The Decline of Small-Scale Fishing and the Reorganization of Livelihood Practices among Sama People in Eastern Indonesia

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This article describes how recent scarcities in Southeast Sulawesi’s coastal and marine environments, and changes in the region’s fisheries and coastal produce industries, have impacted the livelihood options of Sama “sea people.” Sama people are scattered throughout island Southeast Asia, and like other orang laut or “sea people” in the region, they have customarily drawn on the sea as their main source of subsistence.1 Dispersed throughout the region’s coasts and with no history of political unity, Sama people became intertwined in various precolonial political systems. They fascinated colonial observers, who viewed them as “nomads,” highly mobile people who made a living through diverse economic practices on the seas and coasts. Because they appeared to lack a taken-for-granted homeland, colonial Europeans often referred to them as “sea gypsies”—a designation at once romantic and derogatory. In contemporary Indonesia, they are often viewed as “formerly nomadic” and consequently as no longer “original” (asli), no longer the real thing. Yet, as will become clear below, some older practices of mobility persist and new ones have arisen alongside them. In state-sponsored
classifications Sama have been counted among so-called “isolated tribes” (*masyarakat terasing*), while in popular discourse they are simply called “primitif.” Positioned this way between no-longer-asli and not-yet-modern, contemporary Sama people have often become the targets of development projects. Governing procedures, however, were not always so readily focused on them. This is not simply because they were once mobile and have been increasingly subject to sedentarizing pressures—although the trope of ever-dwindling nomadism has dominated the literature on Sama people. Rather, as land-oriented administrative structures grew around them and as other descent groups dominated the networks and privileges linked to their centers, Sama people developed strategies of living on the edges of governance.

Economically, Southeast Asian sea people have for centuries played the role of the initial extractors of maritime produce in chains of trade that extended from scattered locales to regional collection points and beyond to China. In recent decades, however, many of the resources they have relied on for their subsistence and trade have dwindled. This scarcity appears to be due in large part to the dramatic capital intensification of fisheries and related industries. Greater scarcities of fish, as well as the increased use of capital-intensive methods of fishing in Southeast Asia, have resulted in the economic marginalization of small-scale and “artisanal” fishers. With their continued residence along the country’s shores, one effect of this marginalization is the creation of a surplus labor pool, much of it female, available to emerging industries that extract and process the produce of the seas and coasts. Female wage labor in such industries is a new form of the gendered division of labor in “rural” coastal communities and contributes to a trend in which fewer Sama women spend time in boats on the water or collecting on the strand.

For many of those Southeast Asian “sea people” who continue to
fish and to collect in the tidal zone, while their labor appears autonomous—much as piece-work does when it is brought home—changes in the relations of production tie their labor more directly into the global fisheries economy. When combined with the dispersed character of Sama communities in particular, the marginalization of small-scale fishers and these shifts in the relations of production raise poignant questions about the possibilities of Sama social reproduction.

Similar concerns about livelihood and social reproduction in the face of a fisheries crisis made headline news in Europe not long ago. Fears of a collapse in northern Europe’s cod fishery and drastic new quotas set by politicians to restrict the catch of cod and other species caused anger and dismay throughout Europe’s fishing communities. The decision by politicians to impose stricter catch quotas was based on scientific assessments of the decline in fish stocks, yet few serious measures were proposed to offset the losses that fishing communities would certainly suffer under the new limits. Such efforts to save the fish stocks while effectively spurning the fishermen prompted the latter to organize large-scale protests, blocking ports and major shipping channels. These fisherpeople, questioning the scientific bases and the priorities of such policy decisions, and frustrated with their inability to influence them, realistically feared losing not only their livelihood, but also a way of life.3

Recent events in the fisheries of northern Europe, like the events I describe in Sulawesi, illustrate larger dynamics of capital intensification and concentration at work in the fisheries industry globally (McGoodwin 1990). As small-scale fishers face increased political-economic marginalization, they are often forced into other endeavors. In Southeast Sulawesi, these pursuits include outmigration to urban settings both in Indonesia and elsewhere,
greater reliance on the saleable extraction of other coastal resources, and participation as laborers in the more or less industrialized sectors of cultivating and processing coastal and maritime produce.

In the initial sections of the paper, I consider the major economic niches to which Sama people have shifted, including seaweed cultivation, shipping, and the increased extraction of mangroves as well as highly valuable species such as shark fin and turtles. I ask how changes in the environment and these shifts in economic practices have affected their ability to sustain what are recognized by Sama people as well-established patterns and methods of making a living. In the latter sections I look at the effects of these changes, especially on women’s economic participation and their involvement as wage laborers in new productive relations. In particular, I emphasize how both the organization of their labor, and that of people who continue to engage in some older livelihood practices, articulate with larger, spatially flexible political-economic structures. Within a broader theoretical frame, I also consider how some of the issues raised by studies of agrarian transformations play out in Southeast Asia’s liquid territory, and I reflect on how social transformation there may affect the future shapes of Sama social reproduction.

**Extraction and the role of tangan pertama**

Sama and other so-called sea people have long played the role of *tangan pertama*, literally “first hand,” in the maritime goods trade of island Southeast Asia. Also translated as “instigator,” and in legal discourse as “first owner,” *tangan pertama*, in this case, means something more akin to “initial extractor.” It applies to those who harvest the fruits of uncultivated yields, those who make the first extractive step that precedes a series of exchanges in which goods
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change hands multiple times. It is in effect through the agency of *tangan pertama* that such goods from the environment are turned into commodities. I first heard a Sama person use the phrase *tangan pertama* in a description of how government officials assigned blame for coastal environmental degradation and fish scarcity to the initial extractors. The speaker, an elderly Sama man who had once been a village head, described in some detail the striking environmental changes he had witnessed in the near shore waters over his lifetime.4

In contrast with the assumptions of officials, for whom Sama were the targets of educational campaigns and posters about coastal ecology and conservation, this elderly man stressed that other factors and other people had also contributed to these environmental changes. On the one hand, people who were not known as “sea people,” yet who had recently begun to engage in small-scale fishing, also sometimes engaged in practices which clearly took a toll on coral reefs, including the use of fish bombs and poisons. On the other hand, he attributed much of the environmental change in the near shore waters to an expansion in the scale of extraction, a scale of extraction that requires greater capital investment in boats and equipment than most Sama people could muster. The most rapacious example of extraction he depicted was, not surprisingly, the indiscriminate maw of a trawler. However, although trawlers caused the most obvious damage, he also mentioned other less sensational methods of large-scale extraction.

He pointed out that many of these large-scale methods were basically expanded versions of fishing techniques that had long been used among Sama people. But whereas methods used in large-scale extraction were widely associated with the “modern,” Sama familiarity with their smaller-scale versions was in general perceived not merely as a difference of scale, but of kind. Thus the small scale of most Sama fishing contributed to views of Sama people as
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“undeveloped” or “left behind”—as fundamentally not modern. However, by pointing out the similarity in these methods, and differentiating method from scale, this elderly former village head re-valued Sama knowledge to be on a par with “modern” methods and undermined the basis for viewing large-scale methods as qualitatively different. Moreover, by emphasizing the role of the scale of extraction both in environmental degradation and in fish scarcity, and by relativizing the part played therein by Sama people, yet elevating the worth of their knowledge, he offered what was essentially a locally relevant critique of the impact of “development” and development discourse (Gaynor 1995a, 1995b).

A narrow view of the role of small-scale fishers as tangan pertama—such as he implied officials held—portrayed them as responsible for over-extraction and therefore as the logical point of conservation-oriented intervention grossly oversimplifying the interface of the environment with political economy, and also the causes of fish scarcity. It can even be argued that in some cases this narrow view of tangan pertama inverts the relations between the causes and effects of fish scarcity. For instance, officials, environmental advocates, and coral reef ecologists, accustomed to the view that any extraction of mangroves from the coastal zone is detrimental to fish populations, frown upon the felling and processing of mangrove trees into saleable firewood. The selection of appropriate trees, the unmechanized manual labor of felling them, and the hard work of debarking and chopping logs into kindling for sale in towns and cities may well cause an incremental depletion of mangrove stands. However, the rate of extraction of this process pales in comparison to, for instance, the clear-cutting that accompanies the creation of shrimp ponds.

The reason why some Sama people turn to the mangroves as tangan pertama to support themselves is that other options have
been exhausted. It is, of course, no surprise that Sama people extract a variety of resources from the coastal environment. Yet the mere fact of extraction only becomes analytically significant when one examines the broader political-economic contexts in which it takes place. Particularly since the felling of mangrove trees for sale as firewood is a livelihood option of last resort, analysis of this situation is incomplete without stepping back to ask why anyone would do this for a living and under what circumstances. One finds, on doing so, that the conditions under which small-scale fisherpeople such as Sama eke out a living are often so poor—in part because there are so few fish—that only then do they turn to the extraction of other resources such as mangroves, and to other forms of labor less reliant on subsistence strategies. As the former village head asserted, Sama people do not turn to back-breaking pursuits like this with such low remuneration because they want to, but as a result of economic compulsion (Gaynor 1995b).

