

# Sama-Badjao Halaw from South Ubian, Tawi-Tawi, Philippines from 2000-2018: Narratives

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**Abstract:** *Issues on Filipino migration are widespread across the world. But the most prevailing and crucial one is the migration among the Sama-Badjao people in South Ubian in the province of Tawi-Tawi or widely known as halaw issue. Sama-Badjao people illegally migrate to Sabah, Malaysia because of poverty and desire to give their children a better future. This study specifically seeks to answer the following queries: who are Sama-Badjao halaw? What are the factors that push them to migrate to Sabah? What are their experiences as halaw in Sabah, Malaysia? What are the effects of halaw to the socioeconomic condition of Sama-Badjao society in South Ubian, Tawi-Tawi? This study is qualitative, narrative and descriptive in design. Data were gathered through personal interviews using the researcher's designed guide questionnaire and phone interviews. The travel documents and removal order from the Malaysian and Philippine governments of the identified key informants were presented to validate the halaw key informants' personal information. The data show that Sama-Badjao halaw from the municipality of South Ubian easily entered Sabah without detection from both government authorities. However, while Sama-Badjao halaw work in Sabah, sacrificing for the sake of their families' economic survival in the Philippines, many of them were apprehended and imprisoned by the Malaysian authorities. After spending months in Malaysian prison, they were deported to the Philippines. Anxiety and harsh punishments were among the indelible experiences of Sama-Badjao halaw under the Malaysian prison.*

**Keywords:** *halaw, Sama-Badjao, illegal migration, South Ubian, Tawi-Tawi*

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## 1. Introduction

*Halaw* is a Bahasa-Melayu term which means "driven away" or "cast out" from the society. Undocumented people living in Sabah are called *halaw*. These illegal migrants are driven away by Malaysian police, thus the term *halaw*. Some Sama-Badjao people illegally migrate to Sabah with heavy hearts, leave their families behind in hopes of giving a better life and endure hardships of hiding from Malaysian authorities to evade deportation. Caught and jailed undocumented Sama-Badjao are allegedly tortured by Malaysian authorities for several months. The term Sama-Badjao *halaw* is for Sama-Badjao illegal immigrants that are caught and deported back to the Philippines. This issue is relative today and in need of immediate documentation on the experiences of Sama-Badjao *halaw* to shed light to the academe and address this social phenomenon in the Muslim South.

As seen in the television and online news, it is apparent that the Philippine government provides aid to deported undocumented Filipino migrants, not only from Sabah but from other Asian places as well. However, this government aid for the Sama-Badjao *halaw* is regarded by other Filipinos as not necessary for they perceive Sama-Badjao *halaw* as people who commit illegal deeds. Furthermore, their illegal entry is their last resort for economic survival in our modern competitive world. Some consider this desperate entry as an idiotic act. However, despite of all the difficulties, challenges and criticisms, the Sama-Badjao *halaw* continue to migrate to Sabah. Most of the known *halaw* are from Tawi-Tawi, particularly in South Ubian, an island municipality located near Sabah. The responsibility to support their family financially trigger them to move out to Sabah, Malaysia and leave their homeland and loved ones behind.

This paper attempted to document the experiences of some Sama-Badjao *halaw* who are deported from Sabah, Malaysia. Specifically, this paper aims to answer the following questions: Who are the Sama-Badjao *halaw*, and what factors push them to migrate to Sabah? What are their experiences as *halaw* in Sabah as workers and prisoners? And what are the effects of their deportation to the socioeconomic condition of Sama-Badjao society in South Ubian, Tawi-Tawi, Philippines?

## 2. Literature Review

Several related literatures on “*halaw*” or deportees (online and off line) were reviewed. Many of them focus on the following: the harsh experiences of *halaw* under Malaysian detention; The history of Malaysian immigration; How different nationalities illegally entered Malaysia; medical study- The effects of deportation to *halaw*’s health and psychological condition in the Sulu Archipelago; The illegal entry of Filipinos especially from the southern part of the Philippines to Sabah, Malaysia; How native Sabahan and Malaysian authorities perceived the illegal immigrants; Malaysian government in dealing with the illegal immigrants; and the studies of *Paguys* and *Halaws* right after the Lahad Datu standoff on February 2013 and etc.. Based on the researcher’s observation there are many cracks or gaps in their studies that needed to be bridged or carried out. The main question that they were not able to address is “What were the sacrifices of Sama-Badjao in surviving as illegal workers and migrants overseas particularly in Sabah, Malaysia?” Documenting their sacrifices is one of the best ways in doing history. None of them touched the following topic: the important role played by the *halaw* to the socio-economic condition of Sama-Badjao society of South Ubian in the Province of Tawi-Tawi.

