

# Characteristics of the Bajo Tribal Settlement in Torosiaje Laut Pohuwato District, Gorontalo Province, Indonesia

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## Abstract

The Bajo settlement in Torosiaje Laut Village in Gorontalo Province in Indonesia has a distinctive feature: wooden houses with wooden posts, walls and planks with partly thatched roofs built on the coast and partly formed into the sea. Its residences are in the form of houses on stilts and use fixed poles. Arising from these unique characteristics, it is currently also a significant tourist attraction.

This research analyzes the characteristics of the Bajo tribal settlement and the factors that influence the growth of human settlements in Indonesia. The research was carried out in Torosiaje Village, Pohuwato Regency, Gorontalo. It employed a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods. Data collection involved participant observation, structured interviews and a literature survey. Data analysis involved a discussion of the characteristics of the Bajo Tribe Village in Torosiaje Laut Village using qualitative descriptive techniques. This involved describing according to the actual situation.

The findings show that the Bajo Tribe houses in Torosiaje Village have unique characteristics because they are built on water, are simple and can adapt to extreme environments. The village houses are built on stilts made of wood with a saddle-shaped roof, and some are shield-shaped and made of zinc and thatch. These wooden houses have poles 3-4 meters high, stuck into the bottom of the water to a depth of  $\pm 1$  meter. Each house generally uses 16 -20 poles. The more poles one uses, the less vibrations caused by sea waves are felt. There are lessons to be learnt from these settlements about building in harmony with Nature.

**Keywords:** Bajo Tribe, Torosiaje Laut Pohuwato District, Houses, Settlements

## Introduction

Generally, a coastal region can be defined as a convergence of land ecosystems, marine ecosystems and air ecosystems meeting one another in a delicate balance (Budi, 2000). There are many such coastal regions in Indonesia, which are the habitats of the tribes occupying the

Indonesian Archipelago. Many Bajo tribes live on the coast, one being the Bajo Torosiaje. People of Bajo originally lived on a boat called bido, moving about in groups to different places according to the choice of fishing grounds.

It was on this boat that they lived from birth till the end of their lives. Hence, the Bajos were often called sea gypsies because of their nomadic life.

Bajo people have observed that people rely on the sea and the natural resources for their livelihoods. Indeed, they have long occupied the sea, coast and islands and have even been impressed that they have not been able to continue their activities on land any longer than other tribes. The Bajo in Gorontalo is located in Popayato district, Pohuwato district, seven hours' journey West from the capital of Gorontalo province. It is spread out in two villages, one of which is the village of Torosiaje Laut.

The Bajo villages in Torosiaje Laut are also an outcome of the migration process from parts of Indonesia. This condition enabled the Bajos in the village of Torosiaje Laut to continue to experience improvements. The community itself has become a settled village with permanent houses, and yet the ways or activities of the Bajo people still continue to exist.

The Bajos have constructed stilts over the sea, and under the houses, serving as a parking lot for boats and fishing grounds. At first, it was possible to visit from house to house only by boat, but now it had connecting access, a road made from boards, which has made it easier for people to socialize. Although time has passed, the thoughts and development of the life patterns of Bajo people in the village of Torosiaje of the sea has not changed. However, since recent times, the buildings have changed, in principle Already, they are being affected and contaminated by modern times, motives and forms In this context, this paper looks at this settlement closely, in order to ascertain the characteristics of the Bajo-tribal settlements, and the factors that have affected the Bajos in the village of Torosiaje.

Changes in the settlement of the Bajo tribe in Bajo, which is a process of acculturation between the Bajo tribe and the Gorontalo tribe, are the subject of study in this research. First, if the cultural value orientation of the Bajo tribe changes, it will change the needs of the Babaro residence to become a permanent settlement. Second, if life above the Bajo tribe changes to a settled life, they can improve their social, economic and cultural life on land. Problem-solving from Bajo tribal settlements on dynamic water to payments on Static land is a process that is influenced by various factors, both external and internal, namely the natural environment and historical events in the early days of their lives in Bajo, which play an essential role in explaining how the change process occurs. This research aims to explore the characteristics of Bajo tribal settlements and understand the factors that can influence their growth in Torosiaje Laut village. It has the following objectives:

1. To identify the factors that influence the growth of Bajo tribal settlements, Pohuwato district, Gorontalo province.
2. To identify the characteristics of Bajo ethnic settlements in Torosiaje village, Pohuwato district, Gorontalo province.

