HILANG BERSAMA ANGIN:
THE IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE ON LANGUAGE
DEVELOPMENT AMONG TWO BAJAU COMMUNITIES
OF THE CELEBES SEA

Elena Burgos-Martinez
Durham University
e.e.burgos-martinez@durham.ac.uk

Abstract
This research aims to offer a detailed portrait of how two different groups of Bajau (the sedentary Sama-Bajau and the nomadic Bajau Pelao) perceive, understand and face constant changes in their environment. The proposed research will look at how socioecological practices influence language development and how language ‘invades’ and re-shapes the environment as well. And in order to achieve this, I will be focusing on their linguistics practices and how they have developed through different generations of Bajau. I will be focusing on the oral and lexical aspects of their languages, particularly the words used to identify different seasons and the social function of these words within their community; each of these seasonal words relates to specific fish species, tides, diseases, etc. In addition, I will attempt to provide a relevant analysis of different accounts and discourses through which their environment is constantly constructed and re-shaped, and the agency of the Bajau in all this. In order to successfully gain an understanding of these inter-generational accounts as an active part of these communities, I will be conducting multi-sited and mobile ethnographic research during the course of 14 months; initially aiming to stay with both Sama-Baja and Bajau Pelao and also observe their defining interactions in terms of language development and socioecological practices. The geographical focus of this research will be the coast of North Sulawesi and the area of the Celebes Sea that borders the region. Indonesia is one of the regions of the world with the highest linguistic and biological diversity, such a vibrant country offers a unique opportunity to tackle climate change and its impact (adaptation, resilience and sustainability) on local communities through the development of language and cultural identity. A variety of local accounts that will surely enrich the global and international debate on environmental change and human resilience.

Keywords: Bajau, socioecological, linguistics, ethnographic

1. Introduction
Indonesia is one of the regions of the world with the highest linguistic and biological diversity. After the 2004 tsunami a wide range of aid and research organizations brought international attention to the 'Sea Nomads' throughout Indonesia, resulting in the temporary settlement of some groups of sea-faring nomads by erecting pile-houses over the shallow of the bay in different parts of Southeast Asia (Boutry,
2007; Boutry and Ivanoff, 2009). This research aims to present a detailed portrait of how two different groups of Bajau (the sedentary Sama-Bajau and the nomadic Bajau Pelao of North Sulawesi and the Celebes Sea) perceive and understand the constant changes they face in their environment. To do so, I will conduct a synchronic inter-generational study by focusing on significant age groups for each of the Bajau groups. My research objectives include an analysis of the words used to identify the different seasons, and the environmental and social linkages these words possess within their community. Another aim of the proposed research is to produce a study of the diverse accounts and discourses through which the Bajau's environment is constructed and re-shaped by different stakeholders and the agency of the Bajau in this. In order to achieve this goal I will be conducting multi-sited and mobile ethnographic research during the course of 14 months; staying with both Sama-Bajau and Bajau Pelao and also observing their defining interactions in terms of language development. The overarching research question would be How do changes in language reflect and impact on socio-ecological perceptions, relations and life ways among small-scale coastal communities and vice versa? In the 'global' debate on biodiversity and language loss both language and the different species of the biological realm become isolated 'units'-legible for governments and other stakeholders that need to be classified, known through data-bases and monitored in order to promote their survival through very particular forms of conservation. Thus, a second research question emerges; Does the ‘global’ discourse on ‘climate change’, seen through the lenses of biodiversity and language loss, pose a new form of structural violence against minorities who do not share managerial perceptions of the environment and language?

2. Live Words, Life Worlds

2.1. A Question of Naming and Placing

Numerous widely scattered communities of 'sea nomads' can be found in maritime Southeast Asia, especially in eastern Indonesia. Chou classifies them following three major ethnolinguistic groups: '(a) the Moken (b) the Orang Suku Laut, (c) the Bajau Laut' (Chou, 2006: 2). The name Sama-Bajau is often given to the more land-oriented Bajau, whereas the name Bajau-Pelao (the term 'Pelao' means 'fisherman' belongs to the Bajau families and communities that stay afloat. However, there are many categories/names that have been given to different groups, often depending on the time span these groups spend at sea and their expertise in fishing.