## 3. Discussion and Conclusion

Regional migration flows within Southeast Asia is not a new phenomenon in this contemporary time. Social and cultural connections between Sabah and Mindanao are established for centuries. (Frank, Sina 2006) The tradition of border-crossing from the Philippine Sulu Archipelago to Sabah existed during the golden age of Sulu Sultanate and increased dramatically when Mustapha Harun, a native Tausug, became the first governor or *Yang di-Pertua Negeri* of Sabah in the early 1960’s.

Since then, the Tausug, Sama-Badjao, Yakan, Balangingi and other ethnic groups in the Sulu archipelago continuously migrate or travel to Sabah, searching for better livelihood, visiting relatives, attending traditional occasions and others. They use local vessels called “*kumpit*”, “*pelang*”, pump boat and speedboat without legal documents from the Philippine government to look for job opportunities with better salary that could sustain their families’ needs. Legally

speaking, they are illegal Filipino immigrants in Sabah. But for the people of Sulu archipelago, they are just visiting another village and not a foreign country.

The proximity of Tawi-Tawi and southern most Palawan to Sabah makes travelling easier for Filipinos without detection from both governments. The migration of the Filipinos to Malaysia reached its peak when its economy progressed and opened more manual jobs with high salary. Many Filipino families in Sabah invited their relatives in the Philippines to come work in construction companies, palm tree farms and factories in Sabah. However, many of these people have been jailed and deported to the Philippines and locally labelled as “*halaw*”.

### **Sama-Badjao *halaw* and their economic struggles in South Ubian**

Before migrating to Sabah, they work in construction jobs- building houses and wooden footbridges; working for the Department of Public Work and Highways (DPWH), such as constructing of roads, and other kinds of government projects that need manual labor. Wooden footbridges connecting stilt houses in Tabawan Island and in Ubian Island are usually repaired twice a year or more, depending on the wood quality (Kiptiani, 2018). Poor-quality bridges are regularly repaired while sturdier ones take a year or more. Since their foundations are wooden posts and built in shallow waters, they are easily softened by salt water and residing hermit crabs and eventually, broken. Damaged footbridges are usually repaired through the initiatives of barangay chairpersons with their male constituents who receive money as compensation. Workers usually receive 500 to 4000 pesos, depending on the length and size of the footbridges to be worked on. After the job is done, they have to wait for months or even a year to be hired again, leaving them with no source of income.

Building or repairing houses in South Ubian is another seasonal job for its native Sama-Badjao carpenters. Stilt houses in South Ubian are mostly made of wood and dried coconut leaves while a few are made of concrete. The houses, like wooden footbridges, need to be repaired or rebuilt regularly at least once in 4 years (Jildon, 2019). The dried coconut leaves that serve as roofs are also temporary and needed to be replaced regularly. As the population grows higher, the demand for new houses also increases. This opportune situation provides Sama-Badjao carpenters jobs, however, still seasonal.

Seasonal jobs in South Ubian could not improve their living condition. This situation urged Sama-Badjao carpenters to move out to Sabah and find jobs there to sustain immediate and future needs of their family. In addition to their seasonal jobs, farming crops and growing seaweeds are their other sources of income. But still, economic difficulties are present for a number of reasons such as poor soil quality and problematic tides.

Sama-Badjao *halaw* also encounter problems in seaweed farming due to unproductive and limited area of seabed and unfriendly tides that eventually damage and undermine the seaweed. Aside from these predicaments, water and electricity or power supply are another immediate problem that hindered the progress of their living condition. Sama-Badjao *halaw* live in a place of difficulty and hardship. It is greatly different from the definition of “urban”. For instance, the Sama-Badjao people from the area depended upon far-away deep wells and rainwater as water supply. Every household store invaluable rainwater in containers. Daily, they fetch water out of wells with carrying poles and transport them via *bangka* from the shore to their houses.

Meanwhile, electricity supply is another problem that pushes Sama-Badjao to migrate to Sabah. Power supply is generated by portable generators and solar and only a small number of people

can afford these. Cold drinks are rare in the area. Bongao, hundreds of kilometers away to South Ubian, provides most of the ice supply.

