

# **Deconstructing the waves of Austronesian migration to Madagascar and the East African Coast**

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# What's the issue I?

- It has long been accepted (since the 17<sup>th</sup> century) that Malagasy is an Austronesian language
- Since Dahl (1960) it has been accepted that the nearest relatives within Austronesian are the Barito languages of SE Borneo
- However, as we know more about both Malagasy and Bornean languages, it has become increasingly clear the story isn't as simple as that.
- Sander Adelaar pointed out some time ago that wind names and many terms to do with seafaring are direct borrowings from Malay
- Blench (and others) point to the borrowing of natural world terms (especially animal names) from coastal Bantu

# What's the issue II?

- Robert Blust (Austronesian Comparative Dictionary) points out that some Malagasy roots are not attested in Borneo languages
- Beaujard (in his Tanala dictionary and subsequent papers) identifies a number of roots from Sulawesi languages which are not attested in general Austronesian but which are reconstructed by Mills (1975)
- All of this points to a specific Sulawesi component
- Less clear is a Philippines component; Malagasy has a few words which appear to be borrowed from Philippines languages
- It is also possible these are the result of Iberian trans-Indian Ocean traffic, post 16<sup>th</sup> century

# Models for the settlement of Madagascar I

- The settlement of Madagascar remains problematic, for lack of archaeological sites which clearly point to Austronesian heritage
- The earliest sites are around 5<sup>th</sup> century AD and the dating is hardly secure. We might be better to assume 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century
- The pottery is frankly undifferentiated brown ware and does not clearly point to any particular site.
- This seems to point away from direct settlement and to some sort of indirect route. I have argued that the first Austronesian settlements were on the coast and that (perhaps) malaria drove the settlers to Madagascar, together with African serfs/slaves, which would account for the Bantu animal names

# Models for the settlement of Madagascar II

- However, you then have two problems;
  - All sorts of indirect evidence points to prior Stone Age settlement of Madagascar, presumably from the mainland and presumably by 400 BC.
  - Ptolemy clearly knows about Madagascar by earlier than 400 AD, and it seems Graeco-Roman ships were trading with somebody there.
- Probably some of the resident populations still survive as marginal hunter-gatherers, the Beosi and Mikea.
- However, genetics shows that some at least are the same as their neighbours, and so are 'reversions' to foraging

# Models for the settlement of Madagascar III

- Most likely we have to assume the mainland was a staging post, and that the SE Asian mariners interacted with coastal populations before moving on to Madagascar
- The peoples on the coast most likely were both Bantu agriculturalists and Cushitic-speaking pastoralists
- So the next question becomes what is the context of the trans-Indian Ocean voyages?
- The Barito, as far as we know, were inland peoples, with no maritime capacity, and certainly without the skills to navigate the Indian Ocean
- So they are travelling in Malay-owned ships, presumably on the lookout for trade, but also slaving
- Either the Barito were themselves slaves or hired crew

# Models for the settlement of Madagascar IV

- However, both linguistic and genetic evidence points to both lexicon and genes from multiple islands in the SE Asian region, especially Sulawesi
- So the model has to account for this. There are two major options;
  - Either the boat crews were multi-lingual;
  - or the populations which settled Madagascar came in distinct waves, from different source islands, each bringing their own cultural package
- Or possibly, both. If the Malay ships pioneered the route, enterprising maritime populations could have followed in their wake.

