The Baldy Center for Law & Social Policy
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Podcast transcript begins

[Azalia]: Hi everyone this is the podcast of the Baldy Center for Law & Social Policy produced at the University at Buffalo. I am your host and producer Azalia Muchransyah. This episode, I have Jennifer Gaynor on the phone with me. Jennifer is a historian of maritime Southeast Asia in the world, and is currently a Research Fellow at the Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy. She is also the author of *Intertidal History in Island Southeast Asia: Submerged Genealogy and the Legacy of Costal Capture* which is such a fascinating read particularly for me as an Indonesian. Jennifer how did you end up in Indonesia and meet with the Sama people?

[Jennifer]: As an undergraduate at Wesleyan University I had been focused on East Asia and had studied Japanese language for years and after my undergraduate years I did a project through the Thomas J. Watson Foundation. They gave me money to go and live in villages of women abalone divers. And so I've always been attracted to the waters, the seas especially and so I went off to Japan to do this project about women abalone divers who were portrayed in Japanese folktales as these strong self-confident women who samurai could not force to marry them. So off I went but the money I had from the Watson Foundation wasn't enough to stay in Japan for a year so they said just be true to the spirit of your project and do something else and I looked around and kind of landed on Indonesia and got pulled into friendships there with local people and they guided me to a friend of theirs who suggested I go work in Bugis villages and Sulawesi women really hold the power there but women don't go on Bugis boats so I wasn't interested in that because I like being on the boats. So they said well you could go live with the Bajo people, they and so I said, oh who are they, they said, oh lack of fresh water, fish head soup, so I did that and I went to Southeast Sulawesi and was going around looking for the Bajo people as I'd been told and I had the word wrong and people looked at me like I was positively nuts because I was telling people I'm looking for the shirt people, so they said "oh Bajo" and who I now mostly call Sama people because that's what they call themselves and it's become more commonplace to call Bajo people Sama even in Indonesian and certainly in English since then. So that's how I got started living in Sama villages. I made contact with, I made friends and friends connected me with relatives who connected me with other relatives and kind of just ramified through my dissertation that way later.

[Azalia]: Your book talks about Haji Lawi and her capture. Can you explain to our listeners why was Haji Lawi captured by a Bugis commander's henchmen during the 1950's?

[Jennifer]: Capture became a really important part of my research and has led me in all kinds of wonderful new directions but it hadn't originally been part of my research but it

turned up both in the 1950s material I was researching related to Sama involvement or sort of trying not to get involved in the DI/TII (Darul Islam, Tentara Islam Indonesia) a rebellion which is the abode of Islam and the Indonesian-Islamic army in the 1950s. So capture became important because of Haji Lawi's story, how she was captured and specifically she was targeted because she was a member of a high status family, a high status Sama family. They had connections in trade around the archipelago and skills with boats, so that was very valuable for the movement. If they could make a kind of formal marriage with her and her family between the kin groups and try to exploit that to get more Sama or Bajo people to join this movement. Capture also turned up in my research on this same location on Tiworo in the early modern period it was a very important part of this 1655 there were two different battles or times in which the Tiworo area was targeted by the Dutch East India Company, the VOC, and in 1655 there were 300 women and children who were captured as well as about 200 men slaughtered. Capture played different roles slightly different in different times but I became really curious about what is the role of capture? Are these people just sold into slavery, where did they wind up? Can my understanding of this conflict in the 1950s and capture there help me to understand if it can at all? What happened back in the 17th century? So the 17th century stuff, there wasn't like a direct connection. It's not like these 300 women were captured and then married off to allies. I mean if that had been the case it would have been very neat and clean and you know tied up with a little bow but I'm glad it wasn't that easy. But capture was used both to, I mean for sure some people wound up sold in slave markets, possibly in Batavia. Others these women and children were first gifted to the opponents in this conflict, the allies of the VOC from the Dutch point of view, or from the VOC point of view. They were gifted in order to sort of keep those allies of the VOC satisfied with doing the work they were, the fighting they were doing. But this kind of capture also brought in more followers, more people and it deprived their opponents, Makassar, a very important to the group of people, a resource in Tiworo, who they relied on for fighting the VOC and their allies in the Spice Wars. So, depriving your enemies of their strategic resources basically was another reason why people were killed, the men and women captured.

