# ANARCHY IN ALIFURU

## THE HISTORY OF STATELESS SOCIETIES IN THE MALUKU ISLANDS



BIMA SATRIA PUTRA

# ANARCHY IN ALIFURU

**The History of Stateless Societies in the Maluku Islands**

**– Bima Satria Putra**

*In the sprawling seas of the Maluku Islands lies a forgotten history – not of kings and sultans, but of people who lived without them.*

*Anarchy in Alifuru* reclaims the stories of the stateless societies of eastern Indonesia, revealing a world where political authority was earned, not inherited, and communities thrived through consensus rather than command. Drawing from early European travelogues, oral folklore, and anarchist anthropology, Bima Satria Putra invites us into a realm where power was shared, and hierarchy was optional. This groundbreaking work flips the script on conventional Indonesian historiography. Instead of focusing on sultanates like Ternate and Tidore, it explores the Alifuru World: a vibrant mosaic of decentralized island societies who chose autonomy over submission. Through vivid accounts of communal deliberations and egalitarian leadership, Putra illustrates how these societies resisted both Islamic state-building and European colonial conquest by refusing to be governed.

*Anarchy in Alifuru* is a meditation on freedom and the human desire to live without domination. For readers of James C. Scott and David Graeber, this book offers a powerful testament to the ingenuity of societies often dismissed as primitive. In a world increasingly shaped by centralized power, the story of the Alifuru reminds us that another way of organizing life not only existed, but thrived.

Bio: Bima Satria Putra is a writer, researcher, and translator. Interested in the study of history, anthropology, and ecology. His works include: *Perang yang Tidak Akan Kita Menangkan: Anarkisme & Sindikalisme dalam Pergerakan Kolonial hingga Revolusi Indonesia (1908-1948)* and *Dayak Mardaheka: Sejarah Masyarakat Tanpa Negara di Pedalaman Kalimantan.* He is currently conducting research on the Fire Tribes Project and remains committed to writing while serving his 15-year prison sentence from 2021.

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Bima Satria Putra

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Bima Satria Putra

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PO Box 568 Williamsburgh Station
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# Anarchy in alifuru

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# Preface to the English Edition

*"Re-assemble the atoms of our Zomian mind*
*So we can climb up high*
*Wander along and beyond the borders*
*Up in the highlands of my Zomia"*
**– The Observatory, "Oscilla"**



The place of Indonesia in the imaginary and discourse of contemporary leftist politics in the English-speaking world is conspicuously limited. Beyond a few fleeting references to its historic role in the Non-Aligned Movement, Indonesia remains largely absent from many of the key discussions shaping radical political thought today. This absence is striking, given the rich and often radical political currents that have flowed through the archipelago. This translation of a critical work by Bima Satria Putra, undertaken in collaboration with comrades from the Yogyakarta-based publishing project Page Against the Machine, aims to address this gap. This translation effort is not intended as a one-off endeavor, but as part of a broader, ongoing project to bring Indonesian perspectives to a wider audience while fostering connections across linguistic and political divides.

Mirna Wabi-Sabi's concept of "Anarcho-Transcreation" provides

a useful framework for understanding this effort. Rather than seeking one-to-one correspondence between words and meanings, Anarcho-Transcreation emphasizes the creation of texts that resonate deeply within specific political and cultural contexts. It is a process deeply embedded in mutuality, solidarity, and the practical needs of movements. This is not just about moving words from one language to another, but about capturing the spirit, urgency, and lived realities of those who resist. In this case, it also serves as a means of generating tangible support for imprisoned comrades and marginalized voices whose struggles often go unrecognized in mainstream discourse. English-speaking leftist circles, perhaps more than those of many other languages, have a tendency to overlook the importance of translation as a political act. Yet translation is not merely a linguistic exercise. It is a process of amplifying narratives that power seeks to repress or render invisible. The histories of stateless spaces and zones of freedom – from the Zomian highlands to the Alifuru communities of the Maluku Islands – are often precisely those that state power has the greatest interest in suppressing or erasing. In bringing these histories to light, translation becomes an act of recovery, a way of challenging the silences imposed by dominant historical narratives.

The work of translating these Indonesian texts, then, is not just a historical project, but an invitation to rethink the present. It asks us what we might learn from these histories, how they can inform our current struggles for autonomy, mutual aid, and freedom. As the Singaporean band The Observatory sings of re-assembling our Zomian minds, this effort seeks to reconnect us with radical traditions that, though geographically distant, are resonant with contemporary struggles. Even if the Zomian world or Alifuru society no longer exist in the same form, the spirit of these stateless spaces persists, offering powerful inspiration for ongoing and dispersed practices of resistance and

liberation. In this sense, the project of translating Indonesian radical texts is part of a broader effort to build a global political imagination that refuses the erasure of marginalized voices. It is a reminder that the world of radical ideas is richer and more varied than the Western canon alone would suggest, and that true internationalism demands a recognition of these diverse histories of struggle. The task, then, is not just to translate words, but to build the networks of solidarity that make those words meaningful in the context of ongoing struggles for freedom and justice.

# About

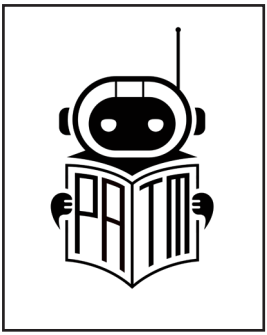
**Proyek Suku Api** (The Fire Tribe Project)



The history of Nusantara is oriented around rulers and conquerors. Proyek Suku Api seeks to deconstruct mainstream historiography by focusing on those who were ruled and conquered, namely the various stateless societies in Nusantara. Proyek Suku Api aims to cover as many regions as possible, including Kalimantan, Maluku, and Java.

**Contact: pustakacatut@gmail.com**

**Page Against the Machine**




Page Against the Machine, a small independent publisher promoting self-publishing, has been operating since 2019. We aim to translate anarchist texts and other critical social issues into English to elevate the narratives from non-European and non-academic writers who are first-hand witnesses to events or their own experiences.

As a cooperative, we are collectively managed under egalitarian, mutual cooperation and solidarity principles, ensuring that every member has access to resources, means of production, and benefits. Moving forward, we plan to collaborate with local authors and publish a greater number of texts focusing on critical literature, social struggles, feminism, anarchism, and queer topics.

**Contact: pageagainstthemachine2024@gmail.com**



# Introduction

> "It is said that the history of peoples who have a history is the history of class struggle. It might be said, with at least as much truthfulness, that the history of peoples without history is a history of their struggle against the State."
>
> – Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State*

Societies without states have existed and have been a common feature of human history across the globe, particularly in Southeast Asia. Steinberg (1987) stated that "far in the past, as today, Southeast Asia may well have been home for more different non-state ethnic groups than any other part of the world." He described the situation as follows:

> "…Whether in the mainland or in the islands, these hundreds of small peoples differed from those of dominant nearby state societies in many fundamental ways. There were a great many more such non-state societies, but in most cases they were a great deal smaller in population than the state societies. They did not have the very steep ladder of social rank all the way from slave to sacral king as in the state societies; most simply have village heads or elders; while some also had a superior social class of chiefs."

Stateless societies were spread across the Indonesian archipelago, including Maluku. Unfortunately, in Indonesian historiography, the history of the Maluku Islands is often centered around the discussion of the growth of Islamic Sultanates (especially Ternate and Tidore) amid the spice trade. That era came to an end when they fell to the colonial expansion of European nations. These two kingdoms were located on two minuscule islands situated across from each other. On the other hand, it is difficult to find information about how the "frontier regions" in Maluku played their roles in trade, religion, demography, and political exchange with the wider region, which to some extent had global consequences. In addition to being scantily recorded in national history, the peripheral areas of Maluku are usually mentioned only in the context of them being dragged into events happening in the center, namely the Ternate-Tidore area (and later Ambon). Within such a paradigm, peripheral phenomena are typically understood as the results of factors occurring at the center, rather than the other way around.

The explanation: Our historiography indeed emphasizes the activities of rulers and power. "Power" is a key concept by which the political center is seen as influencing its subjects. The center possesses the ability to regulate, mobilize, measure, and oversee the periphery, and it is rarely viewed the other way around. This paradigm appears to be widely accepted, so much so that even though the term "Maluku" existed before the arrival of Islam, some believe that the term "Maluku" comes from the Arabic word *muluk* (الملوك), which means "kings." Maluku is then interpreted as the "land of kings" or "land of a thousand kings." This is supported by the fact that tribal or village leaders held grand titles, including "*raja*" (king). However, many of their social organizations are difficult to describe as kingdoms and are more accurately referred to as stateless societies. At a

certain period, these *"kings"* were the result of appointments, promotions, and grants made by states that claimed power or conquered the regions where these communities resided.

Indeed, the term "Maluku" was initially used only to refer to the clove-producing islands in Northern Maluku, namely Ternate and Tidore. As both expanded their territories, the name Maluku was then used to refer to all the regions that were either conquered by or recognized the dominance of Ternate or Tidore, including Halmahera, Bacan, Makian, and Seram. The formation of the colonial state of the Dutch East Indies led to the gradual use of "Maluku" to refer to the entire region under the Maluku Residency, which was established in 1922 and included the Kei, Aru, Tanimbar, Wetar, and Kisar islands. These regions had not previously been called or considered themselves part of Maluku. The Republic of Indonesia continued this colonial administrative division, and Maluku later came to be accepted as a cultural concept that unified all the inhabitants of the eastern Indonesian islands, particularly the southern Maluku islands. From the time of ancient kingdoms to the modern state, the world referred to as Maluku is a space that can be fully understood only as a "state space," and likewise, its history follows this narrative.

This understanding not only prioritizes the center and ignores the periphery, but also frames the history of Maluku entirely as the history of its kings. In this context, the main topics of study related to Maluku are often focused on the history of the spread of Islam and the formation of the Sultanates, the spread of Christianity-Catholicism and the formation of the colonial Dutch East Indies, or the interaction of power structures within the context of the spice trade. Although there has been growing attention beyond the historiography of power, much

of it remains overlooked by Indonesian scholars or has not yet been translated.

In fact, although northern Maluku was dominated by a group of Muslim sultanates, particularly Ternate and Tidore, which emerged with the rise of the spice and forest products trade between regions in the 15th century, the central and southern regions were stateless. These areas were made up of settlements led by tribal chiefs or lineage leaders, which could be highly hierarchical (such as in Kisar and Kei) or relatively egalitarian (like in Aru).

Therefore, this book provides space for a type of historiography for those who were conquered, marginalized, and on the periphery. I attempt to reconstruct what James C. Scott, in his book *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (2009), describes it as a "non-state space." Scott's study focuses on the highlands of Zomia in Southeast Asia, where societies had fled from state projects – slavery, conscription, taxes, forced labor, epidemics, and warfare – of the surrounding nation-states. This book is highly provocative and has sparked ongoing academic debates about the type of "anarchist" societies that are believed to have deliberately chosen to remain stateless.

The challenge is that Scott's subject of study is highland societies in Asia, not the archipelago in the Nusantara. There is a different context that makes Scott's analysis not directly applicable to the archipelagic regions. For instance, states on the western side of the Nusantara and the Asian mainland typically emerged on the coasts and river deltas to monopolize access to goods exchange with the inland and highland societies. This geographical contour is difficult to find on the small, dispersed islands of Maluku, which have small populations. Additionally,

there is some opinion that seafarers had more opportunities to avoid oppressive elite groups compared to mountain dwellers.[1] This requires serious comparative study because both stateless seafaring and highland societies exist in Maluku.

In its historical definition, anarchism is certainly stateless, but stateless societies are not necessarily anarchist. Modern anarchism, which developed in Europe, is better understood in terms of specific ideological pillars and principles.[2] When I use the term "anarchy" here, it refers more to a broader libertarian universe, which is not always connected with historical terms but includes struggles and initiatives against authoritarianism, opposition to domination, and advocacy for egalitarian forms of relationships. Anarchy in this context has nothing to do with the revolutionary socialist tradition of anarchism as seen in Bakunin, primarily because its focus is on alternative political institutions (which are stateless) and does not address other aspects such as economic structure or gender studies.

However, I am not the first to use an anarchist approach outside its historical tradition. Scott is one such example, as well as the anarchist and anthropologist David Graeber, and Pierre Clastres with his classic work on South American Indian communities – specifically the Guayaki – titled *Society Against the State* (1977). A global overview of this approach is provided by Harold Barclay in *People without Government* (1992), with the subtitle "The Anthropology of Anarchism."

1. See the study by Olivier Ferrari and Jacques Ivanoff, *From Padi States to Commercial States: Reflections on Identity and the Social Construction Space in the Borderlands of Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Myanmar (2015).*

2. Felipe Correa. *Anarchist Theory and History in Global Perspective* (no date). Instituto de Teoria e História Anarquista / Institute for Anarchist Theory and History (ITHA/IATH).

This book is essentially a "history of anarchism," examining stateless spaces in Maluku, or the *extended* eastern Indonesian region, where societies continued to follow local political traditions and norms. In this context, I describe the forms of interaction that occurred up until the 19th century between stateless indigenous societies in central and southern Maluku (and some other areas in northern Maluku) and both Islamic sultanates and surrounding European colonial powers. I use Scott's analysis to complement the study based on the bibliographic data I have gathered.

This stateless space covers nearly one-fifth of the territory of the Republic of Indonesia. However, its core population now numbers only two million people. They inhabit thousands of large and small islands, primarily including Alor and Flores in East Nusa Tenggara, extending eastward through Wetar, Kisar, the Leti Islands, Babar, and reaching the southeastern-most point in the Tanimbar Islands. The stateless space can also be extended northward to the Aru Islands, Kei, and into Central Maluku, including parts of or the interior of Seram Island, Buru, Banda Islands, and up to the northern part of Halmahera.

The stateless space I am referring to is very extensive but lacks a specific name. In some early European literature, we occasionally find terms like "Timor Laut" [Tanimbar], "Southern Islands," "Southwestern Islands," or "Southeastern Islands." The historical use of the name "Maluku" is somewhat problematic because it was originally used to refer only to the five main islands around Ternate-Tidore. Referring to it as "Central and Southern Maluku" is now culturally acceptable to all the inhabitants of the region.

Nevertheless, I propose that this stateless space be referred to as the "Alifuru World" as a counter-narrative to the "Maluku World" proposed by Leonard Y. Andaya. From the center of Ternate-Tidore civilization [Maluku], the islands to the south were considered the domain of wild, primitive, and uncivilized people. In local terms, Alifuru, which according to van Baarda (1895) comes from the Tidore vocabulary *halefuru*, consists of *hale* meaning "land" and *furu* meaning "wild" or "savage." This is also why the southernmost sea in Maluku is called the Arafura Sea.[3]

Nevertheless, the term Alifuru originally referred to a broad category encompassing all non-Muslim and non-Christian societies living in the inaccessible inland regions of eastern Maritime Southeast Asia, not limited to Maluku. This name was also used to refer to the Minahasa people and other tribes in Central Sulawesi, as well as to Papua. This cultural boundary has the same political dimension, denoting societies in eastern Indonesia that were relatively autonomous or not fully integrated into the power structures of the sultanates and colonial states.

In Chapter 1, I will discuss the stateless societies, their forms of social organization, and the history of their encounters and early interactions with foreign influences in the context of trade, the spread of religions, and colonialism. I will refer as much as possible to primary sources, including various reports and records from explorers, traders, missionaries, and colonial officials. Although many of these sources are highly biased, they remain useful references when used critically and contextually.

3. There are several other etymological estimates regarding 'alifuru.' See Adolph Bernhard Meyer, *Über die Namen Papüa, Dajak und Alfuren* (1882), 13-15.

Stateless societies in Maluku should not be seen as passive and merely obedient subjects. In many places, both the sultanates and colonial states claimed large parts of the stateless space *de jure*, but *de facto*, much of this space was too fluid to be controlled due to the limitations of military power, communication and transportation technology of the time.

In Seram, Halmahera, and Buru, many communities avoided the state formation processes that brought war, taxes, and forced labor by living a nomadic lifestyle or residing in highland areas with difficult access, far from government reach. The situation is different in Tanimbar or Aru, where, although incorporated into state territory, people practically lived without government due to the absence of administrative structures and the mix of state interference in local affairs.

From the late 15th century to the 18th century, this stateless space gradually diminished and eventually disappeared with the formation of the Dutch East Indies colonial state. This process of "incorporation" occurred gradually and through various means, including conquest and slaughter, as well as peace treaties that were either entirely voluntary or manipulative. Often, these treaties were initially motivated by political motives to secure allies or rulers who could protect them from their enemies, eventually leading to full recognition of state sovereignty over them. The stages of state formation, territorial expansion, and their relationship with conquest will be discussed in Chapter 2.

While power consolidation took place to a certain extent, a similar scenario did not occur elsewhere in Maluku. Although they were involved in extensive trading networks, states did not form within their societies. Chapter 3 attempts to explain the thesis that: stateless societies had mechanisms to prevent the emergence of states within their communities.

Therefore, this book adopts the understanding that there are dualism of worlds, or spaces, namely the world of Maluku and the world of Alifuru. These two spaces, the state and the stateless, the center and the periphery, have dynamic, layered, and diverse relationships that vary over time.

I do not mean to suggest that social organization within and between stateless spaces remained the same over the past 200 years. Different historical periods had different impacts on different places. While I have made efforts to consult the earliest reports from European explorers and sailors, I must also utilize reports from colonial administrators as well as contemporary historians and ethnographers to understand how the portrayal of chieftain authority, independence among kinship units and settlements, and their autonomy from Islamic sultanates and later European colonial states evolved.

The descriptions and historical accounts of Maluku that I present in this section do not replace the sources from the indigenous people of Maluku. Europeans who came to Maluku were usually there for only a few days, so their opportunities for observation were very limited, and they often misunderstood what they saw. Furthermore, their observations were also influenced by their own socio-cultural backgrounds, filled with prejudices that placed Westerners as superior, along with their civilization and religion. As a result, their reports often contain derogatory statements about the people they encountered, such as comments on skin color, clothing, or lifestyle.

Alfred Russel Wallace is no exception. He spent months in the Amazon and the archipelago, building closer relationships with the local populations during his research. However, like other Europeans of his time, his fair praise still carries

a condescending tone for today's readers, as he presents an almost utopian impression that invites admiration:

> "It is very remarkable that among people in a very low stage of civilization we find some approach to such a perfect social state. I have lived with communities of savages in South America and in the East, who have no laws or law courts but the public opinion of the village freely expressed. Each man scrupulously respects the rights of his fellow, and any infraction of those rights rarely or never takes place. In such a community, all are nearly equal."[4]

Therefore, European historical sources should be treated as a complement to the original sources from the Maluku communities. I am very fond of conducting comparative studies with oral history, listening to folklore from elders where the boundaries between legend and history become blurred. This is something I cannot fully address. Due to certain limitations, I have confined this book to a literature review.

If recent findings differ, I leave the responsibility of providing accurate information to those with the capacity for field research. Fortunately, such work already exists, namely *Orang-orang Kalah: Kisah Penyingkiran Masyarakat Adat Kepulauan Maluku* (2004), edited by Roem Topatimasang. I suggest that my book be read before reading *Orang-orang Kalah* and serve as a guide to understanding the contemporary political and cultural context in Maluku. We must understand that the reality of marginalization of indigenous peoples and the expropriation of space today is clearly shaped by the historical

4. Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago* **(1877), 595.**

conjuncture related to the relationship between central and peripheral powers. Understanding the past helps our struggle today.

I must express my gratitude for the various assistance and support given to me. To Jesse and Risa, Arya and Intan, Claudia Liberani, and also to Vrije Bond in the Netherlands for providing research funding. There are many people who cannot or do not want their names to be mentioned, but you surely realize that without your roles, I would never have been able to complete this book.




