

The *Badjao* Religion and Its Rituals. Whether Primitive Religions Should Be Described as Shamanic

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Shamanism is a religious phenomenon centered on the shaman, an ecstatic figure believed to have the power to communicate with the otherworld. In the strictest sense, the term shamanism refers to certain religious phenomena and systems predominant in Northern Asia: Siberia and Inner Asia. Shamanic traditions, with local configurations, can also be found in a few other places, notably in North America and South America.¹

In the general literature on primitive religions, especially in those words with romantic and primitivistic biases, the term is often used loosely. All kinds of priests, healers, ritual specialists, and sorcerers are somewhere called shamans. The term is taken as synonymous with an unarticulated notion of "primitive religious specialist." The shaman in effect is an official practitioner "combining in the same person all the religious functions required in a social group: starting from that of the official high priest in charge of the traditional rites and ceremonies, of astrologer and diviner of choosing the auspicious date for any important decision, to that of fortune-teller, of magician, of healer, of rain-maker, of witch-wizard, of evil

¹ See "Shamanism" in M. Eliade ed. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. For a more cogent discussion see M. Eliade's *Shamanism. Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (New York, 1964); especially pp. 337-374 for Southeast Asia. For this area see Rex L. Jones "Shamanism in South Asia: A Preliminary Survey," *History of Religion* 7 (May 1968): 330-347.

spell destroyer, of sorcerer, etc.” At this point, primitive religions – difficult in any case to categorize under a collective name – end up being called “shamanic religions.”²

These semantic extrapolations make the subject matter more confusing, and, thus, not to be of much use to anybody. With the following excursus on the religion of the Badjao – the most maritime of the Sama-speaking peoples indigenous to the southern of the Philippines – I intend to show that the proper use of the vocabulary remains useful. To clarify, in particular: a) that not every ecstatic experience – less of all the non-ecstatic one – can be equalized to that of a shaman and that; b) that, at any rate, “the presence of a shamanic complex in one region does not necessarily mean that the magico-religious life of the corresponding people is crystallized around shamanism.”³

Shamans belong to the world of intermediaries. They can be more easily understood when studied within the context of ritual. It is here, in fact, that the nature of their mediation is revealed.

Spiritual life, however, never manifests itself only – less of all completely – in stereotyped formulas and fixed institutions. The various religious practices through which the Badjao religious man seeks to express and find harmony with himself and the whole, by themselves alone do not adequately reveal his religiosity. On the contrary, the very basic conviction that sustains the entire Badjao religion – the faith in a Supreme Being – is beyond every ritual and devoid of any mediation.

² This observation by S. D. Gill is taken from *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. XIII p 216; as a demonstration of the loose use of the word shaman see “Chinese shamanism and Christian faith” by S. Ticozzi, in V. G. Cajilig (ed.) *Rooted in Cultures... Faithful in Christ*, Manila, UST Press, 1955; but above all “Philippine Shamanism and Inculturation” by L. N. Mercado in *Philippiniana Sacra*, Sept. 1995, Vol. XXX, n. 90, pp. 425-456

³ M. Eliade, “Shamanism: An overview” *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. XIII, p 202. As for the Badjao religion see B. Bottignolo. *Celebration with the Sun*, Manila, AUP, 1995. For a more extensive ethnological study about this tribe see the bibliography there presented; the authors: Arlo H. Nimmo and Clifford A. Sather.

TUHAN

The Badjaos believe in a Supreme Being. They call him *Tuhan*. A loan-word, from the Malay world, meaning "lord." It is a title which the Badjaos use as if it were the proper name of their god.

When asked to provide information about *Tuhan*, the Badjaos were clearly taken aback. Uneasy, they look at each other as if groping for words. They offer some explanation, but it was as if they were not taking their own concepts and images too seriously. This because to them "*Tuhan* is not like a man; he is not even like a spirit." For them *Tuhan* is a reality not to be found in the conceptual order, but in the order of experience. *Tuhan* is primary a presence – something which each Badjao experiences.

In *Tuhan* one can find outlined the typical characteristics of the high gods. Still, he is not called "father," perhaps because we are in a Islamic context where in this term is seen with suspicion. Above all because what among other peoples is suggested by the divine paternity, among the Badjao is expressed through the concept of lordship, implicit in the name: *Tuhan*. About him there are no myths. One can hardly find a conceptualized thought conveying the content of their faith. The description found in my book is a synthesis drawn from my observations on their religious life practice. Among the Badjaos there are no theologians.⁴

In the same way, one can not find any catechetical mediation. Parents do not feel the need to catechize their children. They are convinced that, as they themselves came to know *Tuhan*, so also their children will come to know him. With this, one does not deny the educational value of the lived faith. It is a deep faith, that emerges intensely in moments of trials, when one hears spontaneously the confession "*Tuhan* wanted so" or "*Tuhan* knows."

Different from all beings inferior to him, *Tuhan* lacks a ritual of his own. There is not a single rite concerning him. But this, more than a sign of lack of attention towards him, is nothing but an acknowledgment of his total transcendence: there is not and there can not be any rite that can possibly put man in a relation of continuity with *Tuhan*.

