

Bugis Migration, Ethnic Conflict, and National Integration

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Observers of Indonesian society have frequently commented on its seemingly extraordinary ability to hold itself together in spite of its geographic fragmentation and cultural and social diversity. The recent eruption of violent ethnic and religious conflicts has shown us how very real the problem of national integration is in Indonesia. With the fall of Suharto in 1998, and the granting of independence to East Timor in 1999, other long suppressed separatist movements are reemerging. Problematizing the idea of assimilation, this paper addresses questions concerning the role of migration and settlement of peoples outside of their homelands as a factor in the economic and political integra-

tion of the region and the Indonesian state.¹

In his recent work, James Scott has been posing the question "Why has the state been the enemy of people who moved around?" (Scott 1999). He finds that in many of the classic states of Southeast Asia, at least part of the answer appears to lie in the state's need for manpower in a region where, until well into the colonial period, land and natural resources were plentiful while population density was particularly low (e.g. six people per square kilometer in 1700). Since Southeast Asian states relied so heavily upon surpluses in rice grown near to the court centers and since it took large numbers of people to grow the rice, Scott suggests that "rounding up people and concentrating them in a particular place was the central preoccupation of statecraft" (1999:3).

One of the consequences of this need for people, according to Scott, was that whether the people being "rounded up" were captives, slaves, or volunteers, assimilation appears to have been relatively easy and quite common. That is, where there was a need for manpower, whether for rice farming, sailing aboard trading ships, or engaging rival kingdoms in battle, Southeast Asians organized themselves such that people of alien ethnicities were welcome as clients and even as family members so long as they settled close to the state center and respected or, better yet, took on the local culture. "Systems of kinship and social organization," Scott claims, "were remarkably inclusive." As an example, Scott points out that assimilation was historically encouraged in the Malay world by accepting as "Malay" anyone willing to embracing Islam, learn to speak Malay, and follow Malay customs, including customary law (*adat*) (1999:3). Early in their history, he suggests, this would have served to assimilate seafarers and traders into coastal kingdoms which relied on their loyalty to flourish. I would add that in the modern state of Malaysia where assimilation has been seen as an essential element in achieving national integration, it has even become a point of law. That is, any citizen can officially become a "Malay" and, thereby, gain certain economic and legal privileges by demonstrating that he or she has embraced these three practices.

In this paper I address three questions: First, what is the nature of Bugis assimilation and hegemony as migrants and settlers outside of their homeland² of South Sulawesi? Second, what do we know of Bugis history and identity as successful migrants and settlers? And third, how is it that things have recently gone so terribly wrong for Bugis settlers in

¹ An earlier version of this paper was first presented to the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Session 2-115: Forms of Regional Integration: South America, Melanesia, and Southeast Asia, November 19, 1999.

² The Bugis terms *pallili'* and *palla'ba'* "emigrant, foreigner, wanderer" denotes to people who travel to and settle in spaces outside of their homeland, whether it be along the far reaches of a river or across the sea, or more generally abroad; c.f. Indonesian *perantau*.

East Timor and Ambon?

Bugis assimilation and hegemony outside of their homeland

Most notorious among the seafarers and traders who roamed the Indo-Malay archipelago were the Bugis of South Sulawesi. Forced out of their homeland by the thousands in the aftermath of the Dutch-Makasar Wars of the late seventeenth century, they used the ships they owned and the overseas connections they had already established to open new trade centers and settle in new lands all across Southeast Asia. As migrants they are reputed for their hard work and success in opening formerly unexploited economic niches by clearing new agricultural lands, developing fisheries, and opening small businesses. In these ways, it seems clear, the Bugis have made a significant contribution to economic integration across the region. From the standpoint of political integration and state formation, however, the history of Bugis migration and settlement is far more problematic. More complicated than in the scenario depicted by Scott in which migrants were assimilated into the political center, the Bugis have tended not to be content to simply assimilate into their new surroundings or to even isolate themselves, but rather more often, to first penetrate and then dominate existing communities.

