

Influences of Regional Sama-Bajau Coastal Dwellings: Social Perspectives through Identity Molding

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Abstract—Ever since colonial powers came into Malay Archipelago, one of the major transformations introduced is the occupying territory by the controlling powers known as State boundary. It delineates cultural grounds that have been long interconnected between mainlands in the archipelago that extends from the Philippine toward Indonesia wherein lies the vestiges of the largest diaspora of ethnic dispersed from its ancestral ground- Sama-Bajau. This particular ethnic is unanimous throughout the coastal area of Malay archipelago with largest concentration would be in Mindanao of Philippine, Sabah of Malaysia and Sulawesi of Indonesia in which Sama-Bajau settlements have developed according to the locality. The objective of this paper is to discuss the evolution of coastal dwellings amongst this ethnic and the influences affecting the growth of Sama-Bajau perceptions and identity particularly within their built environment. Deriving from textual analysis, this paper theorized major influences by socio-politics discourses of Sama-Bajau throughout the history overlapping pre-colonial and post-colonial occupancies in Mindanao and Sabah specifically in its development towards achieving globalization. Study posits that there were two major conducting exertions that coerced development of Sama-Bajau dwellings and settlement: 1) Acculturation, through inter-ethnic relation and marriage; and 2) Malleability, through governing power. Coastal dwellings as in its rudimentary state, gradually thrived onto creating cohesive settlements that had major authority over Sama-Bajau ascension traversing social mobility in their quest for identity consolidation.

Index Terms—Sama-bajau, coastal dwellings, social mobility, acculturation, governing body.

I. INTRODUCTION

Coastal dwellings have always been ubiquitous throughout Malay Archipelago, ranging from fishing villages to ethnic dwellings. The fact that many of the old kingdoms in the archipelago stemmed from maritime society paved the ways for coastal houses to flourish for generations. Brunei sultanates, Sulu Sultanates, are the major port that thrived to be major players in the region's past. These kingdoms utilized their maritime grounds to disseminate their influences in the region- an influence that eventually caught up by the natives within the areas that fell under the rulings of the said governance. These areas might be overlapped in terms of influential power – as in the case

of North Borneo during pre-colonial occupation- land were parted and divided by area of influences.

Coastal dwellings in Sabah pre-colonial period has evolved over the period of rulings until the emergence of colonial and post-independence period of which there have been major changes in governance direction towards imposing new lifestyle for ethnics particularly nestled along the coasts. These coastal settlers range from different ethnics sharing the same space and possibly the same cultural worldview with another as a result of inter-ethnic contacts for generations. The likes of Bajau, Suluk or Tausug and Iranun are the majority of those living along the coasts of the region. Sama-Bajau being the coastal settlers themselves seems to be an ethnic that have been most affected by changes that cover aspect of socio-economics and politics due to their century-long traditions dictated by fishing grounds that enable them to prolong their existence and survival. Sama-Bajau, while considered as a small minority of the population in Southeast Asia [1], they arguably has dispersed and acculturate for generations, has probably numbered more by living in seclusion and averting authorities for personal security purposes.

There are approximately 494 700 Bajau people in Sabah by 2014 and the number expected to grow [2]. Sama-Bajau on the other hand divided into two major groups: *Jomo Sama* and *A'a Sama* [3] or commonly known by western scholars as *Sama Darat* and *Sama Dilaut* respectively [4]. Settlement patterns dictated by these two sub-groups painted an image of landed settlement for Sama Darat and nomadic boat-dwelling people for Sama Dilaut [5]. While the classification of this settlement is somewhat vague and generalized, there is another sub-group called *Sama-Lipid* or also known as littoral Sama believed to have been originated from Tawi-Tawi Island [6]. Another term for 'littoral' Bajau is Bajau Kubang which can be found in Semporna and believed to have been the earliest settlers in the region [7], [8], but this term only popularly used on the east coast. Regardless, several scholars have posited that these sub-groups are linked together via vertical social mobility that transpired through ages, influence and acculturation- a product of sedentary process [9]-[11]. In this case the term Sama-Bajau is used to generalized and neutralized the terms given to their respective home locations with the term 'Sama'; a Malay word that brought about the meaning of 'same' or 'identical' [12]. It is also has been used collectively by several scholars [13], [14].

