

Ecological Peril in Relation to Politics of Space Case Study: Dama Village, Loloda, North Maluku

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Abstract. The distress of climate crisis has become the state of our human condition. We form our idea of politics in favor of our narrow anthropocentric interest. Our understanding of political space involves exclusively the interaction between human beings, disregarding the environment into the spectrum. Hence, politics is all about acquiring power, race to power among people, and the domination of human beings above nature. Our investigation should start with cases in Indonesia on how politics have gravely misconducted, marginalizing local people, and their environment. The eastern parts of Indonesia are often neglected, the extensive researches conducted for 2 years in Loloda, North Maluku have given us a based of understanding on problems of inequality and ecological exploitations. The people of Loloda have a strong history with the coastal tradition. They have an indigenous system called Kolano, or a form of Sultanate. Due to the array of disappointments to the central government, and even the provincial government, they resurrect the leadership of Kolano amidst facing poverty and losing their natural biodiversity to mining since the 1960s. This research utilizes interdisciplinary methods, from historical approach, linguistic and ecological philosophy analysis. This research discovers that the rising political subjects are indicated through the act of forming Kolano as a conscious and collective choice to protect Loloda's heritage and environment. In conclusion, the important findings of the research underlines on how the people of Loloda recreate a social-ecology political space, contesting the current power exercised by the governments. We can view this act as their way to criticize the ruling power, moreover, their political way to survive.

Keywords: Politics of Space, Social-Ecology, Anthropocentrism, Kolano, Ecological Politics, Indigenous Community.

1 Introduction

Indonesia, as an archipelago country, has an extensive range of diversity in culture and language due to two reasons; historical and geological. These pluralities can become its own complex situation if it's intertwined with the idea of decentralization. Decentralization aims to exert the blueprint from the central government and create a homogenous system into every city. Most of the time, in order to achieve this goal, it needs to change the existing structure in the society as well as their daily practices that have embedded into their culture.

When North Maluku was given their regional autonomy to manage itself as a province in 1999; it means that they become to be, geologically speaking, more compact. Loloda is one of the target that has been undergone several changes throughout the years in term of restructuring. Hence, it will be logical to think that the chosen representatives might have

better understanding to govern their people. However, the result points out in the other direction, the representatives and the central government still can not grasp what local people's need.

The differences can be seen if we compare the value of government contrasted to the people of Loloda. In order to integrate Loloda to fit into their vision, the government wants to boost the economic growth by building a gold mine. The indigenous people from Loloda, on the other hand, sees this as means to damage their forest, which can be translated to destroying their environment. For local people, they always have close relationship with their own nature and understand it as part of their culture. They take refuge from the disruption to their culture or livelihood, by re-forming the ancient leadership of Kolano.

The people of Loloda believe Kolano will bring them prosperity through the chosen leader that arises out of their mythical and historical legend. It shows that Kolano is a belief system that has been bound deep into Loloda's consciousness. Not only that, it is also their way to express their disappointment towards the current system that does not include their value. Furthermore, Kolano is not merely a system of belief, moreover, it is also a social fact for the people of Loloda.

2 Conceptual and Methodological Approach

This article use interdisciplinary methods from historical, linguistic, and emphasizing on ecological perspective. The initial problem for this article is the different basic value of modernization and industrialization by the central government against the demand of social space in Loloda. This article starts by explaining that every space is political space and it influenced how the structural framework for each society.

Whenever there are two clashing values in society, the end result usually the powerful value dominates the other, particularly if one able to overpower the other. On this case, the root of hegemony comes directly from the state in form of regional autonomy. The central government reap their values based on urban planning and try to homogenize every society in Indonesia that has rich variety of culture. That being said, every society from each culture has their own way to solidify their social-consciousness.

This article claims that the people of Loloda have tried to fight against subjugation by means of reconstructing a structure called Kolano. To put it even further, Kolano is a unified act of Lolodan as society, which can be translated into their community collective-consciousness

The methodology used in this article is examining the people narratives on spatial issues related with environment. In doing so, we have been conducting field research in Loloda since 2017. In this ethnographic study we have tried to obtain various sources of data on spatial politics. A number of key figures such as Kolano Loloda, members of the DPR, lecturers, students, and journalists have helped us a lot in a series of FGDs.