**Figure 1.** Maluku Map

# Chapter 1.

## Non-state Spaces: The Earliest European Reports

In 1511, the Portuguese carried out a territorial conquest that became, at that time, the farthest-reaching in the history of humanity. A Portuguese fleet of 600 men, led by Afonso de Albuquerque, departed from India (Goa had been conquered the previous year) intending to conquer Malacca to monopolize the international spice trade and thwart Muslim navigation in the Indian Ocean. This effort aimed to break the deadlock caused by the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Empire in 1453, which closed for Christian traders the overland route via the Silk Road to Asia's valuable goods. The port city of Malacca, which controlled the narrow and strategic Strait of Malacca, became the point where all sea trade between China and India converged. In addition to gaining control over important sites for the distribution of spices to East Asia and Europe, the Portuguese also came closer to cloves (*Eugenia caryophyllata*) from Ternate and the islands off west coast of Halmahera, as well as nutmeg and mace (*Myristica fragrans*) from Banda Islands.

### Towards Banda

For a long time, Europe had vaguely heard descriptions of these Spice Islands from Muslim traders, who dominated the market not only for nutmeg and cloves from the Spice Islands, but also for ginger from China and cinnamon from India. For hundreds of years, the Arabs succeeded in keeping the location

of the Spice Islands a secret. They fabricated stories about the dangers of sailing to these islands posed by fantastical monsters and terrifying flesh-eating birds that guarded them. Such tales were designed to help Arab traders maintain their monopoly over the spice trade.

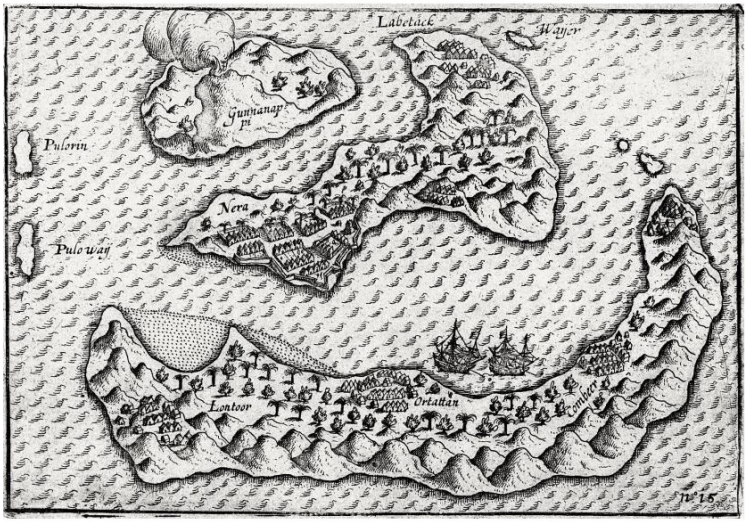



**Figure 2.** Map of the Banda Islands in 1599 (Source: *Tweede Schipvaart naar Oost-Indië under Jacob Cornelisz. van Nes and Wijbrant van Warwyck in 1598-1600*).

The earliest European report on this island can be traced back to the Italian explorer Ludovico de Varthema, who (arguably) arrived in 1505. In his work titled ***Itinerario de Ludouico de Varthema Bolognese*** [The Travels of Ludouico de Varthema of Bologna], published in Rome in 1510, Varthema describes Banda as follows:

> "There are no kings here, nor even a single governor, but there are some peasants who resemble wild beasts and have no understanding...

> Their belief is *getile*, but they are like the castes from Calcutta [India] called Poliar [Pulaya] and Hirava [Vettuvan]; their intellect is weak, and as for their strength, they have no energy, but live like wild beasts... There is no need for law enforcement here, because these people are so foolish that if they wished to commit a crime, they would not know how to do it."[5]

The Portuguese had not yet read Varthema's work, as the Portuguese survey from Malacca to the Moluccas was only conducted in 1511, a year after his work was published. One of the first Portuguese reports on Banda itself was written by Tomé Pires, a pharmacist who lived in Malacca for four years (1512-1515). Pires visited Java, Sumatra, and the Moluccas, and from his diligent work came ***Suma Oriental*** [The Eastern World]. This work is the earliest and most comprehensive description of the history, geography, ethnography, and economy of the eastern regions. Pires provides a report that somewhat differs from Varthema's:

> "These [islands] have villages; they have no king; they are ruled by cabilas and by the elders. Those along the sea-coast are Moorish merchants. It is thirty years since they began to be Moors in the Banda islands. There are a few heathen inside the country."[6]

---

5. Lodovico de **Varthema** *Itinerario de Ludouico de Verthema Bolognese ne lo Egypto ne la Suria ne la Arabia deserta & felice ne la Persia ne la India & ne la Ethiopia. La fede el uiuere & costumi de tutte le prefate prouincie* (Giovanni Angelo Scinzenzeler, Milan,1523) **Ch. XXXIII.**

6. Tomé Pires and Armando Cortesão (Penj). *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires: An Account of the East, From the Red Sea to Japan, Written in Malacca and india in 1512-1515.* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1944), 26.

The ***gentios [gentile]*** or "heathens" in the interior of Banda Island mentioned by Varthema and Pires refer to indigenous peoples with animistic beliefs, the native religions of the locals. Both Varthema and Pires were alluding to those the people of Maluku these days call Alifuru (or "native people"). The difference is that Varthema did not report the presence of Muslims. Meanwhile, Pires mentioned Moors living on the coast, referring to the local inhabitants who embraced Islam.



**Figure 3.** Portuguese watercolor c.1540, unnamed, found in the Códice Casanatense, depicting the people of Banda Island.

What is unclear is the ***cabila*** term, which comes from the Arabic plural word ***qabîlah*** (قبيلة) meaning "tribe." The Portuguese and Arabs used this term to refer to the Kabyle people, one of the Berber tribal groups in northern Algeria. Indeed, Pires wrote his initial impressions of the Banda inhabitants based

on his Portuguese background.[7] Perhaps what Pires meant by ***cabila*** were Muslim traders from various parts of the Middle East, possibly Arabs and Persians, who had settled in Banda. This is because Pires distinguished them from the "Moors," a term Europeans used to refer to Muslims in general. Arab Muslims invaded Algeria since the 600s, bringing exotic spices such as turmeric, nutmeg, ginger, cloves, and cinnamon from the Spice Islands in eastern Indonesia, eventually integrating them into the Mediterranean trade complex. Alongside the Arabs, the Kabyle were among the nations that fought against Christian kingdoms and ruled in the Al-Andalus region, southwestern Europe, which included parts of present-day Spain and Portugal. Pires might have referring to this context.

However, it is possible that Pires felt that the leadership of the Banda people was very similar to that of the actual Kabyle Berbers, hence he referred to them as ***cabila***. The Kabyle people have been described by historians and anthropologists as an "ordered anarchy." One Arab scholar, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), in his most famous work, once explained that the Ziz mountains they inhabit "is one of the most difficult of their refuges to approach and one of the easiest to defend. From there, they defy the power of the government and pay tax only when it suits them to do so." (Roberts, 2014: 147).

Pires' report is consistent and corroborated by another report by Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, son of a royal officer who served as a judge in Goa. In 1528, he accompanied his father to India. During his ten years there (1528-1538), he gathered as much information as possible about the discoveries and

7. Pires was raised during the successful expulsion of Muslims *(reconquista)* in Al-Andalus. If Pires was indeed born in 1465, then the fall of the Emirate of Granada as the last Islamic kingdom in Europe in 1495 would still be fresh in his memory. During these years, Pires had not yet travelled to Asia.

conquests by the Portuguese to write a book on the subject. Castanheda also traveled extensively to the Moluccas. Upon his return to Portugal, he worked on a historical work, the first edition of which was published in 1551. In that book, he described Banda as follows:

> "...this island is inhabited by the *gentios*, people who are poor and coarse, and the most notable reprehensible thing is the absence of a king to obey; each village has a *regedor* [governor] whom I call *Xabandar* [harbormaster], and they obey only out of friendship."[8]

From these three reports, we can see that in less than half a century, trading activities gradually organized settlements in Banda. Initially, the animistic society had no leader (*acephalous*), until village leader and *cabila* emerged. Villiers (1981) explains that Banda leaders (referred to as *orang kaya*) shared control of trading activities with the *syahbandar*, referred to as *cabila* by Pires. Syahbandar is a Persian title meaning "Harbor Master" introduced by the Javanese and Malays. In Maluku, the syahbandar, mostly foreign Muslim traders, oversaw international trade and foreign traders at the port. They were often trusted and appointed due to their extensive experience and foreign language skills. At a certain period, these traders must have gained respect and influence in Banda, but their authority was still limited to spice trade along the coast.

In turn, the local leaders of Banda earned the title orang kaya from the prosperity generated by the large-scale trade profits. Villiers (1981) compares the power of the Banda elders, whom

8. Fernão Lopes de *Castanheda, Historia do descobrimento e conquista de India pelos Portugueses* (1833), Book VI, Chapter V, 7.

he refers to as the "oligarchy of elders," with some indigenous communities in the Philippines during the early Spanish arrival. Like in the Philippines, Villiers believes that in Banda, land and spice tree ownership was communal (*ulayat*), with some managed by certain individuals whom the orang kaya could mobilize to cultivate the ulayat land on their behalf.

The orang kaya title is commonly found throughout the archipelago. However, Kathirithamby-Wells (1986) explains that there is a significant difference between the orang kaya in the western and eastern parts of the archipelago: While the orang kaya figures in the west were within a complex Sultanate structure and largely defined by the level and nature of royal authority and the commercial structure of the state, the orang kaya in the eastern islands functioned as a trading oligarchy within tribal societies (mostly without any state or centralized authority).

Unlike Ternate-Tidore, the absence of a king or single ruler in Banda compelled these leaders to act together to enforce political control or achieve shared economic benefits based on consensuses that was achieved through deliberations. Europeans had to deal with a unified group of ***orang kaya*** who achieved their positions of authority via the consent of the people. When the relationship between Banda and the Portuguese – initially established a hundred years prior – was still amicable in nature, the Portuguese Captain of Maluku, António de Brito, in 1522, made a friendship treaty with all the leaders on the island. Proudly, De Brito wrote to the King of Portugal, João III, about his achievement:

> "I have not yet written to Your Majesty about the *padrão* [inscription] that I have erected in Banda – the most beautiful and grand that can be found with Your Majesty's arms, nor the price that I have agreed upon in another letter... That price is for the cloves brought here and for the mace and nutmeg produced in Banda. I made this agreement forever with the prominent people and syahbandar on the island, because they have no king, and they all appointed me to execute it and agreed that anyone who opposes it must die."[9]

The Portuguese never built a fortress in Banda, and this also drew the permanent presence of the Dutch there. However, as time passed, the Banda people began to sense that the Dutch treatment was too harsh, thus leading them, in 1612, to seek assistance from the English by sending an envoy to negotiate on behalf of all *orang kaya* of Banda. When the English arrived, it was reported that they were ready to hand over their land to the English based on the agreement of all *orang kaya* (Villiers, 1981: 729-730).

The recorded deliberations of people in Banda Islands may have been facilitated by the proximity of villages and islands. Whenever an important matter concerning the continuity of the spice trade in Banda came about, the people could easily gather and produce collective decisions. This cohesion was rarely displayed in other islands of the Alifuru World: Geographical convenience and shared economic interests ensured political unity.

9. Letter of António de Brito to the King of Portugal, Ternate, February 11, 1523, in Artur Basílio de Sá, *Documentação para a história das Missões do Padroado Português do Oriente Vol.2.* (Agensia Geral do Ultramar, 1955) Quoted and translated from Villiers (1981).

Villiers refers to Banda people as "republicans"; Castanheda describes how people obeyed the syahbandar based on friendship [*amizade*]. To provide context, Villiers (1981: 728) compares the Banda society to what he describes as the "oligarchic rule of small chiefs" in pre-colonial Philippine society. When the Spanish first arrived there, the Filipino settlements (*barangay*) were led by elders called *datu* or *raha*.

While this comparison may be accurate, there are still significant geographical and cultural differences. Furthermore, the term "oligarchy of elders" implies gerontocracy, or power within a ruling class that accumulates with age, making the oldest person the most powerful. In fact, the Portuguese Captain in Ternate, Antonio Galvão, noted an interesting custom: trade affairs in the Maluku Islands were conducted by women. Galvão even commented that whenever decisions related to trade were made, "all family members had to give advice and opinions, and if someone said 'no,' even if that family member had only been six or seven years old of age, they could not proceed."[10] Galvão may have been exaggerating and his intention may have possibly even be to insult. However, he essentially emphasized that in Maluku, there was a highly participatory deliberation practice that placed elders in an honorable position but not as sole decision-makers.

Prior to the 1621 massacre, Banda had been a trading hub that connected other islands in the central and southern regions (around Seram, Aru, Kei, and Tanimbar) to Makassar, Java, and the Philippines. The Malay title *orang kaya* was adopted to refer to the prosperous local leaders of Banda who thrived from trade. Gradually, this title seemed to spread to other islands, possibly in the same manner, although in some cases,

10. Hubert Jacobs, ed. *A treatise on the Moluccas* (1971), 74-75.

this title is believed to have been given by the Dutch. Should we believe that the authority and political character of *orang kaya* in various parts of Maluku were more or less similar, it would then be useful to compare Banda with other stateless societies in Maluku, particularly the islands south of Banda which were considered problematic by the Dutch. "they could not really be regarded as having rulers,"" according to Dutch reports, because their leaders "had very little influence over their subjects, whose opinions they had to respect, and accommodate their administration to them."[11]

## The Predecessors and the Successors

The southern region in this context consists of Southwest Islands (formerly known as Serwatty Islands) which range from west to east: Wetar, Romang, Kisar, the Leti Islands, Sermata, Damar, to Babar Islands. It also refers to the Southeast Islands, which include Aru, Kei, and Tanimbar Islands. Throughout this region, *orang kaya* are commonly found, and in Kisar, Tanimbar, and Kei, they usually come from the "highest class" in the local social stratification. In Kisar, society recognizes three classes: the nobility (*marna*), the middle class (*anan*), which makes up the majority of the population, and the slave class (*aka*), consisting of war captives or purchased individuals.

This three-tiered stratification can also be observed in the Kei and Tanimbar Islands, which consist of the nobility (*mel*), the middle class (*ren*), and the slave class (*iri*).

11. Political Report of 1837 (Staatkundig Overzicht van Nederlandsche Indie) 1837 (Jakarta: National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia, 1971), 155. Quoted and translated from Sutherland, *Sea-ways and Gatekeeper* (2021), 129.



**Figure 4.** Kisar Islanders.

This classification can be traced back to the prolonged interaction between two types of communities deciding to coexist in one location. According to Thorburn (2018: 116), during the Majapahit era in the 14th to 16th centuries, traders and political refugees from Java, Bali, and Sumbawa arrived in Maluku. In the Kei Islands, for example, there are people from *Tanebar Evav* (Tanimbar Kei), most of whom are Hindu and claim their ancestral origins from Bali.

Many folk legends from Maluku and Nusa Tenggara often tell of newcomers who requested permission from the native leaders (*autochthonous*) to settle on unoccupied land or join existing clan groups. The newcomers were then offered leadership positions among the native population, as they were considered to possess social and cultural advantages. This gave rise to the phenomenon known as the 'stranger king,' which occurred voluntarily and without military force. This unification could

take various forms, but all within opposite categories: male-female, old-young, internal-external, or sibling relationships, etc. The relationship between the two could sometimes be balanced, sometimes unequal, depending on the context of that particular period.

Hägerdal (2012: 6) cited that this concept was encountered in Kupang in 1797. The Timorese people, who were allies of the Dutch, established settlements around Kupang. One of them reportedly said to the Dutch East India Company (VOC) master: 'We, the kings, have the land, and you have the sea.' The land rulers showed their respect to the sea rulers while still having the means to exercise power during negotiations.

On Buru Island, there is a separation between *geb fuk Buru-ro* ("people of Buru Island or mountains") or *geb fuka* and *geb man-lau taun* ("people whose affiliation flows/originates from the sea" [i.e., foreigners]) or *geb masi*. Buru Island was claimed by the Sultan of Ternate as one of his 'vassals' since the 16th century and for centuries, foreigners have made claims and drawn maps of Buru as a 'model' for their political aspirations. The Muslim kings on the coast of Buru Island legitimized their authority over the inland Alifuru people through the supremacy of Ternate and Islam, and implemented a tribute system where the Alifuru people would hand over a basket of rice, millet, coconuts, sago, sweet potatoes, and tobacco, as well as perform mandatory labor where a number of men would periodically work specifically for the kings. Nevertheless, according to Grimes (2006b: 136), the people of Buru "did not always embrace these foreign concepts or the political relationships that accompanied them." For Buru people, the king was seen as a 'gatekeeper to Buru,' meaning their role was to interact with outsiders.

Anthropological literature sometimes refers to this as diarchy or heterarchy, which means dual sovereignty, consisting of the predecessors from the native community or early arrivals, and the foreign king who came later. Sahlin explains this as:

> "[T]wo forms of authority and legitimacy coexist in a state of mutual dependence and reciprocal incorporation. The native people and the foreign rulers claim precedence on different bases. For the underlying people it is the founder-principle: the right of first occupancy – in the maximal case, the claim of autochthony. Earth-people by nature, often characterized as 'the owners,' their inherent relation to the land gives them unique access to the divine and ancestral sources of its productivity – hence their indispensable 'religious' authority and ritual functions. But the stranger-kings trump these claims of priority in aggressive and transgressive demonstrations of superior might, and thus take over the sovereignty."[12]

In Kei Islands, this division became institutionalized and stratified. *"Mel"* is a term for descendants of newcomers who assume "external" roles, while *"ren"* are descendants of the native population who assume "internal" roles dealing with spirits and ancestors, land and sea. The *mel* and *ren* classes essentially agree that they should live together in an egalitarian relationship where *ren* will secure the position of *teran nuhu* (or *tuan tan*, meaning land ruler) and *mel* will hold administrative or political leadership positions (Laksono, 1990: 110). The

12. Quoted from Todd Ryan Hooe "Little Kingdoms": Adat and Inequality in The Kei Islands, Eastern Indonesia (PhD Thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 2012)

actual hierarchical relationship only applies between *mel* and the slave class (*iri*). Both are minorities and considered newcomers (Adhuri, 201263).

These two groups form blood ties, thus rendering them siblings and unable to intermarry, as that would be akin to incest. As a result, a strict division gradually formed with clear political-religious rights and functions for each group – At a glance, it resembles a caste system. Stratification seems to have formed on islands where newcomers asked for permission to join, marry, or live with existing clan groups. When newcomers lived separately or occupied unclaimed land, dichotomy still emerged but did not become stratified. Although *geb man-lau taun* on the Buru coast are recognized as superior, they do not live together with inland *geb fuk Bururo*. As result, despite the separation, we do not find stratification on Buru Island.

Conversely, Wetar-Kisar and Kei-Tanimbar are examples of interactions where both communities live together in one place, resulting in a hierarchical impression over time. This phenomenon occurred especially when European colonialism intervened with structural arrangements that differed from their previous traditional political order: the strengthened authority of leaders resulted in class disparities. This is stratification.

## Power of the Chieftain

Despite the occurring stratification, the reports I have compiled below show that leaders in all regions of Maluku held nominal power with limited scope within their respective communities. Stratification does not necessarily imply class inequality and excessive accumulation of power, although this could lead to such conditions if colonialism co-opted them. However,

reports from the 17th to early 20th centuries confirm that this did not happen.

For example, in 1662, during its initiation, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) handed over the Dutch flag and appointed a tribal chief in Kisar named Bekker (or Pakar) as an official, and this formally placed Kisar under VOC control. This was an effort to expand the monopoly in the southern Maluku region while eliminating Portuguese influence in Timor. At that time, Bekker offered that they sell beeswax, slaves, turtle shells, and sandalwood exclusively to the VOC. When the agreement was renewed in 1665, around 400 representatives from various villages in Kisar gathered, deliberated, and agreed to the contract. Hägerdal (2019: 6) refers to this phenomenon as "a custom where a tribal chief could not make decisions without general consent, [which] was also found in other parts of southern Maluku in the 17th century."