After being deported, the Sama-Badjao *halaw* can be either successful or unsuccessful in saving considerable large amount of money while working in Sabah to improve their economic status in South Ubian. Overcoming poverty back home defines their risky journey as triumphant. Only an estimated 1% of Sama-Badjao *halaw* are noted successful. Most of them worked under the protection of Chinese employers from Malaysian authorities. While working in Sabah, they are well-protected by their employers but only within their respective establishment premises. Because of this protection, they are able to work longer and save more Malaysian Ringgit though not all protected Sama-Badjao *halaw* are successful. Misfortune befalls them when they carelessly roam Sabah and meet Malaysian police officers who catch and jail them and later, repatriate them. Lucky Sama-Badjao *halaw* are able to send their children to college and open small businesses in South Ubian to sustain their needs.

After repatriation, the *halaw* who were able to save money open sari-sari stores and other small businesses that made their lives comfortable based on their standard. They buy their supplies from Bongao and Tabawan Island where big stores are already established. However, not all these small businesses last long. Some micro businesses close after a few years due to several factors, such as unpaid debts from neighbors or relatives and lack of business management techniques. They lose more money than gain money. Gradually, they lose everything including their business capital.

Unprotected Sama-Badjao *halaw*, on the other hand, are still able to work and receive hundreds of thousands of Ringgit in Sabah which helped their families back home. But these *halaw* who work without protection from their employers have more chances to go back to poverty after repatriation. Due to lack of protection, their stay in their jobs are unstable thus, unable to save enough money to start a good life back home in South Ubian. Huge debt is also factor of their unsuccessful work journey.

After repatriation, the *halaw* struggle to engage in different kinds of livelihood such as *agal-agal* (seaweeds) farming and fishing. Because of dire weather and other untimely conditions, such as large coastal waves, their seaweed culture are destroyed and fish catches are at a minimum. They cannot sustain their children's secondary and tertiary education as well as their daily needs. As a result, most of these Sama-Badjao *halaw* sink in debts from their neighbors. Other Sama-Badjao *halaw* experience the same. Majority of these people have initial plans to go back to Sabah when the right time comes and no better choices are left. Today, Philippine government programs, such as the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) and Indigenous People Program (IPs), somehow ease their livelihood struggles during payout.

### **Sama-Badjao *halaw* experiences in Sabah, Malaysia**

Malaysia is an industrialized country that most people from South Ubian dream of living in. They can think of several ways to become Malaysian citizens. But this action does not entail that they dislike being Filipinos. The aspiration of easing their poor lives they endured and suffered in their hometown is what drives them to do so. In order to fulfill this dream, they see migrating to a place that offers more job opportunities that give higher compensation than the jobs in Tawi-Tawi and Zamboanga City can offer and the same time, accessible. Sabah, Malaysia fits these specs to fulfill their dreams.

These notions push Sama-Badjao people from South Ubian to migrate to Sabah and cross the vast and dangerous Sulu Sea on *lansa*, *pambot*, and speedboats. They are ready to face the large waves of Sulu Sea and threats like pirates and Malaysian marine authority. Before stepping onto the land of Sabah, they take extra care by all means to avoid Malaysian authorities. If caught, they taste the difficulties of life in the Malaysian prisons or *penjara*. But for the *halaw*, these risks are nothing compared to their dreams saving their families from poverty. While living in Sabah, they do everything to find jobs for the sake of their families left behind in Tawi-Tawi. The jobs that Sama-Badjao *halaw* look for vary. Some Sama-Badjao *halaw* work as carpenters or laborers in Malaysian construction companies, while some clean and harvest in plantation companies and others.

Applying for the jobs in Sabah is not a simple thing for the *halaw*. They must be extra careful to avoid police patrol. They cannot easily go look and apply job opportunities. As first timers, they wait and let their relatives look for available jobs in town. Some Sama-Badjao *halaw* are prepared. Before they left South Ubian, they are already hired in jobs at various construction companies. Working places in Sabah need identification documents from the applicants. This is a problem for the undocumented *halaw* because they cannot process any legal papers in Malaysia. To solve this, they borrow and xerox the Identification Card (IC) of relatives that legally work in Sabah. They attach their photos on the photo copied IC and then xerox it again to make it look like it belongs to them and present this to their employers. The *halaw* who are related to company owners and managers need no to do this. Sama-Badjao *halaw* usually work in construction companies, in iron shops, in *gudang* (factories) or in fishing companies. On the other hand, female *halaw* engage in service works. Female *halaw* work in coffee shops, in Tamil and Chinese-owned restaurants and department stores as salesladies. Some work as domestic helpers in well-off Sabah households.

