"The body of my enemy": Armed conflicts in societies without wealth
Proceedings of the meeting of the Société Préhistorique Française, Toulouse (23–24 April 2024)
Edited by Christophe Darmangeat, Arthur Gicqueau, Jean-Marc Pétillon and Nicolas Teyssandier
Société Préhistorique Française, 2026 (Séances de la Société Préhistorique Française, 23)
pp. 109–122
www.prehistoire.org
ISSN : 2263-3847 – ISBN : 2-9588382-1-8

Socio-types and armed conflicts in Sumba

Christian Jeunesse

Abstract: Two distinct forms of organization are found on the island of Sumba (Indonesia): egalitarian tribal societies in the west, and complex chiefdom societies in the east and north. In the former, the territories of neighboring ethnic groups are areas of predation where livestock, slaves, and heads are obtained. The constant need for heads for fertility rituals maintained a system of endless wars between neighboring groups. These could only be obtained from other ethnic groups, and their circulation was carefully calculated to maintain a balance that was never achieved. While looting was an integral part of military expeditions, economic factors were never predominant and territorial conquests were unknown. The same was not true in stratified societies, where war took place within a geopolitical framework more familiar to us. Led by "kings" who were akin to "warlords," wars could result in the annexation of a neighboring domain. They were a means of maintaining the loyalty of "vassals" and other dependents through the distribution of booty. The armies included slaves and mercenaries, the latter coming from the neighboring islands of Sumba. The wars were fought between rival supreme leaders whose families also exchanged wives.
Mots-clés : Sumba, war, violence.

INTRODUCTION

Colonized late and poorly endowed with economic resources, the Indonesian island of Sumba (fig. 1) is a remarkable repository of the social, political and religious practices of the "world before", that pre-statist, pre-literary and pre-urban world of tribes and chiefdoms. Traditional hierarchies, the division into clans and lineages, the strong sense of ethnic belonging, the old political and social reflexes and animist religion have remained alive. Alongside the political institutions of the Indonesian state and, more generally, modernity, they continue to this day to strongly influence the lives of its inhabitants, the majority of whom still live in villages engaged in subsistence farming. The traditional social divisions are still alive and well. Everyone knows their place and that of their family in the old "organizational chart". The general distinction between noble and commoner and the former privileges of the ruling class, specific to the chiefdoms of the east, are certainly not recognized by law, but nevertheless continue to have a profound effect on relationships between individuals. The *raja* ("king") of the east and the *rato* (traditional priest) of the west remain central figures, and the free status of the descendants of slaves is often only a façade.

Of all ancient practices, traditional forms of social violence have experienced the greatest decline. War, the main source of slaves, and headhunting did not survive the Dutch pacification of the first quarter of the 20th century. The skull tree, on which the severed heads were displayed, has remained a common iconographic motif long after the pacification (fig. 2). As a result, this topic is not the easiest to address. What we know about the bellicose world of the tribes comes from oral tradition, collected in the middle of the last century by the first ethnologists from the survivors of the pre-colonial period, as well as from the observations of missionaries, traders, soldiers and administrators. As we have witnessed during the seven missions that have taken us to the island since 2015, we will also see that traditional antagonisms remain alive a century after pacification, and that "old-fashioned" conflicts can arise when police control is relaxed.

In addition to our own observations, this work is based on ethnological studies dedicated to the island of Sumba: monographs devoted to different ethnic groups (Forth, 1981; Needham, 1987; Kuipers, 1990; Geirnaert-Martin, 1992; Gunawan, 2000), an ethnoarchaeological thesis on megalithism (Adams, 2007) and a series of articles, the most useful of which, as regards the issue of social violence, are those by J. Hoskins. We will focus mainly on the role played by ethnic and linguistic boundaries in

Fig. 1 – Location of Sumba island and other places mentioned (CAD A. Denaire).