Each village on Kisar Island was led by *orang kaya* from the *marna* class. English navigator George Windsor Earl (1841112) observed that the *orang kaya* in Kisar administered justice "like a father managing his family." When Dutch sailor Dirk Hendrik Kolff anchored in Kisar in 1825, nearly all the *orang kaya* on the island gathered and deliberated:

> "I have frequently observed, that the natives never decide on any point at the moment, but consult with each other until they have come to a determination. I therefore left them for a time, that they might have their deliberations to themselves."[13]

13. D.H Kolff, *Voyages of the Dutch Brig of War Dourga* (James Madden & Co.,1840), 50.

When Kolff continued his journey to Romang Island, he was also amazed by the involvement of women in decision-making. This was unusual in the political conditions of 19th-century Europe. Dutch women were only allowed to be elected to government positions in 1917, and it was not until 1919 that all Dutch women could participate in elections. But in Romang in 1825, Kolff wrote:

> "The power of the Orang Kaya, however, is by no means absolute, for in the event of any dispute the chiefs of the villages assemble, and the decision is carried by the majority of votes. It is remarkable that sometimes, on the death of a chief, his power is transferred to his wife, so that several women are often to be seen among the chiefs when assembled in conclave. The debates are occasionally continued for two or three days, but they are usually settled without much difference of opinion."[14]

Meanwhile, for Wetar Island, Hägerdal (2019b: 4) states "there are no areas approaching [the form of] kingdoms, only autonomous settlements." The diary of Joannes de Hartog, who visited Wetar in 1681, reports:

> "Wetar is actually the name of the inhabitants of the island, which is 70 to 80 miles in width and length. In most places, this region is filled with high and steep mountains that contain holes and caves where the Alifuru live. They rarely communicate or interact with the coastal inhabitants, except for bartering beeswax... Generally, they are found to

14. Kolff, *Voyages of the Dutch Brig of War Dourga* (1840), 87.

> be non-religious, and there is very little respect between the *orang kaya* and their subordinates."[15]

The inhabitants of Kei Islands live in villages (*ohoi*) led by the *orang kaya,* most of whom are from the *mel-mel* class. According to Catholic missionary Geurtjens, who worked in the early 20th century, the *orang kaya* in Kei "used to be very independent governors in their villages." Van Wouden (1968: 36) commented on this:

> "...we must most likely interpret this to mean that each village was essentially an independent unit... He [*orang kaya*] was not allowed to act arbitrarily, and for all important matters, he had to hold meetings with the 'elders' of the family group."

Stratification in Kei seems to have spread to the Tanimbar Islands, as their social classification is identical. However, the life of the Tanimbar people remained democratic. In the mid-19th century, a pair of Scottish explorers, the Forbes, lived for some time with the Tanimbar people. Naturalist Anna Forbes (1887: 180) reported: "they are without rules, without masters, they do not understand how to obey; you can request, pay, barter, but you cannot command." Her partner, Henry Ogg Forbes, a botanist, also observed:

> "Though they have an Orang Kaya or Chief, his voice has but little more influence than any other full-aged man's. The "old men's" opinion has some weight with the younger men, but every man

15. Quoted from Hägerdal (2019b), 4-5.

> speaks out his mind boldly and fearlessly. When any serious deliberation is going on, the whole community crowds round the assembly room, the women even taking part, and expressing freely and without offence their opinions. The voice of the majority is the law of their community."[16]

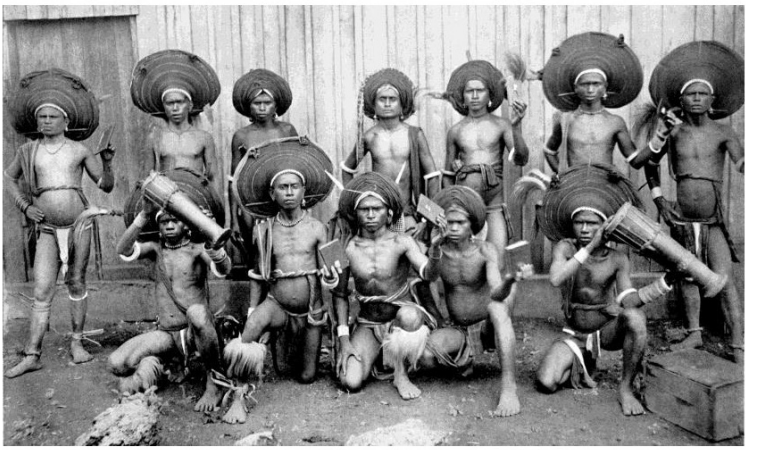


**Figure 5.** Tanimbar people, in 1912.

Piet Drabbe, a Dutch missionary and anthropologist, is a reliable information source for the Tanimbar people because he served there for 20 years (1915-1935), learned the local language, and conducted comparative studies with European texts written before his time. "The tribal chief had no authority at all. Matters were decided among themselves within the tribe itself," he wrote.[17]

16. Henry Ogg Forbes. *A Naturalist's Wanderings in the Eastern Archipelago* (1885), 319.
17. Drabbe. *Het leven van den Tanémbarees* (1940), 178.

Regarding the nature of the society, Drabbe concluded:

"One of the most striking features of the Tanimbar society is its independence and democratic spirit. Everyone is free to express their opinions in the assembly, including women. Leaders are not truly recognized, and officials are respected as long as people agree with them."[18]

The position of *"orang kaya"* can also be found in Aru Islands. However, unlike the surrounding islands, Aru society does not have social stratification. Various records from the early modern period indicate that Aru society is multicultural, non-hierarchical, and "fragmented into a large number of autonomous settlements" (Hägerdal, 2019: 481). Dutch explorer Jan Carstenszoon, during his expedition to Australia in 1623, observed that the people in the Aru Islands:

> "...there is no king at all, and they are not ruled by anyone; moreover, each country or village has a certain *orang kaya* recognized as the head, who nonetheless cannot decide on any deliberation without prior knowledge or notification of all the common people."[19]

## The Alifuru World

The above report came from the area south of Banda. However, if we extend the scope of the reports, we find consistent results. The expanded area in this manuscript will be referred to as the Alifuru World. During the formation of states in Maluku and

18. Drabbe. *Het leven van den Tanémbarees* (1940), 9.

19. L.C.D van Dijk, 1859. *Twee togten naar de Golf van Carpentaria: J. Carstensz 1623, J. E. Gonzal 1756: benevens iets over den togt van G. Pool en Pieter Pietersz.* Scheltema.9-10.

the early arrival of Europeans in the 16th century, the Alifuru World nearly encompassed all the islands in today's Maluku Province (712,000 km²) and parts of the peripheral areas of North Maluku Province. I extend this area by considering the borders with the Indianized region of Bima and Sumbawa, including Flores and Alor Islands in East Nusa Tenggara, the interior of Sulawesi, and parts of the southwest coast of Papua. It includes three Malayo-Polynesian language groups: all speakers of the Central Malayo-Polynesian language group, South Halmahera-West New Guinea, and the southernmost users of the Philippine language.

The initial references to the spread of non-state areas in eastern Indonesian islands can also be seen from Spanish sources, who arrived in Maluku after the Portuguese. Due to the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, Spanish ships were prohibited from traveling to spice sources by sailing east around Africa, which was under Portuguese control. Therefore, many sailors volunteered to sail west, seeking an alternative route to Maluku through America. This mission was accomplished in the expedition led by Ferdinand Magellan, sanctioned by Spanish King Charles V. It departed in 1519 and is known to be the first to successfully circumnavigate the globe. Five ships set out on this expedition. After facing strikes and discords among the crew, some of them reached Maluku within two years of sailing. Afterwards, they traversed the Indian Ocean and reached the southern tip of Africa, then returned to Spain in 1521, haunted by concerns about the Portuguese fleet.

Three years after setting sail, out of the five ships that sailed, one returned to the port. Out of 238 people, 18 returned. The leader of the Magellan expedition died in the Philippines after clashing with the local population. Antonio Pigafetta, one of those who returned, then wrote *Relazione del primo viaggio*

*intorno al mondo* [Report on the First Voyage Around the World] in 1524-1525. His work complements various early European encounters with Maluku and helped construct the scope of non-state areas traversed within the return route, on which they were guided by a Ternate navigator.

To return to Spain, from Ternate Pigafetta sailed past the Bacan and Obi Islands. From there, he stopped at Lifamatola Island, the easternmost of the Sula Islands. Pigafetta explained: "This island is named Sulach; its inhabitants are Gentiles, and have not got a king. They eat human flesh; both men and women go naked, except a piece of the bark of a tree of two fingers' breadth before their natural parts."[20]

When Pigafetta arrived, Sula Islands had been conquered by Ternate through the colonization of Sula Besi Island. However, some Alifuru in the interior of Taliabu Island, the largest island in the Sula Islands, enjoyed full independence from the *sangaji* [leader – Ed] appointed by Ternate. A summary of the memoir of a Dutch officer, Pieter van Hulstijn, in 1915 stated that:

> "Only a few tribes formed small settlements not far from the coast, while most of the Alifuru tribes lived nomadically and stayed in one place for no more than a month. As a result, near-anarchy almost occurred among them. It is true that the Muslims appointed their leaders with various titles, but they had no authority whatsoever."[21]

From Sula, Pigafetta proceeded to Buru Island. "The inhabitants [of Buru] are *gentiles*, and have not got a king," he writes, and

20. Antonio Pigafetta. *The First Voyage Round the World* (1874),148
21. Adatrechtbundel XXIV: *Groote Oost* (1926), 62.

"they go naked like those of Sulach."[22] The Alifuru people in the interior of Buru – in local etymology called *geb fuka* ("mountain people") -live in kinship groups called *noro*. Barbara Dix Grimes (2006a117) explains that there is no centralized political or ritual system uniting the various autonomous *noro* on the island. Buru people describe this relationship through the proverb: "each *noro* governs its own *noro*" (*noro saa perinta tu nake noro*). Each *noro* has a leader (*gaba emngaa*) who is appointed and designated by the elders, and is described as follows:

> "Because of egalitarian values in Buru culture, leaders must operate not by ordering people about, but by their personal charisma and ability to persuade their kinsmen to go along with what they suggest. Whether or not people *caan* (literally "listen to," and in an extended sense "follow/go along with/obey") a leader depends on his ability to persuade them to do so. Decision making is accomplished not by declaration of the *geba emngaa* – either individually or collectively – but by persuasion and ultimately by consensus among all those involved in a matter."[23]

Aside from Banda, which "has no king," Pigafetta also mentions Ambon. However, it seems that Pigafetta's description points to Seram Island. Pigafetta explains: "It is inhabited by Moors and Gentiles, but the former are on the sea shore, and the others in the interior; these are also anthropophagi."[24]

22. Pigafetta, *The First Voyage Round the World* (1874), 149.

23. Barbara Dix Grimes." The Return of The Bride: Affiliation and Alliance on Buru" (thesis, The Australian National University, 1990), 21..

24. Pigafetta, *The First Voyage Round the World* (1874), 149.



**Figure 6.** Alifuru Seram people with furs and jewelry, 1865-1879.

Sachse (1907: 79) states that the Alifuru leaders in Seram "were not much different from their people. Daily, they went out together with their subordinates to earn a living with their own hands, and the authority they exercised was not absolute at all." There are several ethnic groups of Alifuru in the interior of Seram. The most prominent in the west are the Wemale and Alune, and in the center are the Nuaulu and Huaulu. Knaap (1993: 252) explains that both the Wemale and Alune "do not have a central institution that can provide them with a sense of unity." Meanwhile, the social unit of the Nuaulu is described as "a consensual federation of initially separate and autonomous groups" (Valeri, 1990: 61). The *raja* (kings) in Huaulu are described as "not at all comparable or equivalent to the position of 'King' in the general sense as 'sole and absolute ruler'"

(Topatimasang, 2016: 147). The same is said of the *latu* of the Wemale, who "are not 'sole rulers' with absolute authority over all societal and customary matters of the Wemale community" and are "far more democratic and egalitarian than the 'modern' societal order today" (*Ibid*, 2016: 158-159). When a Dutch East India Company commissioner went to Ambon in 1633, he observed that the two Wemale kings he met "looked more like beggars than nobility, let alone kings" (Knaap, 1993: 257).

Meanwhile, the easternmost tip of Seram – including the Seram Laut and Gorom Islands, along with the mainland adjacent to the large island – in the 1800s consisted of "a large number of relatively autonomous domains with a similar political organization and social structure, some large and influential in trade and politicking…" (Roy Ellen, 2003: 91). Alfred Russel Wallace, through The Malay Archipelago (published 1869), describes the limited authority of the king in this place:

> "In the island of Goram, only eight or ten miles long, there are about a dozen Rajahs, scarcely better off than the rest of the inhabitants, and exercising a mere nominal sway, except when any order is received from the Dutch Government, when, being hacked by a higher power, they show a little more strict authority."[25]

From Buru Island, Pigafetta proceeded to East Nusa Tenggara, which is part of the Lesser Sunda Islands. This area stretches from Lombok Island, bordering Bali in the west, to Timor Island at its eastern end. The Sunda Kecil Islands had long been suppliers of sandalwood, sulfur, and beeswax to traders

25. Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago* (1877), 372.

from Java, Maluku, Makassar, the Philippines, and China. Although the western part (Lombok, Sumbawa, and Bima) had established coastal kingdoms, Hägerdal (2020: 19) states that "Some areas of nearby Flores, Sumba, Wetar, etc. were stateless."

Risking a slight digression, we must take the time to discuss this region. East Nusa Tenggara has closer ties to Maluku than one might think. The language on Flores Island, for example, is closer to that of Seram than to that of Sumbawa, as part of the Central Malayo-Polynesian language family. Many settlements in East Nusa Tenggara also claim origins from Maluku, with the most striking example being an island named Ternate. More importantly, the people in Southwest Maluku have stronger cultural ties with East Nusa Tenggara than with other parts of Maluku around the Banda Sea.

The social organization of East Nusa Tenggara society was almost homogeneous. In most places, the inhabitants lived in communities with formal leaders, but there were still no large centralized institutions uniting these various communities. The further east and south, the weaker and less felt the influence of other Nusantara kingdoms. There were many areas in the inter-island and interior regions that maintained their relative autonomy amongst coastal Muslim settlements with political and historical ties to Bima, Ternate, or Makassar.

When Pigafetta's ship passed through this area, they were struck by a storm and forced to stay for fifteen days in Malua [Alor]. Pigafetta wrote: "The inhabitants of this island are savages, and more beasts than men; they eat human flesh; they go naked, except the usual piece of bark to cover their natural parts."[26] It seems that Pigafetta is referring to the Abui tribe (which means

26. Pigafetta, *The First Voyage Round the World, by Magellan* (1874), 150.

"mountain people") in the interior of Alor. Hägerdal (2012: 179) states that the Alor people were mostly "…stateless tribal groups in the highlands." This wild impression, according to him, is the result of the widespread slave hunting carried out by people from other islands. These tribal groups have a fearsome reputation for driving away attackers.



**Figure 7.** Alor people, circa 1900's.

Throughout their history, the Abui people maintained full autonomy. Du Bois (194416) states that the Dutch only appointed *kings* from the coastal communities in 1908. These *kings* were given control over the interior areas to collect taxes and mediate conflicts. However, "the coastal people exercised no power over the mountain population…" and "…taxes are still reluctantly paid." A real conquest occurred in 1918 when oe of the *kings* was killed by the Abui people. This was met with

a military expedition and pressure to relocate the Abui villages in Atimelang to areas more accessible from the coast.

Pigafetta then departed from Alor and the next day arrived at the eastern part of Timor Island. "We had approached that part of the island where there were some villages with their chiefs or head men," wrote Pigafetta. "On the other side of the island are the dwellings of four kings, and their districts are named Oibich, Lichsana, Suai, and Cabanaza."[27] Timor consisted of several tribes and ethnic groups that live in villages with formal leaders. Europeans referred to these leaders as "kings" or even "emperors," as Europeans preferred to honor them with royal terms. However, Hägerdal (2012: 53) states that referring to them as "chiefs" seems more appropriate. The rulers were indeed central components in the system, but their executive power was usually passive and not extensive.

In 1811, the future Portuguese governor of Timor, Affonso de Castro, stated that the island of Timor was divided into two main tribes: the Belu in the east and the Atoni in the west. In his report, all the Timorese villages were referred to as "kingdoms":

> "Belu comprehends 46 more or less powerful ones [*Kingdoms – Ed.*], but all are free and independent among them…The province of Servião has got 16 kingdoms, which all recognize as their superior Senobay [Sonbai] with the title of emperor [imperador], who is king of the Kingdom of Servião, from which the province has taken its name... In that way the whole island of Timor is divided into 62 kingdoms…"[28]

27. Pigafetta, *The First Voyage Round the World, by Magellan* (1874), 152.
28. Affonso de Castro, *As possessões Portuguezas na Oceania* (1867), 185. Quoted in Hägerdal (2012), 68.

Another report implied that the authority of leaders in Timor was weak. The daily notes of Dutch East India Company Lieutenant Jacob Pietersz van der Kerper, documenting the journey from Kupang to Ade in East Timor, stated: "Although there are here various chiefs and negeri, of which the one cannot undertake anything without the consent of the others…"[29]. In the 1820s, a sailor whose ship wrecked in Timor even recorded:

> "The sandalwood islands have neither king nor lesser chiefs…. The highest rank is Anakoda which means a well-off man, who is master of a large piece of land, four or five buffalos, two horses and other cattle, however he exercises no control over anyone except his own servants, whose subordination only exists in name, because master and man eat from the same dish and work peacefully together. They have a hereditary nobility, encompassing rich and poor. The right conferred by this position is that of being able to speak at council meetings, [the] nobles [are] called "Meraboo," which could be translated as the elders of the people."[30]

In the eyes of Europeans, Timor was a vague and doubtful case where small states were difficult to call states, and small kings were difficult to call kings. These characteristics of Timor made Hägerdal (2012: 59) refer to it as an "early-state." But whether the small regions in Timor should be labeled as "states" or not, Sutherland (2021128) considers it a futile debate, as it depends

29. Dutch East India Company report quoted in Hägerdal, "A note on Ade" (2007), 556.

30. The story by the ship captain, J. Battis, published in two parts: J.D.K. [ruseman], "Beschrijving van het Sandelhout Ei-land," *Oosterling: tijdschrift bij uitsluiting toegewijd aan de verbreiding der kennis van Oost-Indie 2* (1835), 72-75. Quoted in Sutherland (2021),128-129.

on perspective and preference. Essentially, the political regions in Timor are very small and decentralized.



**Figure 8.** Prince Afuan Thaal of Aplal, Central Timor, with his wife, Miomaffo, circa 1898.

Lastly, before Pigafetta sailed into the Indian Ocean to return to Europe, he received a story from the inhabitants of Timor that a day's journey to the northwest lay the island of Ende [Flores]. "Its inhabitants are *Gentiles,* and have no king," wrote Pigafetta.[31] It is unclear whether Pigafetta referred to the whole island of Flores or the Ende tribe. However, Ende was part of the six ethnic groups in Flores. The others are Manggarai, Ngada, Lio, Sikka, and Larantuka. Before the Dutch arrived in Flores, Manggarai and Ngada were under the influence, or perhaps

31. Pigafetta, *The First voyage round the world, by Magellan* (1874), 153.

the power, of the Islamic sultanates in Bima (Sumbawa) and Gowa (South Sulawesi). Ende was the seat of an independent Muslim king allied with Bima, while the mountainous Lio region was divided into many local political territories. In the sixteenth century, Larantuka and the Solor Archipelago to the east were ruled by several local kings, and the king of Larantuka held an important position through contact and trade with the Portuguese.