**Fisher-farmers**

As an alternative to harvesting the sea’s dwindling uncultivated yields, a few coastal Sama during the 1990s tried farming. They became farmers neither of the soil nor of fish, but rather of a particular kind of seaweed, agar-agar (Gelidium spp. and Gracilaria spp.). A stabilizing, thickening, and gelling agent, agar-agar is used mostly in the food industry in sweetened jellies, sauces, and fillings. It also has a variety of pharmaceutical applications and is used as a culture medium in the biotechnology industry. Agar-agar cultivation began in Indonesia in the mid-1980s. In 1990, export of seaweed from Indonesia was over 10 million kilograms. By 1995 it had reached a high of over 28 million kilograms, falling off to just under 4.5 million kilograms in 1998, the year after the economic crisis. In Tiworo,
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where seaweed cultivation appeared to be well established but relatively small-scale, “thousands of tons piled up in the fishermen’s storehouses” when the price plummeted in 2001 from 1,000 to 100 rupiah per kilogram. There is, then, a market for agar-agar, albeit one that fluctuates. In addition to an unpredictable market, agar-agar cultivation is beset by a number of other difficulties. From the growers’ point of view, it can be hard—especially for those in out-of-the-way places—to connect with potential buyers. Sometimes growers lack access to good information about which varieties are relatively more valuable, or about successful techniques for cultivation. Another difficulty is that a variety of factors—substrate, salinity, and the dynamics of water movement—all affect whether and how well agar-agar grows. Where it does grow, agar-agar cultivation sometimes raises questions about who owns, has access to, or allocates access to the places with suitable growing conditions.

The term used to characterize those who engage in agar-agar cultivation is “petani nelayan” or “fisher-farmers.” Where exactly the term originates is unclear, but its use is widespread. “Petani-nelayan” links fisherpeople who engage in agar-agar cultivation to the country’s farmers, and through this association they are also connected to a particular image of the Indonesian peasantry. The image I am referring to is that of Marhaen. Sukarno intended for the image of Marhaen to stand for all the nation’s poor masses, who, strictly speaking, could not be called a proletariat because they did not sell their labor and owned their means of production. This included agricultural peasants as well as poor stall vendors and poor fishermen, and, in his view, extended to poor workers, poor clerks, low-ranking policemen, and the children of the troops of the former Indies army (1970[1957]:156-7, 160). In telling the story of how he came to “Marhaen” as a descriptive term, however, he offers an extended depiction of an agricultural peasant named Marhaen, a
“chicken flea farmer” (1970[1957]:156-7, 160). Sukarno may have insisted that pauperization among all the poor masses was a consequence of Dutch imperialist capitalism. However, his image of Marhaen nonetheless closely resembles conventional views of Javanese agricultural peasants, from Du Bus in the early nineteenth century to Geertz in the twentieth (Hüsken and White 1989:259). This image of a basically classless agricultural peasant has existed in fact only as a minority and probably helped to obscure the realities of the system of agricultural production (Hüsken and White 1989:259). Nevertheless, Sukarno’s Javanese Marhaen became an idealized nationalist symbol of the Indonesian everyman. The important point here is that the application of the term “fisher-farmers” to fishers who cultivate agar-agar associates them with a field of discourse about agriculture in which their labor is not denigrated but rather is dignified, even if unintentionally. This in turn underscores the remarkable fact that in a country which is overwhelmingly archipelagic, there have never been any images of fisherpeople comparable to that of Marhaen.

Widely circulating ideal images of Indonesian agricultural peasants are also connected to these fisher-farmers in another way. There is a similarity between how fisher-farmers are viewed by contemporary entrepreneurs and how peasants were described in colonial economic theory. Colonial accounts of economic “dualism” pointed out that agricultural peasants were excluded from the capitalist economy and were thrown back on their own resources. Exacerbated by population expansion, peasants, particularly on Java, were forced to divide limited arable and then marginal lands among ever greater numbers of farmers (Boeke 1953). In his *Agricultural Involution* (1963), Geertz offered an explanation of the response to the situation described by colonial economic theory. He argued that peasants used increasingly intensive methods of agricultural
production to reap greater outputs from smaller plots. During periods of contraction in the export-oriented capitalist economy, agricultural laborers from plantations would, theoretically, have been similarly reabsorbed by the peasant economy. It may be more accurate to say that there was, rather, one economy, and that by absorbing the reserve labor pool, the peasant sector in effect subsidized the plantation sector. In this system, colonial plantation managers had few responsibilities to laborers, who, it appeared, could flow in and out of the plantations, available as needed, and when they were not, they could largely be disregarded. In contemporary entrepreneurial schemes, fisher-farmers are viewed in a similar way.

This view is epitomized in “PIR”—“*pola inti rakyat,*” literally the “nucleus-people pattern,” but often termed the “nucleus-smallholder scheme.” Initially conceived for agricultural development projects, PIR reappears with great regularity in all sorts of entrepreneurial attempts, aimed, at least in part, at helping “poor people,” including fisher-farmers. PIR essentially defines production through the metaphor of a cell. The means of production are called the “*inti*” or “nucleus,” and the labor force is called the “*plasma.*” In this metaphor, plasma is the fluid living matter, and the nucleus is the driving force, the “manager,” as it were, of the cell. The metaphor has an uncanny way of disallowing the capacity of laborers to organize themselves. Furthermore, the *inti*—associated with the company, which is to say with capital, its owners, and managers, appears to bear no social obligations to its workers.

The *inti-plasma* model supposedly benefits the small-scale grower/harvester—such as the fisher-farmer—by cutting out the middleman, thereby assisting in the transfer of goods to processing facilities and helping laborers avoid a common source of debt. It is clear, however, that even where the grower/harvesters are organized into cooperatives, the labor force or “plasma” may still be
subordinated to the manager or inti. As for the benefits received by the inti—that is, their savings or profits—these are rarely emphasized within the framework of promoting development projects intended to benefit either agricultural farmers or fisher-farmers. Perhaps this is part of why these schemes sometimes appeal to coastal people whose livelihood options have been limited by the degradation of their resource base and by marginalization in the fisheries industry. The shortcomings of the inti-plasma model notwithstanding, the price offered for seaweed varies dramatically and the difficulties of cultivation remain formidable. As a result, agar-agar will not—at least for the foreseeable future—provide an easy solution to the economic problems of people trying to survive along Indonesia’s littoral.

The risks of cargo transport

While petani nelayan may try their hand at cultivating seaweed instead of extracting other resources, some Sama people have decided instead to go into the transport of goods. Sama people use a variety of boats, and boat building is fairly common in Southeast Sulawesi’s Straits of Tiworo. A number of Sama boat builders in Southeast Sulawesi trace their interconnections and their boat-building abilities back a couple of generations to Nakhoda Manting, whose grandchildren and great grandchildren predominate in positions of local authority in coastal and island villages throughout Southeast Sulawesi as well as beyond it. Non-Sama people sometimes come to help build boats in Tiworo as well. Usually these are men from Ara, a South Sulawesi village famed for producing generations of boat builders.

One type of boat frequently encountered in the Straits of Tiworo is the perahu lambo, a cargo boat common throughout the
waters of Southern Sulawesi. One of the Sama lambo’ captains I knew in the 1990s gave me safe passage across the Gulf of Boné, and on the journey he told me why he was nearly ready to stop making a living from shipping. It used to be, he told me, that transporting raw logs from one province to another was a fine thing to do. But then the government made it illegal to transport “first-class” wood from one province to another. “First-class” types of wood were highly valuable species such as teak, which in fact had been planted on nearby Muna Island in the late colonial period under the Dutch. The idea behind the Indonesian government’s decision to ban the inter-provincial export of raw timber was to encourage value-adding at the local level. Indeed, in the years following this change, I myself noticed more local processing of wood on Muna Island. There was a new sawmill outside of the main town, Raha; and in Raha itself, there was a furniture workshop turning out some well-crafted pieces. The sawmill, however, was owned by a Malaysian Chinese man, and the furniture workshop was owned and staffed entirely by Javanese people. “Value-adding” turned out to have a distinctly extra-local flavor.

But other results of the inter-provincial ban on exporting raw logs were a concern to this captain. Although the continued transport of wood under these circumstances, that is, as contraband, indeed had the potential to add value, engagement in a trade now deemed illegal brought with it correspondingly high risks. Since the trade had been reclassified as smuggling, the boat now had to be loaded in a place where there were no whistle-blowers, and the cargo had to be carried across the Gulf at night. This is what the captain began to do. It was, however, one trip in particular that soured the captain’s taste for this trade. After crossing the Gulf of Boné, which took two nights and a day, and getting beyond the mouth of the river he sought, the captain piloted the lambo’ upstream past the
fancier looking boats berthed along the river’s edge. These were the boats of wealthier Bugis traders and they did not reflect straitened circumstances or the need to keep a low profile. Once they delivered their cargo, the captain and his two-man crew took their pay and headed back downriver. Yet when they again reached the coast, they were waylaid by the “water police” (polisi air), who took them in for questioning. The police questioned them, took all their money, and then let them go.\textsuperscript{15}

To be sure, it was a risky venture. However, the number of speedboats owned by the marine police—very few—and their unbelievably impeccable timing made me suspect that a double-cross was afoot. The captain did not offer this interpretation, but then again, he did not really need to. Almost certainly the Bugis boss got to keep the delivered cargo, and instead of directly greasing the palms of the authorities to look the other way, he may have tipped them off and let them collect their cut indirectly. After this, the captain decided that the risks were too high, and instead he worked for a while shipping rice locally. In 2000 he began looking for some startup capital to buy an outboard engine. He hoped to start a transit service to ferry people across the channel between the island where he lived and Muna, where people must travel if they want to go to market.