## Theoretical Framework

Characteristics come from the word character, which means accent, and distinctive features (Poerwordarminto, 1986). Characteristics in architecture are translated as the properties of a built environment that differentiate it from other built environments. Architectural character can be seen by observing the facade of a building (Krier, 1988). Character in architecture is the arrangement of the diversity/intensity of the characteristics of an architectural object, a series of essential elements that form an object consisting of shape, line, color, and texture, which makes the object has unique qualities that can distinguish it from the other objects (Smardon, 1986). Ching (2000) says that the characteristics of an object can be related through aspects of form, space, function, technique, and context.

In Indonesia, According to Law Number 1 of 2011 concerning Housing and Settlement Areas, an organization is part of a housing environment consisting of more than one housing complex with infrastructure, facilities, and public utilities. It supports other functional activities in urban or rural areas. A planned organization is equipped with facilities, infrastructure, and

utilities that comply with the appropriate standards. On the contrary, an unplanned organization is one without a prior planning process. This type of organization has an irregular organizational pattern and needs to be equipped with the facilities, and infrastructure, accordingly (Sonny et al., 2012). Hariyanto (2007) states that a person's choice of the location of an organization depends on many factors: economic level, socio-cultural level, accessibility, linkage to certain facilities, and local geographical conditions, etc. Based on this statement, some areas need faster organizational growth. However, this affects the quality of the organization in each region.

The Bajo tribe lives in the ocean and has a view of life with the sea as their home yard, garden, and life. Their ancestors have been descendants of the sea god, which is the belief of the Bajo people. Thus, they cannot escape from the ocean. They spend all their life activities in the ocean. Therefore, the Bajo tribe tends to isolate themselves from development and change (Syefriyeni & Rosie, 2020). They are some of the many communities that manage, maintain, and utilize marine biological resources based on cultural norms and values that have been institutionalized, adhered to, and maintained through social control by each community based on a belief system that originates from the indigenous knowledge (local wisdom) inherited from generation to generation (Arief, 2008).

## Review of Literature

Several studies related to the characteristics of settlements exist. They demonstrate that each settlement has unique characteristics and shapes according to its natural landscape. This difference usually arises on the use of space created by the people who inhabit the settlement. For example, Ambrosius, et al. (2017) have evaluated the pattern of spatial use of the Bajo tribal residences developing in the Wuring village, Maumere city. They have determined that the characteristics of the settlement based on human interaction, space, and environment provide a clear general outline in terms of spatial organization, orientation, and spatial hierarchy within the settlement area. Krisna et al. (2017) say that in looking at the characteristics of a settlement, it can be measured based on existing local wisdom, where local knowledge can be viewed from the geographical conditions, and the way of living so that it can enable the community in adapting to the needs of the settlement in which one lives. This illustrates how to respond to a way of life, which is different from the other communities.

Furthermore, Sampeali (2011) has studied the communication behavior of the Bajo tribe in interacting with the mainland communities in the floating village of the Buton district. They discuss the relationship between the formation of settlement characteristics. They can be based on the customs they still adhere to and the needs related to their activities as sailors. In contrast, Mukramin (2018) has examined the Survival Strategy of the Bajo Tribe Coastal Community in North Kolaka Regency. They see that this area's characteristics are unique in settlements regarding culture and regulations, which cause social shifts and changes related to the livelihood problems they experience. On the other hand, there is also a notion, that leads to creating active relationships using horizontal social relationships (relationships with fellow communities) and surviving through livelihoods as fishermen - efforts to earn a living to maintain life.

Suparman, Setioko, and Martini (2014) have examined the factors forming the characteristics of the Bontang Kuala Settlement, Bontang City, East Kalimantan. They see that the formation of settlements is due to a decline in the quality of the residential environment, which is characterized by the level of housing density, with more and more payments jutting out towards the sea, giving a distinct physical impression in forming the identity of a settlement.

Furthermore, Lautetu, et.al. (2019) discuss the aspects of payments that can be seen based on the physical characteristics of the environment (natural), physical settlements (artificial), and the socio-economic characteristics of the community. Similarly, Dharmawan and Lavinia (2020) examine the aspects of tourism-related residential areas on the shores of Lake Toba. Islamijati and Nisfu (2022) also examine the characteristics of the East Roban fishing settlement, Sengon Village. On the contrary, Azzahra, Diska and Idajati (2022) look at the characteristics of the settlements in the Kejawen Lor Fisherman's Village based on eco-settlements. They see that the formation of residential characteristics can be measured based on

the number of immigrants, which increases yearly, accompanied by reasonably low education, the ecological condition of the residential areas, and the density of the existing buildings.

