

**THE IBAN OF MEROTAI: *BEJALAI* NARRATIVES<sup>1</sup>** (latest version)

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**Introduction**

The Iban community of Merotai, Tawau, Sabah, comprises 160 families and a population of 1,110 people. Located northwest of the town of Tawau, along the Tawau-Kalabakan Road, it takes 45 minutes by car to reach the village from the town center (see Map 1). The settlement is a product of Iban *bejalai*, which literally means ‘to walk,’ or ‘to go on a journey,’ “and it is used by the Iban, to describe the important institution of a journey undertaken for material profit and social prestige” (Freeman 1970:222). This paper comprises excerpts of narratives of Iban migrants who decided not to return home, but remain in the place of their destination. Four of the narratives are from interviews with children of the migrants who have passed away, and three with the migrants themselves.

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