The Bajau are said to have originally come from the Sabah coast, Sulu Archipelago and Southern Philippines. In past decades and under the Sulu Sultanate's reign, they were deployed as labour in the exploitation of marine sources such as pearls and sea cucumber. The term Bajau has been widely adopted in the West, when referring to the sea nomads of the Sulu-Sulawesi Sea (Jubilado, Hussin and Manueli, 2010: 83), however, these communities often name themselves after the places they live in or are originally from, resulting in an extensive number of different 'tribes' (Ubian, Bannaran, Sama, Samah/Sama Sulawesi Selatan, Simunul, Samal, Bajau Suluk, Tando' Bas, Ungus Matata, Tolen, Pala’u, Tabawan, Banguingui, Sikulbung, etc.). I will adopt these two terms: Sama Bajau and Bajau Pelao to refer to the two different communities I intend to study. However, the labelling of these diverse and fluid communities is likely to be challenged once fieldwork commences. The Bajau have had bittersweet encounters with labelling through history, as seen in previous sections, ranging from romantic and
exoticized portrayals to marginalizing definitions of diversity and mobility. Nomenclature is challenged by semiotics in the shifting alliances that take place between these two broad categories, and leads to the constant negotiation of cultural identity.

Since being first recorded in Dutch, French and Spanish colonial accounts, observed initially from distance, the sea-faring activities of these communities have triggered an endemic sense of social anxiety and instability among state officials and related organizations (Sopher, 1965; Chou, 2003). Nomadic communities display a different idea of territorial belonging challenging how the concept of 'place' is perceived by most sedentary societies. The mobile character of these groups challenges universal interpretations of concepts such as language -as encompassed within 'natural' and 'national' boundaries shaped by specific territories. Records show that up until the middle of the last century, sea nomads used to live entirely at sea. However, international media attention was directed at the sea nomads as a result of the unexpected and catastrophic Asian tsunami of 2004. These nomadic groups were portrayed socially marginalised 'exotic' communities, attracting a variety of development and environmental aid organisations, policy makers, donors. In addition to the process of postcolonial political borders being re-drawn through the emergence of new nations that have re-defined Bajau peoples' citizenship, officials have since the tsunami exerted pressure to induce the sea nomads to become sedentary and erect pile-houses over the coastal shallows. Boutry (2007) argues that while authorities urged the Moken of Thailand to move ashore so that they could be protected by local/international aid, these nomadic groups predicted the tsunami ahead of authorities and abandoned the coast moving out to the sea where it was safer. This research will be framed in the post-tsunami Bajau's maritime realm and will register changes in environmental perceptions and understandings.

In a broad sense, the Bajau's maritime realm often consists of ‘an informal network of historical and contemporary links between families, friends, fishing grounds, trading centres and trade routes, through which knowledge and goods are exchanged and an awareness of commonalities shared with other Sama communities in Southeast Asia is fostered’ (Chou, 2003). In Sulawesi, the Bajau (semi-sedentary) form a network composed of small erected pile-houses made of bamboo and wood. Spreading through the seas of eastern Indonesia, this maritime realm is a fluidly defined space that the Bajau have come to know with a high-degree of familiarity from generation to generation, and through the ‘science of travel’ or ‘ilmu -European-influenced esoteric and magical sciences (Tsing, 1993: 127). This 'science of travel' is for the decentralized Bajau landscape, the science of external power. Their maritime realm becomes what the human geographer Soja (1999) termed as 'third space': a space whose meaning can only be 'mapped' when practised and fully experienced.

Similarly to the Meratus Dayak of the Meratus Mountains (Tsing, 1993), the Bajau negotiate local authority regularly through marriages-alliances and other forms of exchange such as story-telling and the journeying knowledge. Thus, travelling in order to expand social spaces and shape political communities becomes an important feature in the daily lives of both the Sama-Bajau (settled off the shallow bays) and the Bajau-Pelao (entirely afloat). 'Men who lose their ability to hike lose their ability both to 'borrow* power and to round up an audience to hear about it' (Tsing, 1993: 128). Thus, the politics of travelling define 'authority' as something ‘borrowed' and constantly
negotiated through movement and the ability to 'tell stories'. Like Gaynor (1995, 2005) suggested, these networks are not limited to those who actively and directly participate in them, the benefits and knowledge are also transmitted to other Bajau elsewhere through stories and conversation. The scope and impact of these fluid ‘story-telling networks’ is endless.

