of the local community's accommodation of the Badjao migrants and the Badjaos' acculturation of social life in the local community.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed the descriptive research design to be able to describe and analyze the Badjao migrants' social integration into the local community of Barangay Malitam. The study was participated in by Badjao migrants; the community leader and his wife; the tribe leader of the Badjaos; the Barangay Captain of Barangay Malitam, Batangas City; and the CSWD Officer of Batangas City. Data were gathered through KIIs, FGDs, storytelling and observations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Integration of the Badjao Migrants into the Local Community

Through time and in their almost 25 years of moving from one place to another, six years of which were spent in Barangay Malitam, Batangas City, it was evident that efforts from the host local community as well as the Badjaos themselves have been undertaken to make the Badjao migrants legitimate members of the community. This process is called "integration" (Webster Dictionary, 1992). Contextualized in a setting of a local group of people or community, this may be called "social or cultural integration." This study made use of Ferguson's (2008) definition of social integration, which states:

"Social integration is the movement of minority groups, which include ethnic minority, refugees and underprivileged sections of society into the mainstream societies."

Social integration can be facilitated by a number of social processes, For this study, only two processes relevant to the case of the typically segregated and discriminated groups such as IPs and migrants were looked into: accommodation and acculturation. In this study, accommodation was viewed as a process where the host community employs conscious efforts to develop working arrangements with the migrants. Moreover, they try to avoid conflict and make their relations with one another more tolerable and peaceful. In order to live a peaceful coexistence with each other, each of the group tries to adjust to others while maintaining its own identity or interest. Whenever conflict arises, they are resolved in the interest of peace and harmony. The host community often tries to attend to the needs of the cultural community which include economic, educational and social programs (Panopio, 1994). Acculturation, on the other hand, involves the borrowing of behavior and thought patterns of another group (Panopio, et al. 1994). The culture of Badjao migrants, for example, may become modified through their contact with the Batangueños, but both their cultures do not necessarily blend with one another. For

example, the Badjaos have now learned the importance and practice of birth registration. Likewise, though illiterate, they are now using mobile phones for communication.

Local Community's Accommodation of the Badjao Migrants

The Batangas City's local government and community were able to accommodate the Badjao migrants through the following efforts and initiatives: assigning a community leader for Badjaos, participating in intermarriage and learning the dialect, providing Badjao children free education, including qualified Badjao families under the government 4Ps, allowing the Badjaos to vote, improving health and sanitation, addressing young marriages, providing livelihood, settling community problems, handling calamities, and building partnerships.

Assigning a community leader for the Badjaos. The Badjao migrants have been living in Badjawan, Barangay Malitam for more than six years at the time the study was conducted. All throughout their stay of more than 25 years in Batangas City, including their stay in Sta. Clara, Isla Noah, Simlong, and Tabangao, their chieftain has been looking after them. But the local government of Batangas City observed that the community where the Badjaos live remain dirty and poor. The local government thus decided to call a meeting among the Badjaos and proposed for an election for a new leader for the tribe's community affairs. There were some resistance among the Badjaos, because they believe that they should be led by a Badjao. The local government was firm with their decision that if the tribe wants to stay in Batangas, the Badjaos should follow the rules set by the local government. The local government then suggested that they elect a Batangueño as their community leader while their chieftain remains when it comes to presiding over their culture and traditions. The Badjaos agreed. For more than two years now, a 34-year old Batangueño, married to a Badjao woman, was chosen to serve as their community leader. He handles community affairs, settles disputes, and coordinates with the local government concerning the problems and successes of the community. This portrays an assertive type of accommodation wherein the local government chose a member of the dominant group as a mentor to guide, assist, and support the minority group. This undertaking hopes to achieve a balance between the migrants and the locals in Barangay Malitam.

Participating in intermarriage and learning the dialect.

A Batangueño who marries a Badjao has to live in the tribe's community. This is advantageous on the part of the Badjaos as it implies the family's security of tenure in Batangas City, which will provide them more access to employment and basic social services such as education and health. This is also an opportunity for the Badjaos' upward mobility. The leader has been married to a Badjao lady for more than 10 years already. He can understand the Badjao language and can speak a little of it. The wife, on the other hand, speaks both Tagalog and Badjao fluently. The Badjaos in Barangay Malitam can understand and speak Tagalog but not as fluent as the wife of the community leader. Whenever the leader calls for a meeting, he would address the Badjao in Tagalog and the

wife would translate words or sentences if the Badjaos do not understand. The Badjaos' suggestions, problems, or reactions are either in their own dialect or in Tagalog. To facilitate the Badjaos' adjustment to the new culture and survive in Barangay Malitam, learning the dialect or the Tagalog language in the area is a pre-requisite. But the Batangueños, especially the leader and those who serve as gatekeepers may need to be also familiar with the Badjao dialect. In communication, this is an opportunity for connecting, creating new meanings, and eventually facilitating "accommodation" by the resident culture of an "outside culture."