[Azalia]: How did you discover Haji Lawi?

[Jennifer]: There was always a kind of fascination that young family members had with the fact that she had been married to a childhood friend and regiment commander under Kahar Muzakkar, who led this rebellion in the 50s, and there was a kind of like oh this terrible thing happened but it's kind of cool to the younger people because it's this brush with unusual and exciting past that they could tap into. So I finally got to meet her more than once and talked with her other family members as well. She's part of an extended family, Haja Lawi, in this region of Southeast Sulawesi and she was very gracious. At first, I went with her nephew who was a kind of research assistant sometimes with me and I let him conduct some of the interviews because he was really interested and so why not. So that's how I got to meet her and she went through quite a lot.

[Azalia]: So with the research you did for your book, how do you see the role of Sama people in the region? Does it give an insight to our understanding of littoral societies in Southeast Asia?

[Jennifer]: So yeah in some ways it's still focused on how sea people or maritime relations, in which Southeast Asians were the mariners, part of a wider early modern world where many different people from different parts of the world but especially Asia were also mariners, but the Southeast Asians had political relations with each other and at times with South India and with China. So I think that they are part of the key to understanding these kinds of relations between polities or part of those relations especially before colonialism really had a heavy influence in the region. So, I'm exploring ways to write about that. Some of which draw on literature, some of which drawn archival material and work by other scholars, and also involves law to some degree. I'm interested in these codes; these Southeast Asian codes are very hard to trace their genealogies you know, where they came from. There are stories about that but actually to trace the sort of links and how they were produced and what they drew on beforehand. Were there Persian precedents, did this just come out of Southeast Asian contexts in practice, very hard to figure that part out. I mean I'm not the first person to be interested in this by a long shot, but I'm particularly interested in the code of Melaka and the Amanna Gappa, which is a Bugis code of maritime law essentially. They're both basically merchant law, lex mercatoria, and they both appear around the same time and I read Bugis and Malay, so yes I'm really looking at them. I mean I actually had started this work for the book, I started looking closely at them and at all the different recensions or versions that there are and tracing which ones really exist and which kinds of erroneous references there were in 18th century European documents and things. And then I cut all that out because it was just like it was too much of a side story. The book was already so complex, but you know Southeast Asianists have been talking about polities rather than states since the 1970s, so it was kind of a natural thing for me to talk about interpolity, pre-Westphalian anthropology relations. I definitely will be looking forward to making those kinds of lateral connections with other people working on the context out of which these patterns of interaction and then law came. And in this case it's about lex mercatoria, it's like it's an alternative genealogy or part of one of many alternative genealogies from merchant law.

[Azalia]: Moving forward, how should scholars ethically and critically approach the study of the Sama people and other littoral societies?

[Jennifer]: I think it is so tempting and easy to romanticize things about the sea and I love the sea, but it's so important to cut through ideological and other forms of bs. One really has to have evidence, evidence for claims that one makes. Not to be overly empiricist but I think that there's plenty of people who can point to what a maritime region it is, but when you get down to the nitty-gritty what are the details in the relationships and how did those come about and what's the substance here? How do people talk about it and think about it, how does that affect their daily lives? So I think one has to have context to look at things and I think approaching this, approaching the study of sea people and Southeast Asia's littorals, you know, it's got to be a combination of really specific case studies, specific contexts because without the specificity it's hard

to learn what's really going on and find out those new things that one couldn't just project from one's fantasies. But there also has to be big pictures of more than one kind and I think that they have to take into account the environment and they have to take into account the importance of the sea and in so many ways in the region.

[Azalia]: That was Jennifer Gaynor the author of *Intertidal History in Island Southeast Asia: Submerged Genealogy and the Legacy of Costal Capture* published by Cornell University Press. This has been the Baldy Center for Law & Social Policy podcast, produced at the University at Buffalo. Please visit our website buffalo.edu/baldycenter for more episodes and follow our social media on Facebook and Twitter @baldycenter. Until next time I am your host and producer Azalia Muchransyah.