# Models for the settlement of Madagascar V

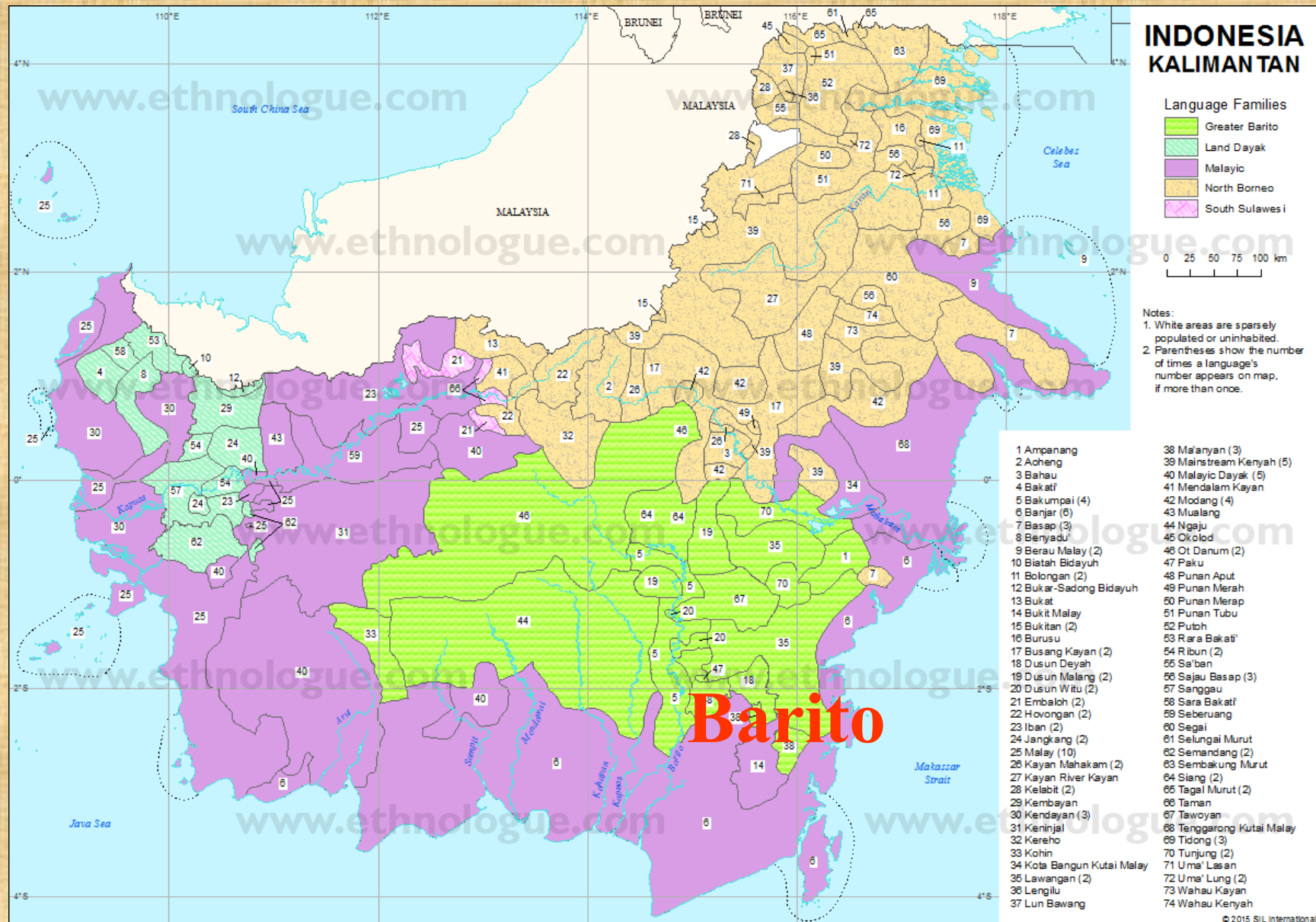
- This is the model espoused by Philippe Beaujard (2003) in a pair of articles suggests waves of colonisation
- However, Sander Adelaar has expression scepticism about this model
- It is not clear whether this *could* be resolved purely from the linguistic evidence.
- Probably we will need archaeology linking ISEA with Madagascar to be sure
- What can be done in the meantime, however, is to establish more clearly exactly what the linguistic and cultural evidence is telling us.
- The handout provides some detail in relation to the lexical evidence