Fig. 2 – Representation of a “skull tree” on a pillar in the royal necropolis of Uma Bara (Melolo) dating from the mid-20th century (photo C. Jeunesse).

the genesis and course of conflicts. Inter-ethnic conflicts will therefore be our main concern, but it goes without saying that their characterization requires at least a summary analysis of intra-ethnic violence. One of the island's strengths in the eyes of ethnologists is the cohabitation, since the pre-colonial period, of two distinct socio-political systems, one egalitarian, the other stratified, which differ notably in their conceptions of the border and their ways of waging war. This divide will guide our approach. Before getting to the heart of the matter, we will begin with a presentation of the characteristics of the two socio-political systems and some information on contemporary forms of social violence.

EGALITARIAN AND STRATIFIED SOCIETIES

The societies found in the ethnic groups in the west of the island (fig. 3) were egalitarian only on the political level, with autonomy of clans, lineages and villages in relation to each other and, within the villages, community life managed by a democratic council. Otherwise, they were riddled with multiple inequalities, which led some authors to classify them as "hierarchical" societies. These inequalities were based mainly on ancestry (primacy of the first arrivals) and birth (existence of two hereditary classes, for which ethnological literature commonly uses the concepts of noble and commoner). The hierarchies they generated had no political translation. However, power relations did exist between the two "free" categories and the slaves, who were few in number in these western societies. Because of the slave hunting raids, villages were traditionally fortified and built on high ground (fig. 4)

In the stratified societies of the east and north of the island[1] (fig. 3), "domains" were ruled by rajas who, from generation to generation, were descended from one of the lineages of the dominant clan. The raja decided on war, could compel free men to work on his properties, to participate in development work of collective interest (construction of bridges, roads, dikes) and to follow him in his military enterprises. We are therefore dealing with a political power based on coercion, which overshadowed traditional hierarchies that nevertheless continued to exist in parallel. The absence of writing and of a real administration independent of family ties are basically the only differences with the socio-political formations conventionally called "states". Prior to the Dutch taking possession of the island, this system seems to have been reinforced in the 18th and 19th centuries by commercial contacts with the Dutch and with slave traders from the Muslim principalities of neighboring islands such as Flores, Lombok, Bali, Sumbawa, or more distant ones such as Sulawesi and Borneo. There were many slaves (tabl. 1) and they were used in agriculture, for domestic tasks and in war. To avoid misalliances, which were automatic in a union within the domain, the rajas married their children to those of their counterparts from other domains, which led to the formation of a feudal-type super-nobility that transcended ethnic divisions. The linguistic unity (the result of a unification?) of the estates of the nobility could also be a by-product of the many interactions, both peaceful and bellicose, between stratified societies.

The ethnic groups of Sumba display many common features with the other "hill tribes" of South-East Asia, particularly those that share their Austronesian origins.