2.1 Lefebvre's Politics of Space

The reshaping of consciousness in Loloda substantially created a new space, to be more exact, a political space. Henri Lefebvre believes' that space is not a valueless object such as *scientific one* that mainly concern about fact; space is always and has been political and strategic [6]. Nevertheless, its difficult to sense one because society normally taken space as is, as something that has been there or some natural thing. However, there is problem when

central government tries to impose a different value to Loloda; first, the government use the urban perspective to direct the course of society that leads only to economic growth, the second one is that Loloda prioritize their society based upon their relationship with the nature and their customs. So, in the process of building the gold mine, the people of Loloda does not see it as a improvement for their society, instead they feel threatened by this industrial existence.

This conflictual perception stems on each parties' relation with the environment. Government, when they develop their cities, tends to fall into a relation that restrict and dominate the others to achieve the urban space [3]. For example, in the cities there is sharp distinction between what is public and private space. This distinction comes into play when government need justification to enforce a law that prohibit people to sleep on the bench in the public park, to put fence around government office, or even an information that public transportation only operates for certain hours. It implicates on the specific behavior that the state wants to have over their people. This is what Lefebvre called how the society produces its own space [5].

Thus, there is a hegemony and pattern of domination that state use to define its relation with their environment. However, in Loloda society, especially to indigenou people, the idea of dominating their environment is completely absurd. It's true that Loloda also has its own specific space. Yet, the way they define their relationship with their environment is based upon ecological value, which is something that the government lacked of. This can be seen from the fact that they have distrust towards how the government manages their biodiversity—which is sacred for their relationship with nature. In addition to that, government overlook the importance of Kolano as a means to unite the society in search of fair leader and a belief that brings hope to Lolodan.

These two different political spaces is also affected by their mode of production [2]. Lefebvre called it "State Mode of Production" (or SMP for short) and it gives framework for each society to construct its own space [6]. However, as I stated beforehand, the society tend to perceive (social) space as given and transmitted natural space. Therefore, society does not realize that the current mode of production is characterized by state's control over space and vice versa. The process of proliferation in political space can be traced back on how they interact with the others [6]. If the basis of interaction rests upon the idea of violence and domination, it will emerge on the process of reproduction their own space. Due to the reason that Lefebvre believe this process is a dialectical one when the society always in constant to reshape the space that they inhabit.

After describing why space is political and it constituted by certain value that the society have, the next section of this article will explain what is ecological politics according to Naess'. Ecological perspective can enlighten environmental problem regarding tendency of anthropocentric policies made by the central government.

2.2 Naess Community

Arne Naess considers that there is a strong distinction between environmental approaches, namely *deep ecology* and *shallow ecology*. *Shallow ecology* itself generally about tackling pollution or focusing on human prosperity in general [8]. *Deep ecology* on the other hand rejects the environment with mere human's images. There is an intrinsic realization between the organism and its surroundings so there is a wholeness and equality in the relation [8]. Furthermore, Naess mentioned in his own philosophy, the need for something called *Ecophilosophy* or more closely *ecosophy*. *Ecophilosophy* or *ecosophy* assumes that there is an intrinsic importance from nature to humanity [10]. Then this implies that ecologically, there

are rules or laws that govern human morals, where morals are demarcating other life positions that have rights [10]. The right to another life, here requires wider consideration than the understanding of anthropocentric nature that tends to see changes and solutions in the hands of economic growth, legal matters, and standardized measurements. Since reasoning in general is not possible to be standardized so, from one place or say from one human to another, can promise prosperity or roughly in Naess' language that technocracy sheltered under modern politics works as *subordination* [10]. In other words, the ecology of Naess upholds equality in the relations of nature with the creatures in it or in the biosphere; here Naess calls it *Biospherical egalitarianism* [8].

However, how *ecosophy* itself can be made possible cannot be separated from the locality in thinking. Where, excessive decentralization can result in much essence being wasted in the administrative process [8]. From the Loloda case, the government which focuses on its own development agenda, will assume that the administrative intensity, apart from bringing a mess on the work agenda, actually intensifies itself as a party that has more power than the existing locality. Because of the intensification of the center, then, the emotions that exist or in Naess' language called *gestalt* [10] are absent. The way of thinking *gestalt* towards a certain local environment does not emerge, because the government only feels what is felt in its own environment and community or perhaps its luxury. The Loloda community, who thought that in the government of the sultanate, agreed to work in nature, such as the supernatural power of the sultan associated with nature (in this case, the ocean), would not be understood by Governments outside Lolodan. It can be said that the political community of the central government which is not based on *gestalt* thinking will have difficulty thinking how Lolodan can feel comfortable within the identity they have, because the thing that comes to mind is confirmation that something can be subject to extrinsic forces. The general consensus of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, does not immediately recognizes identities as independent, and plurality as equality.