Construction companies are composed of different working sections. First, the *mandul* or foremen; then, *tukang kayu* or carpenters; and lastly, the *sakkong* or masons. Their *tauki* or bosses are native Melayu and Chinese who handled projects from the Malaysian government (Albeten B. P. , 2019). The *mandul* work next to the *tauki* and are the ones who overlook the project works. They receive RM150 daily which is more or less than P2,000. Most Sama-Badjao *mandul* are legal IC holders, only a few are undocumented. Undocumented Sama-Badjao *mandul* are usually protected from Malaysian authorities by their *tauki* within the construction sites they work in. *Tukang kayu* or carpenters receive 70RM to RM100 daily equivalent to P1,134 daily, and P34,000 monthly. This can be compared to a Department of Education (DepEd) Master Teacher III salary in the Philippines. There are different kinds of *tukang* such as *tukang kayu*; *tukang mosek*; *tukang basih*; *tukang semen*; and *tukang paitong*. The degree of salary vary from each *tukang*. *Tukang mosek* or the ones that install tiles earn RM80 or approximately P1,067 daily or more depending on how long it takes to install the tiles for the entire building (Abdulhari, 2019). *Tukang basih* or the ones that welded iron steels and build foundation skeleton obtain RM35 or P467 daily. *Tukang semen* or the ones that build concrete homes received RM45 or P600 daily. *Tukang paitong* or the one that finishes the wall receives RM47 or P627 daily (Jilbih, 2019). All these *tukang* are skilled Sama-Badjao people who work in Sabah to overcome poverty back in the Philippines.

Most Sama-Badjao *halaw* who work under good bosses are well protected from Malaysian authorities and work in a comfortable environment. Their bosses bribe the police whenever operations reach the construction sites. However, their protections end if their jobs end. Most *tukang* also stay in *kungsi* provided and can live with their families. Some of them adopt dogs to serve as night guards and warn them for police operations (Albeten B. P., Personal life

experiences in Sabah, 2019). Those who have no dogs, work on night duty to avoid police. Despite the protection from their Chinese and Melayu bosses, they cannot sleep well due to the fear of being jailed and deported to the Philippines.

The salary of carpenters, dish cleaners and others between Tawi-Tawi and Sabah has a big difference. In Sabah, carpenters can receive P34,000 a month which is DepEd Master Teacher III salary in the Philippines, while in Tawi-Tawi they only receive more or less P9,000. Jobs like dish washing in Chinese restaurants usually pay RM 500 or P6,500 to P7,500, while in Tawi-Tawi, only P1000 may be received. The difference on the salaries is significantly great. Most of the *halaw* informants are amazed and attracted by the high salaries their relatives receive while working in Sabah. This salary gap allures them to work there. They think receiving Malaysian Ringgit is a wonderful feeling. Malaysian money is something they look up to than Philippine money because of its higher value. Many people from South Ubian believe the only way to save their families from poverty and their children's future is to earn more money. The only means they think to do this is to migrate to Sabah and work to earn more Ringgits.

There are Sama-Badjao *halaw* who work in different *gudang* or factories such as chicken factories, biscuit factories, instant noodles factories are well protected and decently paid by their employers. They receive RM20 daily. If they work overtime, they are paid RM28 to RM31, approximately P450. They work from Monday to Saturday, 8am to 5pm. Overtime work spans 5pm to 11pm. These factories are usually owned by Melayu and Chinese (Basanun, 2019). Sama-Badjao *halaw* who work in factories are those who have connections within the factory, such as relatives or family members who have worked there for a long period of time. Like the usual for *halaw*, they use photocopied IC. They are protected by their employers by allowing them to stay in compounds near where the factories stand. As long as they are in the premises of the factory, they are protected. According to the *halaw*, their managers warn and tell them to hide in the provided hiding place in the factories beforehand when police operations are to be conducted. Legitimate Sama-Badjao workers with ICs are the only ones who face the police to show that establishments are law-abiding.

Some *halaw* who cannot find any job engage themselves in fishing. They may privately own a boat or not. They use legal fishing equipment like long trawl net, spear guns and others fishing tools. They work like other fishermen. They start dropping the trawl net in late afternoon and allow it to stay overnight under the waters. After dropping the net, they continue to spear fishes under the sea about 30-50 meters deep using compressor and go home around 7:00 in the morning. Then, they take the net, load it to their boat and collect the fishes. Under the deep sea, they get anything edible like small shellfish that is worth RM1 per kilo. They also gather sea cucumbers, prawn, different kinds of fishes and other sea creatures just to earn Ringgits (Sabirul, 2019). Prawn is the most valued marine product in the market. While fishing, some undocumented *halaw* fishermen are captured by patrolling Malaysian authorities because they would just tell that they left their ICs at home and no fishermen usually brings ICs while fishing in an open sea. The things authorities could only do is investigate the legality of fisherman's tools and search for illegal ones such as dynamite and cyanide (Albeten J. , 2019). Despite the tight security, there are times *halaw* use cyanide to catch more fishes and avoid deficit.