External actors that play an important part in the daily lives of the Bajau- such as local governments and NGO's- have recently promoted an apocalyptic rhetoric emerging from the contemporary debate and policy on 'climate change'. This portrays a managerial perception of ‘nature’ as an entity - a bio-physical world of the non-human - that needs to be known and monitored through data-bases in order to be preserved. Socioeconomic concerns to preserve natural productivity, or what the late twentieth century renamed as ‘biodiversity' (Zemer in Greenough and Tsing 2003: 55), has targeted the environment of these communities through a variety of conservation programmes. Global, national and regional discourses circulate bridge and construct global history but where do the Bajau fit in all this? What do they take as evidence when discussing climate change? What are the theories of causality that they understand when adapting to environmental change?

Almost simultaneously, certain Bajau languages have become a target for the conservationist agenda and other ‘salvage’ initiatives; ‘endangered languages' need to be documented before they disappear. This represents a particular worldview that has reduced each language to an isolated and categorized unit, exclusive of a defined space and rigidly tied to a representative group that displays certain ‘indigenous characteristics’. In May 2012, an article entitled: 'Co-occurrence of linguistic and biological diversity in biodiversity hotspots and high biodiversity wilderness areas' (Gorenflo, L. J. et al), was published in several academic journals and other media sources; offering empirical data that related biodiversity loss ('caused by climate change') to linguistic loss in high diversity spots such as the Wallacea region of Indonesia. This approach to climate change linked biodiversity loss to language loss in a rather reductionist manner- the controversies of cultural diversity and biological diversity were reduced to an empirical comparison of the disappearance of ‘endangered languages’ and extinct species in regions of the world classified as hotspots'. An alternative would be to adopt a more person-centred and fluid perspective that takes into account the interactional and relational aspects of language development and environmental change. Similar to the question Harvey (in Poole, 2009: 204) asks, this project interrogates 'what exactly is it that disappears as linguistic forms change? The cultural practices themselves appear to be deeply embedded beyond the particularities of linguistic form through which they are expressed.'

2.2. Organic Spirits: The Coconut-Self, Bamboo-Houses/Streets

Sama-Bajau settlements are usually composed of a number of houses erected on stilts and connected by narrow bridges and passages that rise above sea level. The Bajau-Pelao usually live on boats called lepa-lepa that, like the houses and bridges, are made of bamboo and coconut wood. Similar to people from other parts of Indonesia such as Bali and Nusa Penida, the Bajau display a very rich variety of vocabulary when it comes to talking about their marine/coastal environment (Chou 2003). Following pre-fieldwork conversations with my ‘gatekeepers', the terminology and idioms that relate to the environment seem to become an analogy of life (Giambelli in Rival, 1998: 138), productivity and the self. These
analyses offer an opportunity to approach and analyse the relationship between living kinds (organic) and humans (Howell, in Rival, 1998: 173). Their houses and boats are adorned with ornaments that change during important ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, childbirth, successful fishing trips/seasons, parent lost at sea, rebirth, healing, etc. These ornaments reflect and influence the family’s identity within the group. Their houses and boats, thus, become an ‘extension’ of themselves and develop parallel to the human lifecycle. The Bajau, thus, construct their identity within their community through the social functions of objects that play a crucial part in their daily lives. These organic and inorganic materials and living kinds also function as necessary medium/mediators in all social interactions, not only between humans but also with non-human entities such as spirits. The meanings and values of objects are redefined as they circulate within and beyond the Bajau domain, this meaning is known among the Orang Laut of the Riau Archipelago (Chou, 2003) as the spirit that is embedded in things, upon which giving, accepting and reciprocating processes converge and social cohesion is produced. Do the Bajau create meaning for their houses, boats and other objects through spirits? And if so, is the agency of objects negotiated regularly through reciprocity with the spirits of objects, houses and boats?

When it comes to the livelihood of the Bajau-Pelao, the term house society (Lévi-Strauss, 1987)- an abstract concept in which the house becomes an analogy of kin and political systems- needs to be revisited. This is exemplified by the Sama-Bajau, and when groups of boats form a mobile household. However, this research project aims to approach the Bajau’s house system on its own terms and explore how far Lévi-Strauss' concept of ‘house society’ can be applied. In Sama-Bajau settlements, whose pile-erected houses are connected through thin bridges made of the same material (often coconut bamboo and wood), are these ‘bridges’ streets that connect different houses, or external corridors that descent.