II. SOCIAL-MOBILITY

Social Mobility is the fundamental in the evolution of

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coastal dwellings for Sama-Bajau. Their transcendence caused by external influences caused Sama-Bajau to shift cognition towards life. Their culture, worldviews and socio-economic changed as the result of social mobility. Identity consolidation of Sama-Bajau occurred in two movements: horizontal and vertical mobility. Horizontal social mobility refers to migration by sea which does not bring any changes to social credit and social mobility refers to changes in social status that see them even with other dominant ethnics in social strata. One of the major indications to this is the sedentary process which is vital to an upward change in social hierarchy. Warren [15] believes sedentary process was the main factor in their identity consolidation

Land based group tend to differentiate themselves to the nomadic Sama-Bajau whom they think as inferior in social status. Probably the most obvious is the preference to be called as ‘Sama’. The maritime life adopted by the Sama-Bajau over centuries caused them to be looked down and given some pejorative appellations. The social transformation that occurs to the ascended Sama-Bajau in social hierarchy is based on three factors: complete Islamization, boat dwellers reside on land (sedentarization), and the shift of economic to agriculture. However, there were greater forces at stake that dictates these factors. It is of a basic understanding that ‘sedentarization’ is the fabric component to the social mobility. Sedentarization also spurred the growth of littoral dwellings or coastal dwellings which can be found almost everywhere in this region. To have the Sama-Bajau to live a sedentary life, it requires them greater exertions that brought them to settle permanently. This paper will discuss the major exertions that shaped the present coastal dwellings that can be found nowadays.

III. INFLUENCE OF ISLAM

The first exertion was Islamization. It is without a doubt to be responsible in the lifestyle and culture changes of the masses in Malay and Sulu Archipelago. Reference [16] opines that the influence of religion can be seen in the entire fabric of a culture. Both consciously and unconsciously, and in varying degrees, religion impacts everything from business practices to politics to individual behavior.

Islam has led the Sama-Bajau in the past to expedite acculturation among dominant ethnics in Sulu Archipelago. Islam led nomadic boat dwellers to sedentary life as in the case of Sama-Bajau in Semporna (refer Malleability section). Sama-Bajau in the Southern Philippines on the other hand, once adopted a sedentary lifestyle, only then they are recognize by groups like the Tausug as Muslims [17]. Islam is indeed a powerful exertion to the mobility of sea nomads in the archipelago, however it would not be thoroughly effective if their respected leaders would not accept in the first place. In the case of Tausug and Sama-Bajau, dominant ethnic influences also played a role in bringing the nomadic Sama-Bajau to embrace Islam. Therefore, there was an underlying reasoning for the Sama-Bajau to be coerced into embracing Islam that ultimately brought to their social mobility

IV. ACCULTURATION

Acculturation is the term commonly used in sociological and anthropological subjects to define cultural assimilation or cultural integration depending on how one perceives it to be. While sociologists and anthropologists look at it as in adoption of cultural norms and behavioral patterns of a certain ethnic group, psychologists tend to look into individual process of changes in personal values, behavior and beliefs [18]. Regardless, the profound meaning of acculturation experienced within the realm of social mobility of Sama-Bajau range from holistic structure of their community to individual level of awareness through globalization.

In this paper, Acculturation model by Berry [19] is utilized. It can be sub categorized into four strategies which are the result of interaction between two or more different ethnics. The result of interaction can be subdivided into two cruxes: one’s preference in maintaining his/her culture and identity; and one’s preference in keeping contact and participating with the larger society along with other ethnic groups. Berry then proposed of four different strategies of acculturation, of which can be used to describe the social-mobility of Sama-Bajau based on the excerpts by several scholars on inter-ethnic contacts. The four strategies were:

TABLE I: ASSIMILATION STRATEGY

Strategy	Description
Assimilation	When individual wishes to strengthen the relationship of the other culture while discarding one’s own culture
Separation	When individual wishes to maintain the heritage of one’s culture and avoiding and curb the influence of other culture
Marginalization	When individual not willing to have let other culture permeate through their life while showing little to no involvement of one’s culture of origin.
Integration	When individual wishes to maintain one’s culture of origin while at the same time participating in other culture

