

## Pirates, Sea Nomads or Protectors of Islam?: A Note on "Bajau" Identifications in the Malaysian Context

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### Abstract

This paper briefly examines the dynamics of ethnic identification of the Bajau through two related discourses: one is formulated by the authorities in an official manner, and the other is expressed orally by the Bajau themselves. Following Shamsul's [1996] discussion, the former is an authority-defined aspect and the latter is an everyday-defined aspect of an ethnic identity. Here I shall adopt this dual approach to understand changing identifications of the Bajau in the Malaysian context.

The Bajau or Sama generally live in coastal parts of Sulu, the Philippines, Sabah of Malaysia and the eastern part of Indonesia. I limit the discussion here to the Bajau of Sabah, Malaysia.

The paper first describes the changing images of the Bajau presented in such official publications as handbooks, censuses, and school textbooks by the authorities from colonial times through to those of independent Malaysia. It then presents several cases of the daily discourses of self-identification of the Sama Dilaut, or maritime Sama, a socially and economically marginalized group of Bajau. Finally, it points out that their way of self-identification is closely correlated with the authority-defined images shown in the former sections.

### 1. Introduction

This paper aims to provide a sketch to understand the dynamics of images and forms of self-identification of the Sama/ Bajau in Sabah, Malaysia by analyzing two interrelated social discourses about the Sama/ Bajau: one is the official representation of the Sama/ Bajau offered by the authorities of Colonial British North Borneo and independent Malaysia, while the other is the self-representation of the Sama/ Bajau themselves in a fragmentary, unofficial but intentional manner, largely in response to the socio-political milieu in Malaysia.<sup>1)</sup>

The Sama/ Bajau consist of heterogeneous groups widely dispersed in the Sulu Archipelago, the Philippines, Sabah in Malaysia, and the eastern part of Indonesia. The total population is roughly estimated at 750,000 to 900,000 [Sather 1999: 2]. The population in Sabah

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1) The present paper is based on a report I presented at the 16th conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia (IAHA), Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, 27-31 July 2000 on "Pirates, Sea Nomads and Protectors of Islam: Changing Images of Sama and Their Self-Identification in the Malaysian Context."

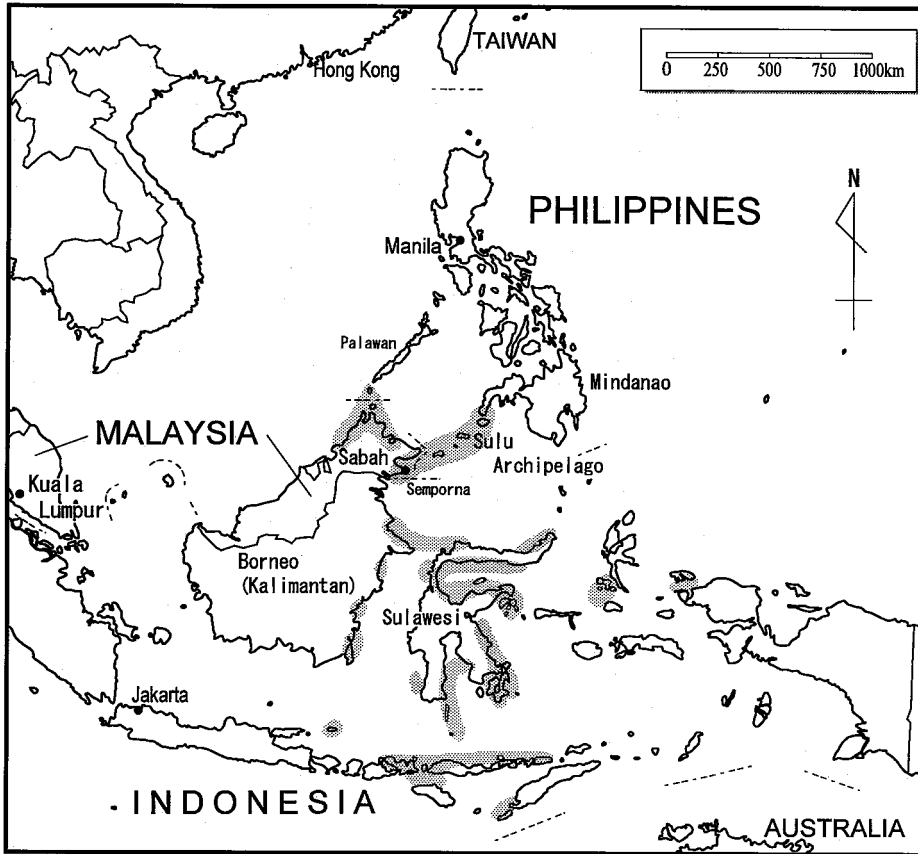


Fig1. Map. Maritime Southeast Asia and Distribution of the Sama / Bajau Settlements

is 211,970 according to the 1991 census [DOSM 1995b]. The Sama/ Bajau are mostly, if not all, maritime-oriented in terms of way of life. Some of them were once boat-dwellers in coral reefs and known as "sea nomads" or "sea gypsies" in the European literature. In general Sama is a term used by the people for themselves, while the term Bajau (or Bajo in Indonesia) has been used commonly by outsiders but is currently adopted as a term of self-reference in some areas like Sabah. Hereafter I use the term Bajau to designate the Sama in Sabah.

If considered "scientifically," the Sama/ Bajau are an ethno-linguistic group [Pallesen 1985] living on the national boundaries between the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia, though they often derive their ethnic identities from the local sub-groups to which each of them belong. It has not been confirmed yet if they are conscious of oneness as the Sama/ Bajau, or ever tried to attain such consciousness. As a result of various political influences upon

national or ethnic identity formation in each of the above-mentioned three nation-states, the Sama/ Bajau are changing their ethnic identifications. It is particularly true in Malaysia where the colonial as well as independent governments have prescribed the classification, the content and the nature of ethnic groups in the state and, based on this prescription, tried to implement policy.

