

Themes in Badjaw Dreams¹

HARRY NIMMO

University of Hawaii

I

As discussed by Barnouw (1963), anthropologists have generally approached the study of dreams from two points of view, namely the collective approach and the individual approach. The collective approach involves the collection of "dreams from a large number of individuals in a particular society and then look [ing] for characteristic features in this sample," while the individual approach "involves recording dreams in conjunction with life history material and other data concerning the individual, such as projective tests. In this case, especially if one can obtain free associations to the dream material, one may perhaps determine the 'latent' content" (Barnouw 1963:215). This paper is concerned with the so-called collective approach to the study of the manifest content of dreams; it is consequently worth reviewing the few anthropological studies which have dealt with dreams in this manner. The reader is referred to the papers by Dorothy Eggan (1961) and Roy D'Andrade (1961) for a discussion of other anthropological approaches to the study of dreams.

Perhaps more than any other contemporary anthropologist, Dorothy Eggan has stressed the important potential which dreams have for anthropological research. She has emphasized the value of examining the manifest content of dreams in

order to determine dream themes or patterns which are unique to a single individual or a single culture. According to Eggan, these patterns, as found in a number of dreams from a single culture, may reveal areas of the culture which generate stress and tension for its members, and thereby provide an additional tool for gaining insight into the culture under investigation.

Employing Eggan's method, Alan Holmberg found that well over half the manifest content of the 50 dreams he collected among the Siriono dealt with some aspect of food or eating. This dominant theme of Siriono dreams supported Holmberg's own observations on the central importance of food in this society of hunters and gatherers. According to Holmberg: "If dreams are an unconscious expression of desires, then those of the Siriono clearly reflect their preoccupation with the quest for food" (1960:91).

In another study dealing with the manifest content of dreams, S. G. Lee (1958) discovered that Zulu dreams are "circumscribed and influenced by the social pressures and sanctions of the culture" (p. 266). Six hundred Zulu informants were asked, "What do you dream about?" and 120 of the women in this sample were interviewed more intensively about their dreams of men and women, as well as differences in the dreams of persons of the same sex in different age and marital-status groups. He was able to explain these differences in terms of the cultural values and sanctions as these operated differentially upon individuals of different sex, age, and marital status.

¹ This paper is based on field research conducted among the Tawi-Tawi Badjaw from July, 1963, to January, 1964, supported by the East West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii. The research was part of the Coordinated Investigation of Sulu Culture sponsored by the Institute of Philippine Culture at the Ateneo de Manila.

Through the use of questionnaires, Griffith, Miyagi, and Tago (1958) made a comparison of Japanese and American college students' dreams. They found important differences between the dreams of the two cultures, as well as differences in dreaming patterns between the sexes of each culture. Like Holmberg and Lee, the authors were able to explain the dominant themes and differences in terms of cultural factors. Similarly, Calvin S. Hall (1951) examined 10,000 American dreams and arrived at generalizations about them. His study is important for possible comparative work on dreams; however, he makes little attempt to interpret the dreams more fully in terms of American culture.

These studies suggest that dreams do tend to be culturally patterned i.e., persons sharing a common cultural tradition reveal similar themes in their dreams. D'Andrade calls attention to the fact that "certain areas of cultural life are over-represented in the manifest content of dreams, while other areas may be considerably underrepresented" (1961:309). These recurring themes in dreams apparently reflect those aspects of reality which cause the greatest anxiety to the dreamers. Thus, Eggan writes:

These repeated themes, or dreams, not only call attention to areas of tension in the personality of the subject, but to cultural stresses and cultural supports in a society, as where the tensions are mitigated by the exaggeration of a cultural concept such as a "guardian spirit," or personal drives are condemned by cultural sanctions (1952:481).

Reference has already been made to Holmberg's contention that the predominant theme of food in Siriono dreams reflects the stresses surrounding food procurement in Siriono waking life. Comparable tension and anxieties are represented in Zulu dreams (Lee 1958).

It is the purpose of this paper to demonstrate how an analysis of the manifest content of dreams may be used to determine certain of the so-called "cultural stresses" in Badjaw society.