⁴ *Celebration with the Sun*, pp. 37-39, 52-57.

And then, as a Badjao explained: “Even if I want to pray him, where shall I go to put the banners”. (The offering of colored banners – usually: white, green and yellow – is one of the typical Badjao offerings). *Tuhan* does not have a seat, neither permanent nor temporary, where one might get in touch with him. Also here, more than a shortcoming, this lack of a seat is an acknowledgment. *Tuhan* is a presence to be found everywhere. “He is like the wind. He is there in heaven and there in the sea, he is here with us and is there in the forest,” say the Badjao. Thus, one can get in touch with him anywhere. To bind his presence to a place is ridiculous: it is the same as setting limits to his presence. Brought back to its origins, this spirituality takes shape within the primal religious conviction stating: *Tuhan* is to be encountered in this world, but is not of this world. He is wholly other.

Consequently, *Tuhan* is not absent. One has recourse to him informally in moments of crisis, in the course of rites for inferiors sacred beings, but above all in acts *pag-addat* or respect: before turning and look for help in some other place, one always asks permission from him. If one wants to speak of a *Deus otiosus*, this otiosity surely has no negative connotations. Certainly, it does not mean remoteness.

Given his accessibility, combined with the lack of seats and rites, there are no ministers acting as mediators between *Tuhan* and man. Any person can have recourse and address *Tuhan*, wherever and whenever he or she likes. Imam or ordinary person, man or woman, adult or child, every person can meet him personally. Between *Tuhan* and man, there is no need for any expert; there is no mediation needed.

UMBOH

True ritual life gets organized starting from the *pag-Umboh* – *Umboh*'s specific rite. *Umboh* is a sacred figure who shapes the entire religious life of the Badjao. If those who follow the teaching of Mohammed and believe in Allah are called Mohammedans, the disciples of Jesus Christ are called Christians, so those who follow the Badjao religious tradition love to be called “*Umboh*.” The name of this sacred being is the name of their religion.⁵

⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 58-86

He is not a deity, even though sometimes he can be taken for a deity. In fact the Badjaos themselves say: "For us, Umboh is only our ancestor, but for some he is the same as *Tuhan*, and at the time of rice harvest they thank him as if he were *Tuhan*." The Badjaos describe him as an ancestor. The first ancestor. But it does not take long to discover that Umboh is not an ancestor in the way of all the other forefathers. He is not simply the first man, the one who started the Badjao genealogy. He belongs to a different order – he is above everybody and everything as the source of all life, human and cosmic.

For those more familiar with phenomenology of religion, *Umboh* is the classic demiurge. A mythical figure very near to the divine – divine which, because of its transcendence, tends to remain beyond reach – can be confused with the divine, but it is not yet a deity. It is a mythical figure that presides over a sector of the life in the universe, the central sector: human life. It is in this sense that the Badjaos – who do not possess a sophisticated religious vocabulary – call him "ancestor."

Umboh is the source of life. He cares for life in the sense that he makes possible that human society's existence could continue, not only by providing health and food, but above all by making sure that society will never fail: neither by lack of members, nor by a possible collapse of the rules governing the civic life. In a broader sense, *Umboh* takes care that there would be continuity and intensity of life in the whole universe.

Umboh's position in the cosmos is recognized and evoked through the metaphor of the human body, where in *Umboh* occupies the place of the head and the cosmos – the universe and the human society or, better, the Badjao community – occupies the place of the body. It is around this metaphor that the *pag-Umboh* develops.

Pag-Umboh is a term that can describe a whole class of rites, of which the fundamental is the *pag-Umboh pai baha-o* or *pag-Umboh* of the new rice. It is celebrated once a year, during the time just after the rice harvest. Today, the rite is celebrated in the hut of the family headman; in the past, when the Badjaos were still living on boats – as some still do – it was celebrated in the boats.

Here, the first important thing to be observed is the use of space. The Badjao builds up his sacred orientation, by contextualiz-

ing on a axis standing in radical opposition to the profane orientation. The latter one is seen in the flow of the daily activity which, in the boat, goes along with the stem-bow axis. The sacred orientation is found on the axis which, moves from one broadside of the boat to the other (profane axis) cross perpendicularly. This defines that radical discontinuity of the sacred from the profane, on which the Badjao set up his most important ritual: the *pag-Umboh*, and more in general, opens up a window of communication with the supernatural world.⁶

In the course of the ritual, a person – in *pag-Umboh pai bahao*, the family head or the elder or somehow the most respected in the group – lies down along the sacred axis, with the head close to a boat broadside that will be called *kokan*, or side of the head. Between this side and the head, a basket of *palay* (unhusked rice) and a coconut are placed. Here, in these fruit of the earth, *Umboh* makes himself present and shall remain present for the entire length of the celebration, which may last from three to seven days. In this way *Umboh* is described as the “head” of the family, of the Badjao community, and the “fountainhead” of life in the cosmos.