Some *halaw* work in restaurants owned by Chinese, Melayu, Tamil and Pakistani as cooks or *tukang masak* and receive RM1, 800 a month. Some who have notable expertise receive RM 2,000 or approximately P27,000 monthly. If they want additional salary, they work overtime. Usually, a cook receives RM2,500 or P33,300 monthly, including overtime pay. All cooks are

stay-in in their working places to avoid being caught by Malaysian police. Same with other *halaw*, they use photocopied IC (with pictures of them) of their documented relatives. According to informant no. 16, the new Malaysian IC is hard to imitate due to its two-photo feature. The only way is to edit it through Photoshop. Sama-Badjao cooks start working at 6:00 in the morning and end at 3:00 in the afternoon (Aspani J. , 2018). Their salary increases as the time of their stay increases. Since Malaysia is an Islamic country, all foods to be cooked are *halal*.

There are Sama-Badjao *halaw*, especially females, who work as maids in Chinese homes and received RM600 to RM800 monthly or approximately P11,000. Their meals are free. Usually, their boss requests them to stay-in to avoid being caught by authorities. Cleaning, babysitting and cooking are among their daily duties. They are loved and taken care of by their Chinese employers. During Chinese New Year, all maids receive allowances, salary increase, and old home furniture and other things (Salik, 2019). They are absolutely happy serving their Chinese employers and say if they are given chance to go back to Sabah they will work again as a maid to their former employers. But despite the care and money they receive from their employers, working as a maid is difficult because of the endless chores and errands.

Other Sama-Badjao *halaw* work as wiremen in Sabah. There are Sama *halaw* who are electrical engineers but only by experience and not by degree. They receive RM50 daily. Others work in ice plants as helper and received RM20 a day (Jula, 2019). Other *halaw* women work in coffee shops as waitresses owned by Pakistani and receive RM700 monthly. Despite of the protections from their employers and extra care to avoid Malaysian police officers, they are caught, jailed and repatriated. Their protections work only within the premises of the establishments they work in.

Going to Sabah to chase high paying jobs and overcome poverty is not simple especially as undocumented immigrants. Competition in working places is common between native IC holders and Sama-Badjao *halaw*.

Some Sama-Badjao *halaw* reach a decade or more in Sabah without being jailed and deported to the Philippines due several factors. One of the factors is their special deal with their Chinese employers to work as domestic helper; worker in factories and others. Some Sama-Badjao IC holders or Sama-Badjao naturalized citizens are encouraged by their Chinese employers to recruit their relatives to work in their establishments. Some Sama-Badjao *mandul* recruit their relatives who live in South Ubian to work with them in different constructions sites. Chinese-owned establishments pay the recruited Sama-Badjao people lower than the standard wage in exchange of protection from Malaysian authorities by all means but only within their premises (Aman, 2019). Both sides benefit from each other. Sama-Badjao *halaw* receive salary and protections while Chinese bosses profit more by giving them lower wages than the Malaysian standard wage. But as mentioned earlier, those protections are not absolute and only work within the premises of the establishment. Those who seldom go shopping in bandar or city proper and who work as maid stay longer in Sabah. Only a few reach 10 to 15 years in Sabah.

Sama-Badjao *halaw* went to Sabah to work for the sake of their families, future needs of their children and ease of life. They do everything to avoid being caught by authorities and resort to going to jungles and mangrove swamps, and others, burying themselves in the mud. Some die because of animal attacks while hiding in the forest (Alsid, 2019). Despite of plans they use to avoid authorities, there is always a time they can no longer avoid getting caught. They consider

it a part of their destiny. Culturally, they believe that Sama-Badjao people from Tabawan are destined to go back home.

While in *penjara* (prison), many Sama-Badjao experience the difficulties of life. They receive small quantities of food not even enough for a baby's stomach and drink water from faucets of comfort rooms. They sleep on the concrete floor without beddings, wear just one dress throughout their life in prison and have no choice but wear dirty garments while doing salat. Men aged 25 to 50 years old are spanked by hot rattan once or thrice; punched in their stomachs when they commit mistakes in counting or delay in having a bath; slapped if they make loud noises (Rock, 2019). The authority does not employ doctors to check the sick prisoners. Some prisons give medicines, but the prisoners are hesitant whether those medicines really cure diseases. All Sama-Badjao *halaw* believe that those medicines can make people crazy and incapable to go back to Sabah once deported. The prisons are infested with rats, cockroaches and mosquitoes as a form of deterrence.