II

The dreams discussed in this paper were collected during my investigation of the social organization of the nomadic Badjaw boat-dwellers of the Sulu Archipelago in the southern Philippines (Nimmo 1965). A personal interest in dreams prompted me to include a question on dreams in an interview schedule. However, I soon discovered that most Badjaw were reluctant to discuss dreams in a formal interview situation, so I quickly abandoned the method. My second attempt was more successful. During casual conversations with Badjaw, I off-handedly introduced the subject of dreams, asking my informant if he had recently dreamed. Usually the method brought results, and the informant related his most recent dream to me. Using this method, I was able to collect 44 dreams from 33 adult informants, 22 males and 11 females. Unfortunately, I was rarely able to obtain elaborations of the dreams. Most dreams were stated very succinctly; if pressed for further detail, the informant generally replied that he remembered no more, or that there was no more to his dream.

In no sense is my dream sample random. I collected dreams from those individuals who were willing to talk with me. The dreams were collected at a single Badjaw village, Tungkalang, near Sanga-Sanga Island; however, because of the frequent movement among the Badjaw villages, persons from all six Badjaw villages in the area are included in the sample. When my interpreter was present, I generally communicated with the Badjaw through him; however, toward the end of my field work, I had learned

the Badjaw language well enough to carry on superficial conversations, during which I often asked about dreams. Dreams collected in this manner were always verified later when my interpreter was available. The disproportionately large number of male informants is due to the very realistic fact that many Badjaw women were reluctant to talk with me, and insisted that their husbands could give me better information than they. As a result, I was able to interview few women.

It is difficult to place the sample in its larger context. The population of any Badjaw boat village is constantly changing since boats frequently move in and out of the village. As a result, the population extremes at Tungkalang, the village where the dreams were collected, ranged from 28 to 120 houseboats, with an average of about 71. The average num-

ber of persons per houseboat is five which provides an average population of about 400 for the village (including its house-dwelling residents), or an adult population of about 170. The 33 adults in the sample, then, represent about 20 percent of the adult Tungkalang population, or about six percent of the total adult population of the six Badjaw villages in the area.

It must be emphasized that this paper is largely heuristic. The non-randomness of the sample presents obvious difficulties in applying findings to Badjaw society in general.

III

As illustrated by the following chart, the most remarkable feature of Badjaw dreams is the consistency with which they reveal a very limited number of themes.

Chart 1 — DOMINANT THEMES IN BADJAW DREAMS

Theme	Food	Spirits	Animals	Illness/death	Other
Males	9	5	6	3	4
Females	6	5	3	2	1
Total	15	10	9	5	5

The dreams were classified according to their dominant themes, and then divided according to the sex of the dreamer.² Because most of the dreams were very brief, dealing with a single episode or event, determining their proper classification was no problem. All dreams concerned with some aspect of eating, fishing, gardening, cooking, or food gathering were placed in the first category. Dreams involving spirits of any sort, e. g., being frightened by a ghost, or encountering a dead relative, were included in

the second category. The third category includes all dreams involving encounters with various land-dwelling animals. Dreams of death or illness formed the fourth category. In some respects it would be justifiable to combine the second and fourth categories since to the Badjaw, most causes of illness or death can be traced to the actions of spirits; however, since spirits are not involved *only* in activities causing illness or death, and not *all* illness and death are caused by spirits, it was decided to place spirit dreams in a special category when they were not specifically concerned with illness or death. The "Other" category in-

² Since the sample is so small, and the differences between male and female dreams are not great, I have not discussed the dreams separately according to sex.

cludes those dreams which do not fit into any of the preceding four categories.

If dreams reflect anxiety-causing situations, it appears from the above table that food, spirits, animals, and illness or death generate a good deal of anxiety for the Badjaw people. To test this hypothesis, it is necessary to examine these themes as they appear in Badjaw society.