The focus of the central government (including up to its provincial derivatives) is on the welfare of the people. But welfare with a certain meter is part of a program that does not assume the best for the well-being of all its people. So, it can be said that even though the government considers that welfare is important, however, the government does not pay attention, that in certain communities, the local people therein have a more deeper understanding of what's best for themselves and for the ecosystem around them [10].

The community has a deeper way of thinking, assuming *Self-realization* (in Naess's thinking, from W to T) [10]. Communities that think by *Self-realization* are inseparable from the way of thinking *gestalt*. This way of thinking, in which various intrinsic values exist in nature, is thus accepted [10]. That way, the relationship of perception with intuition is very close in someone forming their own way of thinking. Because, one can not be separated from its influence with nature, then, what happens to nature, will be perceived in such a way, so that it has its own effect on the feeling.

This will also be felt by communities in certain regions, such as Lolodan. For them, the close oceanic power with the sultan is part of how to understand there is an inseparable relationship between humans and nature. Even though it is not at the level coveted by the modeling of science, how the relationship creates its own comfort is a way to be aware of yourself and your position on the environment. In realizing that joy, the role of intuition works as an extension of perception. So, it might not be appropriate if one model can be applied in the community. Communities have cases and participations, which are motivated by habits and various relationships that have been built culturally or historically in them [10]. Thus, certain people always have their own approach, which they say brings more optimum

satisfaction, with the assumption of self-realization that is intensified in culture and history itself. In other words, this can be a form of criticism of decentralized government that refers to procedural without perceiving a way of life in a particular community. Reasonable disparities in political relations exist between the Loloda community and the central and regional governments of Indonesia.

Thus, it is clear that weakness in the government lies in the shallow ways of thinking that focus on certain models. Also how the community itself is ignored in the process. However, how the community's disappointment at the government's decision implies how in the central government itself, how to understand the community itself is still limited to welfare on certain models. Where, the implication is further, how the government cannot see the real relationship between humans and nature. The values that exist in the relationship between humans and nature are limited to instrumental values [9]. This relation also shows that the central government system of democratic government centralizes the scope of the community itself [10]. It can be illustrated in how the government sees that ecological problems are only limited to environmental problems or environments without populations [10], so that if the environment is improved, then there will be positive outputs that will be obtained for more sustainable programs. The anthropocentric mindset is still a disability in the eco-political relations of the government and community. Community becomes something that remains in the subordination of the government.

In the span of time during the year of 1999-2000, Indonesian government has introduced Law No. 2 concerning Regional Administration, since the concept of regional autonomy in context with the policy of the establishing regional administration were becoming a phenomenon in developing a New Autonomous Area (*Daerah Otonomi Baru/DOB*) at the provincial and district level. Maluku Utara Province was established in 1999, but once a part of Maluku Province. However the distribution of power and political rights between the two provinces didn't rely on credible criteria; it was a mere geographical division that split the area evenly with a single straight demarcation line. Issues then came to the surface, as the division didn't really consider on the existence of natural resources and the lingering tradition and customary practices that are still pretty much influential.

As an example, take the case of social commotion in 2014 at Roko, a village under the administration of West Galela District. Roko has particular point of interest, which is new and promising gold mines, that attracts immigrants from various area and ethnicity to establish settlements and join along with the "exploration". Initially, the people of Roko consists of 80% Tobaru people (ethnic group) of Loloda, while the rest are those who came from Galela, Tobelo, Loloda, as well as Manado, Buton, and Sangir. Mentioning Loloda above, we would also like to highlight the area as a part of historical and cultural unity that once had been a prominent political entity, along with some other powerful kingdoms in the area of northern Maluku.