Although the Bugis are well-known for their earlier military conquests, for their success in exploiting new economic niches, and for controlling the flow of indigenous trade items, the type of domination they have exercised cannot be reduced to any combination of these. In his 1989 dissertation, Greg Acciaioli presents an ethnographic account of a recent Bugis settlement at Lindu in Central Sulawesi where the immigrants had opened the nearby lake for the first time to commercial fishing, creating a complete marketing network through which they were eventually able to dominate the local economy. Acciaioli found, however, that Bugis attempts at domination of the area went far beyond the economic sphere. As he explains, “they have also attempted to provide ideological justification of their dominant position in the local context. As citizens of a nation state committed to development, the Bugis have billed themselves the bringers of progress to the area, the only hope for developing Lindu along the lines the government envisages, and hence the legitimate occupants of such roles as hamlet head” and other local offices. Moreover, Acciaioli continues, “they have also sought to legitimize their position by their rediscovery of the fundamentally Bugis basis of the local spiritual universe” (311). That is, once the Bugis had gained knowledge of local ritual practices, they reinterpreted them in light of Bugis customs (*ade*) and imposed those reinterpretations back upon their neighbors.

Combining all of these dimensions—the economic, the political, as well as the spiritual—Acciaioli argues that what he observed at Lindu is best explained by Gramsci’s idea of

“hegemonic control”: the construction of a common culture by an economically dominant group which thereby commands prestige and the confidence of those it dominates. Through elicitation of the “consent of the dominated,” at Lindu, Acciaioli claims, a consciousness was created among the original inhabitants, that legitimized the “position of the ruling group as natural” (Acciaioli 312).

Acciaioli goes on to show that the situation at Lindu was not an isolated case, but part of an historical pattern. Among those who fled Sulawesi in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, many sailed west where they would often affiliate themselves with local leaders as simple settlers or as mercenaries in battles against traditional and emergent rivals, including the Dutch. Because these migrations were led by members of high Bugis nobility, many of whom had rights to succeed to rule in their homeland, they were not only given land to settle, but also economic and military control over their settlements. As Acciaioli points out, “It was precisely the high nobles of the defeated lands whose primary occupation in the peninsula — governance — had been rendered impracticable along traditional lines. So, they fled to exercise control elsewhere” (49).

And exercise control they did, usurping power through both military might and strategic marriages. In a classic case of penetration and hegemonic control, Bugis nobles and their followers first attached themselves to the Rajahdom of Johor and the Riau Archipelago as mercenaries, and, through marriage, were able to establish not only their progeny’s right to rule, but also their claim as legitimate guardians of true Malay customs and customary law (*adat*) through the rewriting of local chronicles and histories. According to Matheson, it was the Bugis who became the defenders of “pure Malay culture” against foreign corruption and it was the Bugis interpretation of that culture which nineteenth century Dutch scholars recorded as “exemplary forms of ‘Malayness’” (Matheson 1986, in Acciaioli 313). Recall that this appears to be the same “Malayness” that Scott refers to in his argument concerning the ease of assimilation at that time. If, as Scott claims, Malayness was “simply the terms of cultural accommodation necessary to the creation of a cosmopolitan ministate at the coast” (1999:3), then it was the Bugis, not the Malays, who appear to have been dictating those terms (1998:3).

Thus Acciaioli argues that at Lindu and across the archipelago, what distinguishes the Bugis from other migrant cultures is not only their resourcefulness in entering previously unexploited economic niches but, also, their overwhelmingly successful “efforts to restructure local economic, social, political and cultural relations so as to exert economic domination and impose cultural hegemony” (325).

Bugis history and identity as successful migrants and settlers

So, what is the meaning of “success” among Bugis mi-

grants and how are we to explain the general success of the Bugis outside of their homeland? Part of the answer, it seems to me, lies in the historical roots of Bugis migration.

Like other coastal communities prior to European incursion, the Bugis and Makasar not only traded their own surpluses, but forged trading links with inland communities who at first provided forest products and later the manpower, both voluntary and coerced, to develop agriculture, primarily rice, which fed growing coastal communities as well as providing additional surpluses for trade. Initially, however, these surpluses appear to have been sold to Malay and Javanese traders who had developed and dominated interisland trade from a much earlier time. In contrast, substantial Makasar and Bugis involvement in this regional trade network came rather late, resulting from the fall of the port of Melaka to the Portuguese in 1511 and the subsequent diversion of much of that trade to the new warehouse and distribution center at the port of Makasar.