IV

Found throughout the Sulu Archipelago of the southern Philippines, the Badjaw, or so-called "sea nomads," are predominantly subsistence fishermen living at the fringes of urban areas or near barren, isolated coral islands. Although popularly referred to as "sea gypsies," only in the Tawi-Tawi vicinity of Sulu have these people retained the nomadic way of life, their villages consisting of flotillas of sometimes well over a hundred houseboats.

In many respects, the six Tawi-Tawi Badjaw villages may be considered a single community. Because of the nomadic movements of these people, frequent communication occurs among the villages, and a web of kinship ties virtually enmeshes the entire area. Although a few houses have recently been constructed in three of the villages, most of these Badjaw still lead a nomadic life which can perhaps best be described as "fishing and gathering." Only a few of the house-dwelling people have begun to practice agriculture. The nomadic wanderings of the Tawi-Tawi sea folk are generally limited to the water enclosed by the six boat villages (a sea area of approximately 250 square miles interspersed with numerous islands of varying sizes), although some individuals have traveled as far north as Jolo Island (100 miles) and south to Semporna,

Sabah (75 miles). Also, extended fishing trips often take the men far into the Sulu and Celebes seas. Five of the Badjaw boat villages are located only a few hundred yards from Muslim land villages, but contacts between the two groups are strictly of an economic nature—the Badjaw trading and selling fish for the cassava and fruits of the Muslims. There is little Christian missionizing in the area, nor are the Badjaw included in the Islamic community of Tawi-Tawi. An elderly man acts as headman of each village, while the villagers' participation in provincial politics is nil. The sea people are generally considered "filthy pagans" by the Muslim peoples, and their status in Tawi-Tawi (as in most of Sulu) is that of an outcast group. Largely because of this outcast position and their nomadic, waterborne society, the Badjaw exist as a society quite distinct and separate from the Muslim community of Tawi-Tawi. (Nimmo 1965).

Food

Many of the waking hours of a Badjaw's life are spent in some aspect of food procurement, and practically all the major activities of the men are concerned with fishing. During the day, Badjaw men often travel to the open sea for deep sea fishing, or they may go with siblings or siblings-in-law on fishing trips of several days' duration. At night, when the sea is calm and the moon in the proper phase, they frequently fish the waters around the village area. And during full moon, most of the Tawi-Tawi Badjaw sail for the well-known fishing grounds in the area where they may stay for a week of intensive fishing. During the daylight hours, when the men are not engaged in actual fishing, much of their time is spent repairing fishing equipment, or making new nets. Similar-

ly, Badjaw women devote a good portion of their waking hours to food activities. Most importantly, they must prepare cassava, the vegetable staple of the Badjaw. This time-consuming preparation involves first peeling the tubers, allowing them to dry in the sun for several hours, and then grinding them to a fine pulp. The toxic juices must then be squeezed out, and the remaining pulp allowed to stand several hours before being cooked. The women usually cook food at least two times a day (the actual number of meals depends upon the availability of food—sometimes only once a day and sometimes as many as five times a day), collect firewood from the nearby beach areas a couple of times a week, and frequently gather edible crustaceans from the village reef to supplement the fish diet. Those few families who have gardens may spend two or three afternoons a week tending and harvesting their crops.

Although few Badjaw go hungry for extended periods of time, they rarely have a large surplus of food. A successful fishing trip or a new supply of cassava may allow several days' rest from food-producing activities, but it is only a temporary rest since the familiar search for food must soon be renewed. Even though the Sulu Sea is well known for its rich fishing grounds, Badjaw fishermen nonetheless often spend an entire day or night at sea with only a couple of small fish to offer the family larder upon their return. The supply of cassava is usually dependent upon fishing success since many Badjaw trade or sell fish for the cassava of the agriculturalist Muslims in the area. Thus if a man is unsuccessful in fishing, there is little for the family to eat.

As may be expected, little ceremony is involved in Badjaw eating. Food is

eaten as quickly as possible; if family members are absent or sleeping during meal-time, they are seldom called or awakened. Nor is special food prepared for them when they return or awaken; they are simply left out if they miss a meal, and must fend for themselves in preparing their own food. It is significant that during weddings the success or elaborateness of the occasion is generally measured by the amount of food given away by the families involved. Equally significant is the fact that the Badjaw word for travel means "looking for subsistence."