According to the literature review above, there are similarities between the settlements based on the livelihoods of fishermen and non-fishermen. The character of the settlements can be seen from their physical and non-physical characteristics, including analysis of physical environmental conditions, settlement facilities and infrastructure, and analysis of buildings/residences. Analysis of the socio-cultural needs of society as well as analysis of the economic conditions of society help. Furthermore, these fishing settlements also have similarities with other fishing settlements, where people tend to depend on the sea for their livelihoods. People often have a low level of education, but what differentiates the characteristics of one fishing settlement from another is, the factor of social culture formed to create its own identity for the settlement.

## Research Methods

This study uses qualitative research. It employs case study method and produces data through interviews, observations and document studies. Interviews were conducted with the community in their boats chosen randomly. They lasted 30 minutes to an hour depending on the conversations. Interviews were unstructured and enabled the respondents to freely express their views. Observations of the boats and the spaces were also carried out at the same time. Observations were recorded in paper and then were transformed in to digital material for safe-keeping and future use.

Documents were sourced from the libraries as well as from the internet: particularly the journal sites and journal indexing agencies such as Scopus and WoS. The documents studied are as follows.

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## The Case Study: The Research Site

Geographically, the settlement of the Bajo Torosiaje Tribe is located in the Popayato Subdistrict, Pohuwato District, Gorontalo Province. There are three Bajo villages in Torosiaje. First, the Bajo villages of Torosiaje Jaya and Bumi Bahari are located on the mainland, and second, the Bajo village located above the sea is the village of Torosiaje sea. With a wet tropical climate, the area is dominated by a population with significant livelihoods as fishermen. The distance from the capital of Gorontalo Province to the village of Torosiaje is approximately 500 km. Using a private vehicle, the distance from the capital of Gorontalo to the village of Torosiaje takes about 6 to 7 hours.



**Fig. 1:** Pohuwato District Map  
Source: Bappeda Pohuwato District, 2021



**Fig. 2:** Research Site at Torosiaje Laut Village  
Source: Google Earth, 2021

The research site was one of the villages of the Bajo tribes which occupied the Gorontalo region of the village of Torosiaje Laut. It is one of the villages located in the Pohuwato district, Pohuwato, Gorontalo province that has considerable natural resources. The condition of the region on the Gulf Coast of Tomini has a typical characteristic. The village of Torosiaje Laut was scouted from the village of Torosiaje, a settlement of the Bajo tribe.

## Findings and the Discussion

### History of the Bajo Tribe at the Torosiaje Laut Village

Bajo tribe is one of Indonesia's indigenous ethnic groups with a rich history and culture. They generally live in the coastal areas and islands of Sulawesi, especially around the Wakatobi

National Park in Southeast Sulawesi. Here is some information about the history of the Bajo Tribe:

1. **Origins:** It is one of Indonesia's indigenous ethnic groups with a long history in the Sulawesi region and its surroundings. They are known as a group closely related to the sea, especially in fishing activities. It is an ethnic group that lives in the coastal areas in Indonesia, especially in North Sulawesi, Southeast Sulawesi and East Nusa Tenggara. However, other sites have Bajo communities, such as Southeast Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara and Maluku. They are a highly skilled fishing boat group often called "sea gypsy fishermen" due to their high mobility.
2. **Traditional Boats:** One of the characteristics of the Bajo Tribe is their traditional boats, known as "whales". These boats sail around the islands and trade with the other communities. The standard boat is known as a "law." Traditional Bajo boats on the sea have specific characteristics that allow them to sail in shallow waters and various types of oceans including around the coral reefs.
3. **Nomadic Lifestyle:** Most Bajo Tribe live nomadically at sea. They live on boats and rafted houses, usually made from natural materials such as wood and bamboo. This nomadic lifestyle allows them to explore various islands and marine ecosystems. This is an indigenous ethnic group that lives around the Tomini Bay, Gorontalo. Their traditional lifestyle is known as "sea nomadic" because much of their life is related to the sea.
4. **Language and Culture:** The tribe has the Bajo or Bajau language. They also have a rich music, dance and crafts culture, such as making jewellery from the sea shells. The primary language is Bajo, which belongs to the Austronesian language family. It has several dialects in various regions where they live. The culture of the Bajo tribe is closely related to their life in the ocean.
5. **Influence of Islam:** Majority of the Bajo tribe adheres to Islam, which strongly influences their daily lives. They have traditions and ceremonies associated with the Islamic religion but also retain some conventional beliefs and practices. They have unique cultural practices and traditions, most of which follow the Islamic religion.
6. **Modern Challenges:** Although the Bajo have lived a lifestyle closely linked to the sea for centuries, they face modern challenges, such as climate change, coastal development, and economic constraints. Efforts have been made to promote sustainability and the preservation of their culture. In fact, they face several modern challenges that have changed their lifestyle and culture in recent decades.
7. **Kinship system:** In the life of the Bajo tribe, the kinship system between the family and other people around them is very high and good. One example is if there is a Bajo tribe community who is seriously ill and requires high expenses, their families, neighbours and other communities will help without being asked; they will give a little of their wealth to the sick family; another example is if there are people who want to carry out a wedding, other people in the community will help, from the beginning of the wedding preparations to the end of the event, both in the form of materials and labour.