The side of the boat wherein *Umboh* made himself present is considered the side of the head even after the celebration. In fact the Badjaos, when lying down, tend to place themselves with the head directed towards the *kokan*. And, though in ordinary times this position is not always kept. In extraordinary times it is scrupulously respected. When, for example, a person falls sick, he or she lays down in that position – a position that in the smallest boat is very uncomfortable. It is on this axis that lays the women when giving birth. It is in front of the *kokan* that marriage is celebrated. All longing for *Umboh*'s first gift: life or, better, the *atahah-kalluman*: the “long life.”

But it is the moment of death that reveals the ultimate meaning of these alignments. As soon as one passes away, his or her body which during the agony lay along the religious axis with the head towards the wall of head, is turned ninety degrees and is now laid

⁶ This sacred profane dialectic shows – if there were the need-that the Badjao are able to make that radical distinction that allows them to recognize the divine reality, as present I the world, but not of this world.

along axis of the profane orientation that, now, becomes the "orientation of the dead." In fact, with this simple movement the person is declared officially dead, thus no longer belonging to the body of the Badjao human society.

The complex nature of these positions and orientations show how the *pag-Umboh* shapes the entire Badjao existence, and how Umboh is perceived and recognized as the source of the life and the order in the cosmos. There is a sort of sacred "continuity" between Umboh and the cosmos. A continuity strongly denied with *Tuhan*. The ultimate meaning of the faith in *Umboh* is that: underneath the cosmos there is a unique matrix, without which not a particular object will have meaning, function and existence. No material of individual being can ever stand alone. The profane can be distinguished from the sacred but never separated, risking its exposure to disaster and annihilation.

The *pag-Umboh* belongs to the assemble of rituals constituting the domestic cult. Thus, its celebration takes place in the domestic ambit, and guiding it are exclusively members of the family group. In theory, the rite may be lead by any person, as long as he knows how to do it. Women may also do it, as for example during a delivery where the panday (indigenous midwife) is in charge of the situation.

In practice, though, the head of the family is the one who usually presides. This, not only because head of the domestic cult, but above all because the ritual itself, in its structure and symbolism, demands the active participation of the person functioning as head: be it the actual leader or the elder of the family. And since this function is usually performed by a man, the main liturgist is usually a man. These preferences aside, the *pag-Umboh* does not need any specialist, less of all a specialist from outside the family group.

This freedom in the choice of the liturgist, emphasized by the fact that the rite is celebrated in the domestic ambit, evokes the relations that Badjao have with *Tuhan*. The main difference is that with *Tuhan* there are no rites and, consequently, there are no liturgists, while with Umboh there is a rite — in fact, the most important Badjao rite — and whenever a rite is celebrated, a leading person, or liturgist is always needed.

GREAT RITES

The *pag-Umboh* is the most important Badjao rite, one of the major rites, or one of the rites described as “the great rites”. Belonging to this group are the rituals covering the main social events, as the birth rites, those of marriage, and the funeral rites. Likewise there is a set of celebrations called “the great rites of the morning” – they take place at sun rise – that belongs to this group.⁷

The antithesis night-day, with the series of concomitant anti-thesis: darkness-light, past-present, inactivity-activity, private life-associated life, informal-formal, chaos-order, and so on, represents: a) the separation from which all dualism originates and on which all polarities are extolled, and; b) the terms between which major transitions are celebrated. It is within this context that the Badjao religious man places his great rites of passage. “The distinction between the old man and the new, and the passage from one to the other; the distinction between the sick man and the healthy man, and the process of healing, the distinction between the nonbeing and being, and the process of rebirth.... In order to create new forms, the Badjao religious man inserts himself in the cosmic process of re-creation.”⁸

Among these great rites of the morning are: the *pag-timbang* – a rite of radical renewal, used when one's life is in serious danger, as getting lost in open sea, the rite of circumcision and the *pag-hinam ni Tuhan* that we shall present here as an example of great rite.⁹

Pag-hinan ni Tuhan literally means “the work of *Tuhan*” or “the creation of *Tuhan*.” It is celebrated when a woman gets pregnant for the first time. It is celebrated, thus, only once in the life of a woman. From this one can easily understand that the rite does not have the fetus as point of reference, but rather the woman who is the matrix of that fetus and of the many others that may follow.

As all the great rites of the morning, the *Pag-hinan ni Tuhan* also opens with the sacred bath. The pregnant woman seated astride

⁷ A more particular description of all these rituals can be found in my book: *Celebration with the Sun*, pp. 193-248

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 176

⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 212-218

a mortar, stands out high above her husband who squats beside facing towards orient and the point of sunrise. The main celebrant – the imam – stands behind them, and from that position administer the bath, pouring three bowls of water on the woman's head. In a simpler manner, the ceremonial bath of the husband follows.

Then, after an interval during which the couple dry themselves and change, people gather in a hut where in the necessary articles for the ritual had previously been prepared: a vessel of water, a basin filled with cooked rice shaped in a mound, on the side of which cooked and peeled bananas and cassava are placed, and finally a bowl with burning charcoal for the prayer. The lot is arranged on a straw mat, lined up one after the other. The woman takes her place and sits cross-legged – the husband nearby – with the vessel of water in front of her. Upon the invitation of the imam, she leans forwards and puts her hands on the vessel of water so that her fingers are immersed and her palms are resting on the rim. The leading imam, with the other celebrating imams, sits on a side, perpendicular to the couple. From that position they make their prayers, chants, and bless the woman.