With so much of their time spent in food activities, it is small wonder that so many of the Badjaw dreams reflect this preoccupation with food.

Spirits and Illness/Death

For the purposes of this discussion, the second category, "Spirits," may be included with the fourth category, "Illness/Death."

The Badjaw religious system consists of a simple belief in ancestral spirits who are sometimes bad, sometimes indifferent, but very rarely good. The spirit, soul, or life-stuff of a human being is called *ummaged* by the Badjaw. After the *ummaged* leaves the body at death, it may simply drift through the air from place to place, go to one of the cemetery islands, or inhabit one of the many places throughout Tawi-Tawi known to be frequented by spirits. A spirit generally does not leave a man's body until death; however, it may be frightened from the body by an unexpected encounter with a ghost, or *panguah*, during which time a man becomes ill and may faint. If a Badjaw is struck soundly on the chest or stomach, his *ummaged* may be knocked loose and the man will most likely die.

Ummagged seldom interfere in human affairs, but when they do they are usually up to no good. Bad luck, bad weather, or accidents are often blamed on the actions of ummagged; one man told me that his four children had died because the ummagged were revenging his previous good fortune. If proper and sufficient offerings are left to ummagged, they can sometimes be cajoled into helping one if they happen to feel inclined to do so. However, a Badjaw expects little help from ummagged; if they are concerned with his affairs at all, it is usually a concern he could do very well without.

If a deceased Badjaw were evil during his lifetime or if his body were not properly washed before burial, his spirit may return as a pangguah, or ghost, to haunt the survivors. Although a type of ummagged, the pangguah is unique in that it purposely visits villages or encounters Badjaw in order to frighten them. Rarely causing physical harm to the persons encountered, the ghost is content to simply frighten them. Seldom met on the sea, ghosts are always encountered at night if one dares to walk on land; as a result, Badjaw go to land at night only when absolutely necessary.

A third group of spirits, sometimes described as a type of ummagged but more often conceived as a distinct group, are the *saitan*, or evil spirits. Also referred to as a single spirit, *Saitan*, these spirits are responsible for mental and physical illness, death, bad weather, and general misfortune.

One is not in a Badjaw village for very long before he realizes the reality of the Badjaw fear of spirits. As indicated above, most illness is believed to be caused by spirits, and special spirit doctors are employed to extricate the di-

sease-causing spirit. During times of much illness in the village, a special boat, loaded with offerings, is pulled through the village to attract the disease-causing spirits. It is then taken to the open sea where it is set adrift, in hopes that the spirits will float away with it. On days when the wind blows from the south, a spirit-bearing wind, the sea folk place special flags on their boats and along the reef to protect the village from harm. Many birth practices protect the newly-born child from evil spirits. Whenever a Badjaw has a stretch of bad luck, he leaves offerings for spirits in places where they are believed to reside; he may even make a special trip to one of the cemetery islands to leave offerings to his ancestral spirits and ask them to cease meddling in his affairs. The high mortality rate among the Badjaw makes the presence of these spirits real enough to these sea folk, and it is consequently not surprising that spirit activities and illness are recurring themes in Badjaw dreams.

Animals

During my analysis of Badjaw dreams, I was not most surprised by the many dreams dealing with land-dwelling animals. The majority of these dreams consist of encountering and being frightened by an animal (such as a horse, dog, or cow), or of actually being attacked by an animal, especially by dogs, and in two cases, alligators. The dreams vividly reflect many real life situations of the sea folk. The Badjaw, who keep no domesticated animals, spend most of their lives on the sea, and except for those few individuals who have begun to cultivate gardens, rarely go on land for extended periods. It is to be expected then that the unfamiliar animals inhabiting the islands should cause them some anxiety. When the Badjaw visit the land villages of the Muslims, they, as any stran-