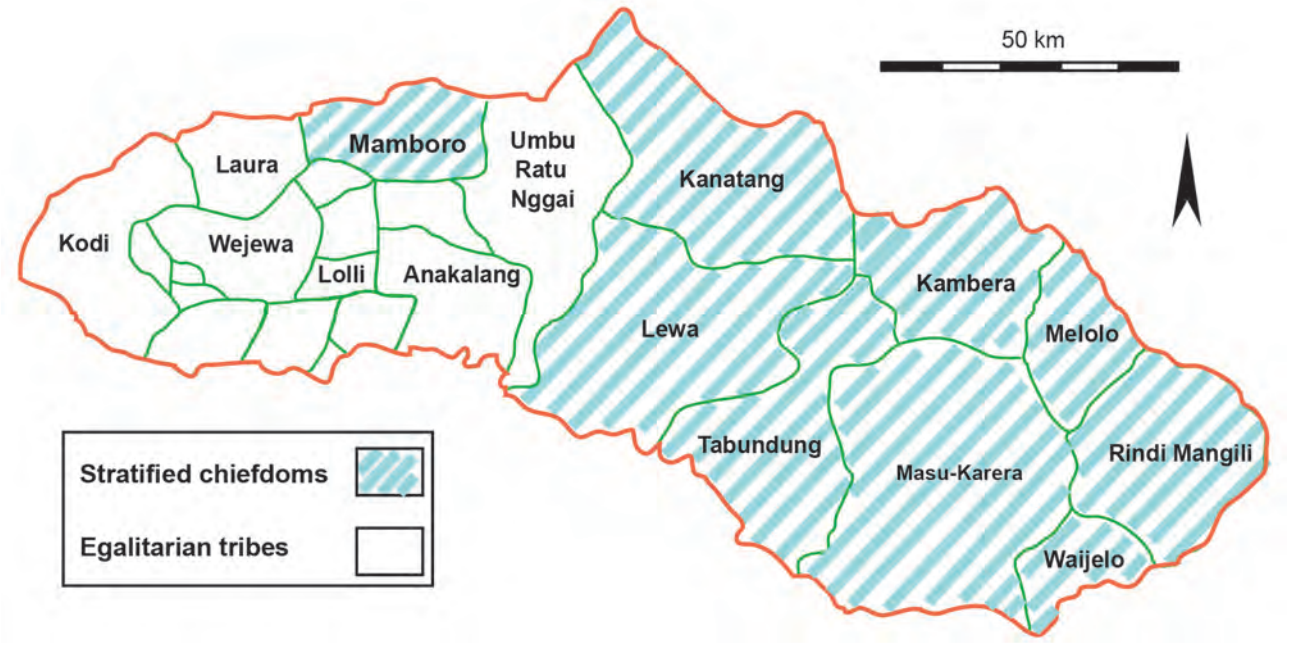

Fig. 3 – Boundaries of ethnic groups and aristocratic domains and distribution of the two forms of social organization (CAD C. Jeunesse after Doubrawa, 2009).

Fig. 4 – The hilltop village of Totok (Laura) with a patchwork of slash-and-burn plots on the hillside (photo C. Jeunesse).

Names of lineages	Number of slaves	Number of free men
Uma Andungu	201	24
Uma Wara	267	54
Uma Penji	110	12
Uma Kudu	103	19
Uma Kopi	478	12
Uma Jangga	39	23
Total	**1198**	**134**

Table 1 – Statistics on the descendants of slaves attached to the Ana Mburungu royal clan (stratified domain of Rindi) in the mid-20th century. Slaves outnumber free men in the clan by nearly nine to one (according to Forth 1981, Appendix 3).

These include, notably, a patrilineal and patrilocal descent system, the practice of headhunting and that of the bride price. Although its inhabitants see themselves as the descendants of a small group of immigrants who arrived in the north of the island a very long time ago, that they share the same animist religion (Marapu) and that there is a strong homogeneity in material culture (illustrated in particular by domestic architecture and the existence of a specific megalithic practice), the island was divided into ethnic groups jealous of their particularities, separated by well-defined borders and whose existence undoubtedly long predated the establishment of the Dutch administration at the beginning of the 20th century. Around 25 ethnic groups and 9 languages (some subdivided into dialects) shared a territory slightly larger than Corsica. The languages belong to the Austronesian language family. They differ from each other as much as French differs from Spanish or German differs from Danish, and communication, once difficult, is now possible through the common use of Indonesian. Their existence and the process of differentiation that explains it is sufficient to prove the antiquity of the borders, which owe nothing to the action of the colonizer. As we shall see, traditional relations between ethnic groups are marked by strong

hostility. Their respective territories were surrounded by large no man's lands, which even today, more than a century after pacification, people are reluctant to venture into, let alone settle in. With few exceptions,[2] people never crossed borders and married within their own ethnic group. Trade took place at temporary markets set up along the border lines (Adams, 1973).