Providing Badjao children free education. Badjao children are allowed to enroll and be admitted to public schools in Batangas City. But even though the national government has already passed a law on free education at the primary and secondary levels, the Badjao parents are still problematic when it comes to other education expenses such as school project, photocopies, school supplies, PE uniforms, and student allowance. Once in a while, certain NGOs and institutions link with the *barangay* for the Badjao community's literacy and livelihood projects. These included academic institutions such as University of Batangas and De La Salle Lipa. The University of Batangas (UB) started teaching about 56 Badjao kids in the community's shed. According to the City CSWD officer assigned in the Badjao community, the Batangas City government is extending various educational assistance to the Badjaos in Malitam. At present, there are two female high school students who were given the chance to attend the Batangas National High School as freshmen. The chosen first year students were given Php3000 each for school expenses.

Including qualified Badjao families in the 4Ps. At the time of the study, there was an increasing enrolment among Badjao children in local schools. This can be attributed to the Badjao families who were recipients of the government's "Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program" or 4Ps. A total of 88 Badjao families were entitled to the benefits of the program which included cash transfer. In return, these beneficiaries were obliged to meet the conditions set by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

Allowing the Badjaos to vote. Despite their illiteracy, the local government of Batangas gave Badjao adults the opportunity to practice their right to vote. The CSWD officer and the community leader and his wife assisted the Badjaos during registration. The candidates in the local elections also visited the Badjao community during campaign periods. The Badjao voters would usually go to polling precincts in groups. The community leader and his wife and the few literate Badjaos in the community then help them fill out the ballots during elections. They would read and shade the ballots for the Badjaos' illiterate voters.

Improving health and sanitation. Lack of knowledge on health and sanitation among the Badjao migrants led to proliferation of diseases such as diarrhea, pneumonia, skin allergy, cough, and flu in the community. Children rarely use slippers and usually roam around barefoot on dirt

during play. Toddlers do not wear underwear. Kids play dirt and would eat without washing their hands. All of the Badjaos use the river beside their community as comfort room. The local government has already constructed a communal comfort room for the Badjaos. Since the community is used to utilizing rivers or seas to dispose their wastes, the local government built a public restroom above the river using bamboo and a toilet bowl. The Badjaos are also recipients of various vaccines from the barangay and city health office. There are instances when barangay health workers or city health workers visit the Badjao community to give vaccines to babies, youths, and senior citizens. In other cases, the Badjaos are encouraged to go straight to the barangay hall or city health office to receive the vaccines. However, the Badjaos' timidity and lack of knowledge on the importance of the vaccine hinder them from obtaining this medical assistance from the local government and other non-government organizations. Because of the health assistance provided by the local community, the Badjaos are starting to live in a clean environment and are now practicing proper care for the health of their children. It may take a while for the tribe to absorb the health practices being taught to them, but what is important is their willingness and patience to learn.

Addressing young marriages and family planning. As part of their culture, Badjao women marry at a very young age, normally at the onset of puberty. Marrying at a young age not only promotes overpopulation in the tribe but also harms the health of the women. This bothered the city government of Batangas especially the CSWD. During the data gathering, the CSWD officer discussed with the tribal leader the local government's plan of sending both of them and another elder to Manila to attend a seminar-workshop concerning young marriages. The Imam, the religious and the tribe leader at the same time, agreed to attend the said seminar/workshop with the CSWD officer. This is an indication that somehow the Badjaos are exerting effort to learn the culture of the place where they now live and find out eventually if it will do them good.

Providing livelihood. Another dilemma faced by the Badjao migrants was the deterioration of their traditional livelihood as evidenced by the lack of viable economic alternatives and sustainable livelihood projects in the community. There are academic institutions which extended their help in the tribe's livelihood development, but none of their projects has been sustainable. One of the livelihood projects of the city government in the Badjao community was charcoal production. Their investment on this has already been somehow recovered, but problems on the availability of lumber, illegal tree-cutting, and pollution subsequently surfaced. Therefore, the project had to be stopped. Another livelihood project of the city government was crafting of accessories. Materials which included beads were provided and the Badjao themselves sold the accessories. The Batangas City administration also gave sewing machines to the Badjao community to help the residents in making rugs which they can readily sell in the markets. Finally, materials to make a boat were donated by the city government. The Badjaos built a big boat which is now being shared among the members of the Badjao community who prefer to catch fish either for selling or daily sustenance. Similarly, De La Salle Lipa

conducted a livelihood program in Badjawan. A group of mothers were taught how to make small woven bags. De La Salle Lipa provided not only the knowledge and skills in making bags but also the materials used. After the bags were made, the school also looked for prospective buyers.