The issues of national and ethnic identity have received much attention in Southeast Asian studies [e.g. Barth 1969; Zawawi 1996; Hitchcock and King 1997]. We now generally recognize that ethnic identity is situational and present in relation with social others. It is "symbolically constructed, selected and ascribed both by a group of people by themselves and by others' perceptions in the respective context" [Toyota 1998: 199]. We also admit that various institutions of a colonial and independent state authority have been concerned in the peoples' ethnic identity formation. As Anderson [1991: 163-170] argues, the census as one of such institutions has provided a basis or a model of "demographic topography" with the peoples under the authority's control to imagine their own "racial" or ethnic attributes [see also Hirschman 1987]. In order to approach this dynamic nature of ethnic identity, we need to focus on the historical process itself in which an ethnic identity has been created [see Ishikawa 1997].

In his study of ethnic or national identities in Malaysia, Shamsul [1996] emphasizes the need to approach the identity discourse in "two social realities," namely authority-defined and everyday-defined social realities, that exist side by side at any given time. The discourse in the authority-defined context is typically recorded in official or academic publications, while that in the everyday-defined context is fragmented and conducted mostly orally. "Since it is overwhelmingly an articulation of personal experience, not meant to be systemized or positioned for a particular pre-determined macro objective, it is therefore not textualised for "future reference,"..." [Shamsul 1996: 478]. It is also useful to refer to Yoshino's [1997: 3-8] critical review of the studies on Japanese cultural nationalism. He points out that scholars of this study have paid much attention to published textualised discourses about Japanese, or to an aspect of self-image productions. But, he continues, they have been little concerned with how and by whom such texts have been read, or with an aspect of consumptions of the produced self-image.

Though some ethnographic studies on the Bajau or Sama have dealt with their ethnic identity or ethnicity [Stone 1962; Nimmo 1968; Warren C. 1983; Sather 1984; 1999], these studies have paid less attention to the authority-defined aspect of their identity formation.

Furthermore, none of the studies have ever tried to historicize the process of identity formation.

This paper is a preliminary attempt to examine the dynamics of ethnic identifications of the Bajau in Sabah, Malaysia from the colonial period to the present by adopting the said two-way approach, i.e. an approach that takes into account both authority-defined and everyday-defined, or produced and consumed aspects of ethnic identity.

The next two parts of this paper are concerned with changing ethnic images of the Bajau in official understandings from the colonial to the independent nation-state period. For this purpose, I shall mainly trace the representations of the Bajau described in such official publications as handbooks, censuses, and school textbooks. The fourth section deals with the daily practice of self-identification of the Sama Dilaut, or maritime Sama, a socially and economically marginalized group of the Bajau. Here I shall rely on discourses studied in the course of fieldwork in Kampong (Kg.: administrative village) Kallong (pseudonym), Semporna District in the eastern part of Sabah, Malaysia.<sup>2)</sup> Finally I try to understand the Bajau's manipulation of self-reference as an attempt to obtain a recognized social status in the local context, and to underscore the fact that their way of self-identification is closely correlated to the authority-defined images shown in the former section.

## 2. The Bajau in the Eyes of Colonial British North Borneo

### 2.1 *Advent of British North Borneo Chartered Company*

In 1881 the British government granted a royal charter to a British and Austrian merchant company operating in the northern part of Borneo. The merchant company was thence named British North Borneo (Chartered) Company (the Company hereafter) and became the authorized colonial government for the territory of North Borneo.

The Company, as an officially chartered administrative authority, was required to delimit the territorial boundary and to group the inhabitants in the territory under the British flag. It was also necessary for the Company to classify the population according to ethnic elements and define who were the natives, or the indigenous people who were subject to their sovereignty. These tasks were undertaken for the purpose of managing "cheap" indirect rule, and of "guiding and protecting" the natives in such a way as to justify the colonial enterprise. In the course of events official reports on natives were written and censuses were

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2) I conducted the fieldwork in Kg. Kallong for one year and nine months from March 1997 to March 1999. Besides, I carried out short-term field researches in Sallang (pseudonym) Island, of Sulu Archipelago, the Philippines for 6 months totally, as well as several extensive surveys in Sulawesi and East Kalimantan of Indonesia.

taken in North Borneo as in British Malaya, or other neighboring colonies. Here we focus on the images and classification of the Bajau together with the discussion about "natives" shown in the official papers in British North Borneo.

## 2.2 *The Bajau Represented*

Coastal peoples such as the Bajau and the Sulu were already famous among Europeans at the end of 19th century, because it was they who had menaced European sea-going traders in Southeast Asia through piratical and kidnapping practices especially from the 18th to 19th century. Being familiar with these peoples through the records of traders, adventurers or natural historians<sup>3)</sup> in addition to their personal observations, British officials had no difficulty in categorizing and characterizing those coastal peoples.

Their case was different from that of the inland populations such as the Dusun and the Murut, about whom the British were less knowledgeable. Thus, the classifications of the latter groups were highly unstable and confused in the censuses throughout the colonial era before the Second World War. The category Bajau, however, was set as one of the main headings of "nationality" (ethnic group) as early as in the 1891 census and has been successively maintained, though there are a few minor rearrangements.<sup>4)</sup>

The earliest official descriptions of the natives of North Borneo were presented in two academic journals in 1880s by W. B. Pryer [1883; 1887], the first Company Resident in Sandakan (then Elopura). In an anthropological journal, he writes about the Bajau as follows:

The Bajaus or Sea Gypsies are a curious wandering irresponsible sort of race, rather low down in the scale of humanity, living almost entirely in boats in families. Though undoubtedly of Malay origin, they are much larger in stature, and stronger and darker than ordinary Malays. Not caring to store up property, and rarely troubling themselves as to where next week's meals are to come from, they pick up a precarious livelihood, along the shore line, by catching fish, finding sea slugs and turtle eggs, spearing sharks, and so forth. ...They lead a wild, free, roving live in the open air, untroubled by any care or thought for the morrow...