A PERSISTENT CLIMATE OF VIOLENCE

The pasola ceremony, which takes place every year among several ethnic groups in the southwest and west of the island, is often presented as a substitute for ancient wars. It is a "form of traditional jousting in which hundreds of riders confront each other […] and try to unseat their rivals from another district with their lances" (Hoskins, 1998, p. 119), in other words a festive ritual that belongs to the cycle of ceremonies marking the new year, at the time of the transplanting of rice. The blood that is shed is offered to the "mother of the marine worms" and to the spirits of the rice with the aim, among other things, of promoting fertility. The ceremony is ancient and therefore it cannot be said that it "replaces" the battles prohibited by the Dutch, especially since the jousting opposes two teams belonging to the same ethnic group. At most, it is an opportunity for young men to prove their bravery and skill in combat, a dimension that probably gained in importance after the pacification, but which in no way explains the staging of the event. A climate of diffuse inter-ethnic hostility has persisted to this day. The no man's lands are still perceived as dangerous areas, and inter-ethnic murders are one of the main concerns for the police authorities. A dramatic event that occurred in 1998 illustrates the persistence of traditional antagonisms, showing that the use of violence remains an option for conflict resolution.

On November 5 of that year, a violent conflict between the Loli and the Wejewa, two ethnic groups from the west of the island (fig. 5), left more than 100 dead in the town of Waikabubak (Vel, 2001; Mitchell, 2007). Almost 900 houses occupied by Wejewa residents in Waikabubak, the administrative capital of the western half of the island located in Loli territory, were destroyed by angry Loli who felt discriminated against in access to public jobs due to the intervention of a Wejewa elected representative. The fighting on what later became known as "red Thursday" was triggered by the arrival of a large group of around 2,000 armed Wejewa. The contingents from the surrounding Loli villages were encouraged by the traditional priests, who "demonized" the Wejewa by likening them to wild boars, symbols of evil forces and targets of ritual hunts (fig. 6) that take place at this time of year as part of the celebrations of the annual wula podu ceremony. They ordered them to wear traditional dress and use only traditional weapons, namely a kind of multipurpose machete, spear and shield, which put them on equal footing with their opponents in terms of equipment. The fighting lasted only one day but was particularly violent and ferocious, with the 100 officially recognized deaths being a conservative estimate. The groups of warriors who descended from the villages acted without coordination, if the incomplete accounts available are to be believed, and