Settling community problems. It is common to witness married couples in the Badjao community engage in petty quarrels and fights because of domestic problems. When this happens the couples usually go to the community leader and tell him of their decision to separate. The local leaders always advise couples to settle their differences and problems amicably and also consider the fate and future of their children. During late afternoons, when the Badjao men would arrive from work, there would be drinking sessions in the community. The problems would arise when the drunk men subsequently engage in brawls. The community leader tries to settle these fights with the help of other Badjao men.

Handling calamities. Indigenous peoples are the most vulnerable groups when natural disaster occurs because of their dependence on natural resource for livelihood such as the sea and their poorly constructed houses located along hazardous areas like river banks. During the past typhoons, flooding and other calamities Badjao families were evacuated by local officials to schools and chapel for safety. While temporarily in the evacuation areas, the city government gave them food supply. Under the local government's food for work (FFW) program, the Badjaos were asked to clean the evacuation area and community surroundings, and in exchange, they got food.

Building partnerships. Although the community leader of the Badjaos has already been transacting with the local government officials of Batangas City, he has to tap also other community partners engaged in development initiatives that would be beneficial to the Badjaos.

Badjaos' Acculturation to the Social Life of the Local Community

The Badjaos in Barangay Malitam tried to fit in the new social group they got into and be accepted by the dominant group, the Batangueños, in the area. Hence, they took deliberate efforts to learn, absorb and imbibe in themselves, whenever feasible, the thought patterns and behavior of the latter (Panopio et al., 1994). This social process is called acculturation. In the process of acculturation, the Badjaos tried to learn the Tagalog dialect; abide by policies of the local government, join other religious organizations; practice Batangueño culture such as manner of dressing, the food they eat, and the burial of their dead; use communication media such as television and cellphones; form organizations; and show respect to local leaders and establish good relationships with others.

Learning to speak Tagalog. The Badjao migrants learned to speak the language of Batangueño, which is Tagalog, while maintaining the use of their own dialect. Even if there was nobody willing to teach them the language as a group, there were numerous ways on how they exerted effort to learn Tagalog. One was through listening to others (non-Badjaos) during their various travels from

their places of origin in Mindanao to Batangas City; watching TV and imitating what the actors or broadcasters say; and attendance in school by their children where the primary dialect used by both teachers and non-Badjao students is Tagalog. As migrants, the Badjaos, in a way, had no other choice but to try the other group's language in order to communicate with them and build new relationships with more powerful and dominant group in the community where they intermingle with. To preserve their culture, the Badjaos used their dialect when they talk among the members of the family and the tribe. Inside the comfort of their own homes, family members from the parents down to their children communicate in Badjao dialect. But when they were conversing with non-Badjaos, they tried to speak in Tagalog. Every time they are with their community leader, the Badjaos speak in their language and the community leader speaks in Tagalog. Both the leader and the members understood each other's dialects. In instances when they could not understand what the other is trying to say, the wife of the community leader, who is a Badjao herself, speaks in behalf of her husband or her community.

Abiding by the policies of the local community. As part of learning how to belong to the "new" community, the Badjaos had to comply with certain rules, regulations or policies prevailing in the community. These included registration for election, birth registration, and practice of family planning. *Registration for election.* Most Badjao adults, though illiterate, were registered voters. Hence, during election time, they are assisted by literate Badjaos, or the community leader and his wife in exercising their right to vote. The Badjaos went in groups to vote; the leader and other literate individuals wrote in their behalf and they merely signed the ballots. The Badjaos were directed by the city government to register so they can be considered as Batangueños, enjoy the benefits and privileges as citizens of the locality, and participate during the local and national elections. Though they were assisted by literate individuals, this gave them the chance to practice their right to vote. *Registration of birth.* When the Badjaos arrived in Batangas City, most of them did not have birth certificates. The city government of Batangas conducted a massive birth registration among the children of the Badjaos who were born in Batangas City. Since birth certificate is a major requirement in school admittance, it will be easier for the Badjao parents to enrol their kids in school.

Practice of family planning. Since most of the Badjao families have four to eight children, the city government through the help of the Barangay Health Workers (BHW) tried to talk with the Badjao women about the use of pills as a contraceptive. There were some mothers who tried to use pills, but most of them were afraid to take the pills. Likewise, the frequent scarcity of the pills in the barangay health center in Malitam also drove them to stop using them because they cannot afford to buy the pills.