# Linguistic evidence I

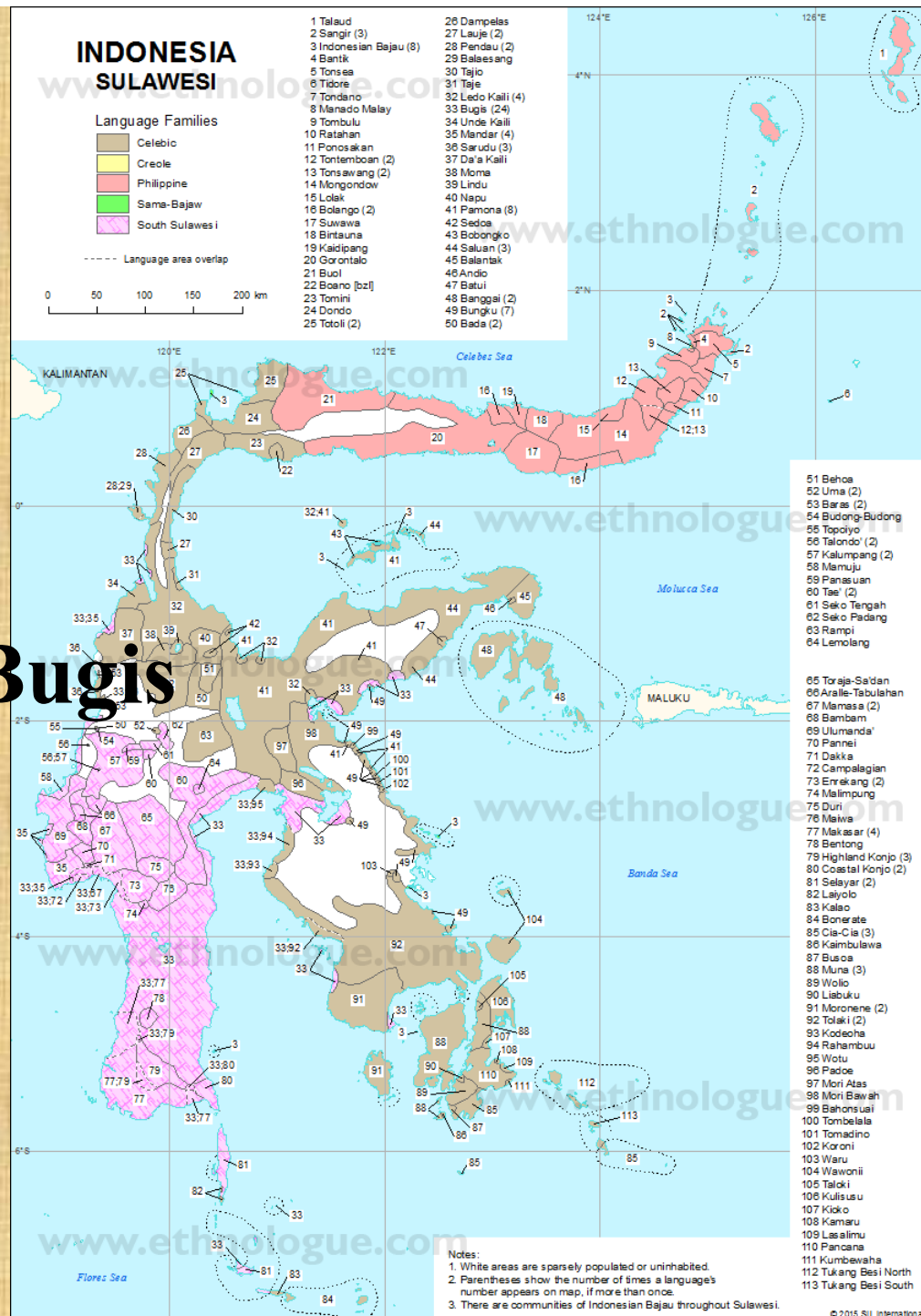
- The evidence for connections with Manyaan, Malay and Javanese has been laid out in various sources, and will not be repeated here.
- The most interesting connections are with Sulawesi. The main body of languages are 'Celebic' and include the Toraja and numerous settlements of the Bugis
- The Celebic languages have a number of innovations, some of which are lexically distinct from PAN, some of which show phonological innovations
- Malagasy shows a number of connections with these Celebic forms

# Languages of Kalimantan



# Languages of Sulawesi

Bugis





# Typical linguistic evidence: Philippines

## ‘Physic nut’ in Malagasy

Language	Attestation	Gloss
Malagasy, Tanala	tanatàna	physic nut, <i>Jatropha curcas</i> L.
Tagalog, Cebuano	tangantangan	castor, <i>Ricinus communis</i>
Tausug	tangantangan	castor, <i>Ricinus communis</i>

**Commentary:** The physic nut is a New World species, apparently rapidly spread around the world by the Portuguese and Spanish. The nut is extremely bitter and used as a purgative, hence the semantic transfer from castor. The connection with Luzon would be surprising, but Tausug is spoken in the Sulu archipelago and so would have been connected with the trade routes linking Sulawesi, Borneo and Madagascar.