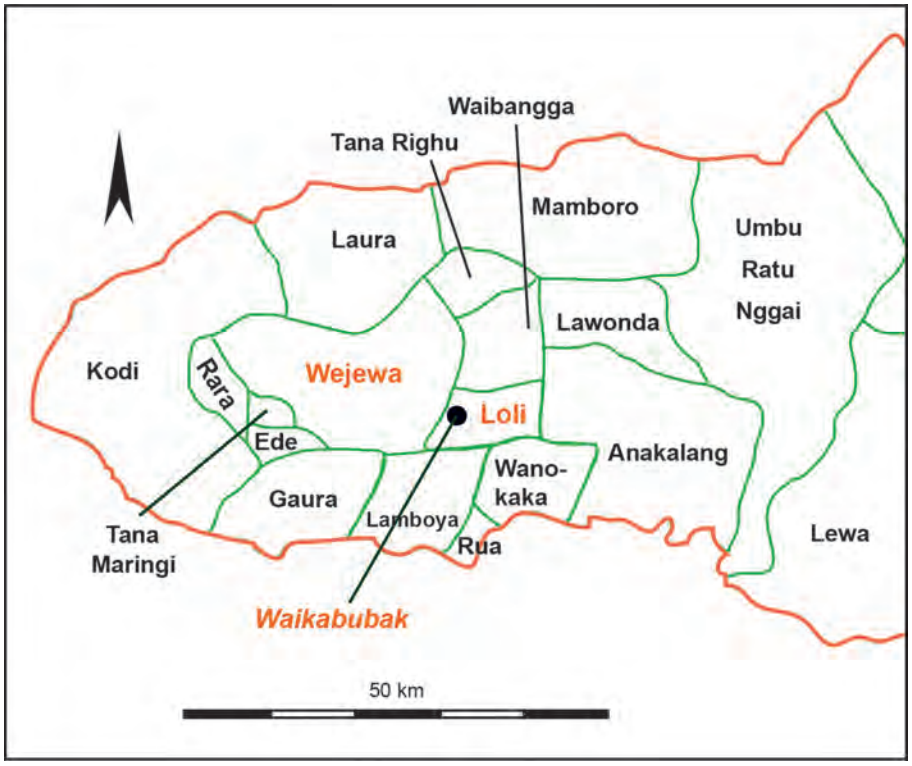

Fig. 5 – Location of the two groups involved in the "Red Thursday" fighting (CAD C. Jeunesse based on Doubrawa, 2009).

Fig. 6 – Return from the ritual wild boar hunt (Tarung, Loli, october 2023).
In the foreground on the left: hunter in traditional dress carrying his spear (photo C. Jeunesse).

no ethnic "leader" emerged for the occasion. No one has since been convicted in connection with this event, which is generally denied, particularly in the media. Even today, people only talk about it reluctantly and without going into detail. The police passivity, at the time weakened and disoriented by the political turmoil that accompanied the end of Suharto's dictatorship,[3] contributed to the escalation. It was therefore a loosening of police control that allowed, as in other regions of Indonesia at the same time, the spectacular expression of latent ethnic antagonisms. Even if the causes of the conflict have led some analysts to reduce it to a non-traditional form of social rivalry, what took place was indeed a small inter-ethnic war. According to a well-known mechanism, a crisis situation led to a reactivation of ancestral identity reflexes. The unspoken and the ensuing embarrassment are a clear indication of the unease following an event that cannot be categorized using the sociological frameworks in use and the dominant social norms.

In the absence of sufficiently precise information, no one knows whether the conflicts prior to the Dutch pacification could have resulted in such high numbers of victims. Let us now see what is known about the traditional forms of social violence. Two key parameters will guide our approach. The first leads us to differentiate the cases of violence according to whether they are internal or external in relation to ethnic boundaries. The second consists of distinguishing the specific forms of the two major types of socio-political organization described above.

CONFLICTS WITHIN WESTERN EGALITARIAN SOCIETIES

As we have seen, these societies were simultaneously socially hierarchical and politically egalitarian. Individual identity was defined by ethnicity, language, co-residence within the same village, clan and lineage affiliation, and relationships of affinity with the lineages that gave and received women. Clans, lineages (both non-territorialized) and villages were politically autonomous. Political management (everyday politics) was carried out by village councils where the chiefs of noble and common lineages sat side by side with no difference in power. Ensuring respect for custom was the responsibility of the clans and, more specifically, of the rato, the traditional priest. The traditional priests of the animist religion (one per clan within the same village) enjoyed great moral

authority, but their role was essentially ritual. They were the ones who managed, within the clans, the relationship between the living and the ancestors (who retained a social existence, were an integral part of the clan and lineage and involved in all important decisions) and who ensured the smooth running of the complex organization of ceremonies, an area in which the sharing of responsibilities and tasks between the clans was regulated by a skillful balance.

Entrenched behind a dry stone wall, the dwellings of the same village formed a defense community against external aggression, in a context marked by permanent insecurity linked to headhunting and raids carried out by the various participants in the slave trade. The latter were captured on behalf of the stratified estates in the east of the island, but also to supply an "international" market (and in particular the Dutch colonial plantations on the island of Java) which was very active in the 18th and 19th centuries and which was only truly interrupted, despite the official abolition in 1860, by the pacification at the beginning of the 20th century. According to a well-known pattern, the acephalous societies in the west of the island were particularly vulnerable due to the absence of a centralized organization. For at least two centuries, they therefore served as a reservoir for the organizers of the slave trade. This, together with sanitary conditions, can be considered one of the major causes of the relatively low population densities encountered by the Dutch when they actually settled there at the beginning of the 20th century. The area of egalitarian societies was then an underpopulated territory where the pressure on the land was low and where, as a result, the ethnic groups could maintain vast no man's lands between them. The hierarchical societies themselves practised a low-intensity slavery, far below the levels reached in the aristocratic domains of the east (tabl. 1). Slaves were considered ritual goods used in particular for ceremonial exchange, including the payment of the bride price. They were then found as part of a set of offerings that also included buffaloes, horses and gold ornaments.