Nakagawa (1989: 33) states that the Lio Ende people were organized into clans *(ata)* that were independent of each other in terms of ritual and politics. The same can be said of the Tana Dea people, who were divided into several autonomous sub-units called *pu'u muku/doka dea*. Lewis (1988: 15) explains that the Tana Ai people in Sikka never had an indigenous king and "did not have or never developed a government." The Ngada people in Sara Sedu, according to Molnar (2002: 6), "claim to have been autonomous and independent, and even within their own domains the various clans occupying Sara Sedu all had autonomy with regard to land, ritual, and political matters." This depiction applies to most other inland areas of Flores.

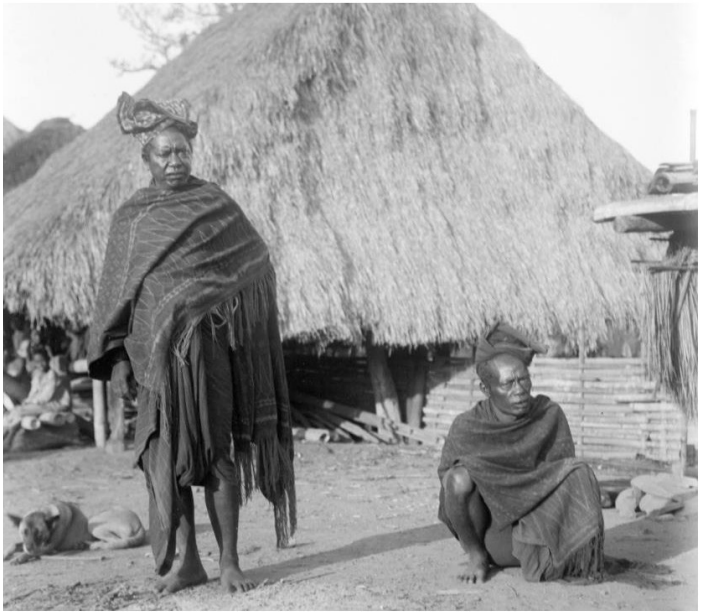


**Figure 9.** Raga Ngole, chief of the Nage region in Ngada, Flores, circa 1910's.

Although the information gathered by Pigafetta did not always come from direct observation, his notes are worth considering as an introductory reference to the lives of the Alifuru. Pigafetta tried to differentiate between societies that had kings and those that did not. For example, when he discussed the Maluku Islands, he explained: "Mutir and Machian have no king, but are governed by the people; and when the kings of Tarenate and Tidore are at war, they furnish them with combatants."[32] Compare this to when he described the "village head" from Amaban in Flores, who "has only women in his service."[33]

32. Pigafetta, *The First voyage round the world, by Magellan* (1874), 127
33. Pigafetta, *The First voyage round the world, by Magellan* (1874), 151

Pigafetta's route did not extend far enough to the east. Therefore, to complete it, we need other sources. If we turn to Halmahera, which has been partly under the influence or control of Jailolo, Ternate, and Tidore since the 16th century, we are to find the same results. There are several sources to be quoted, such as Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola, who was assigned to write about the victories in the conquests by summarizing all the important writings and notes of the Spanish state. His official chronicle, titled Conquista de las Islas Molucas (1609), is the most comprehensive Spanish record of the situation in Maluku in the 16th-17th centuries. During this time, with the help of the Spanish, the power of Ternate-Tidore began to extend to Halmahera Island. Although it seems that Argensola was referring to the extinct Moro people, he described northern Halmahera (called Bathocina) as follows:

> "The inhabitants of the northern side of Bathochina are wild people, without kings, laws, or cities, who live in abandoned places... Each village is governed by a *Superior* [Ruler] chosen by its people; they do not pay taxes to him, but they respect his descendants."[34]

Halmahera is larger and more ethnically diverse. The Tobelo, being the largest group on the island, traditionally live in settlement groups (*hoana*), described as "internally autonomous" (Topatimasang, 2016: 50). Meanwhile, reports about the interior of Halmahera from the early colonial period are hard to find. Even today, this island is the only place in Indonesia where the interior inhabitants, commonly referred to as Togutil (inner Tobelo), are nomadic and have survived

34. Argensola, *Conquista de las Islas Molucas* (1891), 70-71.

despite the shrinking population due to industrial mining disturbances. Like many anarcho-primitivist societies, they live in small, non-hierarchical, and autonomous groups, and because they are quite safe being at the farthest reach of civilization, they remain stateless under the new republic, possibly still the same as their ancestors. Until further research is conducted, not much can be said about them.

Papua is similar to Halmahera. Northern coastal Papua has been loosely connected with Tidore and also adopts attributes and ranking systems. Andaya (1993) refers to this as "Tidore-ization." However, this does not apply to the stateless interior Papua:

> "With a few exceptions, there is no stratification system based on rank within local groups because it would be difficult to enforce status differences among siblings. Therefore, there will be no political-legal machinery like in Western states where all authority is ultimately centralized at the top and delegated to junior officials."[35]

The above situation applies more or less to both West Papua and Papua New Guinea. On these islands, leaders who usually hold hereditary titles from clans or larger social formations are described as "essentially democratic." They differ from officials in Western states in three ways. First, the leaders have a limited role in decision-making due to relatively static economic and social affairs. Second, true authority does not extend to the judicial domain. Leaders and elders in each community do not issue binding legal decisions. Young people sometimes ignore

35. Argensola, *Conquista de las Islas Molucas* (1891), 70-71.

or even reject these decisions if they have different proposals. Finally, the social scope of the leaders' authority and influence is very limited. They are not allowed to regulate agriculture or other important activities or interfere in disputes outside their local groups as this could provoke conflict with opposing groups. The situation varies among tribes. Among the Gahuku-Gama people in the highlands of Papua, the elders' voices are stronger and listened to, while the Garia elders cannot always rely on the loyalty of followers who might move to another settlement or leader.[36]

36. Argensola, *Conquista de las Islas Molucas* (1891), 24-25.

# Closing

From northern Halmahera, central Seram, southeastern Tanimbar, and southwestern Flores, these non-state spaces have been documented in early European observations. I am aware that these various sources are cited from a very long period, starting from the 1500s to the early 1900s. There are many possibilities and contexts that apply to subjects from regions that are also very vast and diverse. Therefore, I admit that in some cases lie the tendency for major generalizations.

Despite these shortcomings, we can draw a general conclusion. The Alifuru world was a society without centralized institutions overseeing various groups or settlements that are autonomous from one another. These groups and settlements were bound only through kinship ties or alliance agreements. Each village had various leaders and chiefs whose power is limited or almost nonexistent. Sometimes the village chiefs were actually creations of Ternate-Tidore or the Dutch. The *king* title at times lead to incorrect conclusions about the relatively egalitarian and democratic nature that is contrary to real authority. Of course, there were some exceptions, such as the hereditary titles of tribal chiefs, social stratification, or the division of villages that submit to a parent village. But all this does not reach a size worthy of being called a kingdom or state. There had been no significant difference either in appearance or wealth between the leaders and the general members of the community. All decisions related to public affairs were always made through deliberations involving many people. In short, there was no centralization of power and accumulation of wealth as in state societies (we will discuss this further). This is what we mean by anarchy.

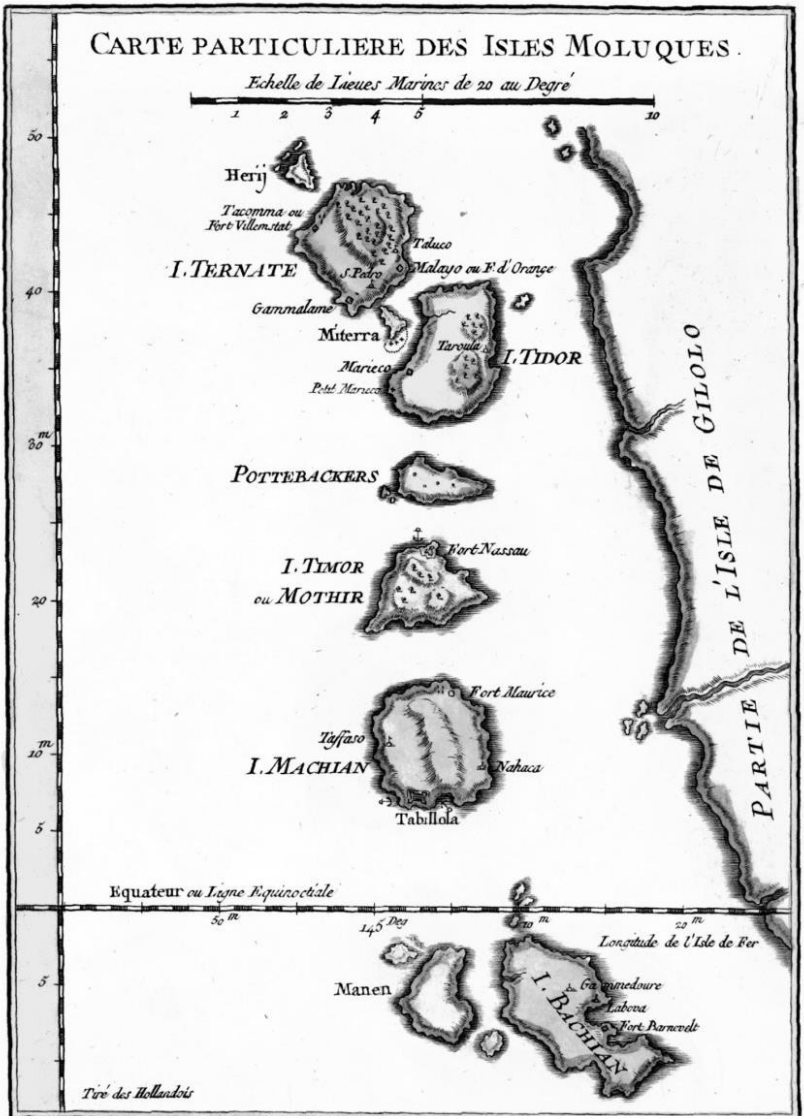



**Figure 10.** Map of Maluku made by French cartographer Jacques-Nicolas Bellin in 1760. Showing Ternate, Tidore, Motir, Makian and Bacan. Gilolo [Jailolo] is the west coast of Halmahera.

# Chapter 2.

## State Formation in Maluku

### Ancient Tales

António Galvão served as the governor of the Portuguese colony and fortress in Ternate from 1536 to 1540. During this time, he compiled information about the inhabitants and the land into a manuscript titled *Historia das Moluccas.* This manuscript was never published and was kept as an archive in Seville. It was only discovered and translated into English in 1970, under the title *A Treatise on the Moluccas.*

During Galvão's time, Maluku was a reference to the five small clove-producing islands in northern Maluku (Ternate, Tidore, Moti, Makian, and Bacan). In his work, Galvão explained that four of them, "was independent [*senhorio*], territory [*camarqua*], and boundaries [*demarcação*]. They lived together in communities, but everyone at his own convenience. They were ruled by the voices of the eldest, of whom one was not better than the other." However, he added that "they used to have neither law nor king..."[37] The story of the coronation of the first king of Bacan has been recorded by Galvão:

> "Once long ago there were no kings and the people lived in kinship groups (Port., parentela) governed by elders. Since "no one was better than the other," dissension and wars arose, alliances made and broken, and people killed or captured and ransomed. In time some became more powerful than others, captains and governors were created,

37. Jacobs, Hubert (ed. & trans.). *A Treatise on the Moluccas* (1971), 74,76.

but there were still no kings. One day a prominent elder of the island, named Bikusagara, went sailing on a kora-kora [a local double-outrigger vessel). He spied a clump of beautiful rattan growing near a precipice by the sea and sent his men ashore to cut some stalks. When they arrived at the spot, the rattan was nowhere to be seen, and so they returned to the korakora. Exasperated, Bikusagara himself went ashore and immediately located the clump of rattan. He ordered his men to cut down some of the stalks, but as soon as they started to hack into the rattan, blood gushed forth from the cuts. Startled by this strange phenomenon, Bikusagara jumped back and noticed nearby four naga [serpent) eggs hidden among the rocks. When he approached these eggs he heard a voice ordering him to take the eggs home with him because from them would emerge individuals of great distinction. Mindful of the command Bikusagara carefully placed the eggs in a totombo [a rattan box) and brought them home where they were guarded with great care. After some time the eggs brought forth three males and a female. When they grew up one of the men became the king of Bacan, the second the king of the Papuas, the third the king of Butung and Banggai, and the woman became the wife of the king of Loloda. From these original four descended all the kings of these islands"[38]

38. Jacobs, Hubert (ed.& trans.). *A Treatise on the Moluccas* (1971), 81-83. Entirely cited from Andaya, *The World of Maluku* (1993), 53.

According to Andaya (1993248), the Maluku society was almost untouched by Indian or Islamic cultural ideas at the time of the European arrival in 1512. However, the striking similarities between the story of Sagara and the Indian epic *Mahabharata* undeniably suggest that the story of Bikusagara is a legacy from the Hindu-Buddhist era in Maluku, possibly contemporaneous with the Majapahit era. The absorption and adaptation of the Sagara story in the Bacan chronicles indicate that the earliest state formation in this region had been influenced by traders from Indianized Javanese kingdoms.

During Galvão's time, Bacan, Papua, Buton-Banggai, and Loloda were not politically significant. Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola noted that some of the earliest Maluku kingdoms in Halmahera had diminished in power: "Batochina [Halmahera] is about 250 leagues in circumference, and subject to two kings; Xilolo [Jailolo] and Lolada. The latter was once the center of all Maluku, throughout the entire sea, and was previously the strongest; but now it is weak."[39] On the contrary, Ternate-Tidore, who emerged as the two main powers in Maluku, drew inspiration or influence from Java as can be found in the Ternate tales recorded in François Valentyn's work titled *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indien* (The Old and New East Indies), published in Amsterdam between 1724-1726:

> "In the beginning the island [of Ternate] was undeveloped and only very lightly populated. The earliest settlement was Tobona, which was located on the top of the mountain and founded by a headman called Cuna. One day as Cuna went to the forests to tap the sugar palm to make toddy *(tuak),* he came across a golden mortar and pestle.

39. Argensola, *Conquista de las Islas Molucas* (1891), 70.

> He brought it back to the village, and it soon became an object of great curiosity. So many people came to see this remarkable phenomenon that he could no longer cope. He therefore decided to give it to Momole Matiti, who was head of the village of Foramadiahi, halfway down the mountain. Once Momole Matiti accepted the unusual object, he too was besieged with visitors so that he in turn gave it to Cico, head of the coastal village of Sampalu. Although many came to Sampalu to view the golden mortar and pestle, Cico was able to deal with them admirably and was honored by all the other heads of the island. He was therefore asked to become the principal head with the title of *kolano,* or lord."[40]

According to Andaya (1993: 50), the golden pestle and mortar are metaphors for the wealth brought by cloves. This story explains the process by which the demand for cloves prompted the relocation of the main settlement from the mountain peak to the coast. Andaya compares it to a similar tale from Tidore recorded by João de Barros, in which the inhabitants who had been living on Mount Mareku eventually moved to the coast because many foreign traders arrived in search of cloves. Spices attracted traders and foreigners to Ternate, and these arrivals to some extent must have aided the reorganization of Maluku society with the appointment of the first rulers. *Kolano* title itself does not originate from Maluku language but is instead a loanword from Javanese language, 'Klono Sewandono [Kelana],' an antagonistic king from a foreign land in the Panji tales from East Java.

40. Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw* (1862), vol.1, pp. 282-283, 81-83. Entirely cited from *The World of Maluku* (1993), 50.

Five main kingdoms once stood in northern Maluku: Bacan, Loloda, Jailolo, Tidore, and Ternate. Lores concerning the origins of these kingdoms are abundant in their variety, almost all of which, either explicitly or implicitly, indicate foreign origins of the kings and the power they wielded. A relatively more recent tradition, emerging after the arrival of Islam, mentions the arrival of an Arab named Jafar Sadek in Ternate as well. Following the appointment of the first kings, the state gradually formed. Rulers of Maluku began to embrace Islam at the end of the 15th century. This affirmed the noble status of *kolano*, whose title changed to *sultan*. Both Ternate and Tidore also created new Islamic-influenced positions, such as *hukum* (legal officers) and *syahbandar* (harbormasters).

Embracing Islam brought economic advantages as Islamic kingdoms in western Nusantara, India, and the Middle East promised to supply trade goods and military support to the new Islamic kingdoms in the region.

Conversion to Islam was the first step in state formation, but it was not sufficient for centralizing power, let alone creating a relatively stable and extensive territory. The centralization of power was more influenced by the presence of Europeans, and therefore, we need to discuss the chronology of their presence.

## Expansion and Conquest

After being formally accepted in Ternate in 1512, Portugal built a fort there the following year. Spain attempted to defeat Portugal and repeatedly sent military expeditions (1525, 1529, and 1542), all of which failed. Spain's final attempt in 1564 succeeded in conquering the Philippines, making Maluku an outermost post. After the unification of Spanish and Portuguese

crowns in 1580 and the conquest of Ternate in 1606, Spain began its brief period of control over Maluku. The English left Ambon in 1623, and Spain subsequently lost its efforts to dominate Maluku against the Dutch, deciding to withdraw completely in 1666. This left the Dutch as the only European nation able to remain in Maluku until the mid-20th century.

During the transition of European power from Portugal to the Netherlands, the Sultanate of Ternate-Tidore expanded and strengthened. The process was gradual. When the Portuguese arrived in Ternate in 1512, the ruler of Ternate was a *primus inter pares* [first among equals], ruling mainly with the consent of local leaders. Power of Ternate palace was balanced by the *fala raha* (four families) nobles, comprising the Tomagola, Tomaitu, Marsaoli, and Limatahu families. Although the *fala raha* benefited from the rapidly increasing income from clove trade, a larger share of the wealth flowed to the Sultan. This marks the beginning of the accumulation of wealth by the sultans.

The European demand for spices introduced a fundamental change in indigenous trade that benefited the rulers. Initially, as Andaya (1993: 56) explains, each village in northern Maluku had its own clove tree area, and each family considered the trees as their property, harvesting cloves by snapping off branches that had cloves attached to them, placing them in baskets, and offering them to traders in exchange for foreign goods. Similar simple management of the nutmeg commodity could also be found in Banda.[41]

41. "Everyone gathers [nutmeg] as much as they can, because it is all common property, and no labor is applied to the trees, but nature is left to do its own work." – Varthema, *Itinerario de Ludouico de Varthema Bolognese* (1523), XXXIII




**Figure 11.** A Portuguese watercolor painting circa 1540, found in the *Códice Casanatense*, depicts the people of Maluku [north].

The Portuguese demanded larger quantities and better-quality cloves. Hence, a societal reorganization was implemented for collection, storage, and sale of spices. Common people were organized to gather cloves for rulers, and profits from trade were distributed through rulers to people in the form of gold, copper gongs, gems, ivory, porcelain, silk, and cotton cloth. In this arrangement, only rulers held crucial intermediary positions to oversee such reorganization.

By mid-17th century, the intensity of international trade had created a growing disparity between rulers and people. Consequently, rulers were able to purchase highly desired items (iron, cloth, and weaponry) from Europeans and other foreign traders. People's growing dependence on the rulers' monopolistic access to these goods gradually enhanced the latters' influence over society more than before.

European nations helped reinforce the position of Maluku rulers with their specific ideas about the ideal royal authority. Among all European nations, the Dutch had the most enduring and lasting impact on Maluku's indigenous society. Andaya explains that in the 17th century, the Dutch played a role in centralizing power and benefited from this. Europeans believed that northern Maluku rulers had privileges and powers similar to other European kingdoms, as they sought to make direct economic and political agreements with northern Maluku rulers:

> "They understood a powerful ruler and found it more convenient to deal with a single individual instead of an entire council. A king with power could sign treaties, make quick decisions, and be manipulated much more easily than a government operating on the basis of consensus. The Dutch were therefore more than happy to support a strong kingship."[42]

These changes were most evident during the reign of Sultan Hamzah (1627-1648), who lived in Manila for 20 years after being taken by the Spanish. According to Andaya (1993: 161), he was influenced by various Spanish ideas about proper authority and ruler strength. Hamzah was responsible for transforming Ternate's governance, relying heavily on military force and the collection of "fines" from conquered territories rather than traditional relationships such as marriage, gifts, and persuasion. During Sultan Hamzah's reign, Ternate almost resembled a typical European kingdom, with decision-making centralized around him rather than through deliberation and consultation with elders.