Nevertheless, and based on what has been discussed in previous sections, this transmission of lineage seems to occur through reciprocity with the different spirits of objects, non-human animals and other organic entities where balance within the biological domain seems to drift from ‘the given’ to ‘the achieved’. These informal and formal visits, exchanges, ceremonies and forms of delayed or immediate reciprocity that establish and inform kinship relations do not exclusively manifest in human interaction. This is worth exploring in the context where traditional concepts are constantly challenged through the incorporation of experiences, frequent change, mobility and fluidity. Thus, and as Carsten (1997) states, ‘the inside and the outside are always potentially subject to transformations into each other’ (ibid. 287). Incorporation of new experiences requires flexibility of personhood and relatedness, a notion that the Bajau’s boundary negotiation between the outside (biological) and the inside (social) may reveal. Therefore, the Bajau would respond to what Errington (quoted in Carsten 1997: 287) calls ‘centrist societies’ that absorb what is on their periphery (environment), making the different (whether socially or biologically) similar.

The available literature provides specific knowledge about the cultural identity of different groups of sea nomads’ that inhabit neighbouring regions and present similar life-styles and livelihoods and also lays down a background suitable for comparison and for challenging the links between cultural diversity and biological diversity through the linguistics of socio-ecological settings. In addition, this theoretical background provides a picture of where past and more recent research stands, and presents an opportunity to
go beyond these accounts and offer a double-sited ethnographic account of the interaction between socio-ecological practices and language development among smaller groups of Bajau, and the role of the interaction of different discourses in the region, and question the controversial relationship between cultural diversity and biological diversity; these links are important when understanding people's perceptions and attitudes towards the environment and how they adjust to environmental change.

3. Research Aims and Objectives

This research aims to provide a detailed and updated portrait of two different communities of Bajau - a community that has adopted a more sedentary lifestyle and lives in the shallow bays of North Sulawesi and a community that remains entirely afloat in the nearby region of the Celebes Sea. I aim to provide an account of how they actively redefine their environment through language and how the fluid and negotiated characteristics of their language and its development ‘invades’ their environment and socio-ecological practices too. This research aims to explore how the politics of stabilizing a region by disenfranchising mobile communities impacts on the cultural identity and livelihood of these communities. It will also register the different local and regional discourses and agendas that play an active role in the construction of the Bajau's identity and the cosmological re-shaping of their environment due to coastal resource management regimes. For example, Mokien/Moklen communities in Thailand who were ‘encouraged’ to settle in coastal villages, re-defining their identity and livelihood (Boutry, 2007, 2009).

3.1. Objectives

In order to approach this aim, two objectives emerge:

a). Objective 1

Through an ethnographic account of the everyday life of these two communities of Bajau (Sama-Bajau and Bajau-Pelao) and their interactions, I will document how the 2004 tsunami changed their perception of the environment. More specifically I will look at ‘the fate’ (development) of words that relate not only to the different seasons that the Bajau identify (related to fish species, tides, currents, diseases, etc.) but also to animal/plant species, coconut and bamboo, and how these words are reintegrated, re-defined and re-used through the years and generations, especially, as a result of environmental change. In addition, I will look at the role these words/terms play within the complex networks of the social space (maritime realm). I will seek the account of 'outsiders', whose interactions with the Bajau opinion and Bajau institutions are influential in the re-definition of their social relations, identity and ecological practices.

b). Objective 2

I will look at the overlap and/or interference between seasons, the different cosmologies of sea spirits (hantu laut) and other spirits (jins) that feature in these different seasons. Placing emphasis on observing not only the Bajau's active interaction with them through prayers, offerings, prediction, navigation and story-telling (placed within the wide spectrum of the 'science of travelling' and the complex networks that originate from it) but also the interactions that occur among each of these two groups of Bajau, between them and their region. Once in the field I will locate significant age groups and will explore their social, ecological and aesthetic perceptions.
4. Methodology and Methods

This research aims to provide a more socio-culturally sensitive account of how environmental change is perceived and constructed through language by nomadic communities in the Celebes Sea. Therefore, a participatory approach that involves local communities of Bajau is essential. The results of this research will attempt to benefit local communities and work towards a better understanding between these communities and local officers, institutions and government. This research will deploy a flexible and adaptable design that will consider my collaborators’ objectives and needs.