This ritual, more than as a series of actions, is a sort of epiphany: it is the announcement that a woman, for the first time, is pregnant. Thus, it is a recognition that the woman has the capacity to procreate, a privilege that not all women have. It is an extraordinary gift that can not be brought back only to a natural process of physical maturity. The Badjao religious man can not help but see in it a supernatural intervention. It is really a gift, a work of *Tuhan*, as the name itself says.

This announcement is made with a series of symbolic symmetries. The first symmetry is that of woman-cosmos. The woman is risen to the level of principle that orders and interprets the cosmos – the image of the womb, that holds the embryo and gives forth a new creature, lends form to the night's darkness and the primordial waters that hold the sun every night and bring it forth every morning. On the other hand, the cosmic event gives a sacred backlight to the human event fulfilled in the women – the rising of a new day, in the backdrop of the first day of creation, becomes the model for the genetrix-women.

A second set of images is developed around the symmetry of water-women. First, the water of the basin symbolizes to the water of the uterus of the pregnant women, holding a new creature. Then, in the context of the morning, both waters reveal their derivation from

the primordial waters of creation. In this way, water offers itself as the primary element from which life proceeds. It is the symbol of universal fecundity. The basin of rice, symbol of abundance, adds to the image of fecundity. All speak of the abundance of life that *Tuhan*, through the women, brings to the family and the Badjao community.

Having the opportunity to witness one of the great rites – like the *pag-hinam ni Tuhan* – is very rare. First of all because these kind of rites are not so common. Second, they are rather complex and require a conspicuously organized effort. Third they are very costly – they are celebrated only when absolutely needed. Fourth, because there are some that have an effect that is presumed to be ineffaceable and, thus, they should be celebrated once only. Finally, the most important reason: they are of difficult access. It is that strangers are bared from them. But, besides being celebrated very early in the morning, at the last moment they can always be canceled. In fact, differently from the minor rites, their celebration demands the respect of some social conditions and cosmic alignment – if there is bad weather, or in the family group a person fall sick, the rite is postponed

Still, only a study of the great rites can give some idea of what the Badjao religion really is; said study shows how it is on the same breath of the great religions and how they are organized around a vision of life centered on the transcendental. Indeed the *pag-Umboh* is in this sense a revelation. It affirms that salvation can be found only in an order that goes beyond the human, in a sacred anthropology defined and realized in *Umboh*. The great rites all move within the ambit of these same convictions. No longer tied to the urgency of daily needs, the Badjao religious man seeks to project, realize and express his existence beyond individual self in the great rites. He places himself within the ambit of the sacred, found most of all in the cosmos. These are ultimately the true Badjao rites, best typifying Badjao religiosity.¹⁰

Presiding the ritual, there is a more specialized figure than those encountered in the *pag-Umboh*. They are persons whom I term as and who the Badjaos themselves call “imam.” C. Sather observes that at times (very seldomly), the Badjaos also call them *pakil*. But

¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 173

this name is nothing but a corruption of the term *fakir*, a word loaned from Sanskrit. As a matter of fact, the Badjaos do not have a proper name for these specialists. What one easily can observe is that with the Badjao: a) the name *imam* is a common name that can be used for all the persons who preside major rites; and b) the persons called by this name are seen and treated as religious officials.

The Badjao imam is the person who more closely evokes the role of a priest; the priest is not the mediator between man and God, especially through the sacrifice. As already stated among the Badjaos, there is no mediator between man and *Tuhan* – the imam is merely a person presiding the rite. It would be more correct to compare them with the Protestant minister or, even better, with the Islamic imam.

WORLD OF SPIRITS

With the notion of specialist of the great rites, we are already in the world of the spirits. In fact, there is not a single person who, in any task, would not have somehow involve a spirit.

The term commonly used in this context is *djin*. *Djin* is called the person who carries the spirit. *Djin* is called also the spirit in the person resides. It seems that *djin* is a generic name loaned from the Islamic world. When used out of this specific context, this term is used to describe a kind of capricious unpredictable, unrestrained and oftentimes evil spirit. But in the case of the chosen persons, the term has an entirely different meaning. For purposes of clarity we shall call *djin*-bearer the person with the spirit and *djin*-spirit the spirit residing in him.¹¹

Djin-bearers can easily be found in every Badjao village, but they are not easily identifiable for a *djin*-spirit is an ineffable reality. Ultimately, perceiving its presence is a matter of faith. Anyone can believe himself to be possessed by a *djin*-spirit and proclaim it publicly. Those who hear are free to believe or not.