42. Andaya, *The World of Maluku* (1993), 179.

Against the background of mid-16th century international trade evolution that facilitated the sultan's manipulation of resources, Sultan Ternate consolidated his position in the palace and initiated an expansion through colonization and apanages to the west and north. Sultan Ternate sought to ensure the loyalty of noble families by "encouraging" them to undertake expeditions beyond the islands. This was also done to tame any potential challenges from the *fala raha*. Noble families waged wars and conquered other islands, ruling them on behalf of Ternate.

The first colonization by Ternate appears to have been carried out by the Tomaitu family, who conquered and established a colony in Sula Besi, the second-largest island in the Sula Islands, in 1488.[43] The Tomagola family conquered Buru Island in 1511. From Buru Island, the Tomagola family branch under Samarau's leadership also extended its influence to Seram, Seram Laut, Saparua, Haruku, Ambalau, Manipa, Ambon, and Kelang between 1523-1524.[44] By the 1660s, Ternate had conquered Tobunku, Banggai, Buton, and surrounding islands in Sulawesi, receiving annual and semi-annual tributes from northern Sulawesi, Saparua, and Buton. The peak was the Bungaya Treaty of 1667, where Ternate received territorial rewards for helping the Dutch defeat the Gowa Kingdom. Dutch recognized Ternate's territories, including settlements in North Sulawesi up to Mindanao in the Philippines, Tomini Bay from Gorontalo and Limbotto to the west as far as Kaili and Palu, Obi Island, the Sula Islands, Banggai, Tobunku, Tibore, Selayar, the westernmost islands under Ternate's control, and Batochina (North Halmahera).

43. Valentijn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën* (1724), Vol. 1, 88. Valentijn records several expansions of Ternate's *kolano*, complete with dates, which can be traced back to 1330. While the validation of these dates is somewhat questionable, I only cite expansions that took place a few decades before the arrival of Europeans.

44. Valentijn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën* (1724), Vol. 1, 96.

Meanwhile, Tidore seemed content with the recognition and submission of indigenous leaders from eastern and southern regions, ranging from Gamrange to Raja Ampat. Various documents and tales provide different versions of Tidore's territorial expansion. However, it can be summarized that in the mid-15th century, during the leadership of either Sultan Mansur or his successor, Sultan Jamaluddin, a Papuan knight from Biak or Waigeo named Gurabesi pledged his allegiance to Tidore. He conquered the Raja Ampat Islands and the coast of Papua under Tidore's control. This was also made possible with the assistance of the Gamrange people from the settlements of Patani, Maba, and Weda in southeastern Halmahera, who had recognized Tidore's authority earlier. Other sources state that Tidore, with the help of the Gamrange, defeated the ruler of Gebe Island, who had influence and power over Papua in the late 15th century. By conquering Gebe, Tidore also conquered Papua.[45]

45. Van der Crab, *Reizen naar Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea* (1879), 19.



**Figure 12.** Ternate soldiers in the early 17th century. Artwork by Georg Franz Müller.

The creation of a centralized hierarchy not only resulted from conquest but also from voluntary submission. The most evident motivation for groups taking up that initiative had been the need for protection. For instance, in the 16th century, the *Watan Lema* (Five Beaches) alliance settlement in Solor once requested Sultan Ternate to send his relative to become the king in Solor and sought Ternate's protection against the Portuguese. This was a rather rare case because, aside from the need for protection, many settlements in Solor were actually populated by Muslim immigrants from Maluku, in particular Seram-Gorom (see Dietrich, 1984).

Conquered territories of Ternate and Tidore provided tributes periodically in the form of valuable commodities, such as *Cendrawasih* (birds of paradise). These birds were highly coveted for their beautiful feathers and were sent as tributes from the eastern islands to the rulers of northern Maluku, who sold them for significant profits to foreign traders. Sago was one of the main tributes collected by Ternate from Banggai, the Sula Islands, to Moro. The primary product of Taliabu and Mangole in the Sula Islands was sago baked into hard biscuits, which were one of the products routinely sent as tribute to the Sultan of Ternate. Alifuru slaves from the interior of Taliabu were another valuable contribution from this island to Ternate. The Gamrange people in southeastern Halmahera and Raja Ampat islands in Papua were the most important for Tidore, providing tributes in the form of ambergris or whale vomit, turtle shells, *Cendrawasih* (birds of paradise), slaves, and spices.

In addition to tributes, many areas were required to provide labor or participate in military expeditions if summoned by the Sultan. Tobaru people in Halmahera were Ternate's most reliable and feared troops. Meanwhile, the Gamrange and the people of Papua were Tidore's most important subjects in the peripheral regions. They had a large number of strong men whose maritime skills and ferocity in battle were well-documented.

Sultan Tidore employed *utusan* (envoys) to visit various outlying regions under Tidore's control and collect tributes. If these tributes (which could include slaves or other items with values equivalent to masoi bark, nutmeg, turtle shells, or other goods) were not fulfilled, punitive *hongi* expeditions would be launched in the name of Sultan Tidore, usually by other kings in the regions under his leadership. Ternate was far more capable than Tidore in conducting *hongi* expeditions.

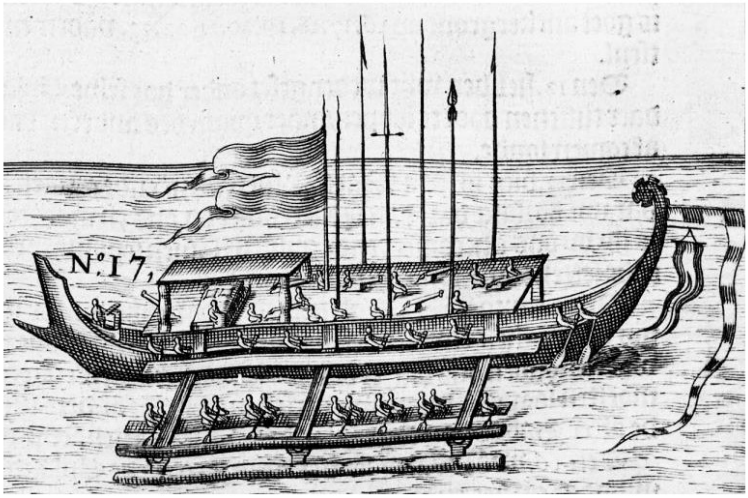



**Figure 13.** A Ternate *kora-kora* as depicted in a Dutch publication from 1601.

This was not a unilateral submission. Most regions that pledged loyalty to Ternate-Tidore received benefits, especially among their leaders. Coastal rulers in Papua gained access to valuable goods from Tidore, such as iron tools, weapons, and cloth, which were highly prized by the inland communities. This provided them with significant influence over the inland Papuans (Andaya, 1993108). When Resident de Clercq visited Berau Bay in Papua in the late 19th century, he reported: "All these places have Papuans under them, who live in the mountains, and who sell nutmegs, massoi and sometimes a few bird skins to the Muslim coastal groups. They are under their tribal leaders but acknowledge the authority of the Muslim chiefs."[46]

46. de Clercq, *De West-en Noordkust* (1893), 128-129. Quoted in Sutherland (2021), 92.

Moreover, Papuan people believed that the primary purpose of tribute missions to Tidore was to obtain titles. Tribal chiefs were granted prestigious titles such as *raja, kolano, jojau*, and *kapita laut* or their local variations. In turn, they appointed subordinates in their communities to receive other "foreign" titles like *sangaji, gimalaha,* and *sowohi.* These titles were believed to transfer the Sultan's sacred power. This applied not only to status but also to clothing and other items bestowed by the Sultan. Title bestowals were also conducted by Ternate in regions that reaffirmed their relations with the former. For instance, during the reign of Sultan Amsterdam, Ternate visited North Sulawesi, which was considered "problematic." There the Sultan presented Indian clothing and conferred the title of *raja* on various tribal chiefs.

During the growth of these Ternate-Tidore kingdom, local leaders across eastern Indonesia were granted *raja* grand titles, which to this day sometimes still mistakenly perceived as actual kingdoms. Andaya (1993107) explained that "The adoption of foreign titles did not indicate a shift to a more centralized hierarchical structure, but rather a way of distinguishing the major chiefs of a particular island or the most important leaders within one community."

It is important to note that Ternate-Tidore's recognition or influence was not the determinant for the shape of the Sultanate's state structure; and cannot be equated with the structure of modern nation-states. We often imagine the Sultanate's territorial authority on a map with dotted boundary lines. Such depictions frequently create the impression and misinterpretation that the authority of the Sultanate or the colonial Dutch East Indies was indeed that strong within the enclosed lines. However, this obscures the types and nature of power relationships, which were more complex and diverse in practice.

## Center – Periphery Relationship

The central control of the kingdom in North Maluku over its territories did not operate evenly across all areas. As explained by Sutherland (2021122), they "claimed power over vast territories, although through fragile chains of authority." The Tomagola and Tomaitu families governed the Sula Islands, Buru, and the Hoamoal Peninsula independently on behalf of Ternate. They were moving towards becoming the new centers of power, especially the Tomagola family whose lands were filled with clove and nutmeg forests and were quite distant from Ternate. This gave them great freedom in governance and participation in the secret spice trade. When dealing directly with Western traders, especially from Makassar, the Tomagola family avoided paying taxes to the Sultan of Ternate and consented to having low, fixed prices for their goods. Meanwhile, some regions like Banggai, Buton, and Jailolo had formerly been great kingdoms with significant regional roles and whose status remained respected.

The effective and real control of Ternate and Tidore was limited to their own islands. Meanwhile, in the peripheral regions, their relationships were not always stable and varied from one area to another. The authority of Ternate and Tidore in Halmahera, Seram, and Papua, at least, were not always able to reach inland areas inhabited by the Alifuru. They merely conquered, gain recognition or respect, and this at times were facilitated by the presence of Muslim trading villages along the coast.

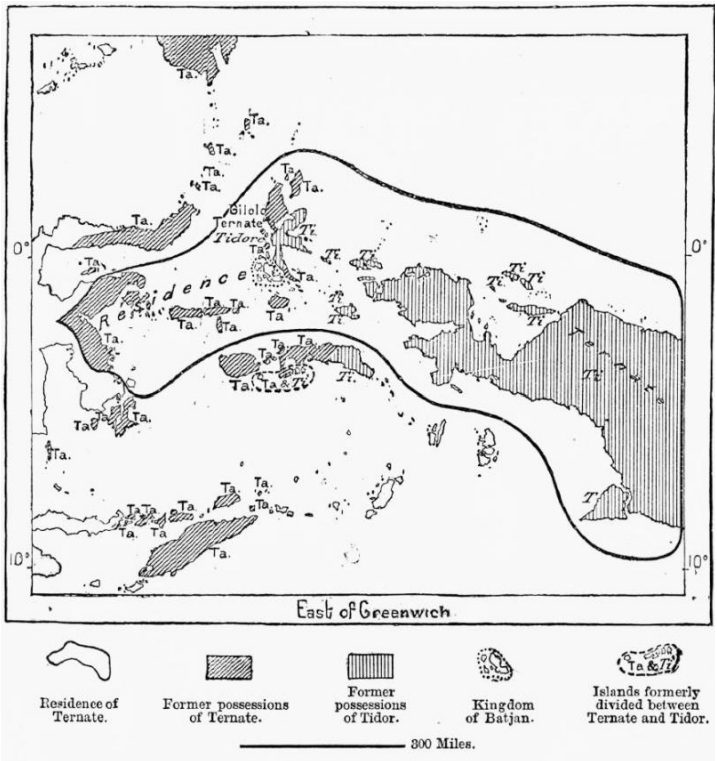



**Figure 14.** The power of Ternate-Tidore shaded on a map, from *The Universal Geography* (1885) book by Élisée Reclus.

For much of its history before Dutch rule, Banda maintained its independence and a dignified relationship with Ternate. Ternate Kingdom claimed that Banda was under its authority. However, according to Villiers (1981), this control was sporadic and minimal, limited to small tributes and tariffs imposed by Ternate's emissaries, who collected and managed some spices and controlled the port. The Portuguese colonial governor Antonio de Brito made an agreement in 1512 directly with the Banda elders rather than with the Sultanate of Ternate, indicating Banda's sovereignty over its own affairs. The

Portuguese chronicler Duarte Barbosa in his work completed in 1518 also stated: "There is no King in these Islands, and they are subject to none, but sometimes they submit to the King of Maluquo."[47]

Since the arrival of Europeans, Halmahera has been divided into territories under the control of Ternate, Tidore, and Jailolo. With the destruction of Jailolo in 1620 by Ternate and Portuguese forces, most of central and northern Halmahera fell under Ternate's rule, while southeastern Halmahera in Gamrange recognised Tidore's authority. However, Platenkamp (1984: 169) stated that "Ternate's political control did not extend to the inland [Tobelo] groups."

Sahu people in northern Halmahera were considered more fortunate until a few years ago because, compared to the Tobelo, they retained much of their cultural base. Perhaps their smaller population was a factor in why the Sultan of Ternate did not intervene intensively. Additionally, the Sahu preferred cultural ties with Jailolo, a state that had dissolved at the peak of the Ternate-Tidore Sultanate's glory. "It can be assumed that the Sultan of Jailolo likely did not have full control over the Sahu territory and people, making the Sahu region and community fully autonomous in managing themselves according to their customary laws" (see Topatimasang, 2016: 78).

A similar situation existed in the interior of the Sula Islands, which were inhabited by several major Alifuru tribes, such as the Kedai in Mongole, as well as the Mange and Seboyu in Taliabu. The Kedai had obligations to Ternate and hunted turtles around Sula Besi. However, the Mange, who lived nomadically in small groups in the western highlands of inland Taliabu, were described in relatively recent Dutch records as

47. Duerte Barbosa. *The Book of Duarte Barbosa, Vol.2* (1921), 198. 'Islands' refers to Banda, while 'Maluquo' refers to Ternate.

"not recognizing any authority and refusing to pay taxes to the Sultan."[48]

The authority of Tidore also did not extend to the communities of Southeast Seram and Seram Laut, which were each connected through various alliances that changed over time. Although Tidore claimed authority over this region, Roy Ellen (1987: 57) stated that they "had little influence." Roy Ellen (2003: 88) also noted that Tidore's influence was "weak along the south coast of Teluk Berau and along the Onin coast." He further commented:

> "In practice, as far as the Onin region was concerned, the sultan of Tidore had no direct power at all, and the only effective indirect influence was through the quasi-client domain of Misool, the ruler of which he was expected to inform before taking any actions with respect to the local people."(Roy Ellen, 2003: 124).

Peripheral sovereignty (Alifuru) continued to challenge emerging centers of power in Ambon until at least the early 20th century. The Portuguese fort in Ambon was taken over by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in 1605, followed by Jayakarta (later renamed Batavia) in 1619. During this time, the Dutch presence was primarily as traders occasionally bound by agreements. The conquest of Banda marked the beginning of the first open colonial government in the archipelago under the VOC, who later moved its capital from Ambon to Batavia. The Dutch East Indies government was established after the Dutch East India Company was dissolved in 1799.

48. *Adatrechtbundel XXIV: Groote Oost* (1926), 62.

Despite this, the centralization of power did not always proceed smoothly, largely due to limited human resources for superintendence. On islands deemed economically "less strategic," the inhabitants were only asked to swear allegiance, and their chiefs were appointed as officials. After this, the Dutch sometimes visited every few years or not at all. Consequently, most areas maintained their relative autonomy as before due to the *de facto* absence of colonial authority.

For instance, in late 1874, Italian explorer G. Emilio Cerutti reported to Dutch authorities that although Aru and Kei were claimed in the name of the Dutch crown and occasionally visited by the Resident in Ambon, they were actually quite autonomous in trade and politics.[49] Dutch ship captain Dirk Hendrik Kolff also lamented this issue decades earlier: "For many years since the inhabitants of the Arru Islands have been uncontrolled by Europeans, and have been without Christian instructors, so that they have advanced but little in civilization."[50] He explained about Lakor Island:

> "This island was formerly under subjection to Moa, and the Orang Tua resorted to it occasionally, to offer homage to the representatives of the Dutch Government there; but now every *nigri*, or small district, was under its own government, and perfectly independent of the chiefs of Moa. Neither the Dutch East India Company, nor the Government, ever had a garrison on Lakor."[51]

49. See Ellen, *On the Edge of the Banda Zone* (2003), 116.
50. Kolff, *Voyages of the Dutch Brig of War Dourga* (1840), 171. 'Arru' here refers to Aru.
51. Kolff, *Voyages of the Dutch Brig of War Dourga* (1840), 109-110.

Some areas of the Maluku Islands were only nominally under the control of the Dutch East India Company on paper or maps until early 20th century. It was only then that the Dutch East Indies government gradually succeeded in deploying more missionaries and establishing guard posts on key islands. Without these measures, there was no guarantee of effective authority. This dynamic was observed by Kolff during his visit to Damar Island in southwest Maluku:

> "For thirty years, they had not encountered a single Dutch person. Their island was rarely visited by trading ships, and the Christian population was nearly extinct. Due to the lack of regular governance and the absence of education for the youth, the community had reverted to its original state of ignorance and barbarism."[52]

As the Dutch gradually began to organize the interior of Seram, Alifuru leaders were appointed by the Dutch and given titles such as *raja, patih*, or *orang kaya*. However, Sachse (190779) explains that the residents often did not fulfill their corvée labor obligations to the chiefs, creating administrative problems because these chiefs did not receive wages from the government. Maartin Manse (2021: 525) describes the interior of Seram as a *"stateless space"* that had long "remained untouched by colonialism."

In a different context, Sutherland (2021: 129) explains that the eastern part of Flores "remain unincorporated" into the state. Throughout its history, despite the political realities, Ata Tana Ai (upland Sikka) recognized the idea and principle that Tana

52. Kolff, *Voyages of the Dutch Brig of War Dourga* (1840), 94.

Ai was ruled by a king. However, with the actual absence of political authority, Lewis (1988: 14) stated that "the region of Tana Ai was essentially independent for most of its history." Additionally, in 1907, Dutch administrator De Vries also complained about the interior of Ende:

> "...the influence of our (Dutch) government did not go further than the vicinity of (the town of) Ende… The controleur also gave the headmen of the nearby mountain-villages to understand, with emphasis, that their villages had to be tidy, the paths had to be maintained etc., in short, all the ordinary things, to which these headmen had never listened… They did not consider the "Compagnie" as their master."[53]

Even in regions that clearly acknowledged state sovereignty – not far from the periphery and close to the center – there was significant tendency towards non-compliance. For example, Andaya (1993: 100) cited Dutch East India Company reports during the joint Tidore and Dutch clove tree destruction expedition to Maba, which was met with hostility. Although they recognized their guests from Tidore, the people of Maba cursed the Patani people for bringing the Dutch into their territory. "When after repeated conferences the Tidore envoy in exas- peration asked whether they no longer wished to obey the Sultan Tidore and to return once again to a situation without a king, their reply was to make an obscene gesture by striking their genitalia, screaming, and shooting off a volley of arrows."

53. Vries, J.J. de. *Memorie van Overgave van de Onderafdeeling Zuid-Flores door de civiele gezaghebber* (1910), 46-47. Quoted in Nakagawa, *The Social Organization of The Endenese of Central Flores* (1989), 45.