Previously focusing on building wealth and power by controlling trade in their ports, the Makasar and then the Bugis quickly moved to profit from all aspects of archipelagic trade, including the ownership and crewing of large trading ships. Further opportunities opened to the Makasar and Bugis during the first half of the seventeenth century as the Dutch in Batavia attempted to control their monopoly on the spice trade by curbing the activities of the Javanese traders (Schrieke 1966).

It was during this period that Makasar and Bugis traders freely roamed the archipelago from the east coast of mainland Southeast Asia to the Philippines, Papua, and the north coast of Australia. Searching for cargos, they followed the monsoon winds, returning home for only a short period each year to repair and refit their ships. Thus they became a critical link in regional and global trade, connecting wealthy consumers in China and Europe with the exotic products of swidden farmers and foragers of the eastern islands and northern Australia.

Soon, however, the Dutch turned their attention to Makasar which, under the control of the dual kingdom of Goa and Tallo', had become the greatest threat to their monopoly of the spice trade. Failing to gain control through treaty, the Dutch declared war on Makasar and succeeded in capturing it in 1669. Allied with the Dutch were the Bugis states of Boné and Soppeng who were intent on punishing Goa for its earlier enslavement of thousands of their people to build infrastructure at Makasar.

Although the more northerly Bugis state of Wajo' was also allied by treaty with Boné, it's leaders had joined with Makasar against the Dutch. In retribution, in 1670, the legendary prince of Boné and commander of it's troops, Arung Palakka, moved against Wajo'. As a result of this war and its aftermath, an exodus of both Makasar and Bugis began which was to heavily influence the integration of the entire region for the next three hundred years.

Scattering themselves across the region, the Bugis and Makasar gained a reputation among both indigenous peoples and European commentators as intrepid and even ruthless in their determination and success in dominating trade and in colonization. As Ricklefs observes, when we stop to consider the enormous extent of Bugis and Makasar military and trade activity from the point of view of the peoples who suffered their depredations and the Dutch colonial forces who were fighting to restrain them, it is easy to conclude along with them that "well into the eighteenth century these fierce warriors were the scourge of the archipelago" (1981:63).

From another point of view, however, it was the Dutch themselves (and, perhaps, 200 years later the Indonesian government) who, by destroying traditional political structures in Sulawesi and elsewhere, created the conditions that allowed the Bugis to take control, whether direct or indirect, in many coastal areas of the western archipelago. Likewise, Dutch policy enabled the Bugis, especially those from Wajo', to develop a trade network that posed serious competition to the Dutch in the 18th century. By 1820, the Bugis dominated internal trade which extended from New Guinea to Sumatra and which provided a critical link in growing international trade between Europe and the eastern islands.

Ever increasing subjugation and exploitation of their colonial subjects by the Dutch merely served, among the Bugis, to encourage further migration, illegal trade, and piracy. As Lineton explains, "Providing labour services to the community or the ruler which were sanctioned by *ade'* (customary law) was one thing; the arbitrary impositions of a foreign power were another, and were seen as intolerable" (Lineton, 1975:23).

While the majority of Bugis migrants were still engaged in trade until the late nineteenth century, the Dutch gradually managed to take control. Meanwhile, the introduction of the steamship and the opening of the Suez Canal increased demand in Europe for tropical agricultural products, encouraging the opening of new agricultural land. Facing decreasing trade opportunities, many Bugis engaged in a new wave of settlement, most often clearing land adjacent to earlier Bugis settlements, where they cultivated coconuts for copra.

My own fieldwork has been among such a community who settled over 100 years ago on a small coral islet in the Sabalana Archipelago, 100 miles south of the Makasar. Today, the Bugis of Balobaloang rely on a mixed economy of coconut horticulture and small-scale seaborne trade supplemented in harder times by commercial fishing from their dugouts and ships. Emblematic of the Bugis during the first half of the 20th century, the Bugis of Balobaloang cleared the forest; planted coconut trees and fished for both subsistence and trade; and built tall ships with which they plied their trade from Sumatra to Papua and Kalimantan to Maluku.