### **Torosiaje Laut Village in the Pohuwato District**

Pohuwato District is one of the districts in the Gorontalo Province with an area of 4,244.31 km<sup>2</sup> or 34.75% of the total area and with a population of 149,297 people. (BPS Pohuwato, 2022).



**Fig. 3:** Pohuwato District Map  
Source: Bappeda Pohuwato District

### Popayato Subdistrict

The Popayato subdistrict is one of the sub-districts located West of the Pohuwato District. This subdistrict has an area of 90.92 or about 2.14% of the total area of the Pohuwato District.

#### Geographical Location

Based on its geographical position, the Popayato Subdistrict has territorial boundaries as follows:

- Northern border: East Popayato Subdistrict
- Eastern border: East Popayato Subdistrict
- Southern border: Tomini Bay
- Western border: West Popayato Subdistrict



**Fig 4.** Popayato Subdistrict Maps  
Source: Bappeda Pohuwato District

The Popayato subdistrict consists of 10 villages and 37 hamlets, with the capital of the subdistrict located in Tahele. In 2023, there was an acreage in Dusun Jati, Kampung Torosiaje Jaya, which has added a Dusun Mangrove as a new Local Environment Satuan (SLS) in the village. In 2022, the population in the Popayato Subdistrict has been 11,014, comprising 5,564 male residents and 5,450 female residents. The ratio between the male and female population in this subdistrict is 1.02. It means that the male population is more than the female population.

The village of Torosiaje is now divided into four parts: the Jaya Bahari village, the Pearl Village, the Cape Reef and the Sengkang village. These four villages are bounded by a bridge at the entrance and exit, and the bridge had the words 'Welcome to Bajo'. The Bajo population of the present village of Torosiaje is settled in a pattern-shaped like the letter u facing the open sea. The entrance to those who come from the land or the shore is next to the settlement. For those who wish to enter the village past the front, it must go by a detour, further the distance. Houses spread continuously at intervals between houses of one or two feet (2-3 m).

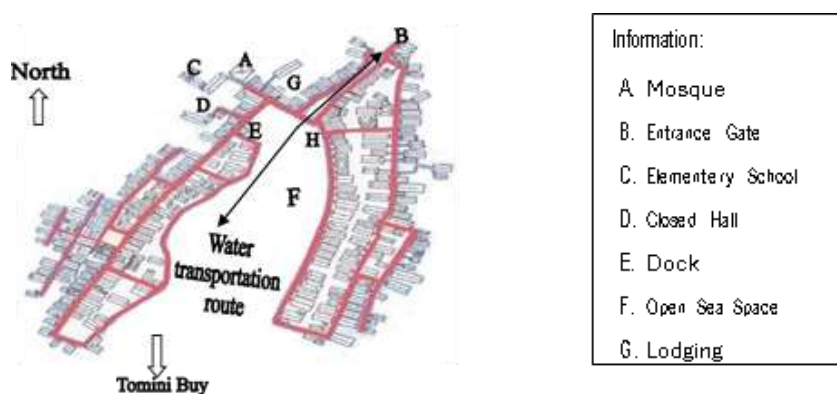


Fig. 5: The Bajo Torosiaje Village Map  
Source: Observation Result, 2022

### Customs and Culture of the Bajo Torosiaje Tribe

People of Torosiaje still hold on to the traditions, beliefs, cultures, and customs of their ancestors, who have traditionally held them firm. There are some traditions still carried out by the people of the Bajo tribe as follows.