Wood smuggling, for its part, has skyrocketed since Suharto’s fall in 1998. It has nearly been a free-for-all, and if the forestry service was seen as inefficient before, its agents are widely rumored, at least in Muna, to be making out like bandits now. The rumors about them say that the Forestry Police catch local people cutting trees illegally, confiscate the goods, and then turn around and make a tidy profit on their sale. In the context of the country’s steep economic downturn, teak is easy money, and it is hard for people, officials or not, to see the forest for the logs. A political economy
focused on wood is, in fact, nothing new in Muna. Except for their longstanding rivalry with neighboring Buton, the politics of Muna—especially during and since the late colonial period—is the politics of wood (politik Muna adalah politik kayu). Yet the phenomenon of rather well-heeled out-of-towners suddenly coming to make use of any local connection they might have in Muna to get their hands on wood is remarkable. This post-Suharto free-for-all in wood—and especially in teak—has had relatively little to do with Sama people, their participation but a tiny dribble in the recent flood of wood smuggling. However, when they do engage in such ventures, their low status may make them more vulnerable than others to the risks involved. The expansion in the scale of forest extraction is similar to that seen in the fisheries, a process which, as I outlined earlier, has marginalized small-scale fishers. Below, I discuss various other resources that Sama people have been the initial extractors of, and on which, where still possible, they continue to rely.

Extraction of other coastal resources

It is not that Sama people no longer fish or gather sea produce. Quite a few still do, but the extent, the means, and the targets of extraction are often not what they used to be. Tripang, or sea cucumbers, which have long been gathered, cured, and traded by sea people, are no longer as important a commodity as they once were, for as with fish, the populations of tripang have also diminished. The trade in tripang from island Southeast Asia via Makassar to China dates back to at least the early eighteenth century (Sutherland 2000), and it is likely that Sama people were involved as initial extractors even then. Tripang collecting voyages from Sulawesi regularly extended to the outer arc of the Lesser Sundas in the mid-eighteenth century (Fox 1977, 2002). During the nineteenth century,
tripang were regularly gathered in the Aru region of the Arafura Sea (Wallace 1869:158 in Fox 2002; also see Fox 2000) and on the north coast of Australia (MacKnight 1976). This commerce was so impressive that in 1839 Earl noted that the trade in tripang on the north coast of Australia alone, the entire produce of which was taken to China, far exceeded in value the fur trade carried on between the northwest coast of America and China (Earl 1839:14, quoted in Fox 2002).

By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the tripang trade began to decrease, and it continued to diminish in the twentieth century (Fox 2002:12). Recently, the search for tripang with high market value in the Arafura and Timor Seas has, reports Fox, become “ever more problematic,” implying an unsustainable level of harvesting by both Sama and often better-equipped non-Sama fishers, and leading the former to shift to the extraction of other species (2002:13). In the Tiworo Straits, older Sama men and women recalled the previous species diversity and abundance of tripang, and said they saw a dramatic decrease in tripang populations during their own lifetimes. Their stories are certainly not contradicted by the sparseness I witnessed, intermittently between 1990 and 2000, when accompanying people to collect on the tidal flats of Southeast Sulawesi.

Fox (2002) reports, in addition, how people from a fishing village on Rote in the 1990s learned—from Sama people—to shift to lucrative shark fin fishing as tripang and trochus became increasingly scarce. The Sama people who shared their knowledge of this technique came from Wanci, an island in the Tukang Besi chain off Southeast Sulawesi. They used the village on Rote as a base for collection ventures further to the south, and had similarly shifted the target of their collecting efforts earlier (Fox 2002:13-15). The challenge of regulating such collection voyages, which
venture into richer waters now under the jurisdiction of Australia, has resulted in a massive apprehension and burning of vessels for illegal fishing in the Australian Fishing Zone (Fox 2002:15-16; Stacey 1999). Similarly, I learned in the 1990s about periodic flotillas—at least in part from the Tiworo region—which went to “Kupang” to gather trochus. “Kupang” was a euphemism for the nearby waters of Australia in the southern reaches of the Timor Sea. Despite stories of an occasional bullet fired across the bows of their ships, veterans of such voyages sometimes joked that it was a delight to be jailed in Australia, since one’s upkeep there was provided for.18

Concerns about the regulation of resource extraction are often framed by the larger issues of rights and sustainability. Intensive shark fishing, like intensive tripang and trochus gathering, has threatened to diminish the species in demand beyond the point where their populations may viably reproduce. Yet while regulation through the state is often deeply flawed and through markets is non-existent, devolving regulatory powers to local “stakeholders” turns out not to be so easy. The question of who has rights to these resources and who may allocate them remains unanswered, and as Fox points out, there is no guarantee that anyone given such rights would allocate resources responsibly (Fox 2002:20; see also Atkinson 2003). “The present hope,” Fox argues, “and it is only a hope—is that by redistributing rights more equitably to the communities directly linked to these resources, we will restructure a balance that has been sadly disrupted and rekindle a commitment in local communities to the welfare of future generations” (Fox 2002:20; see also Zerner, ed. 2003). There is certainly room for hope. For instance, young men and women on islands in the marine protected area of Taka Bone Rate—the third largest atoll in the world (Chou 1998)—impressed me with their willingness to play an active role in island mapping
exercises. These exercises comprised part of the environmental education efforts of a Makassar-based NGO, and their consequences were important for the Coral Reef Rehabilitation and Management Project (COREMAP). COREMAP, aimed at safeguarding the country’s dwindling coral reefs and slowing degradation, is apparently having limited but encouraging results: live coral cover in Taka Bone Rate increased significantly by 6.3% from 23.8% to 30.1% over a recent two-year monitoring period (Chou et al. 2002:126).

However, the devolution of management in part to local communities, in order to increase their sense of being stakeholders in the welfare of the environment, is having decidedly mixed effects socially. The effort to devolve management to the local level runs up against the fact that local communities are themselves comprised of complex social hierarchies. Some people in positions of relative power have their positions bolstered by this devolution, while those on the lowest rungs do not often wind up playing much of a role in the new schemes of management. These latter, however, are precisely the people who are most often impelled toward risky livelihood options left “open” to them for making ends meet. Both sides of this dynamic were apparent to me in Taka Bone Rate. When I arrived at an island in the north end of this huge atoll in 2000, the official vessel on which I hitched a ride was greeted by a small boatful of young men in black t-shirts who turned out to be the relatively new local environmental “wardens.” Why, I wondered, if these wardens were members of local society, did they live in a house set apart from all the others in the village, disengaged from the kin networks in which they would have had the greatest impact and in which their own behavior could also be socially monitored? Some of these youths were apparently permitted to carry guns in their capacity as wardens. Guns are not a common sight in the area, and brandishing them in any form is unacceptable behavior. I was
therefore shocked, along with local residents, when a young man who was obviously not a Sama person had the impudence not only to bring his rifle into a Sama house on a “social” visit, but also to neglect to set it down in a corner immediately on entering the house. This house belonged to a Sama family living in a portion of the village predominantly populated by Bugis people. It was cause for concern that a gun was brought into it by a non-Sama acquaintance, for political power in South and Southeast Sulawesi, as well as in these Flores Sea islands, tends to rest in Bugis hands. That this youthful non-Sama “warden,” fearless of opprobrium, would carry a rifle into a Sama home was a stark reminder of how Sama people were presumed to lack authority in such mixed ethnic social spaces. If, as appears to be the case, such “policing practices” serve to reinforce the relatively low position of Sama people in local social and political hierarchies, then it seems less likely that they will become, as is sometimes hoped (inter alia, Djohani 1996), conservation-oriented stakeholders.

Once when in the company of a few Sama and non-Sama people, just sitting around on a front porch in the village, I heard a large boom in the distance. Turning to the Sama people nearest me I asked, “Did you hear that?” They replied, “Hear what?” The boom was probably from a fishbomb, and I took their “unhearing” to imply that they knew what was going on and did not feel particularly motivated either to acknowledge it openly, or indeed to stop it. In other words, they did not act like stakeholders. I am not saying they did not care. Rather, people engaged in occupations that have been criminalized (like the interprovincial teak transport described earlier), or who have been pushed into economic pursuits on the borders of legality—sometimes under the patronage of bosses who will look the other way if they get into trouble—are not likely to draw attention to the riskier activities of others who may be “one of their
own” or who may even contribute to their household maintenance or that of close kin. Attempts to institute local protection of resources must, then, contend not only with the force of economic compulsion, which may drive people to engage in unsustainable practices like fishbombing, but also with the existence of complex interethnic as well as social class hierarchies. It is not hard to imagine why people at the lower end of these hierarchies might be reluctant to accord recognition to those at the local level who, like these wardens, in practice abuse or flaunt an authority backed by the state, when to do so would not only narrow the already slim avenues for survival but would also give a leg-up to one’s would-be oppressors.

Where extraction of a particular resource is legally restricted yet the resource is still available and in high demand, it is economically a tremendous temptation—especially if one need not go all the way to Australia for it. Turtles, protected in Indonesia at the federal level since 1999, are still easy to sell within the country. I have occasionally known Sama people to cage juvenile turtles below their houses in the tidal zone. Although I have heard a couple of people say that they will later simply be released—a conservationist plan that is literally too good to be believed—at least some of these, it seems obvious, will be sold when they have grown. Only once did I see turtles on the way to market. I had stopped by the house of an acquaintance on an island where I sometimes stayed in a cluster off Sinjai in the western Gulf of Boné. There, one evening, I saw some turtles walking around on the floor of his porch. My curiosity drew me to a room off the side of the porch, with a cement floor, no furniture and a single weak light bulb dangling from the ceiling. Below the bulb two young men, surrounded by twenty or thirty turtles ambling around in the shadows near the walls, held just a single turtle in the middle of the floor, over which one poured boiling water to soften the shell, while the other then tried to cut
the shell away from the body with a hacksaw. Needless to say, it was still alive, and the eeriest thing, as I watched it there, more or less poised upright on its tail, was that from it not a sound was audible as it slowly waved its head and legs back and forth. I realized, of course, that this was taking place at night for a reason, and that there was little I could do about it even if I wanted to. Turtles headed for Bali, the destination for most of the archipelago’s illegal turtle trade (Triwibowo 2001), are commonly shipped alive. However, judging by the methods used in this case, I didn’t think the animals were likely to survive for very long after the shells were removed. They may have been headed for Makassar, where turtle is prized in ethnic Chinese cuisine. Beyond this point, the turtles were not likely to keep fresh without refrigeration.