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3) See for example the books listed in the references of Roth [1980(1896)].

4) With regard to ethnic categories in the censuses of British North Borneo or Sabah after independence, I referred to BNBH [Feb. 1, 1892: 19-34], BNBH [Oct. 1, 1901: Supplement iii], [British North Borneo Official Gazette Jan. 2, 1912: 20], Maxwell [1921: 85], Garry [1931: 100], Jones [1953: 114], Jones [1962: 134] (British North Borneo), DOSM [1976: 69], DOSM [1983: 93, 412], and DOSM [1995b: 89-93] (Sabah).

The well-known Balignini were a subdivision of the great Bajau tribe; they used, as professional kidnapers, to harry the seas from Macassar, Batavia, and Singapore on the south, to Manila on the north; they did not, as a rule, murder without they thought there was occasion to do so [Pryer 1887: 230].

This sort of description of the Bajau offered a prototype for subsequent identifications of the Bajau from the viewpoint of the colonial authorities until the end of the colonial regime. In this article, all the native groups were described in pejorative manner.

Pryer repeatedly characterizes the natives as "pirates," "kidnapers," "slave traders," and "practicers of human sacrifice." Such terms no doubt meant "savagery" in the European idiom of that time. In the 1890 edition of the 'Handbook of British North Borneo,' his description of the natives was reprinted almost unchanged except for some drawings being added, which included that of headhunters [BNBC 1890: 34-43].

In the first few decades of its rule over the colony, the Company should have tried to bring piracy, slavery, or headhunting under control [Warren, J.F. 1971]. Perhaps paradoxically, however, the continued existence of the Bajau as "lawless kidnapping, pirating races" or the Dusun and the Murut as "wild headhunters" was convenient for the Company, because it provided the "humanistic" *raison d'être* for the Company's role as colonial administrator. The *raison d'être* was that only an administration run by white men could change these "lawless tribes" into law-abiding subjects and therefore could protect the other natives' interests as well as free trade [see Crocker 1890; BNBH Feb. 1, 1902: 32-33]. Pryer does not forget to add that:

Any slight bloodthirsty tendencies (of the Dusun)...are gladly abandoned wherever the Company's influence has spread. They show every symptom of thriving and increasing, under a proper firm Government, and there is no fear of their melting away and disappearing like so many races have done when brought into contact with the white man. Much the same thing may be said of the sea-coast races...the Bajaus are probably doing the best in some districts...and are even beginning to build houses [Pryer 1887: 236].

Descriptions of the Bajau have thus served as evidence of paternalistic role of the Company, and as justification for colonialism [c.f. Hirschman 1987: 570]. These explanations con-

firmed that the Bajau were once lawless nomadic pirates, but could abide by the law, settle down, and live peacefully under the auspices and guidance of the Company. The handbook of the Company in 1921 states:

[the Bajaus] were formerly one of the great pirate races of North Borneo and the neighbouring islands,...Lawless and arrogant, they were greatly feared in this part of the east for the raids they made, not only on neighbouring tribes, but also far afield... At the present day they cause little trouble and in many case have settled down to agricultural pursuits,.. [BNBC 1921: 43].

This sentence remained almost unchanged in subsequent editions of the handbook published in 1929 and 1934 [BNBC 1929: 34; BNBC 1934: 39].

### 2.3 *The Bajau as a Dominant Native Group*

Since the northern part of Borneo belonged to both the Sulu and the Brunei Sultanate before it came under the Company's administration, and was a crossroad for local migrants from both the Philippines and Dutch East India (Indonesia), defining "indigenous peoples" within the Company's territory was a far from easy task. The Bajau typically lived and moved across the boundary of three colonial territories. However, because the Bajau were populous and were regarded by the Company as "a main native group," their status as indigenous people in North Borneo did not become a critical matter of discussion, unlike the case with other dominant coastal groups such as the Sulu<sup>5)</sup> (or the Tausug in the Philippine term). The Sulu were considered of foreign origin. This was probably because the Company officers were often suspicious about their connection with aristocrats of the Sulu Sultanate.

In the first population census taken in 1891 [BNBH Feb. 1, 1892: 33] and the second census in 1901 [BNBH Oct. 1, 1901: 307-308 (Supplement i-iv)], the listing order of "nationalities" alluded to a series of native groups (see Appendix). For instance, in the 1901 census native groups were implicitly distinguished from the other natives of neighboring colonies who were classified as "Natives of Netherlands India" or "Natives of Sulu Archipelago." But there was no such inclusive category as natives of North Borneo.

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5) The Sulu or Suluk was/ is an ethnic label for the Tausug speakers in British North Borneo as well as in independent Sabah. The Sulu is at the same time a name for the archipelago and for the once prosperous sultanate there. Note that the Brunei was/ is also a term for an ethnic group in North Borneo and Sabah, though it is a toponym and a name for a sultanate.

In the 1911 census an inclusive heading "Natives of Borneo" first appeared [British North Borneo Official Gazette Jan. 2, 1912: 20], though under this heading fourteen "nationalities" were just simply listed in alphabetical order. The 1921 census [Maxwell 1921], which was first published in book form, gave much more comprehensive and detailed information of the population in North Borneo than the previous censuses. It consisted of twenty-one chapters such as "the population by race," "population of Borneo natives," "predominant races in each residency and district," "religions," "occupations," and etc. It was in this census that the concept of "three big groups," namely the Dusun, the Murut and the Bajau, was advanced for the first time. Many of the native groups were supposed to be classified "linguistically" under these three main groups.<sup>6)</sup>

For practical purposes there are three big groups. (i) Dusuns, who also include Idahans, Kuijaus, Orang Sungei and Tambunwas. (ii) Muruts, who also include Besayas and Tagals. (iii) Bajaus, who include Sea Bajaus, Land Bajaus, and Illanuns. This only leaves five races, Bruneis, Kedayans, Dyaks, Tidongs, and Tutongs, which forming only a small percentage of the whole may be grouped under "Others."