In such situations, the capacity of the periphery to challenge the central status of Ternate-Tidore was very high. Rebellion, desertion, migration, or shifting loyalty from one power to another occurred whenever rulers acted harshly or when opportunities (or allies) were available at the right time. The process of annexing non-state spaces under the authority of ancient and colonial states left a lasting negative impression, manifesting in various cultural expressions in several places in Maluku.

## Political Fugitives and Refugees

The conquest of Banda was the first massacre committed by Europeans in Southeast Asia, marking a new era in the eastern Indonesian archipelago. At that time, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) brutally massacred the Banda people in 1621. At least 44 *orang kaya* were beheaded, and out of 15,000 inhabitants, only 1,000 survived to live as slaves. Those who managed to escape fled to Makassar, Seram, and the Kei Islands. Since then, native Banda people have become extinct, and the island inhabited by slaves who ran Dutch-owned plantations.

A similarly extreme case occurred with the Moro people in North Halmahera, as studied by Villiers (1988) and Platenkamp (1993). The Moro were inhabitants of two areas known as land Moro *(moro-tia)* and sea Moro *(moro-tai)* on Morotai Island. It is unknown whether the Moro people are the same ethnic group as the Moro in Mindanao, Philippines. Platenkamp (1993), from his mythological study, concluded that they are still part of the Tobelo. Their presence was recorded during the Portuguese and Spanish periods through missionary activities in this region, but they vanished from Dutch records and now exist only as a myth among Halmahera people.

Like the Banda people, the Moro people also became extinct – as result of prolonged and harsh conflicts among the Jailolo, Ternate, and Tidore kingdoms, which divided the Moro region. The Moro people, who were rich in rice, sago, pigs, and chickens, were obliged to provide food supplies, most of which flowed to Ternate. Upon the arrival of the Europeans, Moro had a *sangaji* who appears to have been appointed by Ternate. They quickly embraced Christianity as a means to avoid further oppression and to gain protection from the Portuguese, who provided them with clothing, sent priests, and established defenses in Mamuya, one of the main Moro villages. This disrupted the tribute relationship with Ternate, as afterward, the Moro settlements refused to supply provisions to Ternate. In this case, Moro evidently made a decision that made them easy targets for plundering by their Muslim neighbors. In 1606, the Portuguese were expelled from the Maluku Islands. Moro received virtually no protection until the Spanish decided to station troops there. The Spanish chronicler, Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola, in *"Conquista de las Islas Molucas"* (1609), wrote:

> "Only the Momoya [Mamuya] village is warlike: without law, money, measures, coins, gold, silver, or any other metals, and without a king; but filled with supplies, weapons, deity, and devils that speak from within. The Kings of Malucco [Maluku] conquered them, and each person kept what they could; the best parts belonged to Ternate and were given to the King of Tidore, all this power was magnified by the strength of Spain."[54]

54. Argensola, *Conquista de las Islas Molucas* (1891), 70-71.

Moro people experienced three forced displacements and were enslaved to Ternate in the 17th century. In 1614, Ternate captured Moro refugees from Tolo. Subsequently, part of the Morotai population was sent to Tidore, and the other half to Ternate. This practically led to the extinction of Moro people and their trace disappeared from historical records until their land was eventually inhabited by the Tobelo people today.

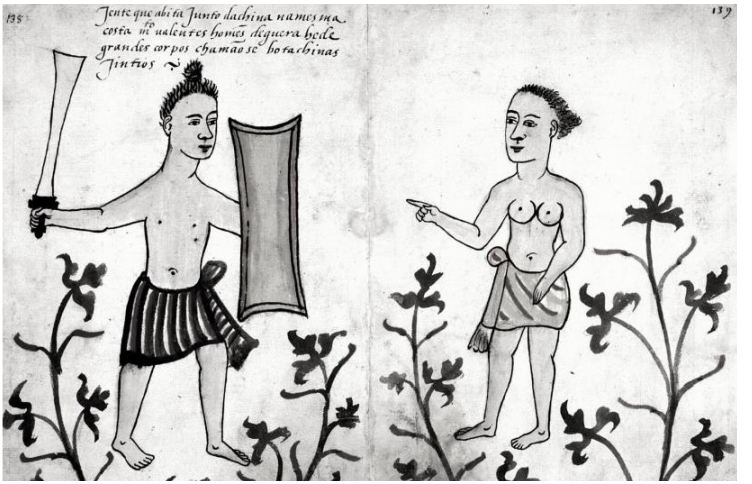



**Figure 15.** Portuguese watercolor c.1540 in the *Códice Casanatense,* depicting people in Batochina [Halmahera].

According to Platenkamp (1993), the Tobelo community has maintained a collective memory of the existence of the Moro society that existed four centuries ago by incorporating them into the cosmological concept of a hidden world. Tobelo people have a legend about invisible beings called "the true inhabitants" *(moroka)*, whose territory they now occupy. In Tobelo mythology, as explained by Platenkamp, Ternate is the source of violence, representing an agent that repeatedly persuades the Tobelo community to leave the protection of the

forest and accept Ternate as their master. On multiple occasions, the Tobelo community moved to the coast and then retreated into the forest, oscillating between the coastal settlements that are "orderly" and "visible" to Ternate, or choosing to stay in the forest, hidden from the view of Ternate, disappearing "like *moroka*." In other words, a world to "escape."

It is not surprising that most contemporary ethnographic literature about various inland Halmahera societies refers to groups who fled from the formation of enslaving states, which levied taxes and tributes, and occasionally conducted massacres during multiple eras. Sometimes, they are also believed to be descendants of defeated groups and political refugees. For instance, it is said that there are still Lingon people with white skin and blue eyes in the interior of Halmahera, believed to be descendants of Portuguese sailors and soldiers who were defeated by the Dutch-Ternate coalition and possibly fled with Tidore or Makian people (Topatimasang, 2016: 85). I am more inclined to believe that Lingon people are descendants of the Moro and their Portuguese (or Spanish) allies who survived and fled inland. Therefore, the legend of Moro spirits preserved by Tobelo people has historical roots.

Halmahera is not a homogeneous island, as there are several language groups and much intermingling, indicating that the Halmahera people are essentially divided into several distinct ethnic groups. Some cases resulted from local political dynamics. For instance, the Dano (Baba) Hassan rebels, who failed to reestablish the Jailolo Kingdom in the late 19th century, fled eastward and reached the oldest Tobelo settlement centers (Topatimasang, 2016: 49). Additionally, the Modole people in central Halmahera are also described:

> "[...] the reason they migrated from their original place in the north is a local legend that states they fled because they refused to pay the taxes imposed by the Dutch through the Sultan of Ternate at that time. Like the inland Tobelo people elsewhere in the northern and central peninsulas, the best way to avoid these burdensome regulations was to escape into the deeper forest areas that [by] *de facto* completely beyond Ternate's control" (Topatimasang, 2016: 88).

Similar stories can be found in many inland or highland areas of the main islands in Maluku. According to folklore in Bacan, "*yakis* [long-tailed monkeys] were people cursed by the Sultan of Bacan for refusing to pay taxes, and then turned into monkeys and driven into the forest" (Topatimasang, 2016: 109).

In Kei Islands, the term *dolo-ternat* law (Jailolo-Ternate) carries a negative connotation. It represents a dark and early period of life in Kei Islands, conceptually as a period at the "edge of Jailolo, the border of Ternate" *(Dolo soin Ternat wahan)*, marked by lawlessness, murder, plundering, and incitements. With the arrival of immigrants from Bali, Kei community organized themselves based on the most formal law in Maluku, known as *larvul-ngabal* (Thorburn, 1998: 59). *Larvul-ngabal* appears to date back to a period older than the Jailolo or Ternate kingdoms, originating from the Majapahit era in the 14th to 16th centuries. Therefore, the phrase "Jailolo-Ternate law" refers to the tyranny and cruelty of Ternate over the regions under its control, but it was used to distinguish the period of political refugees' arrival during the collapse of Majapahit, or an alternative version of the Kediri-Singosari upheaval (Hukubun, 2023: 476-477).

The evidence I have outlined shows that escaping and seeking refuge were still possible, as the tentacles of ancient and colonial state power were not all-reaching, especially in the interior of large islands such as Halmahera, Seram, or the smaller stateless islands in the south. Despite being more maritime, Maluku Islands had a situation very similar to the depiction of stateless societies in mainland Asia.

In his study *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2009) on stateless societies in the highlands of Southeast Asia, James C. Scott explains that the area was not only a resistance zone, but also a protection zone, which he called "zones of refuge." This means, most of the hill populations for more than a millennium and half had come there to avoid various impacts of state formation projects in the lowlands. They were not "left behind" by the progress of civilization in the valleys, rather "over long periods of time, chosen to place themselves out of the reach of the state" (Scott, 2009: 22).

The Alifuru people in the interior of Buru were also once obliged to pay tribute in the form of tobacco, rice, sweet potatoes, millet, coconuts, and sago, as well as mandatory rotating labor for the coastal Muslim *kings* who gained legitimacy from Ternate's supremacy and Islam. For the Alifuru in Buru, as Grimes writes (2006b: 147), this arrangement was unpleasant, and "the burden of tribute is still remembered today." Regarding the people in the interior of Buru, it is explained "the native people of Buru, referred to as Hindus or backward people, lived in the mountains, refusing to be governed or colonized by the Dutch. They were free people. They were not evil!" (Topatimasang, 2016: 119).

Seram presents the most striking case study because it is among the stateless areas considered to have been lacking in economic

resources or opportunities for state development and taxation. Its mountainous and densely forested interior remained uncharted territory (*terra incognita*) for Europeans, recognized as a haven for rebels, pirates, and other state fugitives (Maanse, 2021: 525). In the 1865s, the Dutch government attempted to implement *negeri* state taxes, provoking a full-scale rebellion. The head of soa Tanunu declared that his people "would flee to the mountains until the government made peace […] and attack all *negari* in Seram if the government intended to establish settlements in Nuniali and Kaibobo" (*ibid*, 2021: 534-535).

The threat revealed that the interior of Seram had been one of the refuge zones inhabited by the Alifuru, *who actively and deliberately,* chose to avoid and distance themselves from the state to maintain their autonomy. The South Moluccan Republic (RMS) guerrillas employed the same tactics when they retreated to the interior of Buru and Seram throughout the 1950s.

# Closing

From the explanation above, it is evident that state formation in Maluku was influenced by dynamic interactions within the context of the spice trade. The political and economic changes accompanying the arrival and consolidation of Islam and Europe from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries ensured the central position of Maluku – with its clove-producing islands – in the north and the dominance of Ternate and Tidore at its core. By the late sixteenth century, the Ternate and Tidore palace decided to emulate other Muslim kingdoms in the archipelago in terms of dress style, language, and governance structure reforms.

As the sixteenth century progressed, various influences culminated in a transformation of the social and political systems in Ternate and Tidore, shifting from kinship-based societies where decisions were made by consensus of the elders to Islamic sultanates with hierarchical power centered on a single individual. In the latter half of the sixteenth century, the sultans of Ternate and Tidore had centralized enough power to compete with each other over control of vast territories, including most of northern Maluku, parts of central Maluku, Sulawesi, and Raja Ampat islands. The sultans governed these regions through colonization and the presence of their representatives. Tributes and mandatory labor were collected and sent to Ternate-Tidore. Women from various regions were also taken as wives by the sultans.

Since the arrival of Portuguese and Spanish, and ultimately the Dutch – who succeeded in defeating both – only Tidore and Ternate remained as entities capable of dealing with the

growing European power in Maluku. Ternate and Tidore saw Europe as key allies in their rivalry. Whenever opportunities arose, Ternate and Tidore took advantage to expand control over surrounding territories. They absorbed several regions that were left without rulers due to the decline or destruction of Jailolo, Bacan, and Banggai.

This state formation process intensified primarily due to European assistance and encouragement, as Europeans benefited from the centralization of power. For hundreds of years since the first Europeans arrived in Maluku in the 1500s, their project proceeded through the conquest and incorporation of vast areas of the Alifuru World into state space, often violently (in some cases voluntarily), and was maintained through violence.

Alifuru holds no specific meaning in ethnology. Its definition is almost entirely economic and political, typically used to refer the tribes as "service providers, gatherers, and political subordinates, supplying sago, spices, and other necessities to coastal rulers and trading centers." However, Sutherland (2021: 70) reminds us that this understanding "underestimates the autonomy of the Alifuru community, which is nearly impossible to control. Alifuru subjugation is inherently uncertain." The final conclusion: Alifuru represents those who resisted domination and taming throughout the state formation projects in Maluku from the 15th to 19th centuries. We call this anarchy.

# Chapter 3.

## The Mardika Strategy: Preventing State Formation

### Siwa-Lima as Primitive War

Reports from the Europeans, whether explorers, colonial officials, missionaries, or anthropologists, were filled with prejudices inherited from the ancient Greek and Roman paradigm regarding the division between the center of civilization and the periphery inhabited by barbarians. This paradigm did not change much until early modern writers like Thomas Hobbes, in his work *Leviathan* (1651). According to him, the natural state of humans is a condition of anarchic war of all against all. Thus, Antonio Galvão wrote the ancient tale of Bacan in the mid-16th century:

> "Once long ago there were no kings and the people lived in kinship groups (Port., *parentela)* governed by elders. Since "no one was better than the other," dissension and wars arose, alliances made and broken, and people killed or captured and ransomed."[55]

According to Hobbes, peace and security can only be created by a strong government with undivided power. A similar impression was made in the 1600s by Spanish missionary Juan de la Camara when he commented on Timorese society: "they never united with one another, but always fought one

55. From Jacobs, Hubert (ed. & trans.), *A Treatise on the Moluccas* (1971), 81-83. Entirely quoted from Andaya, *The World of Maluku* (1993), 53.

another."[56] Dutch sailor Dirk Hendrik Kolff, upon arriving on Lakor Island in 1825, also linked societal fragmentation with the absence of a government:

> "During my short stay I was constantly employed in deciding all sorts of petty differences, for the people live in a state of great disunion, and without the interference of the Government, or of European traders, they remain obstinately irreconcilable on the slightest quarrel. Neither do they acknowledge the authority of their chiefs unless they have been installed by the Dutch Government."[57]

The absence of kings and states is at best seen as low culture, or at worst, depicted as uncivilized. Being stateless was considered equivalent to animals, for a society without a state was perceived as no society at all. The existence of state was seen as a pillar of order and peace; anarchy meant chaos and war. Although European reports were often exaggerated, there was some truth in this matter.

Both European historical records and Maluku oral history recount the existence of various war alliances and cross-village *(negeri)* coalitions, symbolized through *Siwa-Lima*, meaning the alliance of five and the alliance of nine. *Siwa-Lima* cannot be understood as a segregated 'two-block political system,' but as a conceptually complementary unity. There is no Siwa without Lima and vice versa. It is an inverted and symmetrical system.[58] Just like two sides of a coin.

56. Manuel Teixeira, *Macau e a sua diocese IV: A diocese de Malaca* (Macau, 1957), 451. Quoted from Hägerdal, "Slaves and Slave Trade in the Timor Area: Between Indigenous Structures and External Impact." *Journal of Social History*, Volume 54, Issue 1 (Fall 2020" (2020), 19.

57. Kolff, *Voyages of the Dutch Brig of War Dourga* (1840), 111.

58. For better explanation of Siwa-Lima, see Valeri, "Reciprocal Centers: The Siwa-Lima System in the Central Moluccas" in *The Attraction of Opposites* (1989), 117–141.

Traditionally, *Siwa-Lima* existed within an endogamous society, and typically there was no peaceful or positive exchange between the two. Instead, they were described as "mortal enemies" who only interacted through war. This war between the alliance of nine and the alliance of five, in the traditional context of Maluku, also implied headhunting from each other (Valeri, 1989: 123 & 137). Both also increased hatred and facilitated reconciliation between communities (Sutherland, 2021: 135).

Interestingly, the dualism of the *Siwa-Lima* organization does not exist in North Maluku. It can only be found in stateless societies in the central and southern parts of Maluku, or as Valeri (1989: 137) described, "developed at the periphery of centralized system." For instance, *Uli Siwa* and *Uli Lima* in Banda, *Patasiwa* and *Patalima* in Seram, *Lorsiw* and *Lorlim* in Kei, and *Urlima* and *Ursiwa* in Aru and Tanimbar. Why is that so? How can we explain a group of people who agree to embrace an identity that marks hostility and will only separate, discriminate, and divide them into war?

In the *Archeology of Violence* essay, Pierre Clastres rejects Hobbes's understanding that primitive society is a war of all against all. Clastres explains that anarchic-primitive society cannot wage war to conquer because if that were the case, there would be winners and those who are conquered. According to him (2010265), a war of all against all would lead to the establishment of domination and power that can be forcibly exerted by the winners over the conquered. A new social configuration would then emerge, creating command-obedience relationships and the political division of society into Masters and Slaves: "It would be the death of primitive society," because the master-slave division does not exist in primitive society. In his 1838 report, British navigator George

Windsor Earl also commented on the extent to which "chaos" in Leti occurred due to villages remaining autonomous from one another:

> "Kisser is the only island of this group in which there is a raja, or head chief. In all the others each village is independent, and consequently jealousies and quarrels arise, often ending in wars, which, however, are rarely attended with much bloodshed. Muskets are used in warfare throughout the group; but the people are so unskillful in the use of them, and the ammunition they use is so bad, that a battle frequently ends without loss of life, or at most with the death of only one or two. These quarrels, however, have the effect of rendering the inhabitants of the islands in which they take place turbulent and disagreeable. At Letti, in particular, we found this to be the case. Had the chiefs of the different villages any supreme authority to which to appeal for a decision of their disputes, I am convinced that the case would be materially altered."[59]

*"It often ends in war, but rarely accompanied by much bloodshed."* This sentence needs to be emphasized as it accurately describes traditional warfare in Maluku. Although more deadly wars could occur among the coastal inhabitants of Ambon, some reports cited by Sutherland (2021: 129) indicate that these were rare exceptions. The situation was similar in other regions.

59. G.W Earl, "An Account of a Visit to Kisser" (1841), 112. 'Letti' here refers to Leti.

A shipwrecked sailor in Timor wrote that local "wars have more in common with children's games than real fighting."

When discussing how the Alifuru waged war in the interior of Seram up until the 1700s, Knaap (2003 168) stated that "The purpose of these actions does not appear to have been conquest. Instead, the aim was either to take prisoners or the heads of people slain, irrespective of whether they were males, females, or children." At every significant moment in the life cycle of the Alifuru community, such as the construction of *bailehu* [council hall] and the initiation of boys and girls into adulthood, the sacrifice of another person's life was required. Headhunting was carried out by only a dozen people with simple weapons, targeting distant *negeri* [villages] rather than neighboring ones. Therefore, it is not surprising that Seram Island was always plagued by small-scale wars, and each village was always on alert, but there was never any conquest or massacre. However, larger wars could occur due to disputes among leaders or conflicts. Should they received bad omens upon arriving at the enemy's settlement, some warriors would advance first – if they succeeded, the others would follow, if they failed, they would all retreat.

Historians generally agree that wars in Maluku became bloodier due to colonialism. According to Andaya (1993), the European model of warfare required more personnel and weaponry compared to traditional warfare, leading to more casualties and escalating blood feuds. The intervention of the Portuguese and Dutch sparked an intensive period of warfare that lasted about a hundred years in Seram and Ambon. Knaap (2003: 190) notes that this was due to the introduction of European firearms and the large-scale killings, occupations, and destruction they instigated, which were greater than

before. This was further exacerbated by religious differences. Additionally, Schapper's (2019) study shows that although stone dwellings were a traditional architectural style, stone forts began to be constructed in the southwestern and southern Maluku islands in the first half of 17th century due to the climate of fear stemming from the Dutch massacre in Banda in 1621. This also indicates an awareness of the need to enhance village security as result of European colonialism.