3 Cases of Environmental Issues in North Maluku

One of the prominent issues being faced by North Maluku Province, especially the island of Halmahera, is the dispute over the illegal mining that has been contributing to the deteriorating condition of public infrastructures, such as environmental pollution and trans-district road damage that is beneficial for ground transportation across districts. Recently, there has been a clear indication that the gold mine in the District of West Galela, Halmahera

is actually belonged to *Tanah Rukun*, a piece of land believed to be owned by *Kolano*, the traditional leader of the people of Loloda who has the same political authority as the sultans of Maluku. West Galela is a district located in the very close proximity to the land of Lolodans, which were administratively divided into two Regency, West Halmahera and North Halmahera, so that half of the land of the Lolodans is located among the administration of West Halmahera, while the other half belongs to the local political establishment of North Halmahera.

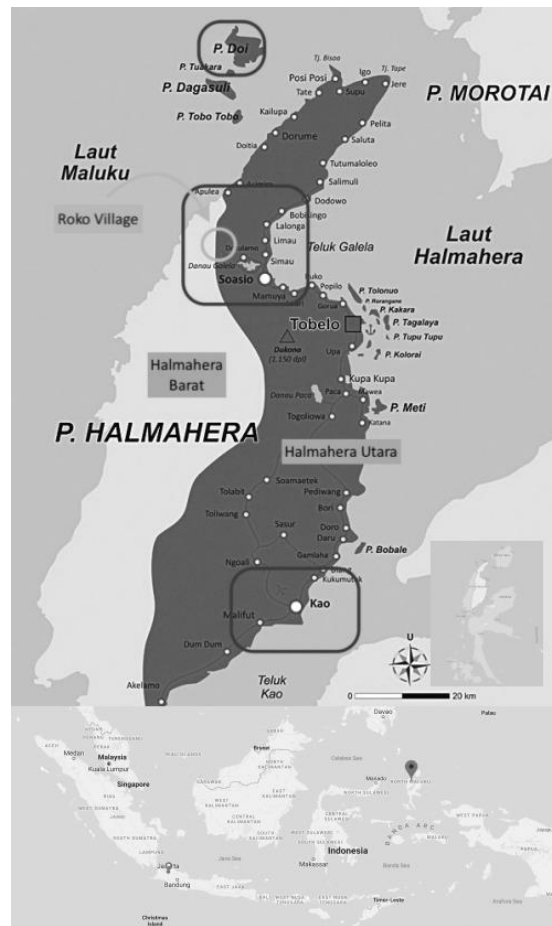


Fig. 1. Map of North Halmahera, concerning the area of studies and environmental crises found along the proximity (Modified)

Such local political establishment was conducted, based on the availability of administrative region, economical values, and population, but disregarding the need of stringing historical and cultural aspect altogether. Both occupy two different domains; one domain manages space and people, while the other one manages the more elemental matter of history and culture within the context of spatiality. Eventually, in terms of historical aspects, the community exists way earlier than the development of its nation-state, let alone a modern

establishment named Indonesia. Harsja W. Bachtiar [11], a professor in societal history, in his dissertation, put a concept regarding the old and new concept of society forward. He identified the old society that filled with tradition and antiquity as “*nasion lama*” (old nation), while the new one as “*nasion baru*” (new nation), which is modern day Indonesia. This is where we could see that, as a modern concept, Indonesian-ness is worth to be presented as a “new political space”, with adjacent contemporary values, and without leaving the trace of tradition and the linkage to the narrative of origins.

After the establishment of North Maluku as a new province with its own regional administration, in the context of the flourishing development of New Autonomous Area (*Daerah Otonomi Baru/DOB*) at the provincial and district level, there had been a confusion regarding the arrangement in the cultural domain, apart from the new political establishment and administration matter. Such confusion was based on the inability, and impossibility, of any laws to reorganize the current cultural arrangement that has been installed among the people of the whole Maluku in the traditional concept of *Maluku Kie Raha*, an ancient belief that unite four sultanates in Maluku that consists of Ternate, Tidore, Jailolo (Halmahera), and Bacan. While the political domain, embodied in the concept of creating New Autonomous Area, manages spaces and people administratively, the cultural domain manages the more elemental matter of history and culture. It is, then, obvious that the establishment of the new province didn't really consider all aspect divided, especially regarding the existence of shared natural resources, tradition, and customary practices that are still pretty much influential.