The variations of dialects in each of the three main groups are wide. ...nevertheless the roots of the language of each main group are the same [Maxwell 1921: 18].

In 1931 there was the heading "Native of Borneo" in the same manner as previous, though its contents changed slightly. The Dyaks were omitted from this category on the one hand, as they were considered immigrants from Sarawak. On the other hand the Sulu came under this category. The main inclusive groups increased to five, as the Brunei and the Sulu were added [Garry 1931].

In the 1951 census, the form for listing native groups was amended significantly: the main native groups were now explicitly labeled as the Dusun, the Murut, the Bajau, and "Other Indigenous" [Jones 1953]. No important change occurred in the 1960 census [Jones 1962].

The ethnic classification schemes used in the 1951 census offered a model for succeeding censuses, and, furthermore, provided a basic framework for popular perception about

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6) It is noteworthy that in the Philippines the Illanun have never been regarded as the same ethno-linguistic group as the Bajau (or the Sama) at any level. There the Bajau and the Illanun speak languages that are not mutually intelligible [see e.g. Gowing 1979: 1-10].



the ethnic groups in North Borneo and, after independence in 1963, in Malaysian Sabah. The popular perception after the decolonization is that the Dusun, the Murut and the Bajau are dominant native groups in Sabah, and therefore they are no doubt citizens as well as "authentic *bumiputera* (lit. sons of soils)" or "true indigenous peoples" of Sabah in the Malaysian context.<sup>7)</sup>

### 3. The Bajau Redefined in the Context of Independent Malaysia

#### 3.1 *Representations in the School Textbooks*

No official reports such as handbooks or censuses are available after independence for surveying official definitions of the ethnic groups in Sabah. Instead the description in school textbooks, which contains authorized explanations about the ethnic groups in independent Malaysia provides clues for mapping the changing images of the Bajau in independent Malaysia.

Most standardized school textbooks are published by the government-supported Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP), or Institute of Language and Literature, Malaysia. A DBP high school textbook of Malaysian history published in 1981 states that:

[Of *bumiputera* groups in Sabah] the third ethnic group [*kaum*] is the Bajau. They are Muslims and immigrant nations [*bangsa*] to Sabah. They came from Johor during the Sultanate of Brunei era. They are regarded as *bumiputera* just as the Brunei Malay are... [W]e will limit our study only to the customary practices of the Kadazan and the Murut. The Brunei and the Bajau people seem to be a similar kind of the Peninsular Malay people [*Orang Berunai dan Bajau adalah seakan-akan sejenis dengan orang Melayu Semenanjung*]. Their cultures are almost the same as Islamic cultures of the Malay [Khuo 1981: 75].

Another DBP textbook of 1996 writes that:

An ethnic group [*kumpulan etnik*] of the Bajau lives in a coastal area as they are famed as

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7) A Kadazandusun, or Dusun previously, author in his book shows this perception, though he excludes the Bajau as well as the other immigrant ethnic groups from the authentic *bumiputera* or real and original owners of Sabah [Luping 1994: 1-3]. The Bajau are, however, popularly considered in Sabah relatively original natives, if compared with the other apparent immigrants such as the Sulu or the Bugis.

sea peoples and fisherfolks. A long time ago there were the Bajau who lived in boats and were known as the Samal...Family ties of the Bajau people are so close that they are famous for mutual cooperation practices [*amalan bergotong royong*]. Formerly they were known as brave and strong heroes who protected Islam [Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia 1996: 121-126].

We may easily understand that, after Sabah gained independence as a part of Malaysia, official images of the Bajau have been reconfigured drastically. No longer is it emphasized that they were once lawless pirate races, but it is instead now highlighted that they are Muslim and once were protectors of their religion (probably their pirate activities in the past, or the Mat Salleh rebellion?<sup>8)</sup> are carefully interpreted as deeds to protect Islam). In addition, it is worth noting that the Bajau are considered immigrants to Sabah, but from Johor not from the Philippines, and the Bajau are regarded as the same ethnic group as the Malay, or are an ethnic sub-group of the Malay.

### 3.2 *The Bajau as a Sabah Version of Malay*

Some Bajau also began to identify themselves in this course, often regarding themselves as *semacam Melayu*, or a kind of the Malay. This may well reflect the influence of politicized ethnicity in Peninsular Malaysia, where the Malay are the dominant as well as most legitimate indigenous population, and Islam is the religion of the Federation.<sup>9)</sup> Although Malaysia successfully invented the concept and pseudo-ethnic category of *Bumiputera* (son of soil) for all indigenous peoples in the nation, the conventional ethnic label Malay (or *Melayu*) remains much more attractive for Muslim indigenous populations in Sabah and Sarawak. It is because the category is synonymous with authentic Muslims in Malaysia and differentiates them from the other Christian or animistic indigenous populations.

This indicates that the term Malay has begun to acquire an ambiguous political definition and is becoming a pseudo-ethnic category in Sabah. The Constitution of Malaysia defines the Malay as a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, and conforms to the Malay custom [Sheridan and Groves 1987: 421]. According

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8) Mat Salleh was a descendant of the Sulu and the Bajau aristocrats lived in the western part of North Borneo. Claiming his status as an independent lord and his rights over the lands and peoples of the region, he together with hundreds of the Bajau and the Dusun rebelled and fought against the constabulary of the Company at the end of the nineteenth century.

9) The Constitution of Malaysia reads as follows: Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation [Sheridan and Groves 1987: 29].

to this definition a person's actual hereditary descent is not as significant as his/ her current cultural identity.