# Typical linguistic evidence: Philippines

## Fruit-bat

## Attestation

Malagasy

fanihy

PMP

\*paniki

Proto-South Sulawesi

\*pan(~ɲ)iki

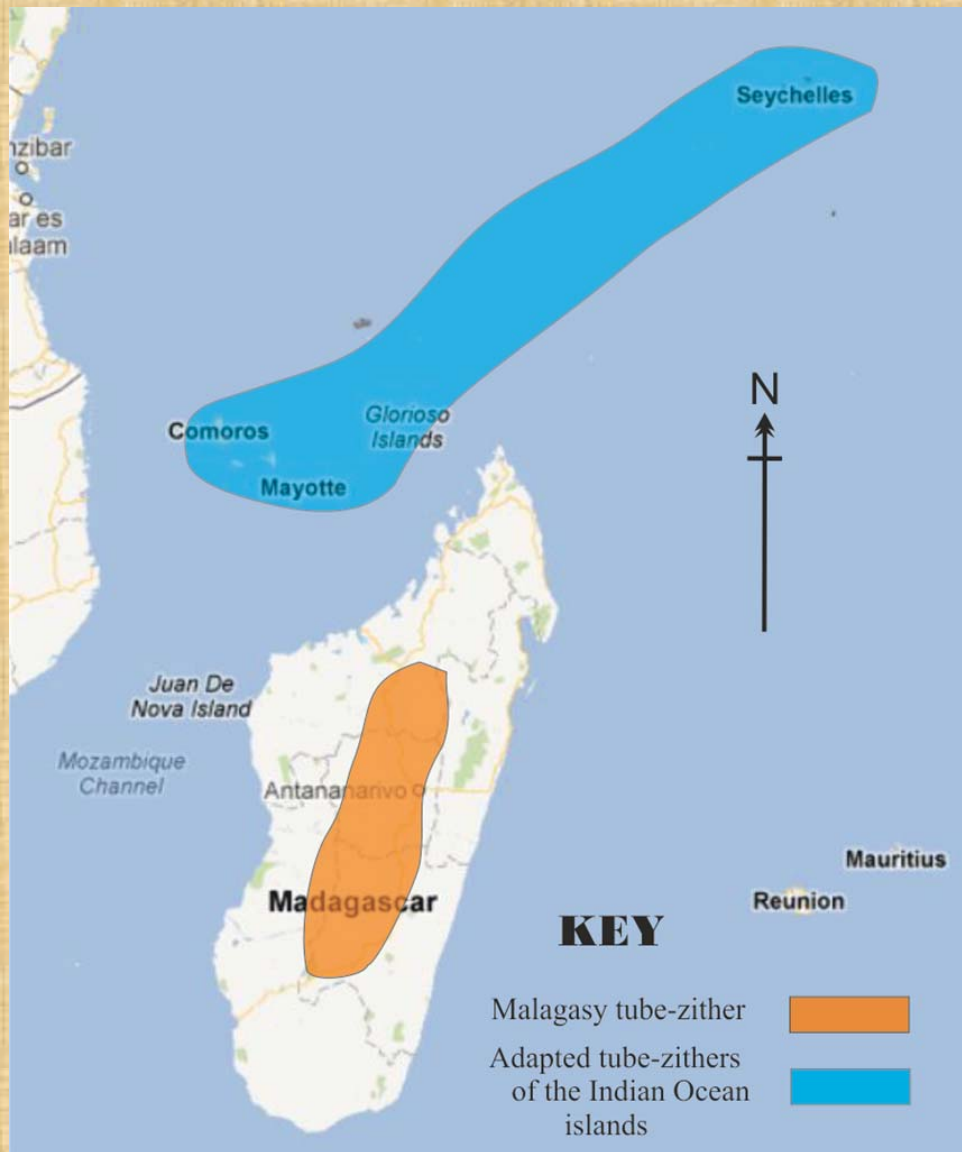
**Commentary:** The term is widespread in the Philippines and most of Eastern Indonesia but is unknown in Borneo and western languages.

# Non-linguistic evidence: the tube-zither

The national instrument of Madagascar is the tube-zither, valiha, which is only played (globally) in Eastern Indonesia and Madagascar



# Non-linguistic evidence: distribution of the tube-zither





# Spread of the tube-zither





# Synthesis

- The evidence still points to the most significant component of Malagasy coming from Barito and a smaller but significant element from Sulawesi and possibly the Philippines
- There is no particular linguistic evidence for historical layering in Malagasy, suggesting that all this happened in the same era
- But Madagascar seems to have undergone massive language levelling (expansion of Merina kingdoms in the medieval period?) wiping out expected diversity and evidence for different chronological frames.
- Though it is definitely also possible there was borrowing of, for example, crop names, in the sixteenth century