In 2014, at the village of Roko, there had been a social commotion that happened due to the newly found gold mines. Roko is the village located at the northwestern tip of West Galela District, within the close proximity to the border between North Halmahera, West Halmahera, and Loloda Utara District. To the east of the village, around the gold mines, there is an area known as *Tanah Rukun*, a traditionally claimed piece of land that is deemed to be owned by the *Kolano* of Loloda. To make it short, several groups claimed that the gold mines were belonged to the *Kolano*, thus it wouldn't matter if the people of Roko wanted to explore the mines, since the people of Roko consists of 80% Tobaru people who actually came from Loloda [12]. The root of this issue was the dissection of Loloda, a prominent political entity in the course of history of Maluku, into two different districts and under two different regencies; North Loloda belongs to North Halmahera Regency, while South Loloda belongs to West Halmahera Regency, disrupting the historical and cultural chain [13].

Other than that, regarding the environmental and health issue, Inayati highlighted the hazardous effect of mercury (Hg) and cyanide (CN) that could risk the lives of many miners. She put her concern toward environmental damage and health issue forward, understanding that there was not much that she could do as the head of the district, since the business permit was issued by the provincial government. Thus, any complaints submitted by the district would be a mere lamentation, if there were no follow-ups from the provincial government. Besides, it turned out that the piece of land was under the jurisdiction of West Halmahera Province. [16]

Further concern from Inayati was when the long-established mining company in West Halmahera, Tri Usaha Baru Ltd., put interest in expanding the scope of its exploration to near Roko. In 2017/18, both province, North and West Halmahera were protesting the company for transporting heavy equipment through Trans Halmahera Utara Road, instead of establishing a road across West Halmahera that could benefit its people, accounted as a part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Such complication was considered as the inconceivable side effects of establishing new autonomous province and district.

According to Mustafa Mansur [14], the Appointed Secretary for Loloda's Kolano, the village of Roko was previously belonged to Loloda of West Halmahera, but since the position of the village is too far away from the province's capital, the village was then transferred into the administration of West Galela of North Halmahera. This fact was also intriguing because some people believed that Roko should at least be put under the administration of North Loloda District. The people of Roko went disoriented after the administrative separation, though they were culturally related to the people who lived in the village of Jano, Loloda of West Halmahera. The issue escalated into a more serious one when some groups of people proposed the formation of community around the mine to ensure the disbursement of any benefits that could be provided by the company under the responsibility of conducting CSR programs, in exchange to the land right given to be further explored, following the existing deals between the people of Kao-Malifut with Nusa Halmahera Minerals Ltd. The proposal was politically and economically correct, but failed to comply with the fact that the land was entitled with the traditional right of Kolano of Loloda.

In Christomy and Suharjo, Loloda was introduced, according to the description of ancient manuscript found, as a royal territory under Ternate. However, according to various oral story sources, Loloda seems to be less considered by the Ternatean government. Even so, Loloda still has a place in the agreement between Ternate and the Netherlands. The signatures of several Loloda officials were written in the agreement. King of Loloda (*Kolano*), Captain of the Sea of Loloda (*Kapitalao*), and Sangaji Melayu (*Sangaji Loloda*) were known to have given their signature on the treaty manuscript [17]. Loloda is one of the oldest kingdoms in Maluku [18]. It is known as *Ngara Ma-Beno* or the gate (of Halmahera). Related to the above, Andaya says that Loloda is a unique region; "Though a King Loloda still existed, only a vague memory of a former kingdom remained" [19].

However, such traditional claim from the Kingdom of Loloda was also considered as premature proposition, since this traditional political entity doesn't belong to the configuration of *Maluku Kie Raha* with Ternate, Tidore, Jailolo, and Bacan. It was said that the Kolano of Loloda didn't fulfil the invitation to the Moti Confederation (*Moti Verbond*) in 1322 [13]. He was late to the meeting, due to the fact that his ship sank near Dufa-dufa, Ternate. As the consequences, Loloda was excluded from the confederation of *Maluku Kie Raha*, and then became forgotten in the course of history for quite a long time. The implication affected the people who lived in the proximity of Loloda, which is located up in the north, facing the open sea as one of the frontier area in the eastern part of the archipelago, up until today. During the rising trends of regional autonomy, Loloda had to be the thanksgiving turkey, carved by both West and North Halmahera. Loloda as a political and cultural entity once again lost the opportunity to establish its own authority and sovereignty. Thus, it is obvious that spatial concepts are open to modification imposed by global capitalism in the means of acquiring the right or access toward traditionally conserved natural resources.