Such a tendency in Sabah is well shown in the censuses. Of the entire native population, those who claimed to be the Malay were only 0.5% in 1960 just before independence, but increased to 4% in 1970 after integration into Malaysia [Jones 1962; DOSM 1976]. This was due neither to natural increase nor to the Malay immigrations from Peninsular Malaysia. The increase was mainly due to the fact that a large number of natives chose to begin identifying themselves as Malay. Now the Malay is the third largest native group, making up 11% of the total native population in Sabah [DOSM 1995b].

Some Bajau are, however, also aware that the term Bajau can be a synonym for the Malay in Sabah or a Sabah version of Malay. The Bajau in Semporna, a district in the eastern part of Sabah, sometimes explain that the Bajau is a collective term for all the indigenous or naturalized Muslim populations in Sabah, including the Sulu, the Illanun, the Bugis etc.<sup>10)</sup> This way of categorization is at times expanded to include those converted Muslims who once were Christian or members of other religions. This is shown in such an expression as *masuk Bajau*, or to enter the Bajau, which means to convert to Islam, just as *masuk Melayu* means the equivalent in Peninsular Malaysia. In sum the term Bajau functions in the same manner in Sabah as the Malay does in Peninsular Malaysia.

The term Bajau has also been reconfigured in a way that allows its members to claim social advantages in the ethnicized socio-political context of Malaysia. Thus, the term Bajau is popularly used to identify themselves by many Bajau including recent Sama immigrants from the Philippines, who regard themselves as Sama, but never as Bajau, in their original place. In the Philippines, the term Bajau is often pejorative: it is applied to the Sama populations who are *not* Muslim and, furthermore, used as a slang term for beggars (!) from the south in the cities like Manila or Davao. In addition to the Sama, other Muslim immigrants from the Philippines refer to themselves as Bajau in order to be classified as natives in Sabah.

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10) This way of understanding of the Bajau category is also confirmed in some published explanations. A yearbook compiled by a newspaper company explain: The Bajau, another major group [of indigenous peoples in Sabah], have often been called Sea Gypsies because of their seafaring ways...Bajau is a collective term for a number of tribal groups including the Illanun, Sulu, Obian and Binadan [note that the Obian and the Binadan are Sama speaking peoples]. Most Bajaus are Muslims [*Information Malaysia: 1998 Yearbook* 1998: 77].

#### 4. Daily Practice of Ethnic Identification

##### 4.1 *Accommodating the Official Accounts*

Finally let us turn our attention to the dynamics of ethnic self-identification of the Bajau as those appear in their daily practices by taking a few cases observed in Kg. Kallong in Semporna district where I conducted fieldwork. Kg. Kallong is a Sama Dilaut dominant village. Its total population is estimated to be 8,000. The Sama Dilaut's way of publicly showing their ethnic identity clearly demonstrates the dynamic nature of their self-identification, though it is not necessarily typical of all the Bajau in Sabah.

The Sama Dilaut is the term by which they refer to themselves. It means maritime Sama. Most of them were boat-dwellers until the 1950s. They sailed back and forth between Semporna waters and the Sulu islands of the Philippines. Because they lived a wandering lifestyle and were once not Muslim, they were long looked down on by the other Islamic Bajau groups which had become sedentary much earlier. After the 1960s they began to settle down in houses built on stilts above the coral reef. Now only about 30% of the adults engages in fishing. Most of them work in neighboring towns. The younger generation practices Islam devoutly. Some speak Malay as the first language and Bajau as the second. The trend of identifying themselves as *semacam Melayu* is visible here too.

Their ways of self-identification frequently reflect the reconstructed images of the Bajau after independence as shown in the previous section. In the case of the younger generation Sama Dilaut, their ethnic-identifications are occasionally formed through emphasis on their devoutness as Muslim.

##### Case 1.

Kassim,<sup>11)</sup> a male Sama Dilaut in his early 20s, is a devout Muslim who is actively involved in mosque events in Kg. Kallong. One day, mosque youth members held a meeting to discuss the banner contests in the Maulidur Rasul (Prophet Muhammad's birthday) celebration organized by the authority at Semporna town. The banners are usually decorated with Qur'an citations written in Arabic and pictures relating either to Islam or to Malaysia. When the youth members exchanged ideas about the picture for their banner, Kassim suggested that we the pure Bajau (*Bajau toongan* [Sm]) have a genealogy (*salsila* [Sm])

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11) Personal names are all pseudonyms.

originating from the sultanate of Johor. We should highlight ourselves as descendants of the sultanate of Johor and as those who brought Islam to Sabah. The picture on the banner should be a map of Malaysia emphasizing the state of Johor and Semporna district with boats bearing people exchanging two Qur'an books on the sea. His proposal drew some attention but was defeated by the modern idea of drawing KLCC (Kuala Lumpur City Center) combined with the imagined MSC (Multi Media Super Corridor) on the banner.

In an interview<sup>12)</sup> with me after the meeting, Kassim answered that he learned of the story that the Bajau originated in Johor from a history class given by a Bajau teacher when he was high school student. He said the story is probably true because it is written in a school textbook too, and actually one of his relatives found the boats in Johor to be similar to those once used by the Sama Dilaut.

The myth that the Sama/ Bajau originally came from Johor was recorded widely in colonial documents as well as ethnographic studies. Though a study of historical geography argued that the myth was based on historical facts [Sopher 1977 (1965)], recent scholars generally deny the hypothesis [Nimmo 1968; 1986; Pallesen 1985]. However the myth is now reproduced and popularized as a fact by the Bajau in Sabah themselves not through the oral transmission in villages but through the public education or the authentic publications. The story is no doubt attractive to the Bajau in Sabah because, firstly, Johor is one of the orthodox homelands of Malaysian Islam and, secondly, the story confirms that they have definitely been Malaysian "citizens" since the ancient time.