Their meals are composed of *kangkong*, *pechay*, cabbage, eggs, rice, mackerel scads, sometimes chicken, and biscuits. Prisoners plant *pechay*, cabbage, and kangkong for their own consumption. All Sama-Badjao prisoners from the same place stay in same cells, group themselves during meals and share foods and bottled water they receive from their IC holder relatives who visit them every week or once in a month to *Lumah Merah*, literally translated as “red house”. Their relatives visit them and bring hot meals, bottled water and canned goods. Prison guards usually demand payment from visitors who stay longer than visiting hours. Cigarettes, other illegal drugs and sharp objects are highly prohibited inside. However, police officers secretly trade-in cigarettes to the prisoners (Oscar, 2019). The following day after this trading, operations to search and confiscate prohibited items, including the prisoners’ newly-bought cigarettes, are conducted. After confiscating the cigarettes, the police sell it again to the prisoners for money or any canned goods. Chain-smoker prisoners avoid such loss and trickery by buying just two sticks of cigarettes they can finish in few hours.

Most of the prison cells are quite large for few numbers of prisoners, but most of the times, it forcedly accommodated 300 to 500 persons per block (Ismoyal, 2019). Overcrowding results to more chances of transmitting diseases and fights between prisoners. Most of the fathers cannot sleep whole night and just contemplate the poverty his family has been suffering (Tajuhri, 2019). They migrate to Sabah for the purpose of earning and overcoming poverty. Who else would work for that dream if the head of the family is in jail? The eldest male children are usually work in the absence of the family’s head. For families with no male children, the mother is forced to work.

The authority gives freedom for religious people and time to pray freely in the provided room for prayer. The problem is the garments they have to use for prayer are the ones they use every day (Abdulmin, 2019). In Islam, one must do *wudu* or clean oneself before facing Allah SWT. This includes washing hands, elbows, feet, hair, face and wearing clean garments. Malaysian authority knows these obligations but they do not give special consideration to the prisoners. Other religious prisoners accept praying with dirty garments rather than not to pray at all. Religious prisoners request for another set of clothing intended for praying but nothing happens. The problems of the prisoners are not addressed at all.

Prisoners aged 25 to 50 years old are spanked by Malaysian police officers with boiled rattan once or thrice, depending on their case. This is known as *rottan*. Boiled rattan leave deep scars that make them sick (Jilbih, Salik, & Usman, 2019). Many prisoners passed through this

punishment. Regular exercises were done in jail. Mistaken prisoners are punished with slapping or kicking and sinking their heads into the toilet bowl. These always happen to the new prisoners (Abdulkamo, 2018). Women prisoners are handled by policewomen to fall in for counting, exercise, cook for the entire prison, wash the prison guards' clothes and others. They usually get slapping and pumping as punishments for mistakes committed.

*Penjara* is not only a place for illegal immigrants and other criminals, but also for sick people with diseases such as gastritis, ringworm infection, chicken pox, lung tuberculosis, psychological illness, cancer and others. Majority of *halaw* from Sabah contract most of the diseases. (Omar) For safety precautions, those with lung tuberculosis and other transmittable diseases are segregated in a block away from the uninfected. Malaysian authority sometimes gives the sick medicines good for one to three months. Most prisons do not have sick-bay facilities. As a result, sick prisoners remain in their cells and transmit diseases to other prisoners.

In order to survive the scariest and the hardest life in Malaysian prisons, some Sama-Badjao *halaw* adapt to the environment by making themselves busy with anything (such as making of toys out of stretched plastic cellophane) to kill time and making friends to talk to. Sama-Badjao *halaw* endure the unclean and crowded cells they are in.

### **Effects to the Socioeconomic Condition of Sama-Badjao Society of South Ubian Municipality**

Sama-Badjao *halaw* bring good and bad changes to the people of Sama-Badjao society and South Ubian local government. The effect of *halaw* being continuously deported from Sabah is prominent today. Their deportation brings changes to the socioeconomic condition of Sama-Badjao society.

#### **A. Open small businesses (Sari-Sari store)**

Most Sama-Badjao *halaw*, especially those who severely experienced harsh treatments from Malaysian authority, decide to stay put in South Ubian. They migrate to Sabah driven by economic poverty. Some are fortunate enough to earn more money from their jobs. They are able to properly manage it until it grew bigger. Others are unlucky to save more money. People from South Ubian believe in “destiny” of man’s life. This belief comfort them, in times of sorrows, especially after deportation when they have nothing left.