# Malagasy origins

Pierre R. Simon

## La langue des ancêtres

Ny Fitenin-dRazana

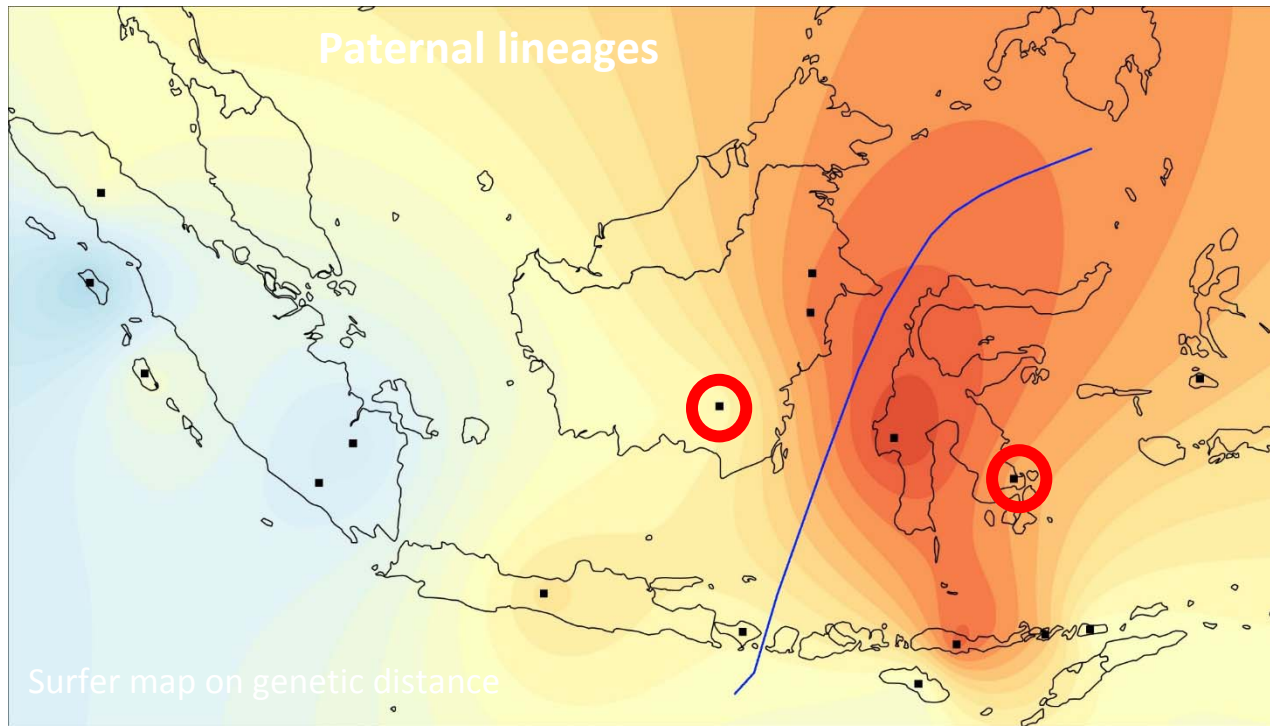
Une périodisation du malgache  
de l'origine au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle

*Préface de Liliane Ramarosoa*

L'Harmattan

# Genetics

- Kusuma et al. have recently explored this question from the point of view of genetics
- They compared both Y-chromosome (i.e. nuclear or paternal) DNA with maternal (mtDNA) for some 3000 individuals from Madagascar and Eastern Indonesia
- The general result was that the paternal line was far more affiliated to the Banjar than the Barito
- The Banjar are essentially local Malay in SE Borneo
- However, the maternal lines were more affiliated to Southern Sulawesi, Maluku etc.
- Difficult to interpret. Perhaps pre-Malays had become Barito-speaking? Presumably the mobile populations were marrying (by consent or seizing) women from the Eastern Indonesian region