Besides rejecting Hobbes' understanding, Clastres also rejected the implied exchange concept by Lévi-Strauss: that there is war, therefore no exchange; there is exchange, therefore no war. For Clastres, exchange and alliance are merely consequences of war, because if there is an enemy, there must be allies (bound by marriage). Primitive societies cannot practice universal kinship in the exchange of women (or marriage, to prevent incest) as modern societies do, due to spatial constraints where friendship does not adapt well to distance. Exchange is easily maintained with nearby neighbors who can be invited to a feast, from someone who can accept the invitation, and who can be visited. With distant groups, such relationships cannot be established. Thus, primitive societies cannot be friends with everyone or enemies with everyone.

> "In the case of friendship of all with all, the community would lose its autonomous totality through the dissolution of its difference. In the case of war of all against all, it would lose its homogeneous unity through the irruption of social division primitive society is a single totality. It cannot consent to universal peace which alienates its freedom; it cannot abandon itself to general

> war which abolishes its equality. It is not possible, among the Savages, to be either friend of all or enemy of all." (Clastres, 2010: 265).

Therefore, Clastres (2010: 271-274) argues that war holds a different meaning for primitive societies. "The constant problem of the primitive community is not: whom will we trade with? but: how can we maintain our independence?" For primitive societies, war serves to preserve the political independence of each community. As long as there is war, there is autonomy: that is why war cannot and must not cease, which is why war has a permanent nature: if an enemy does not exist, an enemy must be created. This opinion may explain why societies without states are historically more prone to conflict. Kolff, in his 1825 report on the island of Leti, explained that disputes among community leaders occurred so easily because they considered themselves equals:

> "When distributing the presents, sent by the Government, at the general meeting of the chiefs, I was requested to apportion the shares for each village, the chiefs themselves candidly confessing that since they all considered themselves as equal in point of rank, were this duty left to themselves, it would certainly give rise to a renewal of the discord that had so long prevailed among them."[60]

The report quoted above shows that war and the absence of state are treated as synonyms. The weakness of authority, autonomous villages, and equality among residents – namely the absence of a state in Maluku – are seen by Europeans as

60. Kolff, *Voyages of the Dutch Brig of War Dourga* (1840), 68.

conditions causing war. For Hobbes, state exists to oppose war; for Clastres, it is the opposite, war exists to oppose the state. "…the machine of dispersion functions against the machine of unification (Clastres, 2010: 277). Siwa-Lima acts as a Clastrian machine to prevent the state.

## Indigenous Confederations

When European reports state that unity can only be achieved through the state, it implies that anarchic societies are incapable of managing collective affairs on a scale beyond their residential communities (communes). If Siwa-Lima is a mechanism for dissolution that prevents its society from uniting in anti-state logic, I have found that societies in Maluku, at different periods of time, have created non-state institutions. Unlike Jailolo, Bacan, Ternate, or Tidore, which evolved into institutions where the centralization of power ended with decision-making monopolized by a few or even a single person, in some places in Maluku institutions were established for centralized collective decision-making while maintaining local political norms. These institutions resemble a federation, as proposed by theorists of modern anarchism in the history of political thought.[61]

Since the emergence of modern anarchism in the mid-19th century, anarchists have consistently proposed federalism of direct democratic communes as a replacement for the state. This institution is where people make decisions about important matters concerning their lives, instead of leaving these matters to be determined by a few individuals. Although this development was not new at its time, it was first articulated by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, often referred to as the "Founding Father of Anarchism" from France. In *Du Principe Fédératif*

61 Federation in this text is different from "federal state."

(1863), Proudhon stated that "the federal system is the opposite of hierarchy or administrative and governmental centralization." According to him,

> "What is essential to and characteristic of the federal contract, and what I most wish the reader to notice, is that in this system the contracting parties, whether heads of family, towns, cantons, provinces, or states, not only undertake bilateral and commutative obligations, but in making the pact reserve for themselves more rights, more liberty, more authority, more property than they abandon."

Proudhon's federalism was also championed by Mikhail Bakunin, who translated *Das Kapital* into Russian. While Bakunin drew inspiration from Marx's economic analysis, he did not do so with his politics. He rejected the dictatorship of the proletariat and thus merged Marx's communism with Proudhon's political federalism. In his work *Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism* (1867), Bakunin wrote:

> "... we today conclude in favor of the absolute need of destroying the states. Or, if it is so decided, their radical and complete transformation so that, ceasing to be powers centralized and organized from the top down, by violence or by authority of some principle, they may recognize – with absolute liberty for all the parties to unite or not to unite, and with liberty for each of these always to leave a union even when freely entered into – from the bottom up, according to the real needs and the

> natural tendencies of the parties, through the free federation of individuals, associations, communes, districts, provinces, and nations within humanity."

In the next generation, Peter Kropotkin credited federalism to Bakunin. He even wrote about it optimistically, calling it "our federated commune of the future." For him, the state and federation were two opposites. "The Commune," Kropotkin wrote, in a situation of dual power, "will know that it must break the State and replace it by the Federation."[62]

Broadly speaking, anarchists agree on the implementation of direct democracy within communes with populations reasonable enough to carry out face-to-face meetings. "Form groups of a modest size, individually sovereign, and unite them by a federal pact," wrote Proudhon, which requires decentralization. But no commune can stand alone. Peter Kropotkin believed that successful commune experiments must be federated. From small units, they then organize into wider and wider areas. In Bakunin's explanation: "…having no other principle but the free federation of individuals into communes, of communes into provinces, of the provinces into nations, and, finally, of the nations into the United States of Europe first, and of the entire world eventually."

The anarchists' proposal for autonomous communes, implementing direct democracy, decentralized but connected in federalism, though in a much looser form, has been practiced by ancestors in Maluku. Roy Ellen (2003: 8) argues that trade in the Banda Zone was not conducted by a large, centralized government controlling river mouths as in the Straits of Malacca. In central Maluku, Ellen notes that "loose

62. Peter Kropotkin, *Words of a Rebel*, 1882

federations" persisted on small islands like Banda because there were no extensive forest areas whose access could be controlled via river estuary or coastlines.

The Gamrange people, originating from three regions (Weda, Maba, and Patani) along the coast of Weda Bay in Southeast Halmahera, have rejected the dual hegemony of Ternate-Tidore by choosing to revere the past glory of the defunct Jailolo. This strategy of aligning themselves with a now-nonexistent power allowed the Gamrange people to create de facto autonomy from Ternate-Tidore while establishing their own political institutions, which "had the right to govern their respective territories, like autonomous regions, but with the obligation to help each other" (Topatimasang, 2016: 98).

> "[...] they even 'blamed' Tidore who was practically not helping Jailolo and Dano Hassan (from Maba) when they rebelled against Ternate. The fall of the Jailolo sultanate and the defeat of Dano Hassan's rebellion ultimately turned this area into *terra incognita* (no man's land) from that point on. Finally, the people of Weda, Patani, and Maba formed an autonomous socio-political confederation called *Fogoguru*" (Topatimasang, 2016: 88).

The practice of federalism has been commonly found in Seram and Ambon Lease. Sutherland (2021: 135) states, "A sketch of Ambon's sociopolitical organisation would encompass hamlets, villages, village federations, and federations of village federations…" Alliances and connections between villages often overlapped geographically and through kinship bonds.

For example, *pela-gandong* was often performed as an oath to mutually aid between regions.

As in Halmahera, two confederations were organized in Seram. In southeast Seram and Seram Laut, there was *Seri-Tahun*, which in oral history is described as a "…confederation formed by the rajas of the five domains of Kianlaut, Kiandarat, Kwaos, Urung, and Keffing to organize against the Dutch…" (Roy Ellen, 2003: 36).

In central Seram, there was also *Saniri Waele Telu* (Malay: Saniri Tiga Air) which united the Alifuru from three rivers: Tala, Eti, and Sapalewa. Although the purpose of Saniri was not achieved, there are those who believe that Saniri was aimed at combating the influence of Ternate, then the Dutch. Others argue that Saniri was "a confederacy aimed at bringing some sort of peace to an area suffering from endemic petty warfare. What started as an institution meant to solve internal problems, however, gradually developed into something which also aimed at resisting intrusions into its cultural legacy" (Knaap, 1993: 270).

Several reports from the Dutch colonial officials documented *Saniri Waele Telu* from the 17th to early 20th centuries. These reports indicate that Saniri meetings could be attended by over 500 participants from various villages in the three river systems in Seram – though they often did not always proceed smoothly – all initiated by a secret society known as *Kakean*. The main leader was called *Inama* (Malay: Head of Saniri), derived from the words *ina* meaning "mother" and *ama* meaning "father." However, like other Alifuru leaders in the interior of Seram, his authority was too weak outside of Saniri meetings (Knaap, 1993).

Siwa-Lima itself is essentially a village federation "… administered by councils within which one man would be recognised as *primus inter pares*" (Sutherland, 2021: 134). This means Siwa refers to a federation of nine, and conversely, a federation of five. This broader territorial arrangement occurs not only in the political sphere but also in the economic sphere. According to Valeri (1989: 121): "the Siwa-Lima system presupposes a metatribal, territorially discrete confederation. The confederations, in turn, presuppose a system of trade...."

## The Miracle of Trading

For Europeans, the establishment of a state was considered essential for the welfare and interests of the colonized societies, supposedly to advance them toward a civilization whose standards were, of course, determined by Europeans. In 1888, Anna Forbes, the wife of a renowned Scottish naturalist, stayed for several days in the village of Waai, Ambon. At that time, she regretted that the potential resources of Waai village were not being utilized properly by the residents who were led by a weak Rajah, and therefore, supported the idea that the people of Waai be governed with an iron hand:

"As I have said, civilising influences have not really raised their moral status; they have become more independent – not, however, for their own good. I fancy it is beneficial for such a people to be under an autocratic ruler. The Rajah tells us his authority is now a mere name. He was once called to attend a conference at Amboina. The men who rowed him "struck" half-way, and turned the boat homewards. They were arrested, and sentenced to eight days' imprisonment, after which they came back with such a tale of the good time they had had – feeding well without any labour or cost, and playing cards all

day with pleasant companions – that more harm than good was effected by the punishment."[63]

European views should be suspected as being part of an agenda to turn indigenous societies into subjects of discipline. In such cases, colonialism often found justification in the paradigm in which Europeans felt they bore the responsibility to advance indigenous societies, which were perceived as being at a lower level of civilization or entirely uncivilized. Underneath this, the primary goal was to enhance the ability to identify, monitor, measure and calculate, govern, mobilize human resources, and exploit the resources of indigenous societies. This agenda was sometimes framed as eradicating illiteracy, pacifying conflict areas, spreading Christianity, or primarily economic development, implying that indigenous peoples were too lazy or ignorant to trade.

In his book *Trade Without Rulers*, Northrup (1978: 4-5) critiques the prejudice that views small-scale non-state societies as insufficiently capable of engaging in cultural and economic systems far larger than their political units. He argues that large-scale trade does not require large-scale political institutions. Although Northrup's study was conducted in Africa, his views also apply to Maluku. Interestingly, these federative institutions coexisted with traditional warfare and trade. Let's take the examples of Banda and Aru.

63. Anna Forbes, *Insulinde* (1887), 87.



**Figure 16.** Banda warriors enjoyed their meal before the battle.

At the end of the 16th century, the Spanish chronicler Argensola described that "there were seven towns on the island [Banda], where they were hostile to each other."[64] The oldest report about Siwa-Lima that we can trace also comes from Banda. Made by a Dutch East India Company official before 1621, the following report shows that Siwa-Lima ensured each participant was relatively equal without being united by a state:

> "Whenever they gather to discuss important matters, the Orang Kayas take their place [on the low platform under the tree], each according to his descent and age, showing great deference to each other, while the common people … sit on the ground, the uli siwa [federation] on the west and south, the uli lima [federation] on the east and north… [N]o serious political matters or war

64. Argensola, *Conquista de las Islas Molucas* (1891), 241.

> can be decided alone…. [The representatives of the different villages] always want to be cock of the walk, but have to respect the others [or they must pay a large fine]. In this way they keep each other in check, so that they can all be equal, which causes great dissension."[65]

At the same time, the trade arrangements in Banda were also different from Ternate and Tidore:

> "The Banda Islands were certainly an important – indeed the most important – central place, over many hundreds of years, articulating trade over a vast area; but Banda was was not a state, and neither were its composite polities. Moreover, it never claimed territory or exercised conventional political control over people and resources beyond Banda itself." (Ellen, 2003: 8).

Alfred Russel Wallace also had quite a positive impression while in the interior of Aru to collect his specimens. He recounted that a war was occurring between two nearby Alifuru villages. "They told me it was a common thing," he wrote, "Individual quarrels are taken up by villages and tribes, and the nonpayment of the stipulated price for a wife is one of the most frequent causes of bitterness and bloodshed."[66] At the same time in March 1857, while he was in Dobbo, Aru, Wallace recounted that he "walk daily unarmed in the jungle, where I meet them continually; I sleep in a palm-leaf hut, which any one may enter, with as little

65. P.A. Leupe, "Beschrijvinge van de Eijlande Banda," BKI 3, no. 1 (1855): 75–6. Quoted and translated from Sutherland, *Seaways and Gatekeeper* (2021),133.

66. Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago* (1877), 471.

fear and as little danger of thieves or murder as if I were under the protection of the Metropolitan police."[67] He wrote:

> "This motley, ignorant, bloodthirsty, thievish population live here without the shadow of a government, with no police, no courts, and no lawyers; yet they do not cut each other's throats, do not plunder each other day and night, do not fall into the anarchy such a state of things might be supposed to lead to. It is very extraordinary!"[68]

Regarding Aru, Kolff expressed a similar impression:

> "It is certainly worthy of remark, that these simple Arafuras, without hope of reward, or fear of punishment after death, live in such peace and brotherly love with one another; and that they recognize the right of property, in the fullest sense of the word, without there being any authority among them than the decisions of their elders, according to the customs of their forefathers, which are held in the highest regard."[69]

When Kolf and Wallace wrote those impressions, the modern anarchist political movement had not yet formed. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon claimed himself as an anarchist a few years before Wallace went to Maluku. So, although Wallace used the term anarchist in a negative connotation, the situation he described aligns with anarchist political ideals. His reflection on his amazement was:

67. Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago* (1877), 440.

68. Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago* (1877), 439.

69. Kolff, *Voyages of the Dutch Brig of War Dourga* (1840), 161. 'Arafuras' here refers to Alifuru

> "It puts strange thoughts into one's head about the mountain-load of government under which people exist in Europe, and suggests the idea that we may be overgoverned. Think of the hundred Acts of Parliament annually enacted to prevent us, the people of England, from cutting each other's throats, or from doing to our neighbour as we would not be done by. Think of the thousands of lawyers and barristers whose whole lives are spent in telling us what the hundred Acts of Parliament mean, and one would be led to infer that if Dobbo has too little law England has too much."[70]

Wallace's findings challenged the political philosophy of Hobbes' Leviathan, which was popular at the time, asserting that without government, a chaotic natural state would ensue. The existence of authority was justified because it was necessary to prevent disputes and wars. So, how to bridge the contradiction seen in Wallace's observation that frequent wars occurred among the Alifuru (Jarjui people) in Aru, but, at the same time, he could still feel safe in the interior? Wallace has the answer.

70. Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, 439.

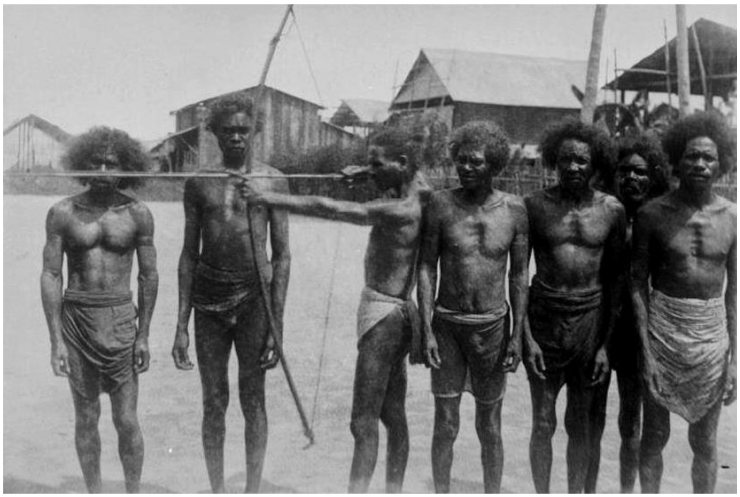


**Figure 17.** Aru people, circa 1890-1915.

From Wallace's explanation, we know that Dobbo at that time was a settlement of traders on the coast, partly Bugis and Chinese, but also Javanese, Seramese, Babar, and immigrants from other islands. Meanwhile, the interior of Aru was inhabited by indigenous people, who came to Dobbo to trade forest products. Wars among the Alifuru seemed localized, as they did not cause widespread disruption in Aru. Issues between village A and village B did not spread further. Moreover, as I explained earlier, wars among traditional societies were usually less deadly and not aimed at conquest. This is why coastal and inland relations could be well maintained. When news of Wallace's presence spread, many Alifuru people from various parts of Aru came to trade goods. He also roamed the interior safely. According to Wallace, since there was no government in Aru, it was not the state that kept its people from falling into "chaos":

> "Here we may behold in its simplest form the genius of Commerce at the work of Civilization. Trade is the magic that keeps all at peace, and unites these discordant elements into a well-behaved community. All are traders, and all know that peace and order are essential to successful trade, and thus a public opinion is created which puts down all lawlessness."[71]

Interestingly, this same formulation by Wallace proved to be true hundreds of years later. In 1999, sectarian riots broke out, dividing the Muslim and Christian populations in Ambon. The government structure collapsed, trading activities ceased, and markets were set ablaze; even the security forces were split into two factions. To meet the increasingly difficult basic living needs, female traders *(papalele)* in Ambon, regardless of religion, took the initiative to create impromptu markets, later known as *"pasar bakubae"* (reconciliation market). In this case, it was not religious leaders, politicians, or soldiers who led the effort, but small traders in Ambon who bridged the gap between Muslim and Christian groups due to their shared needs.[72] This phenomenon occurred in the Mardika area, Ambon, adding another way for the Maluku people to organize grassroots reconciliation when the state "collapsed" for several years (1999-2003). The past and present of Maluku are intertwined through beautiful coincidences.

71. Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, 439-440.

72. See Talakua, "Pasar; Bakudapa Bangun Rekonsiliasi" (2017). Also Aziz Tunny, "Jejak-jejak Perjumpaan," in *Carita Orang Basudara* (2014). Such events did not occur in Sampit, Poso, or other conflict points in Indonesia during the early Reformation; throughout Indonesia, military intervention seemed more necessary to forcibly suppress civil conflicts.

Aru and Banda Islands were both involved in strategic trade, and this could take place without needing a king or a state. Banda was the economic center of this region, trading independently before the Dutch conquered it. Unlike Ternate-Tidore or the agrarian states of Java, the system in Banda "…provided a relatively neutral space for both local and incoming traders to operate, free from the intrusions of other states, and a set of supporting institutional practices." (Ellen, 2003: 279). After the Banda Massacre in 1621, Aru became a major trading point without a ruler and remained relatively undisturbed until the late 19th century. The Protestant Church mission only entered the Aru Islands in 1870, and the Dutch trade surveillance post was established in 1874, decades after Wallace's visit.

The case was different for Leti Island, which also lacked a state but was less economically fortunate. Although Aru was sometimes targeted by pirates or slave hunters, Leti and the Timor and southwest Maluku waters seemed less stable compared to Aru, especially compared to Banda in the 16th century. According to Hägerdal (2020), the presence of the Portuguese and Dutch in Timor created a broad political network but failed to create safe conditions. On the contrary, Portuguese-Dutch rivalry often became a reason for attacks among their respective allies. Religion could be a marker, as these pirates came from East Seram and sometimes Makassar, which were Muslim, while Leti, Moa, Timor, and Wetar adhered to ancestral (Alifuru) or sometimes Christian religions, making them easier targets for slavery.