Joining other religious organizations. The Badjaos are Muslims by religious affiliation. When they arrived in Barangay Malitam, Batangas City, they continued to observe and practice their religion. Some local government and non-government groups started

penetrating the Badjao community in the hope of bringing positive development to the tribe. These included the Born Again Christian Church which built a day care center and offered feeding program for the Badjao kids in exchange of the Badjaos' attendance to the bible study and prayer service of the Born Again Christian Church. The Badjaos would listen for an hour about the Born Again Christian's teachings in a small make-shift house which serves as chapel for the Christians and their converts.

Practicing Batangueño culture. Their stay in Batangas City brought the Badjaos to practice some of the Batangueño culture such as the manner of dressing, the choice of food, and the burial of their dead. For more than 25 years of having been part of the land-based community of Batangas City, the Badjaos have already imbibed some of the Batangueños' way of dressing. The Badjao men now wear jeans and shirts while the Badjao women wear shirts but still paired with their colorful skirts. Most of these clothes were given by the Batangueños themselves when Badjaos go from one house to another to beg. Since there are already Badjaos who converted from Muslims to Christians, the Badjaos also started to eat pork. They have also included cheap canned goods such as luncheon meat, corned beef, tuna and sardines, and instant noodles in their choices of food since these are readily available in the sari-sari store in the Badjao community. Both local government and non-government groups have included canned goods and instant noodles in their dole out projects to the Badjao tribe during calamities and elections. The Badjaos have also practiced burying their dead in the public cemetery. The local government of Batangas has provided a burial site for the Badjaos. Through the support of the City Social Welfare and Development, the Badjaos can also ask for some financial assistance needed for the burial services.

Using communication media such as television and cellphones. Because of poverty, only very few television sets can be found in the Badjao community. Since providing food on their table is their priority, it is difficult for a Badjao family to purchase a television set. With a minimal income coming into the household budget of the Badjaos, television watching became a communal activity. The Badjaos, most specially the youth, usually imitate the actors' and broadcasters' way of speaking. This is one of the ways through which the Badjaos learn how to speak in Tagalog. Though most of the Badjao adults are illiterate, they have acquired mobile phones either by purchase or barter. They used these mobile phones only to call their fellow Badjaos who were living or working in other places. Since most of the adults do not know how to read and write, they could not do text messaging.

Forming organizations. The Badjao migrants in Barangay Malitam also formed different indigenous organizations such as the Women's Club and religious organizations. These groups provided information relevant to their families, community, and work or sources of income. For easy access and identification of recipients of projects, programs and activities, the local government of Batangas City instructed the Badjao community to form a women's group. This women's group has been a recipient of development-oriented activities sponsored by either the

local government or NGOs. The Badjao women's group has also been performing Badjao dances outside of their community. There were times they were invited to showcase their traditional dance in different occasions, events or seminars. And whenever they were lucky, they would also get donations in addition to the free food provided them during their performances.

Respecting leaders and establishing good relationship with others. Indigenous specialists such as their tribe leader and elders are the Badjaos' service suppliers. These people are the ones the Badjaos' trusted the most. Badjaos listen to these leaders without a trace of doubt, from the day they left their place of origin until they arrived in Batangas City. Since the tribe leader and elders have much experience, the Badjaos rely on them when they have queries and problems. But aside from their tribe leader and elders, the Badjaos also respect and follow the instructions, rules, and regulations provided to them by their community leader who is a Batangueño. The Badjaos have been listening and following orders set by the community leader from the day he assumed his post. The Badjaos respected him well, because they saw his perseverance in learning the Badjao dialect and in making sure that he takes proper care of the Badjao community by maintaining cleanliness and peace and order. The community leader also earned the respect of his constituents when he started building good relationships with different government and non-government organizations which can provide assistance for the Badjao community. Another significant leader in the Badjao community was the CSWD officer assigned in the tribe. For several years, the CSWD officer looked into the needs and concerns of the community: health, education, marriage, and livelihood or source of income. She has tapped some local government units to assist the Badjaos to obtain their birth certificates and marriage contracts necessary for admittance in school and employment. She introduced the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) among the Badjaos and was able to identify recipients in the group. All of these earned her the Badjaos' recognition and respect.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) should exert more effort in assisting the Badjaos negotiate with the local government about their needs and priorities in line with their goal of becoming socially integrated in the local community of Barangay Malitam, Batangas City. Local leaders are encouraged to learn the Badjao dialect in order to have better and open communication with the Badjao community. Badjao migrants are encouraged to tap the educated youth in their community. Since the findings infer that the Badjaos place immense trust on their fellow Badjaos, they can assign their educated youth to be their gatekeepers or mediators.

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