#### 4.2 *Appropriation of Others' Images*

Although peoples identify themselves as Bajau in accordance with the official accounts about the Bajau in certain situations, it is also common for them to intentionally identify themselves as Sama Dilaut in the course of their own daily pursuits.

#### Case 2.

Padani, a male Sama Dilaut villager in his late 40s, often works as a middleman to obtain Malaysian identity cards for his relatives. Since officials at the reception desk of the Registration Department are at times suspicious about the new applicants, he often explains

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12) I conducted interviews with the villagers mostly in Sama. However, they occasionally talked with me in Sama mixed with Malay sentences. In this section Sama words or sentences are marked with [Sm], while Malay are marked with [My].

to them with slight anger that:

"Don't you know we are the Sama Dilaut? Until a few years back, we the Sama Dilaut lived in boats fishing and moving around the sea. So our parents were illiterate. Some Sama Dilaut are still afraid to contact persons wearing leather shoes. How could they know the way to deal with these applications? How could they know the Registration Act? Actually there are many Bajau and Sulu who try to apply for identity cards illegally. But as far as the Sama Dilaut in Kallong village are concerned, most are not migrants but a true indigenous, *bumiputera* group (*sesungguhnya kaum asli, kaum bumiputera* [My]). We were wandering around the sea of Semporna even before the British came."

### Case 3.

Sayap, a male Sama Dilaut in his early 40s, recently moved to an island in East Kalimantan of Indonesia. Though living there, Sayap often comes back to Kg. Kallong to visit relatives and to sell shark's fins. Like many other Sama Dilaut, Sayap often crosses national boundaries illegally to fish. He has been arrested several times in Philippine, Malaysian, and Indonesian territorial waters by respective border patrols. Owing to these experiences, he claims he knows well how to deal with the border patrols now. Sayap stated as follows:

"Last year I went shark fishing in the Palawan waters of the Philippines together with two Bugis from Sulawesi. I repeatedly reminded them in case of police investigation not to say they are the Bugis, but the Sama Dilaut or the Bajau Laut, because in the Philippines the Bugis are considered definite foreigners (*bang pamikilan sigam ma Pilipin heq, aa Bugis subai bangsa asing, halam aniyaq saddi* [Sm]) and, with no valid documents, they would be arrested. But the Sama Dilaut or the Bajau Laut are usually exempted from their further investigation (*Boq bang kita yuk aa Sama Dilaut atawa yuk aa Bajau Laut biasa du missa, mbal taluwaq checking heq sigam* [Sm]). The authorities know that the Sama Dilaut rarely commit serious crimes such as smuggling and that the Sama Dilaut cross the boundary out of ignorance." (But the two Bugis honestly designated themselves as Bugis when interrogated by the police, whereupon they as well as Sayap were arrested).

These examples showed that the Sama Dilaut are at times intentionally reviving the former stereotyped images about themselves. They regard themselves as Sama Dilaut to differentiate themselves, in case 2, from the other Bajau or Sulu newcomers, and, in case 3, from the other ethnic groups who allegedly tend to commit criminal acts. In both cases, they are well

aware of outsiders' stereotyped images of the Sama Dilaut as nomadic, naive and ignorant fisherfolks. Though such images are no longer applicable to those settled Sama Dilaut who live in houses and often work in towns today, they are reviving and making use of the images to cope with present national situations in their own life world.

### 5. Concluding Remarks

The essentialization of ethnic groups is often related to the development of macro-authority. During the British North Borneo colonial period, authority-defined images or categories of ethnic groups were not consumed, or used by those so represented. The images and categories were arranged mainly for the use of the authorities. Definitions of the Bajau were made use of by the Company to justify their colonialism. However after independence, the new authorities produced attractive images or categories of the (especially native) ethnic groups so that each group could imagine its legitimate position in the nation. The Malaysian authorities successfully changed the definition of the Bajau in this sense. Since the term Bajau has come to acquire legitimacy in Malaysia on par with such concepts as being Muslim or being indigenous, it has been adopted by the Sama speaking populations in Sabah, unlike in the Philippines where the term Bajau is considered pejorative.

However, in their daily discourses about themselves, the Bajau do not always follow the definition or image of the Bajau represented by the authorities passively. As shown above, the Sama Dilaut are manipulating and portraying their ethnic identity flexibly in accordance with circumstances. On the one hand they identify themselves as *semacam Melayu* to confirm their status at the national level. On the other hand they revive and emphasize self-identification as Sama Dilaut at the local level in order to differentiate themselves from the other immigrant Bajau, or to cope with border controls.

Essentialized or stereotyped ethnic images are not just passively received by ethnic groups. They are subjected to manipulations by each ethnic group as part of its contest with other groups. It is particularly so in such national situations as Malaysia where political, economic and cultural conditions are highly ethnicized. The dynamic nature of the Bajau's self-identification is best understood in this context.

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## Appendix. Ethnic Classifications in the Census of the North Borneo &amp; Sabah, 1891-1991