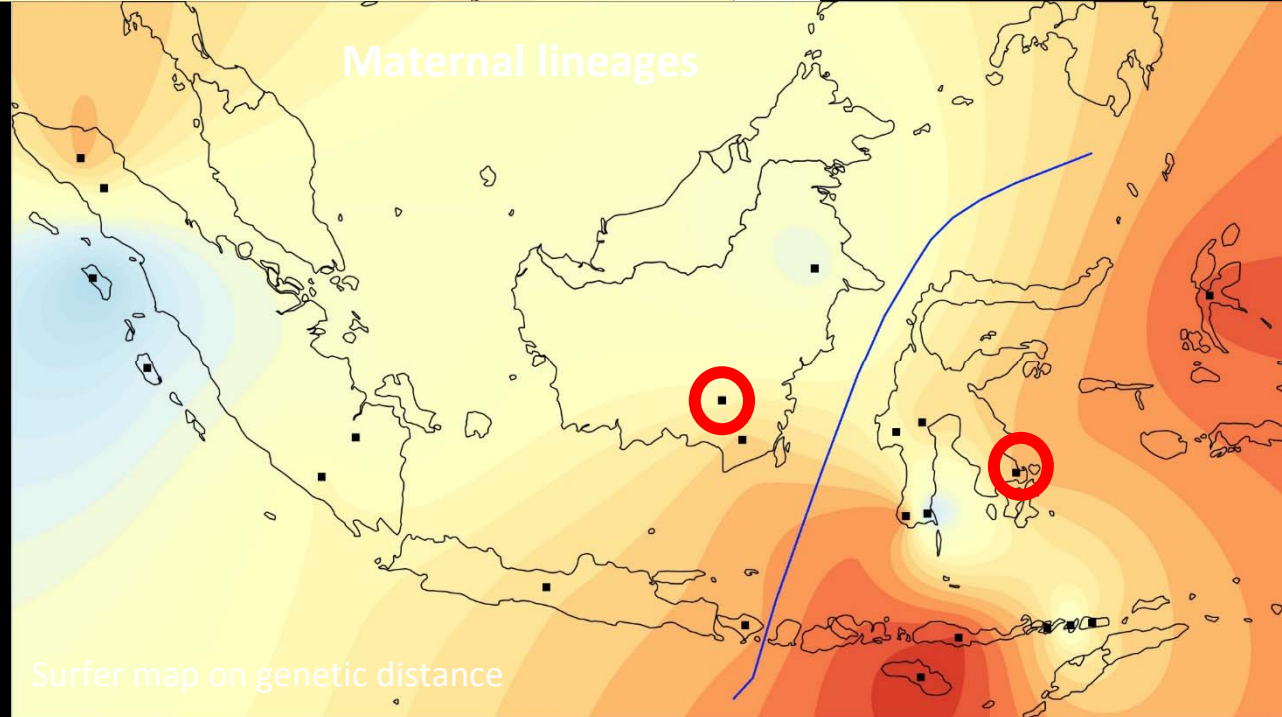


→ Y-chromosome

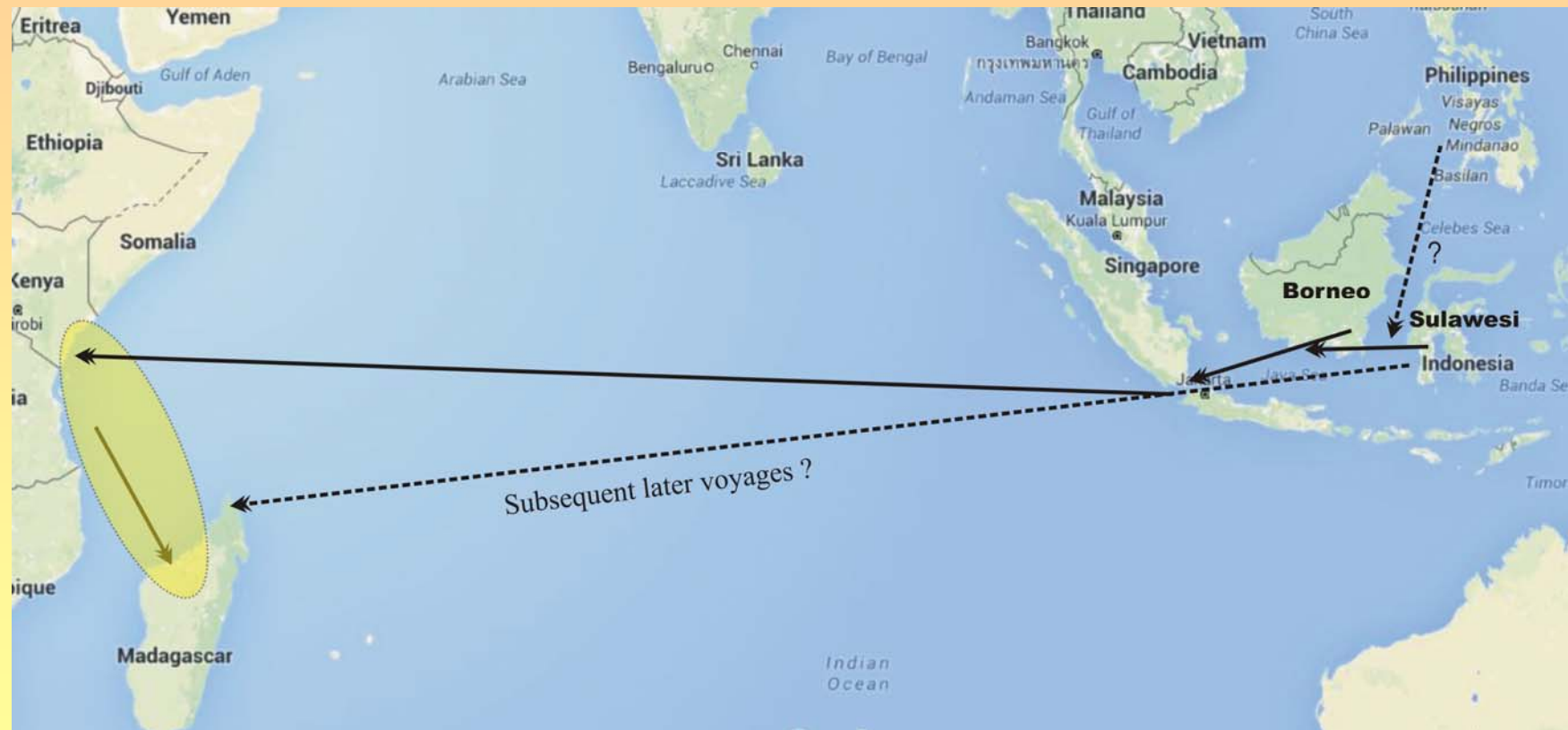
southern Sulawesi  
Eastern Borneo  
Lesser Sunda islands