I will stay with each of the two communities that will collaborate with my research for at least 6 months. Due to the environmental nature of this study, it is essential that I experience their daily routine through the different seasons. Initial contact with the settled Sama-Bajau will be made through a marine biologist who has been researching in the area for the past 18 months and is familiar and on good terms with different groups of Bajau throughout Sulawesi. After the terms of this research and possible stay have been negotiated I will begin to build relations and locate prospective informants through participating in some of their daily events (such as fishing, navigation). It is through my Sama-Bajau informants and once they are familiar with my presence- that I intend to initiate contact with the nomadic Bajau-Pelao and request to join their activities. If access is denied, I will explore other options such as hiring a Sama-Bajau informant as an interpreter/translator to accompany me during trips or stays, offering to represent their needs before local stakeholders, etc. Additionally, I will carry a GPS with me in order to produce an accurate map of my fieldwork locations. In terms of language difficulties, although most Sama-Bajau speak Bahasa Indonesia (a language I am currently learning at intermediate level), I might need the aid of an interpreter once access to the day to day lives of the Bajau-Pelao has been granted. I will assess the feasibility of ‘hiring’ my main Sama-Bajau informant as interpreter and the organization of previous briefings in order to discuss the objectives and scope of this research and clarify any further details and information before embarking on it.

4.1. Ethnographic Research

The predominant ethnographic research methods used during fieldwork will be:

a). “Cultural Mapping”?

Even the remotest people have been influenced by being a subject of study in anthropology; however, national, regional, and village boundaries have, of course, never contained culture as often represented by anthropology.

The link between identity and place needs to be challenged. New research that tackles multiculturalism and human mobility needs to abandon ‘given' ideas of localized' culture and challenge traditional research methodologies too. This research focuses on the borderlands, a place of incommensurable contradictions. This term is often understood as ‘a fixed topographical site between two other fixed locales (nations, societies, and cultures), an interstitial zone of displacement and deterritorialization that shapes the identity of the hybridized subject (String, 2009). Rather than succumbing to the idea of categorizing them as marginal zones between stable places, this study aims to present areas that demarcate land and the ocean as the ‘normal’ locale for nomadic communities. It will attempt to register a mobile account of the cultural environment of
two groups of Baja (semi-sedentary and nomad) and explore their understanding of 'place', 'identity' and language, embedded in interaction and the production and circulation of knowledge. A focus on the interactive aspects of indigenous knowledge offers a new perspective to what has often been approached, by climate scientists, as an individual and cognitive process of knowledge acquisition.

b). A Matter of Placing: Multi-Sited Ethnography

‘...what is so particular about multi-sidedness is the possibility it offers to interrogate the 'site' of research, not as a reconstituted dimension of social inquiry, but as relational process and methodological device.’

(Gallo, 2009: 99)

Multi-sidedness is a methodological device that can help not only to understand the continuities and disruptions that exist between contrasting histories of translocal mobility but to also gain insight into the historical depth of mobility (ibid.). By aiming to study two different groups of Bajau, this research intends to challenge bounded understandings of cultural difference and challenges the Malinowskian complex of a single-sited fieldwork. Due to the mobile and flowing characteristics of the culture of these communities, this research considers a different perspective to the social construction of place, location and field site. The post-tsunami constitution of strategic sites of intervention for environmental protection by governments, NGO’s and related institutions becomes a point of friction against the fluid nature of the Bajau’s cultural identity. What is the Bajau's agency in governed territorial spaces? Does the geopolitics of power offer room for marine dwellers whose life-style and livelihood relies on constant movement and change?

‘The landscape itself is rendered uniform; it is reduced to “space”, a vacuum to the plenum of culture’ (Ingold, 1993: 226). Pursuing a comprehensive account of the relational (i.e. non-managerial) perceptions and understandings of the environment than can be observed through an analysis of the terminology of the landscape and its social functions this research considers the ‘informants' as agents, and actors as part of their surrounding environment. Therefore, it has to follow and embrace the fluid qualities of its respondents’ environment, like the metaphor of the undercurrents in the sea where they flow at times together, at others against each other, into each other and sometimes form treacherous whirlpools until some form of inevitable symbiosis is reached or established. Additionally, it seeks to display the complex array of different agendas and discourses that play an important role in the local (North Sulawesi) debate on biodiversity and language loss.

4.2. Participatory Research

Participatory Research, PR (Objectives 1 and 2), will be used throughout this research as integrated methodology in order to collect information that considers their needs and ideas. By using this approach, the informants take on the role of the researcher, challenging the control of the research that I will have and, thus, my personal bias. Additionally, and since I aim to register how the Bajau make meaning in their everyday life, this methodology will ensure that their needs and ideas take an
active role, it ill, also, encourage their participation in an active way and as agents of their own portrayal.

