A TALE OF TWO FESTIVALS: EXAMINING SAMA/BAJAU CULTURE IN THE KAMAHARDIKAAN FESTIVAL OF BONGAO, TAWI-TAWI PROVINCE, PHILIPPINES AND THE REGATTA LEPA FESTIVAL OF SEMPORNA, SABAH, MALAYSIA

1Hanafi Hussin & 2MCM Santamaria
1Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
1Institute of Ocean and Earth Sciences (IOES)
University of Malaya
2Asian Centre,
University of the Philippines, Diliman
(hanafih@um.edu.my, constanciomat@yahoo.com)

Abstract

A cursory review of tourist events in the southern Philippines and East Malaysia reveals the emergence of quite a number of festivals that veers away from the nature of traditional ones. These festivals are non-traditional for the two important reasons. First, they are instigated by authorities above the kampung or village level. Second, they are largely secular festivals that have less to do with the respective cosmologies of communities, but rather have more to do with a perceived need to create a sense of pride or solidarity beyond the family/clan or village level. Generation of income through tourism revenue may also be added to these two reasons. Two examples of this relatively new type of festival are the Kamahardikaan Festival of Bongao, Tawi-Tawi Province, southern Philippines and the Regatta Lepa Festival of Semporna, Sabah State, East Malaysia. This chapter compares the two festivals through Eric Hobsbawn’s (1983) concept of “invention of tradition.” The invention of new festivals is seen as a function of the need of asserting identity(ies) and/or creating new ones simultaneously. Part 1 discusses old and new festivals found among the Sama or Sinama-speaking peoples of maritime Southeast Asia. It also connects this to the concept of the “invention of tradition.” Part 2 interrogates the comparability of the Kamahardikaan and Regatta Lepa festivals as subjects of academic inquiry through a discussion of the character of their sites and their respective histories. Part 3