- a. *Bitta'* (Pregnancy Phase)
- b. *Ngana'/Ana'* (Birth Phase)
- c. *Kukor dan Sunat Perempuan* (Baby Phase)
- d. *Sunna dan baiati* (Child and Adult Phase)
- e. *Massuroh, Nyorok Salah, dan Noba Batte* (Adult Marriage)
- f. *Matay/Kapatayang* (Death)

### Characteristics of the Bajo Tribal Settlement

Bajo clan has a distinct characteristic of the tribal community of Nusantara since the sea and the boat cannot separate the Bajo tribe. They have been known to prefer to live on the boats and to move about in them. Because of their potential to catch fish, they are being called the sea travelers (Saad in Obie, 2015).

The Bajo house has its distinctive characteristics: built on water, simple and able to adapt to the extreme environments, which were characteristic of the Bajo tribes. Waves, ocean currents, and wind become the beat of daily life. In fact, nearly 90 percent of the Bajo settlements are built over the sea, the remainder being built on the atolls. It makes the difference between the other tribes in Indonesia. For the Bajos, the sea is the only trust. From houses, the search for life is carried on at the sea.

Each house is connected to a wooden bridge as pedestrian traffic. Some residents roam between the settlements through the canals. Each house is equipped with two or three canoes or boats. They do these deep-sea activities in 24-hour shifts. The Bajo tribes are also known as expert seamen. They are used to traveling far and wide for months. In fact, they prefer to build their houses at sea because of traditional considerations, and many rituals of life must be performed at sea. According to the traditions, every baby Bajo is dipped into the sea. The purpose is to acquaint them with the sea so that it is considered as a brother.



**Fig. 6:** Bridge Connecting Between Hamlets

Source: Author, 2022

### Patterns of Space Utilization

The pattern of utilization of open spaces in the Torosiaje Village settlement for sea circulation routes consists of two forms. The first is land circulation routes to connect to each housing unit in the form of bridge infrastructure. The second is sea circulation routes to connect the Torosiaje village settlements with the mainland using means of transportation in the form of boats (patenting).

In the Torosiaje village settlement, there is also open space in the form of a field used for sports, social and play facilities. However, the Pohuwato Regency government plans to transform it into an open park.



**Fig. 7:** Space Utilization Patterns

Source: Author, 2023

In the Torosiaje Village, there is reclaimed land or land that has been filled up and used as a sports field, school buildings and several residents' houses.



**Fig 8:** Space Utilization Patterns

Source: Author, 2023

## Layout Pattern

The layout of the Bajo-tribe settlements in the village of Torosiaje has a grouping pattern. This means that it is a cluster. Indeed, the settlement tends to grow as a clustered hub. Housing grows informally and sometimes causes an imbalance.

The village of Torosiaje has been extending out from the lip of the beach, not connected with land. It is thus flanked by two capes. Flanking to the right and left, the two streams of the Popayato and the Dudewulo rivers are flanked in front of the village of Torosiaje. They are flanked by the two islets of Iloluta and Ilosangi islands. However, the people of Torosiaje name only the big islands and the islets.

## Building Shapes

The culture of the Bajo tribe has changed when they started building Babaroh. However, they still live on the 'bido boats' and in permanent residences on boarding houses and houses. Their purpose is to live or earn a living and no longer worry about the position and honor.

According to Salipu et al. (2018) and Mulyati. (2015), the Bajo people's remark or the house, which is above the sea, consists of three parts, namely:

1. *Pamuaka rumaki*, the top of the house, as a place to store equipment;
2. *Dialan rumaki*, namely the middle part of the house, which is used as a residence;
3. *Dia' rumaki*, is the bottom part, used to moor the boat and store the sails.

The vertical division of space in Bajo people's houses in Bajoe is as follows.

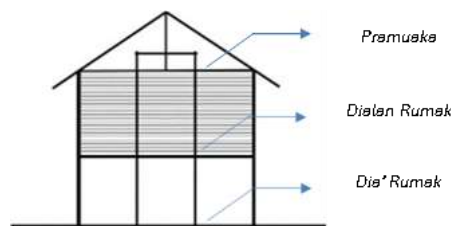


Fig. 9: Vertical division of space in Bajo people's houses  
Source: Salipu dkk, 2018

## Factors Influencing the Growth of the Bajo Tribal Settlements in Torosiaje Laut Village.

The growth of Bajo settlements, as well as that of other ethnic settlements, is affected by several factors that may vary from one location or community to another. These factors that can influence the growth of the Bajo settlements include the following.

### a. Accessibility

The Bajo tribes commonly live in coastal and aquatic areas, such as the sea or a lake. Environmental factors, such as the availability of safe and suitable land, the accessibility to natural resources (such as ocean results), and the ability to communicate with other communities, can affect the growth of their settlements.