Djin-bearers are the leaders, the imams, the parents and the *pandays*, i.e. the persons, who somehow have a social status. In a group apart we find the bearers of the so-called *igal-djin* or “dancing

¹¹ *Ibid.* pp. 111-132.

djin.” They are persons who, in the course of certain rites perform dances in a state of trance, yet seem not to have a well-defined place in the established social order.¹²

Their dances generally follow the movements of the common *pang-igal* (local way of dancing), but the context is purely ritual. To start with, all those who want to dance take turns on the floor. Dancing freely, their act is a prelude to the entrance of the *igal-djin*-bearer. Slowly, in his dance he leaves a normal state and passes into trance. His body shakes uncontrollably and he grinds his teeth. He utters inarticulate sounds and incoherent phrases, mixed with some meaningful sentences. There seems to be no complete loss of consciousness. No stimulant substances are used. At times sea-water is offered to the dancer, who takes it only to spit it out on those present. Finally, the dancer slowly comes out of the trance and returns to normal. This marks the end of the dance.

The *igal-diin* dance can be perform and for itself, as in the case of Alingsaran who, each month under the full moon, has to perform this sacred dance in honor of the *djin*-spirit of his father. Or it can be perform and in connection with other rites, like marriages or funerals. Here the *igal-djin* dance enters as one of the several liturgical actions thus, enhancing the value of the man rite.

Worth noticing is the fact that the *igal-djin*'s dance, by itself does not bring with itself any vision, nor is done in order to acquire vision. When besides the *igal-djin*'s dance there were to be some form of vision, the dance with trance finds itself in a particular ritual context. For example, in the context of a healing ritual: a process often develop within the magic ambit where – as we shall see – the vision is a common ritual expedient. Vision, in this case, should be considered simply as an addition, derived from the specific – magic – context in which the *igal-djin* dance is used.¹³

The spirits – the *djin*-spirits – define the status and outline the structure of the Badjao community. Respect for the *djin*-spirit thus becomes respect for the institution. Usually, these are the spirits of persons who had cover corresponding functions in the past – they are ancestors.

¹² *Ibid.* pp. 129-130.

¹³ *Ibid.* pp. 133-135

Yet, not all ancestors manifest themselves in this way. Others remain only in the memory and in the cult. These, from the invisible world in which they live, together with the ancestors which took up residence in persons, continue to watch over and care for the Badjao community in order that the traditional ways of life are kept, the religious and moral observances respected, and parents and old people cared for.¹⁴

Still within this group, even though devoid of social qualities, we have to count the spirits of the deceased. They can be divided in two categories. The first is composed by the spirits of the persons recently deceased. Moved by intense nostalgia they move among the people and in the places where they lived. They may assume different behaviors, according to the kind of relation they have with the people they encounter: or according to how they died whether they died young, or because of violence, whether the funeral rites have been done properly, etc. The other category is composed by the so-called "spirits of the dead": the throng, that is, of the faceless dead whose names have been forgotten. They represent the main section of the so-called "evil spirits." They are simply harmful.¹⁵

Besides this throng of spirits, which we may describe as of human origin, there is the lot of spirits which we may categorize as the creation spirits. The Badjao universe is indeed swarming with spirits.

The most important are the so-called *saitan*. They are beings which take up residence and make themselves present in special places: usually in some rock or tree. They are spirits difficult to be defined. On one hand, they have all the characteristics of the divinity: they are uncreated and, consequently, eternal like *Tuhan*, even though to him inferiors. On the other hand, they behave in an inconsistent, often questionable, way and sometimes hurt people.¹⁶

In my opinion they should be considered as the incarnation of that transcendent presence that, found in a different order, the Badjaos call *Tuhan*. More than spirits, in fact, they themselves are

¹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 101-103.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 94-108.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 42-52.

“presence.” Incarnated presence. Thus, they are *hierophanies*. But as incarnated presence their absoluteness assumes the forms and limitations of the human and material world, so that they get practically downgraded and end up by becoming and being treated as “spirits.” Only for this reason we number them, here, among the spirits, even though by their nature they make up a category of their own.

Then, there are the spirits of the various things. A coconut nut intended for the *pag-Umboh*, from the moment it is picked or bought, acquires a special identity. Better said, it acquires a personality and becomes “someone.” Its purpose gives it a significance that activates its “spirit.” In the same way, the presence of a spirit is recognized in the rice for the *pag-Umboh*, in the rice of the harvest, and in that which put aside for sowing. A spirit is recognized in the field which will receive the rice, as well as in the rats that could destroy it.¹⁷

One should not think that for the Badjaos all things have a spirit. As one can observe from the above mentioned examples, only the things which in some way become relevant ends up having a spirit. It must be noted that very same thing, which are relevant, can lose their spirit, when it is removed with a rite, or they may fall into oblivion.

The assemblage of the human spirits and of the creation spirits constitutes the Badjao animistic world. *Animism* simply means belief in spirits. It goes without saying that from this meaning all evolutionist conceptions which are at the origin of the term, are ruled out. Badjao animism represents only a part of their religion. It does not make up the whole Badjao religion. As a consequence, one can not say that the Badjaos are animist.

Together with animism there is a perspective from which the world is viewed as a homogenous whole, sustained by an omnipresent living energy and, somewhat stronger. He who somehow has less of it, must be very careful in his contacts with the realities which have more energies. A sick person, for example, can not enter the forest: he would be annihilated. The universe, is seen as a continuum filled of forces which are perceived only in some points of major condensation.

¹⁷ Ibid. pp. 91-93.