The social-mobility of Sama-Bajau is straight forward albeit segmented. The Sama-Bajau’s acculturation in North Borneo saw a gradual movement over the years of occupancy. The occupancy of Sama-Bajau on certain part of the region has gone through the process of intercultural connections with another group where symbiotic relationship is inevitable due to their repertoires. History has shown that the existence of ‘*Tamu*’ [20] in Sabah is the result of two ethnics renowned for their geo-cultural prowess to be in close contact in order for them to exchange resources [21]. The Bajau were skillful fishermen, salt makers and involved in trades [22] while Dusun people were embracing agriculture and ranching. The relationship that grew over the years may create awareness to Sama-Bajau to embrace the Dusun lifestyle or any other agrarian ethnics. Dusun people was seen as the better tribe as they were able to produce self-sustain income via variety of plantation. Concerning with their own image, the Sama-Bajau at the time might have some awareness and thus pushing themselves further inland by incorporating the culture of Dusun into their lives- a situation which ‘assimilation’ occurs. Assimilation could propel permutations in many aspects, ranging from language, dressing and eating, but in this case, dwellings would be

look upon in the perspective of acculturation. Shifting of dwellings from the coast to the inner land create a far better opportunities for plant cultivations, trades and even guided by the political stance of the current governance (see socio politics during colonial period).

The shifting among the realm of Sama-Bajau social mobility can be called as sedentarization- a condition to describe a nomadic lifestyle that has come to live permanently. Sama-Bajau has gone through the process of social transcendence that has seen their lifestyle changes from maritime oriented towards agrarian. It could well be explained by studying the rudimentary lifestyle that can be seen in the Pala'u; semi-modernized 'littoral' Sama known as Sama Lipid or Sama Kubang in Semporna; and west coast Bajau or largely recognized as Bajau Kota Belud. Bajau Kota Belud can be said as the product of perfect sedentary process where duration and gradual inward settlements contributed to their identity consolidation. They totally change their economics and rely on paddy as their main source of income [23] and with that, they create a new material culture discernible with the rest of its antecedent.

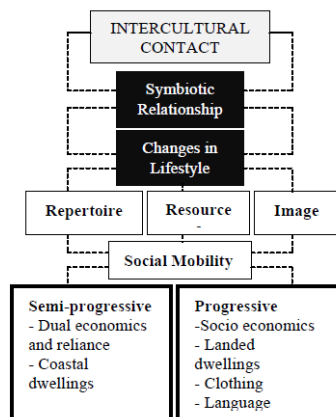


Fig. 1. The concept of acculturation in built environment's consolidation of Sama-Bajau.

Reference [24] posits that the boat-dwelling Sama-Bajau, or famously known as the Pala'u, is categorized of having both integration and separation. She stressed that even though there is a positive evolution in the life of Pala'u, there are many aspects that shows Pala'u as having more of 'separation' in their daily life due to their undying beliefs to the spirit of their ancestors. However, this fact is considered to be merely based on observations. There is a high motivation at play that could govern the life of the Pala'u and thus making them retract back to their comfort zone rather than contending for their life which is uncertain (Refer to the section 'malleability' for explanation).

Littoral Sama on the other hand stuck in the interstice of socio-economic and politics, though, socio-economic is majority at play in many cases. They are trapped in their only repertoire that they wouldn't be able to survive if they were to settle further in land while at the same time, reality of the situation and the globalization within other ethnics further pushing them to trail behind in education and economics. Awareness was incremental as many of them would realize that they need to reap all the opportunities given to those fully sedentarized and work on plantations. This further boost by the Brunei Sultanate governance and

also policy set by the colonial masters during the colonial era in North Borneo which brought this discussion into the new domain of exertion- Malleability by political entity that governs the life of Sama-Bajau in the region.

V. MALLEABILITY (GOVERNING POWER)

Malleability is the second major exertion in the progressive changes that consolidated the sedentary life of Sama-Bajau. In north Borneo during pre-colonial period, there were two major Sultanates responsible in shaping its citizen in the region via trades and maritime dominance: Brunei Sultanate and Sulu Sultanate- both with their own dominance within certain period of peak-governance. Brunei Sultanate was at its peak after the fall of Malacca kingdom to the Portuguese. In the past during Brunei Sultanate era, the land ownership was governed according to the 'native' land ownership, which was one of Brunei's land governance systems [25]. The Chiefs assigned by the Sultanate or *Pengiran*, have absolute power in the ownership of the land. *Pengiran* title is conferred to those that have royal bloodline of Brunei Sultanate and were assigned on certain land to govern as periphery to the central government- land of which called as 'feudal-asiatic land'. Sultan Brunei on the other hand, only possessed those of 'governments land' [26].