Those *halaw* who earned more and properly managed their earnings opened small businesses such as sari-sari stores in South Ubian to sustain their families’ daily needs. There are *halaw* who have never saved money from their jobs in Sabah but still managed to open a sari-sari store. Their small businesses contribute to the municipality income by paying business tax. They struggle to earn money in South Ubian as much as they earn in Sabah. But the *halaw* think being at the comfort of their own homes is better than being caught and imprisoned again.

#### **B. Revolutionized the productivity of Seaweeds Farming**

Province of Tawi-Tawi is known as one of the major producers of seaweeds in the country. People in South Ubian have long engaged in aquaculture, particularly in seaweeds farming. However, the major island of South Ubian, Tabawan island, where most people do seaweed farming has limited and poor seabed. This predicament leads the Sama-Badjao people to migrate to Sabah and take risks just for economic progress. Bintawlan island and Tabawan island are problematic in terms of growing seaweeds. Nearby islands also deal with these problems when the *agal-agal* or seaweeds season is over. Despite of this, *halaw* experiences

lead in the revolutionizing the production of seaweeds. Their method yielded more seaweeds than expected.

Some *halaw* who stay in South Ubian are forced to develop new ways to boost the production of seaweeds in the problematic tides. Seaweeds are sensitive to tides and wind. They are easily infected by parasites in an unhealthy tide (Abdul, Tajuhri, 2019). Sama-Badjao *halaw* and others none-*halaw* have techniques to allow seaweeds grow faster and healthier in an unhealthy tide. Even though a seaweeds season is over, they are able to culture seaweed but not as fast during the growing season. The fear being caught and spanked by boiled rattan trigger them to revolutionize ideas on *agal-agal* farming. The *halaw* learn from their experience and bring good for the development of socioeconomic condition to the Sama-Badjao society of South Ubian.

### **C. Remittances decreased, Poverty increased**

Economists consider remittances as one of the international financial flows in the country that boost the country's economy and living condition of its people. Sama-Badjao *halaw* migrated to Sabah mainly to improve their living beyond poverty. They believe working in Sabah could improve their lives there than in the Philippines. They go through sacrifices. Most of them sell their valuable belongings for transportation fare but never recover it again because they saved nothing before they were jailed. Many of them leave their love ones to pursue their dreams. Fathers, mothers and eldest children endure the hardship of hiding from Malaysian authorities, while others work safely under the protection of Chinese employers. Due to high salary, they were able to send more remittances to their families back home and ease their living. Remittances brought great changes in the lives of Sama-Badjao in South Ubian.

Sama-Badjao *halaw* often send their earnings back home to their love ones. Many *halaw* receive high salaries compared to the salaries they receive in Tawi-Tawi. Their money is utilized for buying LPGs (liquefied petroleum gas) for kitchens, living in fully-furnished bungalows or two-storey houses, and acquiring large boats powered by double-inboard engine. These are the notable signs of improvement in lifestyle of Sama-Badjao society in South Ubian. However, poverty is at bay again when the *halaw* are deported. Gas stoves are replaced by traditional wood-burning stove again. Large boats and house furniture are sold for daily expenses or business capital. These *halaw* do not want to go back to Sabah because of the tragedy they suffered in Malaysian prisons. This shows us the social-economy of Sama-Badjao society shifts from better lifestyle then back to poverty.

Estimated thousands of Sama-Badjao *halaw* send hundreds of thousands yearly before being deported. Hundreds of thousands remittances that flow to the municipality of South Ubian are cut off. This cut-off of remittances from *halaw* in Sabah bring great changes to the socioeconomic condition of Sama-Badjao society.

Estimated 98% of undocumented Sama-Badjao *halaw* in Sabah contribute much to the economy of Sama-Badjao society of South Ubian. Since then, Sama-Badjao families rely on what they call *usaha sabah*, literally translated as "earnings from sabah," to improve their living. Deportation of *halaw*, is one of the factors that prevent them to earn more in Sabah because of discouragement due to cruel treatments they suffered from Malaysian police. They never forget the great anxieties forever. Decreasing remittances and staying in South Ubian result to poverty and high debt.