| Years                        | 1891(1)                     | 1901(2)                     | 1911(3)                        | 1921(4)                           | 1931(5)                                     | 1951(6)                           |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Terms for the Classification | Nationality                 | Nationality                 | Nationality                    | Races                             | Nationality                                 | Community                         |
| Categories                   | 1 British                   | 1 Europeans (14 categories) | 1 Europeans                    | 1 [Europeans]*                    | 1 <British>** <Murut> (5 subcategories)     | 1 <European>** (10 subcategories) |
|                              | 2 Other Europeans           | 2 Eurasians                 | 2 Eurasians                    | 15 West Indians (6 subcategories) | 6 <Europeans>** 46 Murut                    | <Dusun>                           |
|                              | 3 Eurasians                 | 3 Chinese                   | 3 Chinese                      | 16 Ceylonese                      | 12 Americans 47 Peluan                      | 11 Dusun                          |
|                              | 4 Africans and Arabs        | 4 Japanese                  | 4 Japanese                     | 17 Eurasians                      | 13 Eurasians 48 Tagal                       | 12 Kwijau                         |
|                              | 5 Native of Northern Indian | 5 Siamese                   | 5 Siamese                      | 18 <Chinese>** (9 subcategories)  | 14 Africans 49 Tenggara                     | -----                             |
|                              | 6 Native of Southern Indian | 6 Arabs                     | 6 Arabs                        | 27 Formosan                       | 15 <Chinese>** 50 Timogun (6 subcategories) | 13 Murut <Bajau>                  |
|                              | 7 Siamese and Kalantan      | 7 Native of India           | 7 Soudanese                    | 28 Japanese                       | 21 <Indians>** <Sulu> (5 subcategories)     | 14 Bajau                          |
|                              | 8 Malays                    | 8 Native of Neth. India     | 8 Somali                       | 29 Saigonese                      | 26 Jews 51 Sulu                             | 15 Illanun                        |
|                              | 9 Brunei Malays             | 9 Native Sulu Archipelago   | 9 Philippinoes                 | 30 Siamese                        | 27 Japanese 52 Tidong                       | <Other Indigenous>                |
|                              | 10 Banjer massin Malays     | 10 Native of Borneo         | 10 Malays                      | 31 <Indians>** (4 subcategories)  | <Malay Races>                               | 16 Orang Sungei                   |
|                              | 11 Javanese                 | 11 Bajau                    | 11 Natives of India & Ceylon   | 35 Afgans                         | 28 Dyaks                                    | 17 Brunei and Kedayan             |
|                              | 12 Bugis and Tidong Men     | 12 Brunei                   | 12 Natives of Neth. E. Indies  | 36 Arabs                          | 29 Neth. East Indians                       | 18 Besaya                         |
|                              | 13 Dyaks                    | 13 Dusun                    | 13 Natives of Sulu Archipelago | 37 Jews                           | 30 Peninsular and Others                    | 19 Sulu                           |
|                              | 14 Dusuns, Muruts           | 14 Dyak                     | <Natives of Borneo>            | 38 Africans                       | -----                                       | 20 Tidong                         |
|                              | 15 Kadayans, Bisayahs &c.   | 15 Idahan                   | 14 Bajaws                      | 39 Native of Neth. Indies         | 31 Philippine Islanders                     | 21 Sino-Native                    |
|                              | 16 Bajows                   | 16 Illanun                  | 15 Bruneis                     | 40 Philippinoes                   | 32 Siamese                                  | 22 <Chinese>** (6 categories)     |
|                              | 17 Sulu                     | 17 Kedayan                  | 16 Dusuns                      | 41 Malays                         | -----                                       | <Others>                          |
|                              | 18 Manila                   | 18 Murut                    | 17 Dyaks                       | 42 Sulus                          | <Natives of Borneo>                         | 28 Native of Sarawak              |
|                              | 19 Chinese                  | 19 Orang Sungei             | 18 Idahan                      | -----                             | <Bajau>                                     | 29 Malay                          |
|                              | 20 Japanese                 | 20 Orang Padas              | 19 Illanun                     | <Natives of Borneo>               | 33 Land Bajau                               | 30 Cocos Islander                 |
|                              | 21 Not recorded             | 21 Sarawak Malay            | 20 Kedayan                     | 43 Bajau sea                      | 34 Sea Bajau                                | 31 Javanese                       |
|                              |                             | 22 Tangaras                 | 21 Muruts                      | 44 Bajau land                     | 35 Illanun                                  | 32 Sumatran                       |
|                              |                             | 23 Tutong                   | 22 Orang Padas (Besayas)       | 45 Besaya                         | <Brunei>                                    | 33 Native of South Borneo         |
|                              |                             | 23 Orang Sungei             |                                | 46 Brunei                         | 36 Brunei                                   | 34 Other Indonesian               |
|                              |                             | 24 Tagals                   |                                | 47 Dusun                          | 37 Besaya                                   | 35 [Indian & 2 other categories]* |
|                              |                             | 25 Tambunwa                 |                                | 48 Dyak                           | 38 Kedayan                                  | 38 Native of Philippines          |
|                              |                             | 26 Tidongs                  |                                | 49 Idahan                         | 39 Tutong <Dusun>                           | 39 Others                         |
|                              |                             | 27 Tutongs                  |                                | 50 Illanun                        | 40 Dusun                                    |                                   |
|                              |                             |                             |                                | 51 Kedayan                        | 41 Buludupi                                 |                                   |
|                              |                             |                             |                                | 52 Kujiau                         | 42 Idahan                                   |                                   |
|                              |                             |                             |                                | 53 Murut                          | 43 Kwijau                                   |                                   |
|                              |                             |                             |                                | 54 Orang Sungei                   | 44 Orang Sungei                             |                                   |
|                              |                             |                             |                                | 55 Tagal                          | 45 Tambunwa                                 |                                   |
|                              |                             |                             |                                | 56 Tambunwa                       |   |                                   |
|                              |                             |                             |                                | 57 Tidong                         |   |                                   |
|                              |                             |                             |                                | 58 Tutong                         |   |                                   |

Appendix. Ethnic Classifications in the Census of the North Borneo & Sabah, 1891-1991(cont.)