A. Governing Power (Pre-colonial) — Brunei Sultanate Influences

Brunei sultanate was a thalassocracy kingdom, of which means a kingdom primarily operated within a maritime realm. Like Srivijaya and Majapahit, Brunei sultanate thrived with its strategic location as an established commercial linkages between east and the west [27]. This glory culminated in the period of success called 'Brunei's Golden Age' with the reign of the fifth Sultan of Brunei, Bolkiah in 1485-1521. According to the genealogy of its Sultan, Brunei embraced Islam in 1476 subsequently marked the new era of conquest under the Brunei Sultanate that extends over the coastal regions of East, North Borneo and Sulu Archipelago [28]. Brunei also had a profound link with Chinese Kingdom before the demise of Emperor Yung-Lo in 1424 making Brunei one of the most influential kingdom at the time. Antonio Pigafetta, a navigator for Ferdinand Magellan's expedition to Brunei in 1521, described Brunei as a city built on salt water, except the Sultan's palace and houses of certain chief men. The palace was protected by brick ramparts fortified with brass and iron cannons. The palace itself was emanating with opulence as the Europeans ride on top of 'elephants draped with silk-cloth' with the palace occupants 'had their body covered with gold embroideries, silk, golden hilts, and blessed with pearl and precious stones.

Another crucial note from Pigafetta was his description on the urban dwellings of the city at the time, he described a city of approximately 25,000 families living in wooden houses built on stilts and great beams raised above the salt water. At high tide, the women would go ashore to buy things and selling merchandise. This fact could be overlapped with the fact that coastal dwelling has been observed as a cohesive functional living system as early as

15th century. Considering the fact that Brunei society during 15th century may not consist of Sama-Bajau as the majority in the population, it could also mean that many other ethnics were adopting the dwelling system due to the influence that the Sultanate has along the coasts of Borneo and Sulu. This influence, coupled with docile nature of the Sama-Bajau as adept seafarers contributed to the acculturation of Sama-Bajau.

Many of the lands under the governance of Pengiran were involved in socio-economic activities. Demography, economy and connections were the aspects of the settlement under the leadership of Pengiran that led majority of the land to revolve around main rivers. During this period, Tamu exists where the main tribes that dwelt in the area: Bajau and Dusun, to symbiotically dependent on each other. While it is almost impossible to study the settlement pattern or its geological factor, however it can be assumed that the influence of Brunei Sultanate has fundamental role in changing the life of Sama-Bajau during the era. According to Saat, there were several Bajau settlements that exist before 1900th. They are listed with the exact geological location for each of the Kampongs:

TABLE II: PRE-COLONIAL GEO-LOCATION OF SAMBA-BAJAU CONCENTRATION IN KOTA KINABALU (WEST COAST) UNDER BRUNEI SULTANATE GOVERNANCE

Kampongs	Location
Kampung Tambalang	Coast & river mouth
Kampung Mangkabong	River mouth
Kampung Menggatal	River side
Kampung Api Api	Coast
Kampung Sembulan	Coast
Kampung Kinarut	Coast
Kampung Pangalat	Coast & river mouth

The fact of the matter during the Brunei governance, the Sama-Bajau at the time has already embraced sedentary life and move further inland. While technically at the time, they could be as well use fishing as a source of income, it could not halt the fact that they already started to shift to another alternative source of income that is mainly paddy plantations. Cowie in his travel in 1898, reported that main economy in the area was paddy cultivation [29]. It can be postulated that the Sama-Bajau community at the time has dual economics tendencies: one that still retains their traditional repertoire (fishing and making salt) and another as a result of socio-political impact in their life (plantations). This shows that Sama-Bajau was having the process of integration at this stage. The integration that occurs for hundreds of years, compounded with acculturation via inter-ethnic contact via trades and exogamy is what could possibly consolidated Sama-Bajau identity thus creating a new sub-ethnic that have concrete material culture that is the Sama Kota Belud.

B. Governing Power (Pre-colonial) — Sulu Sultanate Influences

It is relatively easy to relate Sama-Bajau in the east coast of Sabah with those in the Southern Philippine. Dialect spoken by the east coast Sama is said to be in identical with the language spoken in the Southern Philippine [30][31]. Sama-Bajau or the Samal as in Southern Philippine is universally known as docile and loyal community. While

the arrival Tausugs in the region during 11th century has changed the life of Sama-Bajau and bring about fundamental fabric to the Sama-Bajau. Many have assimilated with other ethno-linguistic groups collectively called Bangsa Moro; some have decided to separate themselves and remains nomadic; and some would have travelled and disperse over the North Borneo (particularly in Darvel Bay) and Celebes Sea.