The assemblage of the spirits, together with world, constitutes the cosmo-biological dimension of the Badjao religion. This horizontal dimension never monopolizes the Badjao religious tension to the point of obliterating the theistic dimension: through *Umboh*, said dimension remains always centered on *Tuhan*. It is within this context that we must understand the minor rituals.

THE CULT

The *Saitan* have a ritual system of their own. In its more elementary forms, it seems to be simple. The cult becomes more explicit and formal with offering to the seats. The Badjaos who are afraid to approach the *saitan* alone, go there in small processions. The usual offerings are rice cakes and banners.

These rituals describe a system of rites that should be counted among the major rituals. Its importance is in its expression and it proves of the divine nature of the *saitan*. They are invoked for protection and help: for example, before a journey, or when facing an examination. Yet most of the time they are prayed to when asking to be freed from some illness caused by them themselves. In these latter cases their rituals become more questionable and comes down to the level of the minor rituals.

Ancestors are usually honored and invoked in the context of the major rites, especially in the *pag-Umboh*. When they come forward as *djin*-spirits they have a series of rites of their own as, for example, the "prayer with oil and incense." In these rites, the *djin*-carrier performs the function of a medium; the main theme is the reminder and return to the tradition way of living. The ultimate goal always consists in soothing a spirit.

Likewise the spirits of the persons who have recently died are honored rituals. They range from the wake to after the funeral, which is never omitted, and may even extend to some other ritual on the grave or at home. The latter ones usually are done in order to appease the more restless spirits, with remembrance and offerings.

The spirit of the thing has a very limited and rather casual system of rites. Said rites are often limited to a dialogue. When, for example, a Badjao tills the soil, he speaks to it: he begs for forgiveness if he hurts it, or begs it to be generous in producing fruits. In

the same way, he speaks when he waters the flowers, or he takes the fish in from the sea. Sometimes more complex rituals are held. When, for example, a Badjao has not been able to catch fish for some time, he may go the sea and make a prayer with incense followed by a mock "fishing" ritual by throwing ceremony the fishnets or lines.

The cult that underlies all the rituals addressed to the spirits is born out of the persuasion that man is not alone in this world. Man should learn cohabitation, avoiding as far as possible any conflict and seek a relation of harmony and with them all, as if these other being were neighbors.

In this ritual the *Tuhan* is always involved. As a matter of fact, before initiating in any of these minor rites and praying to a spirit, the Badjao always turns to *Tuhan* and ask for his permission. He explains him the reasons for the rite and begs him not to see any depreciation of his power because of the recourse to an inferior entity. *Tuhan* would always remain the "*Tuhan*," the lord of all, and owner of all.

The object of a ritual, though, often is not a spirit, but simply a practical goal. The spirit only acts as helper or assistant. What is important is the administration and manipulation of that energy whether personal or impersonal said energy goes throughout and sustains the whole cosmos and maintains it. Thus, the nature of these rituals is indeed magical.

MAGIC

"Magic in primitive societies is the manipulation of enigmatic forces for a practical end. Magical means are said to be extranatural or supernatural, while the objectives of magical intervention, are natural. The magician prepares a variety of special objects or "bundles," "spell incantations" or "portions," which are said to bring about, in some mysterious way, real changes in person, object or event."¹⁸

The number of Badjao' magical ritual is endless. There is a rite for all kinds of needs ranging from the creation of an amulet to the

¹⁸ See "Magic" in the *Encyclopedia of Religions*, Vol. IX, p. 89.

desire of hurting a person; from the search of a profitable exchange at the market to the need to rid oneself from witchcraft. Obviously, not all of these rituals receive the same attention. On a higher level, there are magical practices which are viewed as a gift from the ancestors. On a lower level, one finds that group of practices that the Badjaos themselves describe as pure and simple "superstitions." At any rate, none of these practices can ever be used against the *Tuhan's* established order. Likewise for this reason, the Badjao, while relying on magic, has recourse both to *Umboh* on one hand, and to the doctor on the other.

One of the main focuses in this sector of rituals is life in general and health in particular, thus there are rites which are called "healing rituals." In truth, sometimes the major rituals, that are used for healing purposes which in a way degrade them. This notwithstanding their basic orientation towards the transcendent persists. Thus, that their religious value are not go completely lost. This however can not be said of the bulk of the rituals addressed to the spirits. Very often, they are born out of the need to free oneself from an evil – misfortune or sickness – caused by a spirit. But, in the magical sector proper, there are always rituals of healing.

The concern for life and health, and the rituals dealing with them, make up a large part of Badjao' religious practice. However, they only represent a part of it, thus they are not the most important. The excessive attention paid to these rituals, because of their number and of accessibility can be proven by around a Badjao village at any time of the day or night to stumble onto some of these celebrations. Often little attention is paid to the major rituals because they are less numerous and of difficult access. This can give rather distorted impression of the Badjao' ritual structure and religious thought. Likewise it may give the impression that the Badjao religion is devoid of any anthropology that goes beyond an immanentistic vision of life.¹⁹

Leading these minor rituals – addressed to the spirits or dedicated to magic – one can find any of the *djin* carriers mentioned above. Likewise persons whose function is not specifically religious participate. This overlapping of functions is due, first of all, to the fact that roles often overlap thus we can have a parent or a leader that is

¹⁹ See *Celebrations with the Sun*, pp. 172-175.

also an imam. It is contingent, then, also upon the fact that they are all *djin*-carriers: persons marked by the sacred and thus abilitated in the sacred. In truth, more than the imam, the so called "lay" leaders are those who venture upon minor rituals. Imams, as far as possible, avoid having to deal with this set of rites: their reputation is at stake. At any rate, in the field of minor rituals, especially of magic, the presence of persons with official capacities and roles in society are not very common.

