

Voicing Diversity Project

Our Land is the Sea / Air Tanahku (2018)

Educational Materials



Ahdan, fisherman from Sampela.

Image: [Matt Colaciello](#)

A collaboration between

Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies (CRCS), Gadjah Mada University

Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS), University of Hawai'i

Funded in part by a grant from the US Department of Education

Our Land is the Sea is a short documentary film about three generations of a Bajau family in Wakatobi National Park, Indonesia. The film explores how they're navigating drastic cultural and environmental change.

About the Film

As plant and animal diversity rapidly disappear, human cultures—and the long-cultivated knowledge they sustain—are disappearing too. *Our Land is the Sea* explores how these parallel trends are related through the diverse perspectives of members of a Bajau community grappling with coral reef extinction, economic change, ethnic discrimination, and changing practices of Islam.

This film grew out of a long-term collaboration between Bajau community members Andar and Saipa—who are featured in the film—anthropologist Kelli Swazey, and digital storyteller Matt Colaciello. The footage in the documentary was filmed during five multiple-week trips to Southeast Sulawesi by the filmmakers in 2018 and 2016. The film was edited in Yogyakarta.

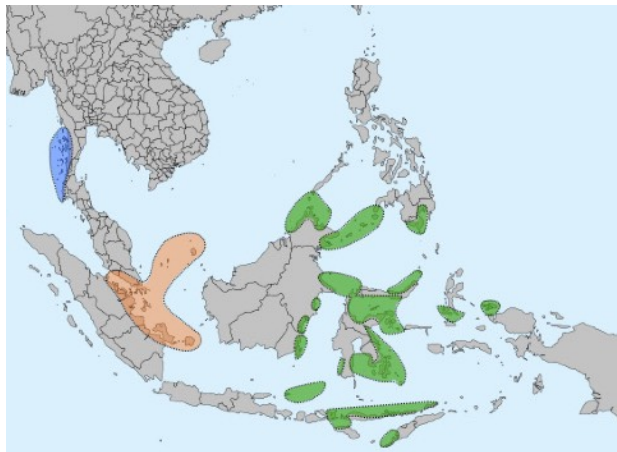
The film is part of the Voicing Diversity Project, a collaboration between Center for Southeast Asian Studies UHM and The Center for Cross-cultural Studies at Gadjah Mada University, a research and

public education center that focuses on religious life in Indonesia and the diversity it contains. These films were supported by a grant from the US Department of Education as part of the Center's Religion and Diversity Initiative. The project aims at creating educational resources on diversity in Southeast Asia for educational institutions in the US and Indonesia. *Our Land is the Sea* (Indonesian title: *Air Tanahku*) is currently being shown in universities and other public spaces around Indonesia in open forums to encourage discussion about the issues of religious and cultural diversity, indigenous rights, culture and environment, and conservation.

About the Bajau

"Bajau" or "Bajo" is an overarching term for a number of groups of nomadic people who have traditionally lived their lives on the sea. Bajau communities are found across the Coral Triangle, a marine territory that encompasses the oceans surrounding Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Timor-Leste, the Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea, and

contains more than 75% of the world's known coral species. Although Bajau groups use different names, they speak a common language and consider themselves to be part of the same cultural community. We have chosen to use the term "Bajau" in this film at the request of our local partners in Sampela, who hope that their stories represent the challenges facing many Bajau communities who depend on the ocean as the source of their culture and livelihoods.



Distribution of three different peoples referred to generally as "Sea Nomads" Blue: Moken, Orange: Orang Laut, Green: Sama-Bajau

Bajau people relate to the ocean as a collection of places, each with their own history and associations with ancestral spirits. The interviews and research conducted in the course of making this film explore how this worldview informs Bajau people's relationship to the natural world and their practice of Islam. The film also explores how discrimination

against non-normative practices of Islam and other indigenous religions of the archipelago is contributing to the loss of cultural knowledge in Indonesia.

The village of Sampela stands over the shallow waters of a coral atoll in the Tukang Besi Archipelago in Wakatobi National Park, Southeast Sulawesi. Over the last half century, this previously nomadic community has been driven by government policies and economic change towards a more sedentary lifestyle. Despite increasing pressure to move to land and become "modern" Indonesian citizens, the people of Sampela continue to insist upon living at sea. Sampela is thus the product of ongoing innovation carried out with limited resources in the face of constant change. Today, as marine resources disappear and the effects of climate change intensify, the people of Sampela are confronting the reality that they may finally be out of options for maintaining their lives at sea. *Our Land is the Sea* documents the perspectives of people from three generations in Sampela. The film is not only a record of their personal stories of adaptation in the face of great change, but also a commentary on the importance of protecting diversity, both human and other than human.