| Years                        | 1960(7)                         | 1970(8)            |                                  | 1980(9)  |                          | 1991(10)                     |  |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|--|--------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| Terms for the Classification | Community                       | Community          |                                  | Ethnicity/ Keturunan                                 |                          | Ethnic Group/ Kumpulan Etnik |  |
| Categories                   | 1 European                      | <Kadazan>          | <OtherIndigenous> cont.          | 1 Pribumi  | (Pribumi) ***            | <MalaysianCitizen>           | <Bumiputera> cont.                           |
|                              | 2 Eurasian                      | 1 Kadazan          | 22 Tidong                        | 2 <Chinese>**  | 1 Kadazan                | <Bumiputera>                 | 25 Rumanau                                   |
|                              | 3 Dusun                         | 2 Kwijau           | 23 Sino-Native                   | 3 Indian/<br>Pakistani/<br>Bangladeshi/<br>Sri Lanka | 3 Murut                  | 1 Malays                     | 26 Lotud                                     |
|                              | 4 Murut                         | -----              | 24 Others                        | 4 Bajau  | 4 Bajau                  | <Other Bumiputera>           | 27 CocosIslanders                            |
|                              | <Bajau>                         | 3 Murut            | -----                            | 4 Vietnamese   | 5 Illanun                | 2 Negrito                    | 28 OtherIndigenous (Sabah)                   |
|                              | 5 Bajau                         | <Bajau>            | 25 <Chinese>** (6 subcategories) | 5 Other Asian  | 6 Lotud                  | 3 Senoi                      | 29 [Indigenous, Sarawak]* (10 subcategories) |
|                              | 6 Illanun                       | 4 Bajau            | 31 Indonesian                    | 6 Eurasian   | 7 Rungus                 | 4 Proto Malay                | -----  |
|                              | <Other Indigenous>              | 5 Illanun          | <Others>                         | 7 European   | 8 Tambanuo               | 5 Dusun                      | 39 <Chinese>** (10 subcategories)            |
|                              | 7 Brunei                        | -----              | 32 Native of Sarawak             | 8 Others   | 9 Dumpas                 | 6 Kadazan                    | 49 <Indians>** (9 subcategories)             |
|                              | 8 Kedayan                       | 6 Malay            | 33 Native of Philippines         |  | 10 Maragang              | 7 Kwijau                     |  |
|                              | 9 OrangSungei                   |                    | 34 European                      |  | 11 Paitan                | 8 Bajau                      | 58 Indonesian                                |
|                              | 10 Bisaya                       | <Other Indigenous> | 35 Eurasian                      |  | 12 Idahan                | 9 Iranun/Illanun             | 59 Filipino                                  |
|                              | 11 Sulu                         | 7 Lotud            | 36 Indian                        |  | 13 Minokok               | 10 Murut(Sabah)              | 60 Thai                                      |
|                              | 12 Tidong                       | 8 Rungus           | 37 CocosIslander                 |  | 14 Rumanau               | 11 OrangSungei               | 61 Japanese                                  |
|                              | 13 Sino-Native                  | 9 Tambanuo         | 38 Others                        |  | 15 Mangka'ak             | 12 Sulu/Suluk                | 62 Korean                                    |
|                              | 19 <Chinese>** (6 categories)   | 10 Dumpas          |                                  |  | 16 Sulu                  | 13 Bisaya (Sabah/Sarawak)    | 63 Other Asian                               |
|                              | <Others>                        | 11 Maragang        |                                  |  | 17 OrangSungei           | 14 Rungus                    | 64 Eurasian                                  |
|                              | 20 Native of Sarawak            | 12 Paitan          |                                  |  | 18 Brunei                | 15 Sino-Native               | 65 European/ Caucasian                       |
|                              | 21 Malay                        | 13 Idahan          |                                  |  | 19 Kedayan               | 16 Kadayan (Sabah/Sarawak)   | 66 Others                                    |
|                              | 22 CocosIslander                | 14 Minokok         |                                  |  | 20 Bisaya                | 17 Tidong                    | -----  |
|                              | 23 Indonesian                   | 15 Rumanau         |                                  |  | 21 Tidong                | 18 Tambanuo                  | 67 Non-Malaysian Citizen                     |
|                              | 24 Indian, Pakistani, Ceylonese | 16 Mangka'ak       |                                  |  | 22 Other Indigenous      | 19 Idahan                    |  |
|                              | 25 Native of Philippines        | 17 Sulu            |                                  |  | 23 Melayu                | 20 Dumpas                    |  |
|                              | 26 Others                       | 18 OrangSungei     |                                  |  | 24 Sino-Native           | 21 Mangkaak                  |  |
|                              |                                 | 19 Brunei          |                                  |  | 25 Native of Sarawak     | 22 Minokok                   |  |
|                              |                                 | 20 Kedayan         |                                  |  | 26 Native of Philippines | 23 Maragang                  |  |
|                              |                                 | 21 Bisaya          |                                  |  | 27 CocosIslander         | 24 Paitan                    |  |

\* The headings quoted in square brackets are set expedientially for the present study. In the census detailed categories are shown and enumerated accordingly.

\*\* In the census the subcategories are shown and enumerated accordingly.

\*\*\* Populations of these subcategories are not given.

- (1) Table 16 Analyse of Nationality, Age, and Sex for the Whole of the Territory reached by the Census [BNBH Feb. 1, 1892: 33]
- (2) Table 9 Nationality, Age, and Sex for the Whole of the Territory reached by the Census [BNBH Oct. 1, 1901: Supplement iii]
- (3) Details of Population throughout British North Borneo [British North Borneo Official Gazette Jan 2, 1912: 20]
- (4) Schedule II Population of Whole State by Race and Sex [Maxwell 1921: 85]
- (5) Schedule II Population of Whole State by Race and Sex [Garry 1931: 100]
- (6) Table 5 Total Population -Communities by Age Groups [Jones 1953: 114]
- (7) Table 4 Total Population by Community and Subgroup, Sex and Age [Jones 1962: 134]
- (8) Table 2.2 Detailed Community Groups breakdown of Total Population X Community X Sex X Type and Size of Locality [DOSM 1976: 69]
- (9) Table 2.7: Population by detailed Ethnic Group, Sex and Stratum [DOSM 1983: 93, 412]
- (10) Table 24: Population by detailed Ethnic Group, Stratum and Sex [DOSM 1995b: 89-93]