In fact, this is the proper field of the multitude of practitioners. Each one acts on his own responsibility. Each one has his own qualifying ritual. One is specialized in fortune reading; another, in the making of a certain amulet; some others, in relieving toothaches or in rescuing from some kind of witchcraft, and so on. Each one has his own specialization because of the possession of a specific knowledge that others do not have. They are all *djin*-carriers. In fact they are all holders of a *djin*-spirit without which they could not operate. The imam, the parents, the panday, the leaders and the are all called "djin." One can not, though, help but notice that, in contrast to the just mentioned persons who besides the *djin* title also have an official title. These practitioners have no specific title which would classify them under one and the same category. This is due to the fact that they work privately, each on his own.

These observations help us understand better the semantic value of the term "djin." Although a person is a leader of a certain group it is not automatic that he be recognized a *djin*-carrier: this recognition, exists only among his followers. In fact, they, who by their own very nature operate in private and have no followers, are recognized as *djin*-carriers only by the few who have recourse to them. The name "*djin*" with which Badjao describe them, does not imply a public office or recognition.

The *djin* are, above all, specialists. They work trusting only in their own science and technical ability, since their rites and formulas are effective only by his authority. Out of conviction or prudence, they recognize *Tuhan*'s existence and before performing their rites ask him permission. But they act with the belief that *Tuhan* allows them, because the world is the field of applied science. Were *Tuhan* to intervene, they would do nothing but withdraw from the intervention. They do not place *Tuhan* in relation with the people, nor the people

in relation with *Tuhan*. If some form of mediation exists, this is for each one of them, between his clients and the *djin*-spirit from which he claim receiving his power.

These practitioners are specialized and have the “power of knowledge.” They know how to move certain mysterious cosmic forces and energies so as to achieve some specific objective. Here the concept of vision refines and gives further prestige to their knowledge. There are not many those who claim to have this vision. “As a matter of fact, the ‘revelations’ and ‘inspirations’ that can be found in the great historical religions are nowhere to be found in Badjao belief. To discover the desires of their spirits and meet them so as to fulfill their personal aspiration, the Badjao depend almost exclusively on a sacred science, deduce rationally from experience.”²⁰

Those who make use of the vision, use it either within the context of trance sometimes – or in a dance.

SHAMANISM

The History of religions shows that the shaman’s figure processes three characteristics. The first, the more noticeable one, lies in the visionary faculty: the shaman is a “seer.” The second one is the fact that his knowledge-power comes from the spirits. A shaman works with the help of an auxiliary spirit with which he has made an alliance. Finally, the third and most important characteristic: the shaman undergoes a personal transformation that ushers him into the world of spirits. For this, he must undergo a long process of initiation, starting with a mystical death that will make him able to move freely in the visible world as well as in the invisible world. This initiation culminated in a public demonstration of the abilities acquired, through to which he will be accepted and given credit in the community.²¹

This last characteristic is decisive and is the true distinguishing character: the initiation followed by the community’s recognition. The other two characteristics: the vision ability and the know-

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 135.

²¹ For a discussion of the subject, see the example quoted in M. Eliade, 1964: pp. 13ss. Also J.Goetz’s *L’Esperienza di Dio nei Primitivi*. (Napoli, 1983), 183-186.

ledge-power coming from the spirits can be found in some other places as well. They can be found in magic.

Delacroix proves that the bottommost roots of magic rest in human emotion. The magic apparatus is switched on by goals dictated by fervid desires. Hence – as Wildegren explains – a magical action is nothing but a reaction so strong that the man involved want to break the limitations set by time and space.²² Under emotional thrust, he starts converting his desires into action, with words and gestures. Through these he pursues his desires so as to bring about their transposition into reality. This he does employing the means originated from his very own yearning – when wishing, for example, to transfix an enemy, transfixion become the mean and he transfixer a puppet or something else.

Oftentimes, this action led by desire is strengthened by ecstatic deeds, whereby – in a state of intense emotional excitement – the distance between what is possible and what is real violated with the help of an ecstatic state that gives complete free hand to faith. In a second stage, the efficacy of magic in general and the special value that resides in the rites consolidate in the pledge given by the magic tradition.

Ecstatic states, are not foreign to the magic process. Be they for real or simply acted out, they facilitate that faith on which the whole magic process rests. They are part of the expedencies constituting the magic ritual. But, even because of the context in which they are found, they are of different nature and should not be confused with the ecstatic states of shamanic experience.

Discernment does not always come easy. The field of action proper to the shaman should be that where the major rituals are. It is not rare, though, that a shaman might poach the ground and practice also some form of magic.