Refrigeration on boats is still unobtainable for Sama people. Even the ability to afford fuel—diesel for marine engines and gasoline for outboard motors—is difficult for most small-scale fishers. If people in more “remote” areas had cold storage on boats, they might be able to break their dependence on middlemen in order to get their catch to larger markets, where fish sell for more than they do in villages. Most Sama, however, still have limited access to electricity in their homes, at best enough for a few feeble light bulbs in the evening, and more often than not, on small islands anyway, the power is supplied by local people with diesel generators rather than by the state electrical company. This intermittent source of weak electricity is not enough to make large quantities of ice to store a good catch. One need not have refrigeration to salt and dry fish, a very old practice, and some Sama people continue to do this, but it has become much less common. Sama people themselves scorn dried fish, which is only eaten when there is nothing fresh to be had. It has become less common for them to produce dried fish because there is less demand for it in towns and cities where
established fish markets, easily procured ice, and some refrigeration make fresh fish—which other Indonesians also prefer—more readily available than in the past.

**Flexible fishing**

Despite the absence of refrigeration on Sama boats and the rarity of it in most Sama villages, ice is sometimes available. A friend of mine in the Straits of Tiworo, for instance, had spent some time trying to make a living by collecting crabs herself and buying them from others. She would store them in an icebox, using ice that was delivered once a week from the provincial capital, Kendari. When she had collected enough of them, she would transport the crabs to Kendari. The scheme, however, did not last long; it was apparently defeated by the hassle and cost of taking the goods to Kendari to sell them. Still, the icebox and the ice had enabled her to accumulate stock over a period of time. Without ice, she would have had to sell them in a smaller, closer market, perhaps even in her village, where they would be likely to go for less, or else distribute them among kin. Moreover, without cold storage, one would need to organize the collective labor capable of gathering enough crabs (or other goods), in order to make a trip to market worthwhile. With ice the labor of seeking and collecting produce for sale could apparently be more independent, or at least more loosely coordinated.

This is what has happened among many of the remaining small-scale fishers in Southeast Sulawesi. The availability of ice for storage has made possible a change in the patterns of how labor is organized for fishing and gathering, making the labor of *tangan pertama* seem more independent. Yet these changes in how labor is organized are more than simply the result of the existence of new devices for storing maritime produce. Iceboxes and ice are
themselves provided by fishing companies which have boats that make the rounds to buy up whatever is in the iceboxes. Consequently, while fishers who operate on a very small scale appear to preserve a degree of independence and control over their own labor, they are much more directly tied in to the global fishing economy. This form of labor is, in effect, the piece-work of the fisheries industry.

On Pulo Tasippi, an island in the Tiworo Straits, Mbo’ Ndaco described to me how this system works and the prices he could expect for different items. Mbo’ Ndaco had risen at four to go off from his small house by the water. He later returned home with fish for his family, and with eleven *udang kipas* or slipper lobster (*Thenus orientalis*). These were not for family consumption, but for sale. The eleven *udang kipas* weighed 1.9 kilograms, and he would, he said, get 30,000 rupiah per kilogram for them. At pre-1997 exchange rates, this would have been about 12 or 13 U.S. dollars per kilogram. With the rupiah hovering between eight and ten thousand to the dollar at the time, however, this comes to less than four dollars per kilogram. Either way, the price is a far cry from what *Thenus orientalis* sells for at the other end of the industry. It is likely that Mbo’ Ndaco had also been paid less for his produce before the 1997 economic crisis than just after it. The fall of the rupiah produced a windfall on agricultural exports such as coffee and cocoa (not to mention teak) and the value of fisheries exports would likewise have soared. The peak exchange rate (15,000 rupiah to the dollar) did not last long, however, and inflation soon followed, driving up the price of domestic goods.

Mbo’ Ndaco listed the current price for other maritime produce as well. From PT Philips, an American company, he said he would get 6,000 rupiah per kilogram for crab. For spiny lobster, pricing depended on variety and size. He mentioned two kinds of spiny lobster: *udang mutiara*, the multicolored “pearl” or ornate spiny
lobster (*Panulirus ornatus*), and *udang bambu*, the painted or blue spiny lobster (*Panulirus versicolor*). Ornate spiny lobster of the “number one” size, that is, each weighing 0.9 to 2.5 kilograms, were worth 125,000 rupiah per kilogram. Larger than that size, in the “super” category, they could be worth up to 175,000 rupiah per kilogram. Those in the “number two” category, weighing only 0.5 to 0.8 kilograms, were worth 80,000 rupiah per kilogram. Undoubtedly these amounts fluctuated, and he seemed proud to be abreast of current prices.

To give the reader a better sense of just how global this industry is, I will briefly describe how I double-checked the names of the creatures Mbo’ Ndaco brought home to his icebox. Since *udang kipas* is not in my dictionary, I went online in the hopes of finding an English or Latin name for it. I plugged “*udang kipas*” into a popular search engine and one of the results was a web page with a list of “non-fish marine resources from Indonesia.” The list had the common species names in Indonesian on the left, English in a center column, and the Latin equivalents on the right. Then, wishing to confirm visually that, indeed, I had the right species, I did a search for “*thenus orientalis* photo.” One of the first pictures I found was on a website for a Belgian frozen seafood company. It listed (in French) “Queues de Cigales” with “*thenus orientalis*” beside it. There was a link to the photo, below which was a note stating that these Queues de Cigales originated in Thailand. The web page on which this product appeared, the Belgian seafood company’s offerings of “other crustaceans and mollusks,” also listed marine produce originating in, among other places: China, Southeast Asia, the Bahamas, and Chile. Probably Mbo’ Ndaco’s *udang kipas* did not wind up in Belgium, but they could well have. Furthermore, the fact that the website listed all these places of product origin not only hints at the quality of these commodities. These place names
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also provide buyers with a way to vicariously experience the world’s geography, and suggest that they consider themselves “global” subjects. At the same time, behind the presentation of product information and images, the labor processes that produced these commodities and the social relations implicated in their production lay almost perfectly concealed.29

What were these social relations and how were they structured? According to Mbo’ Ndaco, PT Darma and PT Kembar Jaya, both Chinese-owned companies—by which he meant Indonesian ethnic Chinese—came around Pulo Tasippi frequently. PT Sultra Tuna, a provincial branch of another Indonesian company, also made the rounds, as well as a Japanese company, PT Anagi, which, he added, also buys anything— “[and] they all take fish as well.” All the companies, he explained, went around to the penampung, a word that does not simply mean “receptacle,” as in a vessel for containment, but is rather the person or thing which literally intercepts and retains something. In this case we might therefore call the penampung “the collector” or “the gathering point,” where fish and other valuable species awaited potential sale to the boats of one or another company. In Pulo Tasippi alone there were seven of these gathering points. Ice is brought to them from the companies, “each of which has an ice factory.” “So,” Mbo’ Ndaco continued, “if Anagi provides ice, and Darma takes the produce, then Darma also gives ice.” I asked whether the company that had provided the ice would be angry if another company took the produce stored in the icebox. “They wouldn’t be angry,” he said. “That’s what you call speculation. But if you borrow capital [from a company], then you cannot sell to another. It’s rare that someone needs to borrow capital, though. If you don’t borrow capital, then whoever’s price is high, that’s the one you sell to.”
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According to Mbo’ Ndaco, Darma Samudra was the first to operate this way in Tiworo. This kind of system, he said, had been operating there since 1989, eleven years before our conversation took place. I recalled that others had noted recent changes in the littoral environment and I asked him whether there was a scarcity of fish. At first he explained how the local monsoon seasons affect species abundance in the area. In the west monsoon, he said, “It’s a fish flood here!” That is, from September until about January or February, there are lots of fish, of many kinds. Then from March until June, “This place is slipper lobster central,” he exclaimed. “But,” he went on, “if you compare it with twenty or thirty years ago, it’s completely different.” A man who joined us concurred. Born in 1967, this man came to Pulo Tasippi in 1978. “It really started to decrease in 1980,” he said. “Nowadays there are modern instruments (alat-alat),” by which he meant that one now commonly encounters the use of “modern” fishing technologies aimed at large-scale extraction. “But in the old days, with a dragnet (pukat tonda, “tow net”), just rowing or using a sail, you could get [literally] a ton. Now, even if you’re at sea for a month you might not be able to get (mencapai) a ton. Before 1980 there were lots more fish being salted—laid out to dry all around the villages.” But neither he nor Mbo’ Ndaco offered any conjectures as to what had caused the decrease in fish populations.
Figure 1. View of Tiworo looking more or less southwest. *Bagang ruma,* or small stationary fishing platforms, dot the waters of the Straits here and there. A portion of Southeast Sulawesi’s main peninsula appears in the distance on the right, and the northwest corner of Muna Island juts out from the left with the island of Kabaena just visible behind it. Sailors from Pulo Balu take their homeward bearing from the tall tree that seems to be on the tip of the island, just to the right of center. (Photo by the author.)
Since at least 1989 in this area of Indonesia, then, a system of production has emerged in which individual fishers, working in a relatively depleted environment, sell their catch either to those companies who have provided them with capital, or to those company boats which have good timing and a reasonably high bid. While these fishers appear to retain a high degree of autonomy and control over their labor, they are nonetheless very closely and directly tied in to the global fishing economy, and their position within this system of production is analogous to those who do piece-work in the clothing industry.