Dr. Kelli Swazey
Matt Colaciello

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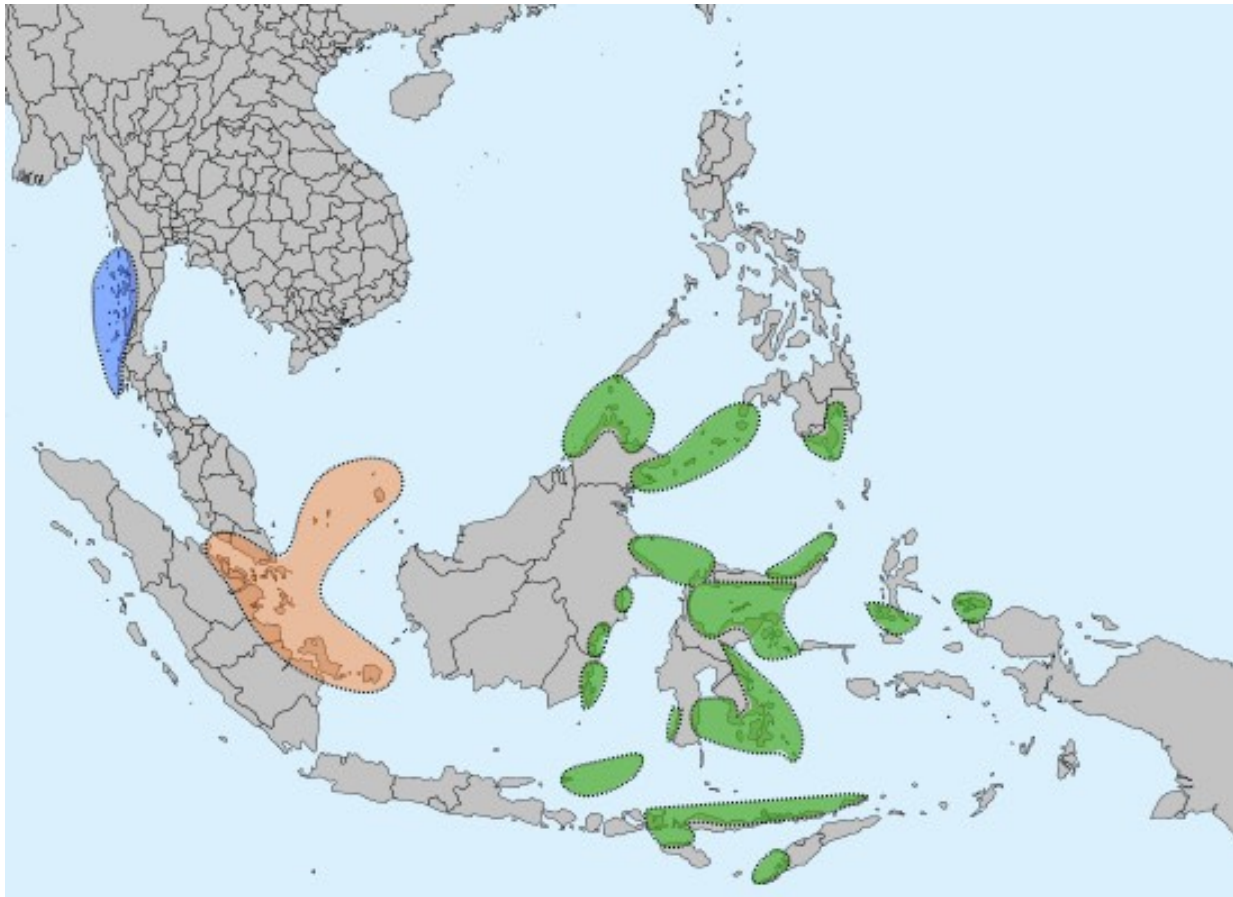
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Note: Our thanks to Dr. Barbara Watson Andaya for her contributions to the bibliography.



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*https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sea_Nomads_distribution_map.jpg