The public transport system used to transport the Torosiaje tourist village in the form of a cat crazy boat included a couple of Scots that held the boat in two places. The Bajo camp on the ground and the sea at about \$5,000 to the Torosiaje tourist village, could take about five to seven minutes from the mainland harbor. In the past, the village of Torosiaje was used by boats to travel to houses in the village of Torosiaje. However, now, there is a 2,000-foot (4000 m) bridge connecting the two ends of the Bajo village. In the village of Torosiaje, a motorboat (speed boat) was also provided so that the tourists who wish to go to the island in front of the village of torosiaje could do so without any difficulties.

**b. Socio-cultural and Cultural Conditions**

Cultural and social aspects such as the traditions, norms, values, and social structures of the Bajo tribes influence how they plan and manage the growth of their settlements. These factors can influence the choice of a site, layout, and the size of a settlement.

In the Bajo, there is the concept of the wearer calling himself the same tribe and calling those outside his tribe 'tribe'. When they are among the same people, they used the word "same" as a reference term to identify their fellow groups. The term "bagai" means other communities (various groups) outside the Bajo people, especially the people of the land.

**c. Environmental Changes and Natural Disasters**

People's knowledge of the environment in which they live have already been applied to the construction of their houses, such as at the level of the tides. Moreover, knowledge of the measurements of the length, width, and size of other houses relate to the human body.

Since the Bajo-tribal settlements are mainly coastal, they are susceptible to such environmental changes as rising sea levels, extreme weather, and natural disasters such as Tsunamis or hurricanes. These factors may force them to reconsider locations and methods of building settlements.

**Social Changes of the Bajo Tribe**

The Bajo are a group of indigenous tribes in Indonesia, found mainly in the coastal region around the islands of southeast Sulawesi, central Sulawesi, and north Sulawesi. Like many tribal groups throughout the world, the Bajos have undergone social changes over time. Some of the significant social changes that can occur among the Bajo tribes are as follows:

- Changes in people's social values
- Changes in people's education

**Changes to the Bajo Tribal Community**

Recently, new government programs have been introduced into the Bajo community, despite their negative changes to indigenous institutions. In fact, they cannot be denied positive social changes that the Bajo people directly experience. The country's growth program (PPK) for example has been followed by the state Finance Minister from 2007 to 2007. This has significantly changed the physical appearance of the local Bajo community. With its three significant areas of activities: (1) education and health (2) tools and infrastructure and (3) women's group of saving loans (BKP), the pec and PNPM alike have contributed to the empowerment of the Bajo tribal community. Such contributions include providing a katinting boat as transportation for the Bajo children from school to school, constructing a boat bridge, lending assistance to the Bajo women's group, building an early-age children's education, and building an Integrated Healthcare Center.

**Interaction with the Other Groups**

Interaction with the other ethnic groups or communities can also influence the growth of Bajo tribal settlements. This interaction can have cultural, economic, and social influences that impact residential development.

The Bajo tribe's communication behavior is based on robust and weak social interactions with the mainland communities. The stronger the Bajo tribe's interaction with the mainland communities, the greater the emergence of new communication behavior identical to the mainland communities. Factors that influence the Bajo tribe's communication behavior in interacting with the mainland communities are level of education, life patterns (kinship system, residence patterns, and marriage patterns), language, shared religion, needs, and forms of social interaction.

The interaction of the Bajo tribe and the mainland communities is a form of relationship between them, as emphasized in social exchange theory. The Bajo tribe relates to mainland communities because they hope for something that can fulfill their needs.

## Conclusion

This research and discussion indicate that characteristics of Bajo tribal settlements in Torosiaje Village can be determined as follows.

1. The Bajo Tribe residential area in Torosiaje village is divided into two zones based on physical conditions: the land zone, which is a reclamation area, and the tidal zone, which is the original area of this settlement.
2. Bajo Tribe House in Torosiaje Village is also divided into several groups: (a) houses on land, namely stable stilt houses and permanent houses built in a reclamation area and (b) houses in tidal areas, namely stilt houses consisting of permanent dwellings and semi-permanent houses.
3. House size, room pattern, and the shape of the roof varies greatly; it depends on the economic capacity of the household. The most dynamic development of spatial patterns among the three existing groups of houses occurred in a group of houses on land that are built permanently.
4. The most common thing found is the use of building materials such as tin roofs and glass windows. Another thing is the construction system, where all houses are built today adopting a modern construction system.

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