With the establishment of an independent Indonesia in 1949, a Javanese-dominated government continued to both

stimulate Bugis migration and facilitate settlement outside of their homeland. Shortly after Independence, an Islamic rebellion broke out in South Sulawesi and spread into Central Sulawesi. Allied with the Dar'ul Islam movement in advocating an Islamic Indonesian State, this guerilla war persisted for over a decade. Meanwhile a second secessionist rebellion was being waged against the leftist and militarist Sukarno government by the unlikely alliance of Muslim West Sumatra and mostly Christian North Sulawesi. As a result of both of these movements, for more than a decade many rural villagers, caught between the Indonesian army and the guerrillas, chose to flee rather than fight in what Acciaioli claims to be the largest Bugis migration since the devastation of Wajo' two and a half centuries earlier.

Among those who chose flight at that time were several separate contingents of Bugis who settled in a village along the shore of Lake Lindu, south of Palu in Central Sulawesi and who later became the subject of Acciaioli's dissertation research. What I find remarkable about Acciaioli's analysis of Bugis migration and settlement at Lindu is his "holistic" approach that takes him beyond the reductionist analyses of his predecessors and allows him to envision the Bugis quest as itself holistic, with its combined goal of economic domination and the imposition of cultural hegemony (325). He thus begins his analysis by acknowledging the importance of the material and structural dimensions of kinship, rank, and economic organization within Bugis society, emphasized by earlier social scientists and described above, as they bear on our understanding of Bugis mobility. Thus he argues that the Bugis experience at Lindu recalls many of the same "themes and strategies" observed among Bugis settlers at other places and times :

... status, achievement of material success and its signs, reliance on kin in recruitment and settlement, the continuation subethnic loyalties, complementarity in resource exploitation, and the construction of leader-follower hierarchies. (1989:324)

Acciaioli then goes on to explore the motivations and meanings that the Bugis, themselves, attached to their quest for economic domination and the imposition of cultural hegemony. Bugis immigrants, he finds, often speak of "searching for good fortune" (*massapa dallé; rejeki* in IND) as their primary motivation to migrate, a phrase which Acciaioli argues "entails a quest guided by some of the most basic tenants of Bugis culture." Briefly, he finds, the search for good fortune is "a search for knowledge as well as riches, embracing a way of seizing one's fate..." which, it is hoped, will take the searcher well beyond the accumulation of material wealth, to include the general good fortune that is accrued through life (1989:267). Evidence of good fortune is found in such things as respected status in community, children, magical knowledge, and the blessings of God. In practice, Bugis emphasize that in a world dominated by economic

and social commitments, both hard work and the purposeful construction of a network of clients—many of whom are more recent Bugis immigrants—is necessary to sustain both oneself and others. These, in turn, provide the political and moral authority to mediate negotiations over cultural and social matters within their communities and, by extension, those communities to which they attach themselves. In other words, for those who succeed it entails the development of a strong, often hegemonic, connection with their new home.

How is it that things have recently gone so terribly wrong for Bugis settlers in East Timor and Ambon?

Until now I have been speaking only about that which the Bugis might regard as "successful" migration and settlement. During the 1990s, however, there have been two prominent instances of less than successful attempts at settlement. I'm referring here to the recent mass out migrations of Bugis and other non-natives from East Timor and Ambon. Although there are many historical differences, both have in common a rapid growth in the numbers of Bugis immigrants who, during a period of economic boom, sought their fortune as traders and owners of small businesses in urban markets. Seen by development agencies, the Jakarta government, and the Bugis themselves as a force for economic expansion and political integration, this immigrant population increasingly came to be regarded by locals as intruders who were taking away their economic and political power. In Dili, the capital of East Timor, Bugis and Makasar immigrants, by the early 1990s, made up 80% of the traders in the main market. In predominantly Christian Ambon, Bugis merchants and other Muslims began to build mosques in Christian neighborhoods and to virtually take control of the government bureaucracy. But by early 1999, most of the Bugis had fled these provinces, many returning home to Sulawesi while others are seeking their fortune in Irian Jaya and other parts of Indonesia. The question, left unanswered here, is, "Why didn't the Bugis "succeed" in East Timor and Ambon, and what is the meaning of their "failure"? In light of the continuing ethnic and religious conflict in Indonesia which threatens to tear the country apart, I suggest that it is a question which deserves our serious attention.

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