We might call this post-Fordist, or flexible, fishing. Like the geographer Derek Gregory, I have reservations about how sharply
David Harvey draws the distinction between Fordism and flexible accumulation or post-Fordism (Gregory 1994:412, n.190). My interest here, however, is less in regimes of capital accumulation than in systems of production, with regard to which it may be important not to draw the distinction too sharply. Harvey himself, for instance, points out how Marx noted in *Capital* that the factory system can intersect with domestic, workshop, and artisanal systems of manufacture (Harvey 1990:187). I would suggest that rather than the system of production, what may be especially “post-Fordist” or “flexible” here are innovations in the spatial organization of production. To analyze this dimension of recent Sama livelihood practices in Indonesia, I find the work of Doreen Massey (1994) most helpful.

In contrast to the position of “piece-work” fishers visited by company boats, yet just as much an example of this flexible spatial organization of production, is the work of those who perform repetitive tasks in what one could call the “branch workshops” and “production units” of the coastal fisheries industry. These branch workshops and production units are places where women—invariably, it seems, women—do low-skilled wage labor, such as carefully extracting the flesh of crabs from their shells or cleaning off oysters to make them accessible to the next stage in the pearl culturing process. This work takes place in the “rural” littoral zone, away from urban centers where the waters are too polluted to serve the aims of production.

“Branch workshop” is a term that applies to how production is organized for deshelling crab, work that is done by women wearing plastic smocks and gloves, arrayed around large tables in a simple structure—a large shack really—located close to the high water mark. In Southeast Sulawesi, such crab workshops are found here and there, usually on the outskirts of large coastal villages with easy
access to transportation infrastructure. The workshops are dispersed, decentralized in relation to where the rest of the processing or production takes place. Production, in other words, is broken down into the component parts of a process and the different parts take place in different locations—what is called a “part-process structure.” This functional structure of how production is spatially dispersed has the effect, among other things, of short-circuiting labor’s ability to organize. It also makes it difficult for workers to communicate their claims on the obligations of management who are off in a distant city or another country.

Pearl-culturing is organized not in this kind of part-process structure with branch workshops, but rather in more or less contained “production units.” There are two pearl-culturing sites at the southern end of Southeast Sulawesi’s peninsula, both Japanese-owned and -operated, one in the Straits of Tiworo and the other in nearby Kolono Bay. Each morning in Tiworo, young women from villages on neighboring islets are picked up by the company boat, and after a day at low-skilled manual labor, are brought back again to their villages in the late afternoon.

In Japan, the pearl-culturing industry has similarly drawn on a “rural” female surplus labor pool, namely the off-season labor of local women abalone divers. Like these women, their Tiworo counterparts are not employed in the closed room where the pearl nucleus is carefully inserted into the oysters. Rather, they do the manual labor of hauling the oysters up from their underwater dwellings, knocking off the growth accumulated on their shells, and brushing them clean enough to be pried open by others, either to be checked or further treated before being sent back out to be submerged again in the coastal waters. It is, of course, hardly surprising that Japanese pearl-culturing companies should expand their production operations to a country where local people presently
have almost no control over the allocation of coastal space and where labor is phenomenally cheap. In contrast with the part-process structure we saw with deshelling crab, here the whole production process is largely contained within one unit. Yet, like the branch workshops in which crab deshelling takes place, the pearl-culturing production units are themselves dispersed from each other, as well as physically distant from the top levels of management in Japan. No less than in the part-process structure of the crab-deshelling workshops described above, the way pearl-culturing production is spatially decentralized similarly impacts labor’s position in relation to management.

In her discussion of how production was decentralized in late-twentieth-century Britain, creating the structures upon which new sectors were later built, Massey emphasizes that spatial organization is an important element in any exploration of the nature of uneven development. “One way of approaching this,” she explains, “is through the conceptualization of the spatial structuring of the organization of the relations of production” (Massey 1994:87). What she calls “spatial structure” illuminates what is essentially a functional geography of the social relations of production (Massey 1994:90, 101). In other words, she describes a set of relations that are conceptualized and organized spatially, but which is undergirded by a functional logic. In my examination of decentralized coastal production, the physical spatialization of these sites in the littoral is also important. Their location in the littoral is materially crucial, for these endeavors require a relatively unpolluted coastal environment with the right conditions in which to culture pearls and to obtain freshly caught crabs. Yet in addition to this material consideration of the littoral environment, there is another reason for their location there, a social reason: namely, the existence of readily available labor.
Sama livelihood practices through Sama terms

Below, I return to the question of why there is a surplus labor pool of Sama women available for employment in the branch workshops of deshelling crab and in the production units of the cultured pearl industry. To understand this geography of labor and why such a surplus labor pool exists, one must first know more about the sorts of work women have previously done, and one must therefore gain a better grasp of how, more generally, Sama people have heretofore gleaned a living from the seas and the littoral. Although I have so far said relatively little about how coastal and maritime livelihood practices are referred to in Sama language, in what follows I discuss how certain terms characterize different sorts of fishing and collecting endeavors. These Sama terms, which below I call “styles,” refer as much to particular patterns of labor as they do to culturally specific ways of making a living on the seas and coasts.

One can think of Sama fishing and collecting practices along two axes: method and style. By method I mean simply the technique of fishing, either in its “traditional” or in its expanded capital-intensive versions. For instance, the general term for all forms of fishing with a line is missi’ (from pissi’, Indonesian pancing). Under this category of “fishing with a line” there is a range of particular methods to which one refers with different terms. Miséah, for instance, requires a baited line that moves through the water as one rows quickly. One may, however, use this same term to refer to longline fishing, in which multiple (hundreds or thousands) of lines with baited hooks branch off a main line. Whether one catches one fish or thousands of them, whether, that is, one uses a single baited line rowed quickly through the water or the capital-intensive set-up known as longline fishing, both techniques may be referred to by the same Sama term for this method: miséah.
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By style, I refer to how one goes about the sort of venture one is on. *Pongkeq*, for instance, means to make a living by going out in a boat, by oneself or with one’s family, for a few days, weeks, or months, usually traveling from market to market in order to sell one’s catch and to buy necessities. On *pongkeq* one does not have to limit one’s endeavors to a particular species or a given method of obtaining it. Whether one fishes with a line (*missi’*), employs a spear with one point (*tiru’*) or a fishing trident (*sapah*), uses a seine or dragnet (*ringgi’*), sets a rattan fish trap (*bubu*), or releases a poison (*bobo*), one may still be engaged in *pongkeq*, for it is a style of fishing and collecting, not a particular technique. *Pongkeq* is not about the method one uses, but the sort of venture one is on and how one goes about it, that is, in a relatively small boat, alone or with family—male or female, child or adult—for a vague amount of time ranging from a few days to a few months, and often traveling, as noted above, from market to market.

One may contrast *pongkeq* with *sakei*, another Sama style of making a living on the waters. *Sakei* is to go off to another region for a long period of time, usually a year or more, with a relatively larger boat that is fully equipped for the trip. I take Fox’s descriptions (mentioned above, 2002) of trips to gather tripang, trochus, and shark fin as examples of *sakei*. Those who go on *sakei* may be groups of men, but they may also be families, including women and children. *Sakei* is defined both by the long length of time involved, and by the fact that during this time one lives in that other place and away from one’s own region. Furthermore, contrasted with *pongkeq*, *sakei* involves a capital investment, both in relatively larger boats and in the supplies and the gear that people require to carry off a venture that is at least minimally profitable.

It is worth noting here that these styles of making a living, practices that involve a great deal of mobility, nonetheless contrast
sharply with the nomadic placelessness that characterizes stereotypes of Sama people—or one should say, using the exonym, Bajo people—in the discourses of outsiders, both Indonesian and non-Indonesian. While Sama do not, as a group, trace their mythified collective “origins” to any singular place on land as many groups in Indonesia do, along Sulawesi’s southern littoral, Sama identify strongly with the particular locales they come from, and their travels for pongkeq and sakei, as well as other kinds of journeys, are hardly what one would call an aimless wandering. Pongkeq and sakei are not random migrations, but are, rather, culturally specific practices, styles of making a living by fishing and collecting, that eventually return people, for the most part, to the littoral places from which they hail.36

In contrast to pongkeq and sakei, which are both boat-based practices, nubba (from the root: tubba) is a practice of gleaning from the tidal flats what remains after the tide has gone out.37 Sama women, and to a lesser extent men, gather various kinds of produce on the tidal flats, especially during spring tides when the flats are most exposed. If tripang is gathered, women tend to do the labor of preparing it for sale, and if slipper lobster is found it is likely to be sold as well. Yet much of what is caught on seemingly casual trips across the tidal flats—including small fish, squid, mollusks, and crab—is for domestic consumption and therefore an important part of the subsistence economy. As a practice, nubba is more method than style. It is a technique of gathering food or produce which one does not have to travel far to do, but which one may also do on one’s travels. In part, however, it is also a style, for it is a way of going about making a living in which one may employ various techniques depending on what there is to find. One might use a snare to catch lobster, a net to catch small fish in tide pools, a machete to pry loose mollusks, or just pick up tripang off the sand.
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It may sound like collecting on the tidal flats does not entail much skill. However, there are hazards such as poisonous species that one must know to avoid, and furthermore, a wealth of knowledge goes into reading the environment and skillfully reaping what it presents. Consider, for instance, what it takes to find and catch crabs. During the day they often lie beneath the sand, and to notice them at all one must be aware of a change in the density beneath the surface on which one is walking. Once found, the crab must be held down in place with one hand, while the other hand reaches around and under its back end (and how does one know which end this is when it is in the sand?) to pick it up and toss it into a bucket. Alternatively, one may render the crab harmless by breaking off a tiny side leg and, using it as a nail, hammer it into the weak spot just behind the joint of the claw to disable the claw from closing. Such are the skills used on nubba.