4.3. Interviews

Interviews (Objectives 1 and 2), will facilitate dialogue and will aid in locating specific needs. This method eliminates the presence of others, an aspect that might discourage and alterate behaviour and narratives registered towards what is publicly and socially appropriate. The semi-structured nature of interviews will help flexibility and adaptability to the participant ideas.

Interviews offer a person-centred account of how each individual relates and interacts with their cultural context. However, to achieve this I will have to wait until I have established a rapport through participation in their everyday routine so that I can put participants at ease when answering questions. The interviews will be semi-structured in order to meet the participants' needs and locate the key issues present in each community, household and individual. The questions will undergo re-shaping through the course of fieldwork as new matters and concerns arise. In addition, as my competence in Bahasa Indonesia and regional languages improves I will be able to engage more meaningfully without the need for an interpreter to be present during the interviews; recording -when allowed- would also aid transcription and analysis when linguistic competence fails to meet requirements. Interviews will be carried out wherever the participants feel more comfortable. Through the recording of interviews, this research aims to register visual expressions and other communication systems.

I aim to offer a representative sample of different generations of Sama-Bajau and Bajau-Pelao. And these interviews will begin once I have been granted permission and collaboration through PO and by being an active part in their daily routine.

5. Concluding Summary

Through a highly participatory, multi-sited and mobile ethnography that aims to disclose the different discourses and agencies that take part in the local debate on environmental change and language loss, this research will attempt to offer a combination of accounts of the interaction between socio-ecological practices and language development as experienced by small communities but also how the socio-cultural constructions of 'nature' are tightly tied to those of 'language'. The livelihood of the sea nomads requires a flexible and fluid approach that challenges traditional approaches to culture as embedded in a particular place and space.

Despite the wide range of studies and ethnographic research carried out in the nearby regions of Indonesia that has provided the disciplines of linguistic anthropology and environmental anthropology -among others- with important ethnographic evidence, no account of the controversial relation between cultural diversity and biological diversity has been undertaken to date. Additionally, no linguistic and/or socio-ecological account of the identification of a multitude of seasons by the Bajau and the formation of their identity through the agency of everyday objects and their kin relation to the sea and other species has been registered before. The interactions between human, non-human animal and non-human entities (such as spirits and phantoms) shape and re-shape complex and crucial networks that provide the nomadic Bajau with social cohesion and regulate power structures and authority within these communities and beyond.
The struggles for meaning that drift from the global to the local and back through the social constructions of language and environmental change call for anthropology to provide the links for a middle ground that can facilitate the appreciation of the shifting role of these discourses and their 'alliances' in producing global history through local constitutions of place, the self, language and ecology. This approach intends to work towards facilitating a better understanding between the Bajau and local governments, NGO's, international aiders, policy-makers and other stakeholders and it will try to do so by highlighting where the pillars of the misunderstanding between local environmental and development institutions groups lie. All this will be achieved through participatory research than involves not only the Bajau but also other agencies involved. Thus, by focusing on the terminology of the living space and the ‘fate’ that these words and their social functions suffer as active part of environmental change, I will attempt to move farther from the global debate on endangered languages that categorises indigenous languages as independent units, statically contextualized within a specific environment. This project will look at language borrowing, language alliances, the recycling of words, language adaptation to socio-ecological changes and how linguistic practices frame and become framed by a changing environment.

By looking at the interaction between socio-ecological practices and language development this research will interrogate the controversial relationship between cultural and biological diversity; a link often asserted as significant to managing environmental change, but that yet remains largely unexplored by academic researchers. Do these language developments reflect and influence people’s environmental perceptions and behaviours? And if they do, what can we learn from them? Knowledge of how these processes work and their outcomes are important in understanding how people might adjust to environmental change, or if these adjustments are ones that mitigate or enable further accelerations of climate change.

The ‘bridge* that will function as a link between perception and understanding of the environment, as being part of it, will be the terminology of the living space and not only how the Bajau encode ecological information but also the complex cosmologies that relate to these concepts. The sea and the coast represent a skeleton around which geographical, historical, ecological and genealogical knowledge (relations) is organized. The richness of vocabulary for referring and talking about the sea (often referring to it as a father), marine animal and plant species, the coast, rocks, sand, trees, coconuts, the bamboos that become their pile-erected houses, seasons and natural disasters function as organs that give life to what a ‘sea nomad’ is. Thus the physical landscape and the identities of those who inhabit it become one, or better said a varied and complex multiplicity of interactions.

References