mtDNA →

Maluku  
Lesser Sunda  
southern Sulawesi



# Malagasy origins



# The Vezo hypothesis I

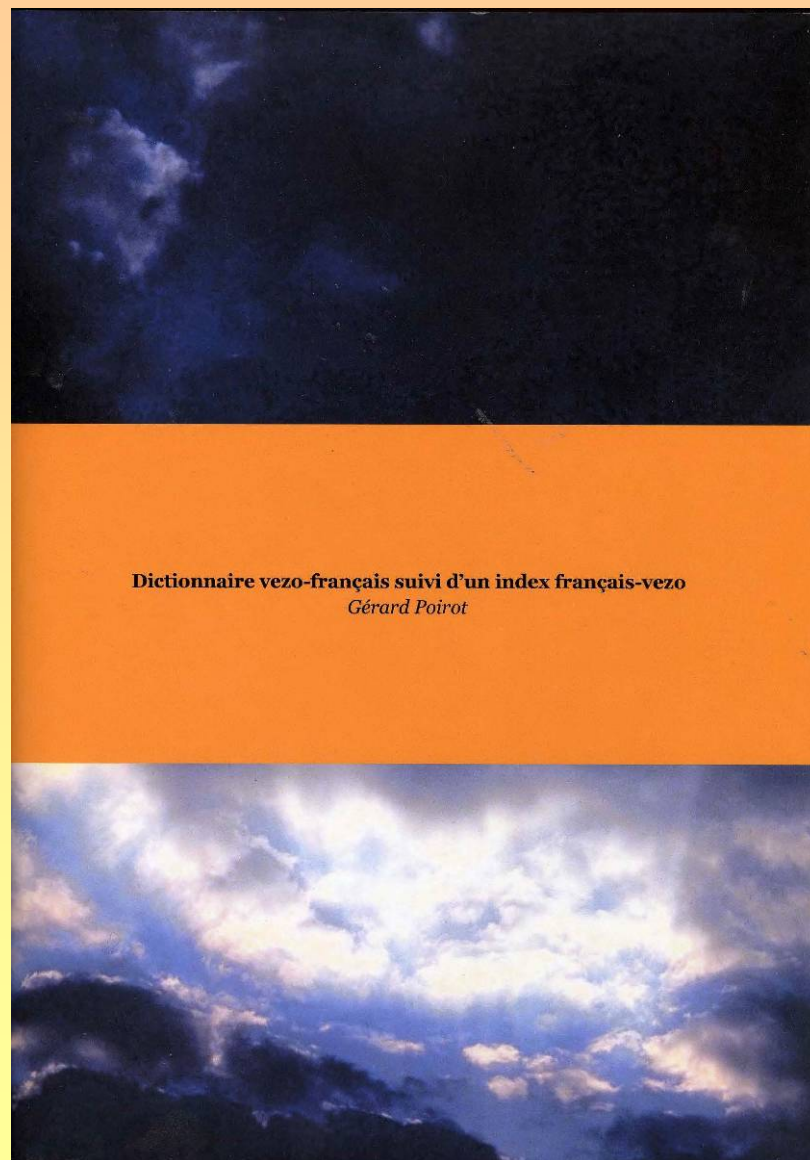
- Dahl (1970) argued some time ago that there was a link between the Vezo and the Bajaw, the sea-nomads who voyage between islands from the southern Philippines to Timor
- Their language is part of a group of languages known as Samalic, which is not part of the Philippines group, but most closely related to SE Borneo languages
- The Bajaw are nomadic fishermen, living on their boats and trading sea produce for staples and manufactured trade goods
- The Vezo are more land-based but also spend many months a year at sea, living on sandbanks fishing

# The Vezo hypothesis II

- Unfortunately there is little or no direct linguistic evidence for a connection between Vezo and Bajaw
- However, it is very striking that Vezo marine fish names are very different from other Malagasy names (although they resemble Antanosy)
- Given that Vezo is generally close linguistically to Merina, this is quite surprising and possible points to a distinct origin for their fishing culture.
- It certainly would not be unreasonable to imagine Bajaw following the route pioneered by the Malay ships reaching Madagascar independently