Such similar occurrences, regarding the concern toward environmental health and sustainability, are found in most district of Halmahera, including in the village of Dama, which has been the centre of our discussion in this article. As an example, Morotai Island is also dealing with the environment damage caused by the iron mine, or other mine, such as nickel and gold. Turns out that the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program runs by various companies had failed to comply with the deteriorating condition of the nature, which then affects the community even further. The program was proven to be mere practical and platonic solution toward the issue, without even considering such traditional patterns and cultural bonds that are still exist in North Maluku. The effect of the mining activities is somehow unbearable, noticing that it doesn't only affect the land, but also the body of water

surrounded the island, disrupting the traditional way acquired by the locals to meet their subsistent needs.

However, a human structuring agency, as a prime mover of the community, is needed in order to establish better handling toward the issue. Perhaps, the re-establishment of Kolano institution, as well as the Sultanate of Loloda, could be the medium of encouraging such agential power to rise. It could be the local political leader, or even religious leader. In West Galela, a woman stands tall as the “tip of the spear” of the struggle. Ahsun Inayati is the head of the district of West Galela whose agential role could be noticed and promoted further, in order to establish a strong and powerful stance in conserving Halmahera, North Maluku, within the framework of the unity of Loloda.

3.1 Kolano as Collective Consciousness

As mentioned above, indigenous people in Loloda perceive life as something that inherently distinct. Life is not an idea that exclusively belongs to human, but life is something that has intrinsic value [8]. Human, in this context, is also part of nature despite the fact that we can shape our own society by infrastructure. Thus, human always have the urge to ‘feel’ the nature in any form—urban people reconcile this tendency with green area. Naess called this phenomenon as *friluftsliv*, or roughly translated by Reed and Rothenberg as ‘open air life’ and ‘nature life’ [10]. However, the term itself is used to define the condition where the state of mind and body in nature. This goes along with the Self-realisation that has been mentioned above.

Therefore, every time that modernization comes in contact with nature and disrupts the relationship in term of ‘oneness’ in nature. Often times, it manifest as angst that need to be fulfilled with being surrounded by nature. Now, this is also the same reason why Loloda resurrect sultanate system. It happens because of the fact that the product of decentralization has increasingly decreased their nature. They are not only see it as a threat against nature, it is a direct threat against themselves. Lolodan does not see the distinction between the nature and them. So, the rejection shape in form of their custom beliefs, which is Kolano.

If we follow along this logic, when Lolodan do not see the difference between the nature and themselves, then Kolano is not an act *over* something, it is an act *within* them [1]. Thus, it cannot be seen as the ruling power from individual action to dominate others. There is a sense of ‘wholeness’ and ‘unity’ for Lolodan when they perform Kolano. So, it cannot be reduced to one consciousness, Kolano is an active and collective-consciousness. The ritual itself is a symbol of hope for their society and they truly believe it.

However, even though Kolano is a symbol of hope, it does not mean that they know the direction of their hope. At least, in their case, the hope works as the end result of their collective-consciousness. They do not see the importance if its going to affect the development or mining process in Loloda. They see it as a way to understand the complexity of human-nature relationship as a one [1].

Therefore, the resurrection of Kolano does not arise from meticulous plan to triumph over decentralization, but it derives from their concern with ethical guidance to respond the decentralization. Although, the government should position themselves accordingly to react at indigenous people’s voice. Kolano is the equivalency of urban way to vocalize their protest [7]. Thus, the government should treat it with the same degree of respect.

4 Conclusion

Kolano cannot be comprehend only as a romantic tradition, it also the Lolodan way to respond over the destruction that government has caused upon them. They do not see the distinction between their nature and themselves because of wholeness or oneness of their relation with nature itself. Hence, Kolano is an active action from Lolodan, especially when they feel threatened over the diminishing of their biodiversity. Therefore, it can be concluded that Kolano is Lolodan collective-consciousness that take shape in their custom beliefs.

The attempt from central government to bring decentralization to North Maluku does not go along well with the cultural establishment of Loloda. They try to reshape the cultural space of Lolodan society to become more urbanized. But, the result is only damaging their biodiversity and formed as a threat toward Lolodan itself.

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