#### **D. Illegal Drug Selling**

During Noy-Noy Aquino administration and before him, illegal drug activities is a serious issue across the country. South Ubian is considered one of the fertile grounds for illegal drugs activities because of the island's remote geography. According to Philippine National Police - Special Action Force (PNP-SAF) in Bongao, illegal drug dealings is a large profitable business than pharmaceutical businesses. This is why many people turn themselves to engage in this kind of illegal activities knowing the fact that it destroys young generations. Selling of *shabu* have become one of the alternative livelihoods of the poor across the country, including some *halaw* in South Ubian. The Sama-Badjao who work as pushers are protected by the rich and powerful local drug lords. Although *shabu* is negatively perceived by the Sama-Badjao before, they turn the other cheek and become positive because of high profit. Sama-Badjao *halaw* pushers are convicted by PNP-South Ubian and rehabilitated last year, as South Ubian municipality states. They choose illegal business rather than go back to Sabah or find other ways of living. They have better lives in Sabah before being deported than living in South Ubian. Increased deportation also increases illegal drug business that destroy the young generations of South Ubian.

#### **E. Remittances decreased, Education affected**

One of the dreams of many families in South Ubian is to send their children to universities and colleges for education and better employment in the future. Sama-Badjao parents and their eldest sons try to engage in all kinds of livelihood they know to support the younger children's higher education. People from this place strongly believe that the best treasure to be handed down to children is not money nor acres of land, but education. Education is the only treasure that cannot be lost from them. It also makes their life better in the future because most companies and institutions only hire college graduates. That is how they perceive education in society.

Fathers who had been deported face great fear for their children's educations. They can no longer support their children in Bongao. In some families, eldest sons replace their fathers' positions as head of the family and migrate to Sabah to work for the education of their younger siblings at MSU-TCTO, Mahardika Institute of Technology Inc. (MIT), and Tawi-Tawi Regional Agricultural College (TRAC), and others. Sama-Badjao students from South Ubian stop studying after their fathers, uncles or brothers who supported them are jailed by Malaysian police and later deported to South Ubian. *Halaw* deportation brings great effects to the society of Sama-Badjao of South Ubian in aspects of youngsters' higher educations. Poverty is a hindrance to education in the past decades until today when President Duterte signed the free education for all into law.

#### **Conclusions**

By studying the Sama-Badjao *halaw* experiences in South Ubian and in Sabah the research concludes that the *halaw* phenomenon in the municipality of South Ubian is the main result of extreme poverty. Low employment issue in the Philippines is an element that pushes Filipinos, specifically, the Sama-Badjao *halaw*, to migrate to a place where more job opportunities are open for professionals, skilled and unskilled job seekers. Sabah, Malaysia is the first destination Sama-Badjao people go to for practical reasons. First, the short proximity of Sabah to South Ubian; second, the historical and religious connection of Malaysians with Tausug and Sama-Badjao of Sulu archipelago; and third, the availability of job opportunities for non-professional job seekers.

The data reveals that many Sama-Badjao *halaw* are men who are elementary and high school graduates. In the Sama-Badjao society of South Ubian, especially in Tabawan and Bintawan, poorest families allow their elder sons with their fathers to earn for families' living. No wonder

many teenagers migrate to earn after they finish their secondary level, while younger children finish tertiary level. The living conditions of Sama-Badjao *halaw* in South Ubian continuously push them to migrate forcibly. Sama-Badjao *halaw* enter fearlessly and make themselves ready to face any obstacles along the way to Sabah. Despite of the tightened security by Malaysian government, Sama-Badjao *halaw* are able to enter Sabah with an estimated chance of 98% success. Entering Sabah is less challenging compared to going out.

The data also reveals that Sama-Badjao *halaw*'s living condition in Sabah vary from one person to another and depend on the kind of jobs they engage in any place where they stay. The Sama-Badjao *halaw* who work under the protection of their Chinese employers easily earned Ringgit and, eventually, improve their living condition back home. The *halaw* who work in Sabah without protection from their employer struggle much to cope with poverty. These *halaw* did everything to earn money but not to the extent of selling their own dignity or hurting anybody.

Positive and negative significant changes in the socioeconomic condition of Sama-Badjao society result from the Sama-Badjao *halaw* phenomenon. Positive changes include opening up of small businesses (Sari-Sari store) and revolutionized production of seaweeds which somehow make socioeconomic condition progress. This is good news for the local government of South Ubian. The negative impacts include decreased remittances, bouncing back to poverty, illegal drug (*shabu*) selling and decline of education. These are the negative effects slowly affect the Sama-Badjao society, socially and economically. Despite of all these dark side effects, Sama-Badjao *halaw* still strive really hard and they never give up working hard for survival and waiting for the government intervention to support their aspirations.

Overall, their migration to Sabah is a great help to the socioeconomic condition of Sama-Badjao society of South Ubian. If not disrupted and jailed by the Malaysian authority, the Sama-Badjao *halaw* will greatly improve their poor life in South Ubian. But most of all, if poverty is addressed and job opportunities are open, South Ubian would become a progressive and peaceful community in the country.

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