Still, although a shaman can and may act as a magician, it always remains true that a magician is not and can not act as a

²² H. Delacroix. *La religion et la foi*. (Paris, 1922), pp. 27-45. Cf. also A. A. Bevan. *Holy images*. (London, 1940): pp. 27ss; B. Malinowsky. "Magic science and religion", in *Science, Religion and Reality*. (London, 1925), pp. 80ss.; G. Widen-gren. *Fenomenologia della Religione*. (Bologna, 1985), p. 63-87.

shaman. Eventually the third shamanic characteristic – the typical initiation with the ensuing social sanction – will mark the distinguishing quality. Whenever this characteristic were to be missing, it must be acknowledged that we are in front of a mere specialist who work in the field of magic. The practical objectives that with his supernatural ritual actions this specialist purposes to achieve can further confirm that we are barely in the field of magic.

As far as the Badjao is concerned, I never encountered and never knew of a single case of which one can speak of shamanism as applied to the Badjao.

SHAMANISM IN A WIDE SENSE?

Still – I am told – when one speaks of Badjao shamanism one uses the term in a broad sense.

This new meaning, rather, spoils the discussion. In fact, what does one mean really by “shamanism in a broad sense”? Nobody takes the trouble of explaining this new meaning: the nature and the limits of this new concept. Unexplained, it is leisurely used to vouch for any unspoken assumptions.²³

Taking into account the broad meaning of the word “shamanism” one could to include all the Badjao ritual specialists, without distinction. Thus, the term “shamans” could be applied to the lot of the practitioners, even those who do not “know” the ecstatic state. This includes all diviners, healers, magicians, sorcerers. At the same time, the official religious ministers – like the imams are namams. It will not take much to understand the ambiguity of this generalization.

Unfortunately, there is no indigenous collective name valid for all the practitioners. The term “*djin*” used by the Badjao them-

²³ In his article: “Philippine Shamanism and Inculturation” (*Philippiniana Sacra*, Sept. 1995, Vol. XXX, n. 90, pp. 425-456), Leonardo N. Mercado pretends to explain, but what he really offers is a summary of Eliade’s description – where the term “shaman” is used in a strict sense – and then goes directly to the presentation of his own examples, without even bothering to discuss whether these examples correspond to Mircea’s description or not. The end result is that Mercado’s examples – which present mere magic of the lower level – manifest the prestige and the glamour of shamanism at its best.

selves is too broad. It can describe indifferently either some evil spirits, or the spirits residing in persons, or the persons carrying these spirits. Only the contextual use can tell us its meaning.

Yet, one does not understand why of all terms, shaman – which is not indigenous should be used to describe these practitioners, who are everything but shamans in the strict sense of the word. Why don't we call them using their professions for example, medicine-men or magicians? Or why not call them simply with the term commonly used by the ethnographers: medicine men.

By being called shamans: they all become figures somehow credited with some sort of supernatural inspiration. Here, the value and role of the vision is extolled and, indirectly, an explanation for the very existence of primitive religion is suggested.

Gone are the days when it was said that the primitives did not believe in God. Yet these days seem not to be completely over with the bias that the primitive is a being of limited intelligence, unable to reach a transcendental knowledge of the divine.

By being labeled as *shamanic*, the Badjao' religion is practically reduced to the cosmo-biologic level. Thus, the spirituality of the great rites which seek a realization not in a practical, but in a transcendent anthropological level, is forgotten. Forgotten is the belief in *Umboh*, whose cult is everything but shamanic. But, above all, forgotten is the belief in the Supreme Being, *Tuhan*, whose cult is belief of any mediator, and is the basis and the foundation of all the Badjao religious tension.

To describe the Badjao religion as shamanic is nothing but an elegant way of doing what some anthropologist of the past used to do reducing the primitives' belief to animism. In our case, anthropologist generally reduce it to shamanism, understood in a wide sense, which in practice means magic.

Joachin Walk, describes the religious phenomenon with a series of formal universals. The main ones are: 1) Religion is the answer to what is experienced as the ultimate reality; 2) It's the total answer of the total being to what is experienced as the ultimate reality; 3) It's the most intense experience of which man is capable;

4) It's a concrete answer that involves a commitment that compels man into action.

Among these universals, the first is certainly the most important. Now, among the Badjao, what is experienced as the ultimate reality is nothing but *Tuhan*. All other realities found in the Badjao religion, important as they may be, have a religious value only in so far as they find themselves within that basic religious tension steered up by *Tuhan*.

It is *Tuhan* which the ultimate foundation and source of the Badjao religion. Whoever – anthropologist or phenomenologist – underrates the role of *Tuhan* in the Badjao religion, either because he is not able to recognize its importance, or because he pays too much attention to minor phenomena of cosmo-biological order like animism or magic, does a serious injustice to this people.

Widening the discourse on the traditional religions, it can be said that: all phenomena of cosmo-biologic nature are an integral part of the primitive's religion. They must be treated with the respect and seriousness reserved to the religious matters. But they are not at all the foundation on which the religious tension of the primitive religious man rests. □