Sama-Bajau presence has far preceded the arrival of other ethnics in Southern Philippine. Pallesen has theorized that Sama-Bajau originated from Zamboanga, Mindanao as early as 800AD before dispersing to east Indonesia, Basilan, and North Borneo based from his dispersion hypothesis. The earliest record of the presence of Sama-Bajau in Zamboanga was in 1521 by Antonio Pigafetta, who mentioned of sea people living in floating villages and houses on the sea [32]. It can be assumed that the floating village would be equal to those of Pala'u in Omadal Island of Semporna. The village might grow from the boat houses of Sama or simply can be considered as the second evolutionary line of Sama-Bajau houses.

The Sama-Bajau consolidated their identity as disunited people and scattered across different territories. As nomads, they have no absolute grounds for them to be called home. Their living is bound to the availability and abundance of sea resources, shifting places to places wherever they deem enough for sustenance. However, due to the politics, social and economics factor, many of them starting to live a sedentary life and pushed towards acculturation of Sama-Bajau.

Socio-politic has called for major restructuring of the ethnic's socio-culture that brought them further into urban areas from the vast seas. According to the tradition of Maguindanao, Sama-Bajau often said to have come with Sharif Kabungsuwan, the man responsible for spreading Islam across Mindanao [33]. The community then mingled and many exogamy happened between Sama-Bajau and Maguindanaos. They have become relatives through intermarriages that saw the Sama-Bajau rise on the social hierarchy and treated without bias.

Malleability by the government for the east coast saw the heavy influences of Sulu Sultanate that was in the peak of maritime supremacy during 18th century. Trades, raiding and plundering have shaped the Sama-Bajau to be one of the fearsome ethnic in the region. However, not all Sama sub-ethnic has attain to that level, the Balangingi, a sub-ethnic of Sama originated from the island of Balangingi has become one of the main asset for Sulu Sultanate to disseminate their area of influences. The fearsome Sama-Bajau or Samal incessancy in piracy and marauding way of life often referred to Samal Balangingi. The Balangingi is assumed to have ascended in vertical social mobility that sees them acculturated and heavily influence by neighboring sea-faring Tausug. They were an emergent people whose society and culture substantiated as a result of mixed marriages. James Warren in The Sulu Zone [34] stated:

'Originally fishermen and traders with martial skills and a flair for organization, many of them adopted agriculture. With the introduction of Islam, about fifteenth

century, they evolved well-articulated political and economic system'

The rise of Jolo, the capital of Sulu Sultanate then, is boosted by the band of seafarers consisted of the Iranun, Balangingi and Tausugs. Iranun and Balangingi especially, are essential in making Jolo as the main entrepot famous for its slave markets among merchants from 17th century until 19th century. Piracies were rampant and slave raiding were the trend for Tausug Chiefs as a symbol of wealth. The relationship too, is symbiotic like the Sama in west coast; Tausug wanted wealth and the Samals wanted assurance and sustenance. This reciprocal activity is what led to the economic prosperity and development that further consolidated Sama-Bajau identity. Intermarriages not only bounded between the Sama-Bajau and the Maguindanaos but also happen among slaves that they captured. The slaves would then adapt themselves and acculturate with the Sama language, custom and even religion.

Warren posits that unprecedented forced migrations of captives and slaves for the economy of Sulu, shaped the demographic origins of the Balangingi and the population trends and settlement pattern in the 19th century in the Philippines and eastern Indonesia. Coastal settlements have seen to be growing at this period due to the close proximity with the Sultanate. It can be assumed that during this period, majority of the Sama were 'littoral' Sama due to: repertoire and also political interest with the land ethnics.

C. Governing Power (Colonial)

Before colonization by the British, Sama-Bajau sat on top of the social hierarchy in Kota Kinabalu as a result of blood relation to the Pengiran, however once colonization by the British took place, the social hierarchy was dominated by colonial-capitalist followed by oriental migrants. They continued dwelling on lower side of the hierarchy even after gaining independency from British. This is caused by the policy of their Colonial master to undermine Muslim ethnic as part of their subliminal crusade; there were lack of social institutions growth particularly education. Not only that, colonial policy also focused on ethnics that operate agriculturally. As a result, the ethnic disparity grew bigger between Sama-Bajau and Christian ethnics. Saat then asserts that the urban development of colonial times has infringed the local *bumiputras* – coastal Sama-Bajau included- from economic mainstreams. Causing their development and social mobility to stagnate until Sabah gained independency.

