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Perspectives on Bajau/Sama' Diaspora

Edited by

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LANGKAPAN AND TAMPAT: SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL RITUAL SPACES OF SAMA-BAJAU RITUAL OF THE PHILIPPINES AND MALAYSIA

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Introduction

Space carries many definitions, concepts, and interpretations. Among popular definition is a boundless, three-dimensional extent in which objects and events occur and have relative position and direction (Britannica Encyclopaedia, March 30, 2016). Space is treated differently by philosophers, especially in discussing space and time that is connected to the spiritual. Space is not something objective and real, nor a substance, relation, or an accident; instead, it is subjective and ideal, and originates from the mind's nature in accordance with a stable law as a scheme, as it were, for coordinating everything sensed externally (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy).

In performing ritual, spiritual and physical spaces are always intertwined with each other. For many people who subscribe to earth and nature-based religions, there is a true sense of magic in the use of sacred space. A sacred space is one between the worlds, a spot that is not just a physical place, but one that exists on a spiritual plane as well. It may help a person in their magical and spiritual practice if they learn how to create a sacred space for themselves. This can happen either by creating a temporary space on an as-needed basis, or a permanent one that remains in place all the time (Wigington, 2016).

In certain cultures, an object which the anthropologist calls material culture and intangible cultural heritage by current academics have always created its space (Sullivan, 2015, p. 141) in the spiritual and physical realm. Despite the stated goal of giving each object of its space, the proximity and choice of objects produces interaction. This paper discusses the spiritual and physical space relating to the ritual of Sama-Bajau of the Philippines and Malaysia, i.e. the Sama-Dilaut/Bajau Laut of Sitangkai Island of the Philippines and on the east coast of Sabah, Semporna.

Sama-Bajau of the Philippines and Malaysia: Sama-Bajau/Bajau Kubang and Sama Dilaut/Bajau Laut

The Bajau or Sama peoples are a linguistically and culturally diverse group of communities living throughout the region from the southern Philippines, coastal areas of Sabah, Malaysia, and to eastern Indonesia. Sabah is one of the states in Malaysia, where two majors Bajau cultural complexes exist—the west coast Bajau, and the east coast Bajau. Although the two are traditionally dependent on the sea for livelihoods, they differ widely regarding languages, culture, and history. The