What recent changes may be discerned in these livelihood practices? In part as a result of the decrease in fish and other species over the past two decades, the role of nubba in subsistence has greatly diminished and the practice of pongkeq has become much less common. How fish scarcity and decreases in other species affect sakei is harder to determine. It is practically impossible to ascertain whether or not more people are going on sakei, yet the distances people travel to do it are certainly far—as mentioned, for example, in the discussion above, to “Kupang” or the waters of Australia. It is likely, however, that in order to make sakei trips worthwhile, people may be traveling farther than they did previously and, where they are able to, using more capital-intensive methods of extraction; fisheries economists would say that they are increasing fishing effort to compensate for the lower yields.

These changes in Sama livelihood practices in turn have a number of effects. When a previously common boat-based practice
such as pongkeq becomes increasingly rare, that avenue for both women and men—not to mention children—to be on the water consequently narrows. As for sakei, with the attempt to compensate for lower yields, it appears to be getting more exclusively male-oriented. With the increase in “fishing effort” and with the increased use of “modern” versions of fishing technologies, to say nothing of risk, there is a perception that men are the more appropriate laborers, producing a more sharply gendered division of labor and more homosocially male spaces of labor on the sea. In addition to changes in older boat-based practices, new ones are being taken up. Over the course of the 1990s, for instance, commercial purse seining expanded in one village at the eastern end of the Tiworo Straits. Purse seine boats became more numerous and were crewed exclusively by men.40

Other factors besides a capital intensification of sakei and the perceived suitability of men for this labor may also help explain why fewer women spend time at sea than in the past and why the social environment there is increasingly male-oriented. Women now, for their part, appear to have a variety of reasons to stay at home in the village. The desire to keep their children in elementary school, as well as ideas of female beauty disseminated by the mass media, influence their decisions not to undertake distant sea-travel for long periods of time, as occurs on sakei. True, not all Sama children feel compelled to attend their compulsory education, especially when they have few opportunities to continue beyond the most basic schooling without leaving their natal villages and immediate family. Yet, with the poor economic circumstances on the coasts and nationwide ideas connecting status to the level of one's education, parents often view education as a means “up,” and even though not many of their children get to pursue this route very far, there is, nonetheless, pressure to keep children at home.
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while they are still school-age. There also appears to be social pressure on girls and young women, especially those of the “elite” (bangsawan) social class, to stay at home, although it is very difficult to gauge how this compares with past practice. A popular Islamic perception that unmarried women of good breeding should not stray from home, as well as state-sponsored gender ideologies of the Suharto era promoting women as homemakers, may be as much a factor in this as ideologies brought by television satellite dishes that portray “beautiful” women as pale-skinned, thereby discouraging women from getting darker skin as a result of going out in the sun, or, as local beliefs would have it, the wind. Such perceptions of the importance of education and the means to signify status and beauty also factor into a dynamic in which fewer Sama women are on boats.

The decrease in certain practices like pongkeq and nubba, alterations in others such as sakei, and the taking up of new ones, such as commercial purse seining, part of a larger picture of how changes in the environment and political-economy impact a variety of social relations. Not least among these changing social relations are the gendered segregation of labor practices and the spaces in which they take place. In the past, for instance, Sama women also fished, traveled, and lived on boats, either alone or with family, and they continue to do so. However, it is less common for women to be on boats than it used to be, it is much less common for a woman to go off in a boat than it is for a man, and it is much less common for a woman to go off in a boat than it is for her to go off to the tidal flats with a small group of kin and friends. Sama people do not, however, have prohibitions against women on boats as the Bugis do, and women do still spend time on the water, just rather less of it than seems to have been the case a generation or two ago.
The decrease in pongkeq, the increased male homosociality of other boat-based practices, and the limited fruitfulness of nubba, then, have all contributed to the development of an especially female surplus labor pool, appealing to and available for industries that have moved into the littoral. Employment in the branch workshops deshelling crab has the “benefit” of enabling women to stay out of the sun and the wind, while the boat transportation provided for young women who work in the production units of the cultured pearl industry ensures that although they leave their villages, they do not go far and are returned home to their families every day after work. As dependence on the cash economy continues to rise, these examples of wage labor become rare “opportunities” for women to support themselves and their families while continuing to live in the coastal zone.

Social transformation

In analyzing the decline of small-scale fishing among Sama people in Indonesia, I have attempted, as Goto (1995) suggests, to get beyond the dichotomy of subsistence and commercial fishing in insular Southeast Asia. I have also followed the point advocated by Fox (2002:19-20), that in addition to a better understanding of resource ecology in Indonesia, we need a greater understanding of the social ecology of resource use. However, we also need to be able to analyze how the social ecology of resource use relates to the workings of capital. I have tried to bring together my knowledge of a range of contemporary Sama livelihood practices in an attempt not merely to list a collection of old and new ways to labor on the seas and coasts, but to illustrate the extent to which these livelihood practices are formed and reformed in the spaces where the condition
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of the environment interfaces with the structures of capitalist production.

Looking at how small-scale economies relate to wider political-economic forces is hardly a new concern in the study of Southeast Asian artisanal fisheries. Indeed, along with exploring on its own terms the “rationality” of Malay fishermen, the study of their small-scale peasant-like economy was Raymond Firth’s (1966) main concern. Yet situating the changes taking place among contemporary Sama communities in and around Sulawesi’s littoral regions demands a perspective that is fundamentally attentive to more complex ways of thinking about space than the “local” and, in effect, the “wider.” What local might be in such a context of dispersed nodes yet interrelated networks of Sama sociality is unclear and hard to define. It is, however, quite clear that its formation as local is not simply relative to scales of provincial, national, and regional political imaginaries. “Local” is also constituted, in part, through the very processes of how production is spatialized. This insight implies the need for a multi-sited approach that is not limited to rigidly circumscribed areas, not only because of the flexible and decentralized ways that production may be organized spatially, but also because, at least in this case, we are dealing with interconnected littoral zones and widespread networks of Sama people.

Examining the relationship between Sama livelihood practices and changing political-economic structures also requires an approach that is not framed by the discourse—or better: the litany—of ever-dwindling Sama “nomadism” and their apparently ever-increasing sedentarization.44 While issues of mobility and settlement are certainly important for the study of Sama social worlds, this recurring and rather evolutionary trope contributes to the reproduction of a nostalgic perspective on Sama people and their pasts.45 The prevalence of this trope, both in academe as well
as in the field, and the air of nostalgia that invariably accompanies it, obscure our ability to critically discern how the forms and structures of these present transformations compare with those in the past, with those in other parts of Southeast Asia, and with those in other parts of the world.

Agricultural studies of the 1970s, for instance, debated the issue of whether a capital-intensive and capitalist technology would lead to increasing class divisions that might in turn create the conditions for revolutionary insurgence—whether, in other words, the green revolution would turn red (Gupta 1998:26-27). While no simple proletarianization of small-scale fishers is happening here, it is still worth considering what kinds of questions from agricultural studies may be instructive in this case. Substantial work has been done on agrarian transformations in Southeast Asia, analyzing, for instance, how local-level mechanisms of labor control and accumulation both participated in and (in some cases) altered larger political and economic forces (Hart et al. 1989). I have tried here to make a contribution to the study of related processes of transformation in Southeast Asia’s coastal zones. Yet drawing analogies to agrarian transformations remains a formidable challenge. Perhaps this is due, in part, to the concepts we are accustomed to using in analyses of such transformations, so many of which—like “enclosure,” “tenure,” even “peasants”—are not as easily applied to such watery places. Consequently, although it has great heuristic value, asking the question that drove the work of Scott (1985) and Gupta (1998)—whether the introduction of a more capital-intensive method of agriculture sifted rural society into capitalists on the one side and the landless proletariat on the other—has limited use in this context of life in the littoral and work on the seas and coasts. Its usefulness is limited not only for the seemingly land-locked connotations of these terms of analysis,
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but also because the processes of contemporary uneven development in Southeast Asia’s fisheries and coastal produce industries, with their dispersed and remarkably flexible spatial forms, preclude any such simple sifting into haves and have-nots. What does remain useful from agricultural studies is the more general question of how new technologies and organizations of production affect class and other social relations. Yet we need fresh eyes to do this sort of analysis in such liquid territory.

One of the aims of this paper has been to document ethnographically how capital-intensive fishing technologies and new structures of production have impacted the lives and livelihood practices of Sama people. I have tried to show how these technologies and structures of production alter the everyday lives, not of the rural poor—on whom Scott and Gupta focused—but rather of these people in Sulawesi’s southern littoral. In illustrating recent changes in their livelihood practices and examining the environmental and economic circumstances under which they cobble together a living, I wish to emphasize that the conditions for the reproduction of Sama ways of life focused on the sea are undergoing profound changes. In addition, then, to alterations in the practices of everyday life, there is another important point I am driving at, namely that the conditions may no longer exist for a certain kind of Sama cultural reproduction. This, however, is not a matter of cultural death, but rather one of social transformation.49

All these things that I have described are pieces of a larger picture of transformation: the marginalization of small-scale fishers by capital-intensification in the fisheries industry; the marked scarcities in the coastal and marine environments and the efforts made to extract and sell resources that remain; the changes in Sama livelihood practices—in the “styles” of how one goes about the sort of venture one is on, and the related shifts in how work is
organized socially; and finally, the structural changes in the social relations of production, including “piece-work” fishing as well as wage labor in industries newly arrived to the littoral—industries with very dispersed and flexible forms of spatial organization. The larger picture of which these are all a part raises the question, especially poignant it seems, given the dispersed character of Sama communities, of what the future shapes of Sama social reproduction may be.