Similar instability also occurred in Seram, where the tentacles of Ternate-Tidore and the Dutch monopoly on spice trade tried to grip the region. Traders from the west, especially Makassar, tried to penetrate the Dutch blockade for cheaper alternative

access to spices from Seram. Dutch efforts to prevent this made peaceful and free trade impossible.

Historically, the presence of the state was more of a disturbance to local economic-political order than a driving force for development. Despite being in a Eurocentric paradigm, when reviewing the spice monopoly in Banda by the Dutch government, Wallace concluded: "The true 'political economy' of a higher race, when ruling a lower race, has never succeeded. The application of our 'political economy' to such cases has always resulted in the extinction or destruction of the lower race."[73] Wallace was also right that the main profits from the spice monopoly did not flow to the nation, but to a handful of people.

## How Rich are the Orang Kaya?

The concentration of power aligns with the accumulation of wealth. These two things are among the prerequisites for the formation of states in Maluku, as seen in the cases of Ternate and Tidore, where the profits from the spice trade primarily flowed to the sultans. But this did not happen with the Alifuru. Not because they were incapable. The spice trade in Banda, and the trade of sea cucumbers and pearls in Aru enabled chiefs to accumulate wealth. That is why the title of chiefs and respected elders in central and southern Maluku is historically referred to as 'orang kaya' (rich people). However, there were several cultural practices in Maluku that prevented serious accumulation of wealth by preventing the emergence of entrepreneurs who could become rulers.

Wallace stated that the people of Aru "[s]ometimes they hunt or fish a little, or work at their houses or canoes, but they seem

73. Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago* (1877), 439.

to enjoy pure idleness, and work as little as they can."[74] The inhabitants of Banda before 1621 were said to "live off the produce of their land; and although there was constant war, most remained idle."[75] Similar depictions have been repeated almost everywhere of Maluku for hundreds of years. The main response to this is usually that these depictions were merely used as a justification for colonialism. While there is some truth to this, the work hours and leisure time in societies as recorded by Europeans were not actually excessive.

Pierre Clastres, by analyzing the mode of domestic production by Marshall Sahlins, cites ethnographic evidence that primitive economies were indeed less productive because work was consumer production to ensure the satisfaction of needs and not as exchange production to gain profit by commercializing surplus goods. According to him, *primitive societies are societies that refuse economy* (Clastres, 2010: 198). This view might further explain the myth of the lazy native; laziness is a rejection of accumulation: "…primitive man is not an entrepreneur, it is because profit does not interest him; that if he does not "optimize" his activity, as the pedants like to say, it is not because he does not know how to, but because he does not feel like it!" (Ibid, 193).

Clastres (2010: 199) also concluded that "[p]rimitive society allows poverty for everyone, but not accumulation by some." Accumulation by a few means changing social relations, namely a division that forms a dominant minority (chiefs and clients) that would rule and dominate the majority. That is why Clastres said that the conditions to become a chief are the ability to speak well and generosity.

74. Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago* (1877), 450.
75. Argensola, *Conquista de las Islas Molucas* (1891), 243.

Within this understanding, the most diligent individuals find their place in society. However, everything is arranged in such a way that they cannot be used as a means to create permanently unequal wealth, as forms of self-enrichment would end in competitions to see who can give the most. One of the ways to manifest this is through the redistribution wealth of the chiefs in various expensive celebrations and feasts. Sachse (1907: 160) reported that "The Alifuru people are lovers of celebrations and they happily take advantage of every opportunity to celebrate. For example, if a chief is appointed, the celebration lasts at least a full week." This tradition reflects one characteristic of the *"orang besar" (big men)* who may be influential but not powerful, as explained in Chapter 1.

> "In exchange for his generosity, what does the big-man get? Not the fulfillment of his desire for power, but the fragile satisfaction of his honor; not the ability to command, but the innocent enjoyment of a glory he exhausts himself to maintain. He works, literally, for glory: society gives it to him willingly, busy as it is savoring the fruit of its chief 's labor." (Clastres, 2010: 202).

Aside from redistributing wealth, the other option is to destroy wealth. The Alifuru people in Seram have countered accumulation in a more extreme way. Sachse (1907: 149) noted, "throughout Seram, a grave is given no marker, but as a sign of mourning, plates, gongs, and other items are broken and thrown upon it." In Aru in 1825, it was also reported:

> "When a man dies all his relations assemble and destroy all the goods he may have collected during his life, even the gongs are broken to pieces and thrown away. In their villages I met with several heaps of porcelain plates and basins, the property of deceased individuals, the survivors entertaining an idea that they have no right to make use of them."[76]

This custom is no longer practiced. When Wallace visited Aru 30 years later, he described a different burial practice in Aru. He acknowledged: "…they have evidently been considerably influenced by their long association with Mahometan traders."[77] The same case applies to Tobelo in Halmahera, where the arrival of Christianity led to the prohibition of traditional death ceremonies and their replacement with Christian burials. According to Platenkamp: "...no other ideological element of Tobelo has ever been altered so drastically by the introduction of Christian teachings as the concept of death."[78] In Aru Islands themselves, more than half of the population now embraces Christianity.

Topatimasang (2016: 28) argues that the implementation of [religious] values is also related to economic and political interests, namely as a cultural legitimacy basis for the expansion of capital and government power. According to him, "the indigenous people of Maluku can no longer use their traditional teachings and beliefs, which have very different perspectives, as reasons to reject, argue against, or protest the influx of capitalists

76. Kolff, *Voyages of the Dutch Brig of War Dourga* (1840), 166-167.

77. Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago* (1877), 481.

78. Platenkamp. *Tobelo: Ideas and Values of a North Moluccan Society* (1988). Quoted from Roem Topatimasang, *Orang-orang Kalah* (2016).

supported by official rulers endorsed by official religious institutions." Of course, sometimes religion can preserve some local cultural practices; both can coexist. But religion also eradicates beliefs that help prevent wealth accumulation. The Abrahamic religions, which inherently have a liberating side, when promoted by Sultanates and colonial states, historically perpetuated wealth accumulation, the foundation of hierarchy, which became the initial stage of state formation. This is an interesting topic to explore further.

# Closing

The formation of the state is prevented by various mechanisms in Alifuru culture that shut down the possibility of power centralization and prevent wealth accumulation, which are some of the factors for state formation. One of the mechanisms in Maluku's social life that seems beneficial to prevent the formation of the state is Siwa-Lima. They do not reject unity, because Siwa-Lima itself is unity within the concept of dualism; instead, Siwa-Lima rejects the stage of power centralization, as in the case of Ternate-Tidore. Siwa-Lima is a symbolic pact that binds its participants collectively, both in the alliance of nine or the alliance of five, to remain in a stateless condition, ensuring autonomy and equality in the balance of adversaries. War in the concept of Siwa-Lima is not for conquest, and without conquest, a state will not be formed. Without Siwa, there will be no Lima and vice versa.

Instead of power centralization with the establishment of Islamic monarchies, many stateless societies in Maluku established various federations, and there were at least three confederations (*Fogoguru* in Halmahera, *Seri-Tahun*, and *Saniri Tiga Air* in Seram) that align with modern anarchist theory, albeit very loosely applied. From some gathered information, Saniri itself was a council that managed reconciliation in disputes, indicating that wars and headhunting were attempted to be controlled or mitigated, but not eradicated. Such efforts also failed.

Not all areas had federations, as some islands had villages that were entirely independent of each other. Therefore, the existence of these institutions showed the capacity for self-

organization within broader areas, united by common interests and needs, especially security and self-defense. At the same time, this allowed for the regulation of their own economy.

Ergo, with or without a state, wars could happen. With or without a state, trade could happen. With or without a state, peace could also happen. Now, the arrangement for with or without a state is an active choice. Alifuru, therefore, aligns with David Graeber's explanation: "Anarchistic societies are no more unaware of human capacities for greed or vainglory than modern Americans are unaware of human capacities for envy, gluttony, or sloth; they would just find them equally unappealing as the basis for their civilization. In fact, they see these phenomena as moral dangers so dire they end up organizing much of their social life around containing them." (Graeber, 2004: 24). We call this anarchy.

# Conclusion.
## Alifuru: Conquest & Liberation

The characteristics commonly attributed to the Alifuru as a stateless society are usually the same: Living in the interior or highlands, not wearing clothes, barbaric, adhering to ancestral beliefs, etc.[79] Unlike the state formation projects of Ternate-Tidore, colonial, and the new Indonesian nation-state, which represent the opposite of Alifuru: living on the coast and lowlands, dressed, civilized, and embracing Islam (and later Christianity). Both exist in a mutually dependent relationship, as, definitively, there is no barbarism without civilization, and vice versa.

The ebb and flow of Alifuru's identity are determined by the state's scope. In the early days of Ternate-Tidore's expanding power, Alifuru was used not only to identify the highly diverse tribes in the interior of Buru, Seram, Halmahera, but also the Banggai and Sula Islands, the people of North Sulawesi, especially the Minahasa and Bolaang Mongondow communities, the southwest Maluku islands, and even Papua. As the power of the Sultanates and colonials spread and many of the subjects embraced Islam and Christianity, the Alifuru identity gradually faded and narrowed. Today, Alifuru is used to refer to ethnic groups in the interior around Seram and Central Maluku who still hold on to their original beliefs. However, some people in the interior of Central Sulawesi, for example, still remember this identity.

79. Due to the Islands' topography being absent of mountains or high hills, the cosmology of the people in the Aru Islands is somewhat unique. The relatively flat surface of this island produces a concept that divides Aru into two worlds: the front coast towards the northwest (Banda), which is more cosmopolitan and inhabited by traders, separated from the back coast (backland) in the southeast, inhabited by the indigenous people and the source of sea cucumbers and pearls.

Therefore, the concept of Alifuru cannot be understood in isolation. Alifuru is merely a side of the same coin that reflects the relative position of a group in relation to state authority. The same formulation applies when we discuss the Batak in Sumatra and the Dayak in Kalimantan.[80] Andaya (1993) also concluded that certain characteristics of Maluku society in the early modern period revealed the strong influence of broader Austronesian thought.[81]

Being Alifuru is a political choice. If they submitted to the Sultanate's power, they could embrace Islam. If they submitted to European colonial power, they could embrace Christianity and Catholicism. If they were anarchists, they became Alifuru. However, embracing state religions did not guarantee full loyalty from the indigenous population or signify a loss of autonomy. In reality, neither the sultanates nor colonial states could fully control their subjects.

Power in the context of eastern Indonesian islands is not accurately illustrated by dotted lines and shading on a map. Rather, it is more accurately likened to the light of a torch, as in European Enlightenment thought, Western civilization is the source of illumination, awakening, progress, and development. The further we are from that light source, the more we move to the periphery, the dimmer the light and the darker it becomes. Although this expression may seem exaggerated, it is what James C. Scott (2009: 45) refers to as 'friction of distance':

80. See my previous study, in Bima Satria Putra, *Dayak Mardaheka: Sejarah Masyarakat Tanpa Negara di Pedalaman Kalimantan* (2021).

81. Seen in an even broader context, the phenomenon of statelessness has been a feature of social organization in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. The Tobelo settlement called *hoana* is also used by the Minahasa people and ancient Javanese (*wanua*), Dayak (*banua*), as well as in Hawaii (*honua*) and Fiji (*vanua*). *Latu* in Seram also has the same meaning as in the Philippines (*datu*), ancient Java and Fiji (*ratu*).

"Before the distance-demolishing technology of railroads and all-weather motor roads, land-bound polities in Southeast Asia and Europe found it extremely difficult, without navigable waterways, to concentrate and then project power."

In the state formation project, the Dutch used all disciplinary tools from their colonial toolkit, as mentioned by Manse (2021: 541): structural disarmament, resettlement, forcing villagers to settle, dismissing village heads and breaking local ties between land and communities to reorganize movements and hierarchies, along with introducing labor services and taxes. Knaap (2003: 181) also cited four elements of conquest, namely: military domination, controlled populations, divide and rule tactics, and building consensus.

Ternate and Tidore had no ambition or power to conquer the interior, but the Dutch were different. The Dutch had naval superiority, and because of this, they were more powerful maritime-wise. The Dutch found it easier to conquer the coasts and made the coastal population their main allies in conquering the interior. But once the Dutch conquered the mountain settlements, they forced the Alifuru to move to the coast to be more easily monitored.

The form of social organization in Maluku, marked by political fragmentation, was also a major obstacle to the state formation project. For example, in order for the Dutch to conquer West Seram (Hoamoal) and Ambon Lease, Knaap (2003) referred to this process as the Hundred Years' War: "There was no clear centre in the area. Consequently, shortly after one political factor was eliminated, another quickly arose to take its place."

An equally important aspect of the colonial project to restore societal conditions was the cooperation of indigenous community leaders, whose interests rarely fully aligned with those of the Dutch (Manse, 2021: 544). Chiefs were appointed and endorsed by the Dutch, and given greater power than what was given in their traditional authority. For instance, the position and role of *Latu* in the Wemale society of Seram were manipulated by granting them full rights as representatives in land release negotiations if desired by the colonial government (Topatimasang, 2016: 159).

It is not an exaggeration to say that many tactics of Ternate-Tidore and the Dutch are still employed by the Indonesian nation-state. The strategy of power centralization today keeps the colonial legacy alive.

Lastly, society and the state are two different entities and are often in conflict. The state may emerge from within society, but society can abort it; the state's tentacles may grip a society, but society can cut them off; civilization attempts to tame, but wild and uncontrollable anarchy keeps flourishing. The state can crumble, corrode, and disband, but society remains. The historical conjuncture of Maluku is best understood by examining the formation and reduction of power.

In his explanation of political organization in Southeast Seram, Ellen (2003: 38) described: "Some were federations of equals; others were semiautonomous groups in a hierarchical relationship within a larger semicentralized domain. Moreover, their existence and specific composition appear to have been in a continuous state of flux." Kolff in the early 19th century also stated that the Arafura [Alifuru] in Wetar considered themselves subordinate to coastal inhabitants. However, Kolff wrote, "The Arafuras of the interior had been in a very unsettled state some

time past, all regularity of government having been put an end to by the death of the Raja…"[82]

History in Maluku can be viewed from the perspective of the rulers and the ruled; I take the latter. Instead of interpreting history as an evolutionary stage from low-level savage societies destined to follow the flow of civilization (where they have become the main victims of development), we must understand this history as a process of capture-escape and snatch-collapse. This is the perspective of the Alifuru – the people whom surrounding state formation projects have been trying to rule for centuries. This is the historical perspective of those who were ruled and conquered. This approach is sometimes called "people's history," occasionally "history from below," and more recently, "anarchist history."

Thus, I reject Andaya's (1993: 49) understanding, who said that "Maluku is neither a political state nor a stateless society." According to him, local traditions explaining a relationship between a community and other communities – be them on a certain island or within the broader Maluku World – function as a guiding map and authorize political expansion, while providing an accepted basis for action sans political pressures amid cultural and societal differences.

Instead, I propose that historically there has been a separation, two spaces and worlds, namely the state space (Maluku World) and the stateless space (Alifuru World). The relationship and position of both have been thoroughly discussed previously, and many of its elements help us explain the Maluku landscape formed today.

82. Kolff, *Voyages of the Dutch Brig of War Dourga* (1840), 44.

As analyzed by Hägerdal (2024), legends and traditions about the beginning of European colonial presence in Southeast Asia sometimes depict foreigners as protectors, but also as largely dangerous and unreliable forces. The people of Maluku did not always see their relationships with Tidore-Ternate or European rulers as beneficial. If they became subjugated or victims of piracy, many communities across Maluku saw Europeans as potential allies and new rulers. At the same time, being under the shadow of government for most of the time was clearly unpleasant. It meant being regulated and supervised, taxed and levied, and their labor mobilized for things that typically only benefited the ruling class.

The most accurate conclusion at present is that the Alifuru became anarchists not because they were too ignorant to form a state. The Alifuru became anarchists also not simply because they were too far from the reach of government services and power. The Alifuru were anarchists because their society was characterized by relative equality; consensus decision-making; and the absence of centralized political institutions. Furthermore, they continuously fought for autonomy and actively strove to prevent themselves from forming a state. This means that the Alifuru were consciously and actively anarchist. They knew what they were avoiding and what they wanted.

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And now, what is the benefit of this text?

Amid the roar of mining machinery and rainforest continuously transformed for large-scale plantation openings dragging us to the brink of mass extinction and climate crisis, we need to rethink all the assumptions of civilization and development being touted today. What is the meaning of progress in modern history? Both capitalism and communism, though differing in their approaches, utilize the same vehicle of industrialism and believe that there are historical stages leading to progress. These stages are sometimes bridged by rapid social changes, a revolution. But Walter Benjamin has an alternative suggestion: "Marx said that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps it is quite otherwise. Perhaps revolutions are an attempt by the passengers on the train – namely, the human race – to activate the emergency brake."[83]

Our economic-political order has gone too far and too fast. It is a global machine driven by the law of limitless growth that drastically reduces the Earth's capacity to support a more habitable ecosystem. This was already Wallace's contemplation hundreds of years ago. During his time in Aru, his worldview changed drastically. He began to question why European-made goods were sold cheaper in Aru than in their place of origin, even though these goods were not truly needed by the indigenous population. He realized something was wrong with the global economic order at that time.

> "[...] that in one of the most remote corners of the earth savages can buy clothing cheaper than the people of the country where it is made ; that the weaver's child should shiver in the wintry wind,

83. Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, 1938–1940*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (1996).

> unable to purchase articles attainable by the wild natives of a tropical climate where clothing is mere ornament or luxury, should make us pause ere we regard with unmixed admiration the system which has led to such a result, and cause us to look with some suspicion on the further extension of that system. It must be remembered too than our commerce is not a purely natural growth. It has been ever fostered by the legislature, and forced to an unnatural luxuriance by the protection of our fleets and armies. The wisdom and the justice of this policy have been already doubted. So soon, therefore, as it is seen that the further extension of our manufactures and commerce would be an evil, the remedy is not far to see."

The remedy is not far off, said Wallace. If we seek inspiration for revolution, perhaps we need to stop, if necessary, go backwards. I am not proposing that we return to the past. I do not mean for us to behead, or destroy our own property, or flee to the mountains, like the Alifuru ancestors once did. I am proposing decolonization, because being free from colonialism and forming a new state alone is not enough, and has even proven to be disastrous. The inspiration needed may not come from the Western world, but here now on our land. Look at Nunusaku, there is anarchy, and Mikhail Bakunin would surely agree.

# HENAMASAWAIYA

*Hena masa waya waiya lete huni mu a o*

*Yuri tasi bea sala ne kotika o*

*A oleh ruma o ruma singgi sopa o*

*O paune ite kibi ratu hira roli o*

**Meaning:**

*The Countries in lofty places where we reside in MU are buried in water day and night.*

*Upon tracing the origins of us all, unmistakably then*

*Our houses are genuinely multi-storied, passed through generations*

*We are all, without exception, like Kings.*[84]

84. Siyauta, Saul. 1986. *Hena Masa Waiya*. Manuscript: Ambon. Quoted from Aone van Engelenhoven. *On the philosophy of folklore: a review and proposals.* Leiden University.

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## About The Author

**Bima Satria Putra,** born in Kapuas, Central Kalimantan, on November 4, 1995. Graduated in journalism from Fiskom UKSW, former Editor-in-Chief of the Student Press Institute Lentera. Now he is a writer, researcher, and translator. Interested in the study of history, anthropology, and ecology. His works include: *Perang yang Tidak Akan Kita Menangkan: Anarkisme & Sindikalisme dalam Pergerakan Kolonial hingga Revolusi Indonesia (1908-1948)* (published in 2018) and *Dayak Mardaheka: Sejarah Masyarakat Tanpa Negara di Pedalaman Kalimantan* (published in 2021). He is currently conducting research on the Fire Tribes Project (PSA) and remains committed to writing while serving his fifteen-year prison sentence from 2021.