# Vezo dictionary



Dictionnaire vezo-français suivi d'un index français-vezo  
*Gérard Poirot*



# Vezo boats



# Vezeo smoking fish





# SE Asian sea nomads



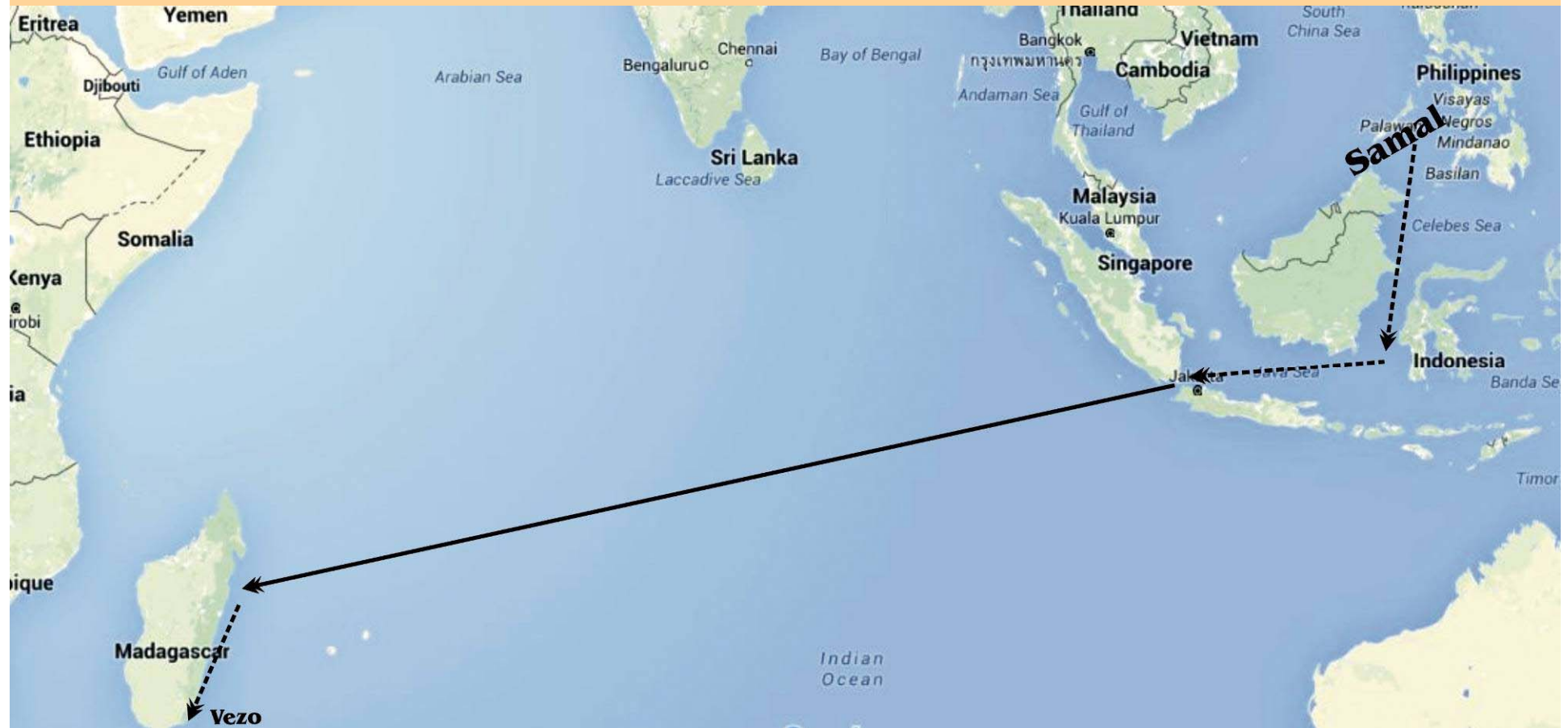
Adapted from a map by Torben Venning

# Sama Bajaw In Sabah



ex Torben Venning

# The Vezo hypothesis





# Conclusions I

- ❖ It seems credible that Malagasy contains cultural elements from a variety of languages of Island SE Asia
- ❖ The most probably model is that with the rise of Srivijaya in the sixth century, Banjarese trading ships were picking up crew, willing or unwilling, in the region between SE Borneo and Sulawesi
- ❖ So the 'mixed crew' hypothesis is most likely; individual ships may have been weighted more in favour of one or other ethnicity.
- ❖ Nonetheless, the distribution of a musical instrument such as the valiha among the highland Merina, points to some sort of Sulawesi connection, so subsequent independent voyages by both 'pre-Bugis' and Samalic peoples are not ruled out.

# Conclusions II

- ❖ The genetics is hard to interpret at the moment, but what is striking is that Malay is not the dominant language in Malagasy as the might be expected from these results
- ❖ It certainly is connected with the apparent lack of 'Austronesian' ceramics on Madagascar
- ❖ We will need to know a great deal more about early movement, trade, slavery in ISEA

# THANKS

- To the many people who have contributed to this talk, especially Philippe Beaujard, Sander Adelaar, Pradiptajati Kusuma
- The errors are entirely my own!