Even with the ravaging of the coastal and marine environments, it seems likely that Sama people will continue to maintain settlements on far-flung stretches of coasts and small islands—places that may be less remote than they seem to city dwellers and landlubbers. If boat building can continue, then an increase in trade—“legal” and “illicit” forms—is likely to fill the gap as subsistence strategies based on the environment’s bounty wane and dependence on the cash economy continues to increase. Petty merchants, usually Bugis, selling clothing and housewares, already make the rounds of coastal villages periodically. Local Sama people voyage to town—in small boats and then public minivans, or on large boats the whole way—to bring back major staples such as rice. Unless there is a sudden rise in the number of enterprising saleswomen who travel by boat to these villages to hawk their vegetables and bananas, then—the small gardens of some Sama people notwithstanding—travel by coastal villagers to the smallest nearby local markets will of necessity become a more common part of everyday life. An informal industry in motorized local coastal transportation is likely to grow around the need for such trips. Smuggling of various kinds by various nautical actors is only more likely to rise if the economy worsens, but in any event will expand as the subsistence base deteriorates further and the government continues to lack the resources to stop it. The kinds of smuggling
most likely to be in the future of the coastal poor are the more “downmarket” variety, such as the vast used clothing market and cigarettes, not arms or what is more common these days, people. The latter, in any case, require connections with urban crime rings and corrupt officials, and most Sama people, already subsisting on the edges of governance, are not likely to have the social access to cultivate such high-end players as associates or even as patrons.

Outmigration from coastal villages to urban areas both within and outside of Indonesia is likely to increase. This will swell the Sama neighborhoods that already exist, for instance, in North Bali and in Jakarta—neighborhoods whose neighbors often do not know that they are living next to Sama “sea people.” Yet this does not necessarily mean that coastal villages and coastal society will be decimated. If people do passably well in the cities, they will likely only reinforce existing networks of migration and kinship between these more urban areas and Sama villages in other parts of the archipelago.

These existing networks persist despite the fact that Sama people, dispersed along the coasts of Island Southeast Asia, have had neither socio-political unity, nor a political imaginary that would lend them a shared place of mythic origins. Except at the local level, they seem to lack the structures, be they through labor, politics, or what is commonly called civil society, through which to disseminate self-conscious consideration of their current shared situation in Indonesia, or to attempt the organization of widespread collective projects to address it. Yet, even when combined with the transformations described above, these factors do not necessarily preclude social reproduction. Whatever shapes social reproduction takes, we should no more consider the far-flung distribution of Sama communities an obstacle to it in the future than the absence
of formal political unity was a hindrance to it, as far as we know, in the past.

Endnotes

1. The research for this article was conducted in 1999 and 2000 with funding from the Social Science Research Council and Fulbright-Hays. The piece also draws on earlier trips to coastal Sulawesi and its environs: in 1990 as a Watson Foundation Fellow, in 1994 with support from the Association for Asian Studies’ Southeast Asia Council grants for isolated scholars—funded by the Luce Foundation—and in 1995 with a research grant from the Center for Business, Education and Research at the University of Southern California. I thank the Sama people on the east coast of Southeast Sulawesi, on islands in the Flores Sea, in the Gulf of Bone, and above all in the Straits of Tiworo for their patience and generosity over the years. I am grateful to Stuart Kirsch for his comments and suggestions. Any shortcomings of the article are borne only by me.

2. This situation contrasts, for example, with the fisheries industry in France, where state regulation of the labor pool takes place through educational certification programs, as well as through early retirement. These methods inhibit the development of a large surplus labor pool, where one might otherwise expect it as a result of capital intensification and fish scarcities (Menzies 2003).

3. See the series of BBC articles in the list of references. The Luddites, who faced a transition from production organized through Trades to one dominated by industrial capitalism, similarly protested against not simply technological impositions but the new relations of production that threatened both their livelihood and their rank and position in society (Thompson 1963:521-602).


5. Extensive mangrove depletion or damage does adversely affect fish populations because the juveniles of many fish species live in the waters of the mangroves. This is not new information, nor are the attitudes that reasonably and often accompany it, as I learned while a student and researcher of coral reef ecology at Fairleigh Dickinson University’s West Indies Laboratory in the late 1980s.

6. Shrimp ponds have only recently begun to appear in Southeast Sulawesi and, if their construction progresses at all, it promises primarily to benefit investors from outside the locale. On the impact of shrimp farming in Indonesia, see, *inter alia*, *Down to Earth* 2003.
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7. Similarly, in the 1950s Sama people who fled intermittent armed conflict in the Straits of Tiworo for the safer town of Raha found there were no jobs there, so they moved on to the provincial capital, Kendari, where they eventually were employed “getting wood” from the mangroves. Fieldnotes, March 30, 2000, Mbo’ Dahing, Mbo’ Masiya, at Pulo Tasippi, Tiworo Straits. Mbo’ is Sama for grandmother/grandfather and is a term of address for elderly people.

8. Statistik Perdagangan Luar Negeri Indonesia, Ekspor, Biro Pusat Statistik Dikumpulkan dari Buku Tahun 1990-1998, cited in “Aspek produksi—Rumput Laut.” Strictly speaking, these figures are for rumput laut (seaweed), the bulk of which is agar-agar, but which also includes other seaweeds, primarily carageenan.

9. “Ribuan Ton Rumput Laut Ditimbun.” (“Thousands of Tons of Seaweed Piled-Up.”) (Jawa Pos 2001). These “thousands of tons” reportedly piled up in Tiworo may have been exaggerated slightly for the media. Since the report was filed from the provincial capital, Kendari, the reporter may not have gone to witness the effects in person. Except for one journalist I know who was born there, it is almost unknown for reporters to go to Tiworo.


11. See for instance the warnings and advice of the former Head of the Indonesian Board of Cooperatives, Sri-Edi Swasono, January 30, 2003.

12. This is not the place to go into a typology of boats, but one caveat should be noted: contrary to some widespread notions, particular kinds of boats are not the exclusive preserve of particular groups of people in the region. See footnote 35 below.

13. For instance, the Imam of the main mosque in Poso is part of this family.

14. In 1994, for instance, builders from Ara came to Tiworo to help with work on an enormous wooden boat which, cradled in its scaffolding, towered at least three stories high over its quiet island boatyard-host. In April 2000, the Sama boat-builder in charge of this construction, a Haji with a Bugis-style house in an almost exclusively Sama village in the Straits of Tiworo, said that this boat, built for a man in Ambon, was over twenty meters long from stem to stern and had a tonnage or carrying capacity of over 200 tons.

15. As the Captain said, they were “processed”—in Indonesian: diproses, from the Dutch: proces (lawsuit, case).

16. For an indication of the seriousness of the problem in Muna and also the possibilities—only recently—of printing something about it, see (Tma and Ant 2002, 2003a, 2003b).
17. Fox (2002) presents the Bajau or Sama people from Mola on Wanci “and other nearby Bajau villages” as having begun to shift to shark fin fishing in the 1980s in response to: scarcities of tripang, being outcompeted by other groups who utilize diving equipment, and the rising price of shark fin. It should be noted, however, that sharkfin fishing by “Bajaus” for the China market goes back over 150 years in the Banggai and Sula Islands (Hart 1853:104 in Sopher 1965:149). Although Mola is not in these latter areas—it is between them and Roti—such a shift as he describes to shark fin fishing is nonetheless likely to have been one among a range of options long familiar to Sama people at Mola, who are part of wider networks of both kin and knowledge.

18. “Enak dipenjarakan di Australi—digaji!” Literally: It’s great (“delicious”) to be jailed in Australia—[you’re] salaried!

19. The people residing in these island villages were not part of societies with customary “men’s houses.” Organizations of *pemuda* or “youth” were, however, a common feature of urban life in late- and post-Suharto Indonesia. Predominantly young men and teens, they often engaged in petty extortion and protection rackets.

20. This is generally the case, except in some areas or particular villages where the population is mostly Sama, e.g., in parts of the Tiworo Straits. Predominantly land-dwelling others in the Tukang Besi chain who variously consider themselves linked to the Wolio political center in Bau-Bau, Buton, play a similar role to the Bugis further west.

21. Another way social hierarchy factors into fishbombing is that this practice tends to be embedded in unequal relations of production. In the words of an experienced Sama friend: “Where there’s a fishbomb there’s a boss.”

22. See the articles on *penyu hijau* in the daily *Pikiran Rakyat*, (2002a, 2002b).

23. Sama people do offer fish for sale in their home villages, if there are any that exceed the modest expectations of distribution among close kin. Their neighbors may find such fish “expensive,” but they are a fraction of the cost in town markets. Below I discuss a new structure of productive relations in which buyers come to island villages.

24. *Mbo’* is a term of address for elderly people. In Sama, “*tasippi*” (Indonesian *terjepit*) is to be squeezed, pinched, or hemmed in. Here, the island is squeezed between others. The interaction and fieldnotes are dated March 28, 2000.

25. For instance, on February 1, 2003, 3 pounds or 11-13 tails of *thunnus orientalis* (1.5 kilograms) cost $69.50 at http://www.land-sea.com/index.asp?PAGEID=CATALOG&CATEGORY=Lobster. That’s $46.34 per kilogram, not including shipping. This species has a variety of names, including
Spanish or Sand lobster, and many more names in Australia, such as the Moreton Bay Bug.