At the peak of the trades, Mindanao has inevitably brought Colonial powers who vying to control the region for its greater benefits. Molucca at the time was rich with spices which then draws western power to the area. The marauders: Balangingi and Iranun of the past were being used by the three powers during the peak of maritime grounds struggle over trading supremacy in the Sulu region. The cross-cultural trades involving Sulu Sultanate, China and western powers was the major cause for the ascendancy of marauding Iranun and Balangingi which subsequently paved the way for social and cultural transformations to take place. Sulu Sultanate's economic vitality was directly involved in the marauding activities of their maritime forces. Slave-raiding was the major occupation at the Sultanate's

height of power. The struggle between three western powers: Dutch, British and Spanish, had a profound complex relationship interchanged with one another. Geopolitical rivalry amongst western powers has pitted themselves with each other while more often exploiting the advantages of having pirates in their economic zones to thwart each other's influences.

Intrusion caused by colonial powers especially the Dutch has brought considerable number of sea nomads to the alternative centers notably Jolo and Cotabato in Southern Mindanao and Makassar in Sulawesi [35], thus promoting many inter-ethnic contacts that enriched the culture of Bangsa Moro as whole. The settlement then has been centralized to the urban center which many of them grew from the status of entrepot, compounding to the mass number of floating villages. However, the tale of the piracy fame came to an end when Spaniards, who vow to put an end to the rampant piracy in the region, destroyed the Sama stronghold in Balangingi in 18th century that marked the long struggle of Sama-Bajau. Causing them revert to nomadic life and dispersed to other islands in Sulu archipelago, North Borneo and Moluccas.

D. Governing Power (Post-colonial)

After independence, there was a massive movement from the government to abolish poverty in Sabah. Coastal dwellings, of which majority of them reside by Sama-Bajau are still ubiquitous. It has often draw criticism and always has been seen as a product of perpetual poverty issue that still remains until this day. However, as much as coastal settlements still exist, they have modernized themselves by using conventional materials for their houses, better planning, and better utilities.

Looking at west coast Sama, their vertical mobility can be considered as linear, like many other ethnics that accepted globalization as a whole that the colonial power has imposed on them. They thrived over generations to embrace modernity and education that brought massive changes in their life. Many have succeeded and move to the city to follow suit the current flow economics yet many still succumb to their traditional skills that requires them to still living in the coasts. While it is not entirely a negative aspect to live along the coast on stilt dwellings, as in the case of those living in rural locations, majority of them are still devoid of basic amenities to lead them live a comfortable life due to the location and also city council to not providing them with amenities due to the land title that fall under native land in *Land Ordinance Cap.68 (Section 78)[36]*. Though there are alternatives provided by the government such as giving individual water tanks to each houses, building materials, boats and engine, and aquaculture initiatives, they are then left unintended and subsequently ignored.

Upon reaching independence, efforts to reduce poverty have been vigorously implemented. Sama-Bajau along with other *Bumiputras* were introduced to many economic models, better education and better opportunities in the city. Many ancestral grounds have been reintroduced as native lands under modern laws; and were granted and approved by The *Yang di-Pertua Negeri* if he thinks it is necessary to protect the present and future interests and well-being of the

natives of Sabah in Part IV- Native Reserves, Point No. 78 (Sabah Land Ordinance Cap. 68, 2013 ref). While these gazette lands bring relief to the natives, it is deemed only temporary due to the fact that the YDPN is entitled to revoke the land status. However it would seem unlikely to happen due to possible backlash and trouble of resettlement. As much as native land reserves were granted, they are countless coastal houses built on illegal grounds, causing many unwanted slumps to grow out of control in the state. One thing is certain, native land reserves for Sama-Bajau faced an uncertainty over their long-term futures.

VI. CONCLUSION

It is essentially hard to pinpoint the exact evolution of the coastal dwellings in this region. The study of its influences however could help disentangle certain question on why they are almost occupied every single coastline in the North Borneo and Sulu Archipelago. History and facts dictate their unbridled movements throughout the maritime realms, exerting influences after influences while supported by trades and economic activities. Sultanates in the region are born out of maritime supremacy. Important trades with China that requires sea products; security and maritime power prescribed a good military might on the ocean; and Sama-Bajau docile nature made the influences propagate easier along the coastal areas of Sulu Archipelago. Even to these days, coastal houses are still scattered and continue to grow, along with the fact that Sabah is still poverty-ridden, the existence of coastal dwellings will continue to live on.

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