

# **CROSS-BORDER MOVEMENTS AND CONVERTIBILITY OF MARITIME NETWORKS: A CASE OF THE SAMA-BAJAU IN THE SULU-MAKASSAR SEA**

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By the early 20th century, the Sulu-Makassar Sea was politically divided up among colonial powers. Today, it spans the national borders of the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Dispersed throughout the region lived the Sama-Bajau, a maritime population once known as sea nomads or pirates in European literature. Even after the sea was partitioned by colonial outsiders and later by nation-states, they intentionally and increasingly undertook maritime movements which, after demarcation, were defined as border crossings. This paper traces the development of the Sama-Bajau cross-border movements in the Sulu-Makassar Sea, focusing primarily on the period from the 1910s, when colonial powers gained substantial control over the region, to the 1970s, when each of the three independent nation-states that succeeded the former colonial territory established political authority. Moreover, it explores the process through which these peoples created networks, which were both flexible and multifunctional, and formed the basis of cross-border movements. Finally, an analysis of the dynamics of their maritime movements and network formation in both a local and wider political context of the modern states (be they colonial or national) is presented, emphasizing how a maritime society responded to the expansion of modern states and reconstructed their own social space.

**Keywords:** Sama-Bajau, Sulu-Makassar Sea, Cross-border movement, Maritime network