26. “PT” is the Indonesian equivalent of “Inc. Ltd.”
28. http://www.hottlet.com/Fr/files/autres.htm. One can, incidentally, access this site in Dutch, German, and English as well; however they will only ship within Europe.
29. This is slightly different from Harvey’s discussion of how time-space compression has radically changed the mix of images and commodities that go into the production and reproduction of everyday life. Harvey considers the concealment of product origins, labor processes, and social relations to be part of how the interweaving of simulacra in daily life brings together different worlds. I emphasize, on the one hand, how the indication of product origins plays into the construction of “global subjects,” while on the other hand, the concealment of labor processes and social relations keeps different worlds apart. This difference is, I think, largely one of analytic perspective. In other words, it is a result of whose “everyday life” is brought into focus. Harvey’s view, needless to say, represents an occidentalist reading of everyday life. See Harvey 1990:300. Also see Gregory 1994:413.
30. Indonesian seasons are named either “wet” or “dry” on the one hand, or, on the other, are named after the direction (more or less) from which the prevailing winds come.
31. Further north there are other sites. The Japanese company established its office in Kendari, the provincial capital, prior to 1990.
32. The following is based on time spent in Japanese fishing villages with predominantly female ama abalone divers during 1989-1990, under the auspices of the Thomas J. Watson Foundation.
33. It was a stated privilege to be able to watch this process in Japan, the details of which at the time I was asked not to divulge, and which I am sure are not openly shared with the majority of their employees in either locale.
34. My treatment of each is by no means exhaustive.
35. Sama people in Sulawesi’s southern littoral gave somewhat conflicting descriptions of pongkeq, but agreed on this loose framework when pressed on the specifics of what it usually involves and what it may or may not include. Lowe (2003) renders it pongkat, in the dialect where she conducted research, the Togian islands off the north coast of Central Sulawesi. Some descriptions of pongkeq tie it to a particular kind of boat, a soppieq, which used to be common among Sama people in Sulawesi. Although the soppieq is widely perceived to be a Sama vessel, in fact it has also been used by non-Sama people, and Sama have formerly used and lived on other boats such as jarangkaq. I would stress that pongkeq as well as sakei, which I discuss below, are particular practices, neither defined by the type of boat nor by the methods of fishing and collecting
one may employ in them. Pongkeq and sakei often appear in the literature as part of a trio of terms describing “traditional Bajo fishing practices.” The third term is “palilibu,” a word that drew blank stares from multiple informants in Southeast Sulawesi. Djohani (1996), for example, discusses these “three” practices and reduces the differences between them to one merely of relative distance, stating that pongkeq takes a few days and “palilibu,” conducted near the village, takes a few hours (Djohani 1996:265). Such descriptions of these practices in the literature—quite a bit narrower than those I encountered in the field—and in particular this trinity, tend to be in work by authors who have not actually spent much time in Sama villages. More importantly, though, this trio of terms and the heavy promotion of the soppéq as a “traditional Bajo boat” may be traced to a single source, from whom I myself heard these things authoritatively described in 1990. This source is a man who spent his childhood in a Sama village in Tiworo, but who left it at an early age. Most of his adult years were spent in Jakarta and then later Kendari, the provincial capital of Southeast Sulawesi, working as a journalist for the government newspaper Pelita until it folded in the early 1990s. He returned with me to visit his natal village for the first time after a hiatus of many years during my first pre-graduate trip to Tiworo in 1990. A classic ethnographic “culture broker,” he has continued to set himself up vis-à-vis outsiders as a spokesman for “his people”—a self-presentation that rested in part on claims to elite (bangsawan) status and to an authority that remains unrecognized among his Sama (which is to say his maternal) kin. He generously shared his nostalgic (and sometimes infantilizing) characterizations of “the Bajo” with any interested persons, especially foreigners, who happened to pass through Kendari, and his position as a culture broker crucially rested on this location, and—most important of all—on his ability to speak English.

36. Lowe (2003) and Sather (1997) similarly encountered strong ties to local places among Sama people in the Togian Islands of Sulawesi and southeastern Sabah, Malaysia, respectively.

37. Although Volkman (1994) describes a very different sort of shift in livelihood practices that have little to do with such low-tide gathering—a change in some Mandar women’s work from weaving to selling fish—this practice of nubha nonetheless calls to mind the title of her article, “The Sea is Our Garden.”

38. I say it is “practically impossible” with an emphasis on practicability. Even setting the limits of such a survey presents a challenge—would one survey how many people from a given locality were said to be gone on sakei during a specific time? But then one ought to go and see what they are really doing, and people go to a variety of far-flung places for many reasons. If their trips were of questionable legality, would they be likely to tell an outsider about them, even a sympathetic ethnographer, or might this not effectively be “informing” on friends or kin? Would, for that matter, an ethical ethnographer put subjects in
the position of risking her presence on an illicit venture, or would the ethnographer travel such distances, even in mutual trust, at the risk of being caught by the authorities of one or another country? Such are the questions that might beleaguer the researcher who would attempt to undertake such a study.

39. This is what Fox (2002) tries to show as happening with tripang collecting over a period of roughly two centuries. For an account of migrant fisherfolk from Palawan in the southwestern Philippines (most probably Sama) having to go farther and, because the fish stocks are so low, use cyanide and fishbombs in order to make collecting ventures worthwhile, see Guzman 2002.

40. Sather (1997:80) notes that, among the Bajau Laut of southeastern Sabah, ice manufacture and mechanization of boats beginning in the 1960s meant that “fishermen became less dependent on the labour of their wives and children” in salting and drying fish. Mechanization further resulted in a major shift in the nature of boat crews away from family units toward short-term all-male crews aimed at pulling in larger catches. Firth (1966) noted a sharply gendered division of labor among Malay artisanal fishers even prior to the mechanization of fishing, as compared with peasant agriculture.

41. I am including in the category of “women” those few transgendered cross-dressers who participate in largely female-gendered roles.

42. Needless to say, this idea of paleness as beautiful is as connected to class ideologies as it is to racialized colonial ones.

43. See also Moeran (1992), who disputes the usefulness of these terms as employed by the International Whaling Commission.

44. See Gaynor (2005), as well as note 49 below, for further discussion and examples of this point.

45. This trope is on the one hand intimately connected to discourses that “primitivize” Sama (or “Bajo”) people, who, it seems, can never—in the eyes of other Indonesians—be settled enough (read: can never be as modern as we are). On the other hand, nostalgia for this presumed lost past of “nomadism” participates in the dominance of progress-oriented developmentalist discourses in the region. Lowe’s recent (2003) contribution, with its critical perspective on the image of Sama as a “nomadic” people, is a welcome addition to the literature.

46. Other works with similar aims are: Bailey (1986, 1988a, 1988b); Bailey, and Zerner (1992a, 1992b); Lim (1990); Jomo (1991); and Pollnac, Bailey and Poernomo (1992). Most work along these lines hopes not only to perform analysis and critique but to offer policy recommendations; all may be considered contributions to what ought to be a larger field of study linking political economy and social transformation affecting the people of the region’s coasts.

47. Gupta (1998:27 and 343, note 32) notes that this, in fact, was the central question animating Scott’s “magnificent work” on rural Malaysia (1985).

48. Fisheries economists, for their part, usually pay little attention to the empirical social context of resource use, still less to the relation between...
local economies and the broader emergent structures of capitalist production. These have, however, begun to receive greater interdisciplinary attention: the MARE Centre for Maritime Research held a conference in 2003, and one previously, on “People and the Sea,” in which biologists and social scientists actually seemed to learn from each other. As for the usability of fisheries data in Indonesia, the statistical data produced during the Suharto era were not unlike the reported achievements of agricultural productivity in the late colonial period. As the coral reef ecologist Mark Erdmann (2000) put it, “consecutive Suharto-era five year plans (Repelita) that inevitably called for a more intensive fisheries effort…by ‘official’ fisheries statistics…predictably showed a perfect increase in catches in line with the demands of the Repelita.” Needless to say, he does not believe these statistics are terribly valid.

49. Space does not permit a full comparison here, but a related sort of transformation to what I have been discussing is nicely described in Metcalf 2002. Metcalf looks at the role of political economy and the sheer scale of environmental changes, and how these have affected forms of everyday life, even altered the old use of descriptive terms as new ethnonyms in new social formations. I bring out the point about cultural death, which may seem obvious to some of my readers, because of the tone and preponderance of discourses about ever-decreasing nomadism and ever-increasing sedentarism. Since practically, and also ideologically, their “identity” is linked to notions of them as “sea people,” these discourses imply not just nostalgia for vanishing ways presumed to have existed, but also an anxiety about Sama cultural death—a version of “disappearing primitives.” Perceptions of Sama cultural disappearance are not uncommon in the anthropological literature as well as in contemporary Indonesian journalism. Pelras wrung his hands over what he described as increased contact with other descent groups as a result of Bajo settlement, especially in the Pulau Sembilan group, in the 1970s. Contemporary popular media portray a “death knell” for the Bajo, although what they describe is much more a widespread problem of infrastructural “improvements” on some more densely populated coasts and harbor regions. These infrastructural projects, if they do not remove coastal people outright, make life in the strand a health hazard and make a seafaring life for the poor well-nigh impossible. See Hudijono and Azis 2001.

50. See for instance the piece describing the import of secondhand clothing via Singapore and Malaysia (Bharattextile.com 2002). While this article mentions only Sumatra and West Java (Jakarta), it is only because they are the largest, densest markets for these goods and the rest of the archipelago is probably much less familiar to the reporter.
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