gers to the village, are usually greeted by the barking pack of village dogs, and not infrequently a villager may set his dog onto a Badjaw for amusement. Although horses and cows pay less attention to the presence of the Badjaw, their rarity in Tawi-Tawi, and therefore their strangeness to the Badjaw, is sufficient to make them distrust such animals. The two dreams of attacks by alligators are not supported by any actual events which I know of; however, alligators are found in the interiors of two of the islands of the area and the Badjaw always professed a great fear of them, although I doubt if many had ever seen one. Snakes appeared in none of the dreams, although numerous snakes are found in the island jungles. The absence of these animals in Badjaw dreams may be partly explained by the fact that many sea snakes inhabit the Tawi-Tawi waters, and the Badjaw are consequently familiar with their habits and know how to deal with them. Thus, they have little reason to fear snakes. The Tawi-Tawi islands are also inhabited by monkeys, but these were reported in none of the Badjaw dreams; this is probably due to the fact that the Badjaw consider monkeys as pleasant, amusing animals who harm no one. It is significant that not one dream dealt with an encounter with a sea animal. The sea folk are extremely knowledgeable of all sea life, and this may be one reason why these animals apparently cause them little anxiety.

Sex

Noticeable by their absence are dreams about sex. Not one of the 44 dreams dealt with sex. The only dream approaching sexual connotations, recorded in the "Other" category for a male, concerned an elopement. This man dreamed that a young boy and girl of the village eloped

in traditional Badjaw fashion by spending the night at the boat of the village headman. The following morning the two sets of parents visited the headman, and the marriage ceremony was performed. However, even this dream does not directly reflect sexual matters since a Badjaw boy and girl who elope in traditional fashion do not engage in sexual intercourse during the night. The fact that they leave their parental homes and spend the night in the headman's boat simply symbolizes their demand to be married.

Although an analysis of the latent content of Badjaw dreams may suggest sexual overtones, it appears that the absence of sexual dreams is related to the fact that sex seems to cause few anxieties for most of these sea folk. Most Badjaw marry at a very early age, 14 or 15, and thus have no time to develop the anxieties generally associated with sexual abstinence. Although pre-marital sexual intercourse is considered improper, nonetheless, some of the unmarried teen-agers engage in it. It is common knowledge that such affairs occur, but no one seems upset about them. Sex is discussed very frankly and openly by the Badjaw; one man explained to me his personal technique of love-making in the presence of his wife and children—no one was embarrassed nor too concerned with his explanation. Another man told me that he was very tired one day because he had been awake most of the night making love to his wife; his remark was so casual that he could very well have been telling me that he was tired because he had been out fishing all night. The crowded nature of most houseboats makes the Badjaw children early aware of their parents' nocturnal love-making, and the fact that they themselves go nude until about the onset of

puberty early acquaints them with the physiognomy of the male and female genitalia.

In vivid contrast to the surrounding Muslim peoples, the Badjaw rarely make jokes or humorous comments with sexual connotations. They apparently do not regard sex as a humorous matter; rather it seems to be an urge that is satisfied when it arises—much as one eats or sleeps. I never encountered any reluctance on the part of the Badjaw to discuss sexual matters, and therefore do not feel that reluctance to relate such dreams is an explanation for their absence.

V

Through the analysis of the manifest content of 44 Badjaw dreams, I have attempted to demonstrate that the recurring themes of these dreams reflect "cultural stresses" in Badjaw society. The four major themes occurring in the dreams, i. e., food, spirits, animals, and illness/death, as discussed in the context of Badjaw society, were seen to be those areas of Badjaw life which are most difficult for the sea folk to control or comprehend, while the rarity of sexual dreams is related to the absence of sexual anxieties in Badjaw society.

The analysis of the manifest content of dreams has been offered here as one methodological tool by which the anthropologist can arrive at a more complete understanding of a social system. However, it is only one tool, and one that must be supported by other data for verification. As Honigmann has noted: dreams are merely one source of information to draw upon in studying a socially standardized system of personality. The structure of a culture, or of a system of social personality, emerges only

after many data from a variety of sources have been fitted together into a reasonably congruent and coherent system." (1961: 584).

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