The role of the border can be illustrated by cattle rustling, which is still practiced today. The legal context changed completely depending on whether it took place inside or outside the ethnic boundaries. Inside, it was a serious offense, likely to generate bloody conflicts between clans, in the same way as insulting or kidnapping a woman. When perpetrated on the territory of a neighboring ethnic group, it became a duly celebrated feat. It was one of the ways for young men to build a reputation by showing their bravery and courage.[4] It was part of a gradation of levels of difficulty (and the associated benefits in terms of prestige) in which the next level was the headhunting raid and/or capture of prisoners destined to become slaves or hostages ransomed. In Sumba, these two activities were only possible between different ethnic groups. Headhunting was inconceivable between clans or villages,[5] unlike what was observed, for example, among the Naga people of north-eastern India. The territories of neighboring ethnic groups can therefore be seen as predatory zones where one could hope to obtain cattle, heads or slaves by violent means.

Wars were used to settle conflicts arising from these predatory activities or as a result of murders or attacks on women. On the other hand, they were never intended to seize territory, probably at least in part because, until recent decades, land was never a scarce and coveted resource. Economic motivation was always secondary, even if looting was perpetrated in the raids carried out in the contexts listed above. Buffalo were stolen to increase one's prestige, but also to expand herds whose sole purpose, as sacred goods, was to circulate as part of ceremonial exchange.

J. Hoskins (1987, p. 608) described an example of war waged by the Kodi on the territory of a neighboring ethnic group. It was a headhunting expedition intended to avenge the loss of heads taken by the adversary and thus restore the balance between the two ethnic groups. Contrary to the way in which headhunting is often depicted, it was not a stealthy raid relying on the use of surprise, but an expedition led by a fairly large group of warriors, richly adorned and dressed, who noisily announced their arrival with the help of rattles. The protagonists of the expedition belong to a small group of Kodi clans specialized in headhunting and who, in this case, represent the entire ethnic group. For the heads, the counting of losses and profits is done at the ethnic level. With each revenge raid, what needs to be restored is the fertility of the entire ethnic group, not that of a particular clan or lineage (Hoskins, 1996b, p. 224). As we have seen, this type of expedition could be accompanied by the looting of food supplies (Hoskins, 1989).

Such expeditions could also be used to avenge a murder. In the same quest for prestige that drove the theft of buffalo, the ideal was to kill a renowned warrior, but the execution of a helpless old man was enough to restore the balance, regardless of the identity and characteristics of age, sex or status of the "internal" dead person who was being avenged. Women and young children, captured to be enslaved, were collateral victims and can be seen as one of the forms of plunder. The protagonists of the raid were, in this case, close relatives of the victim who were accompanied by "mercenaries" paid in the form of animals taken from the loot (buffalo and pigs), or in the form of debt forgiveness. This type of conflict was also an opportunity to take prisoners who would be ransomed. The warriors were all mounted. The weapons used were machetes, spears and buffalo-skin shields, an assemblage reproduced in the panoply used during "red Thursday" and, even today (with the exception of the shield), during ritual hunts carried out as part of the wula podu ceremony. As J. Hoskins explains, the inter-ethnic warfare was endless and constituted an ordinary feature of the relationship between neighboring ethnic groups (Hoskins, 1996b). Internal needs (conquest of prestige, restoration of fertility through headhunting) being constant, the same was necessarily true of the counter-measures that consisted of revenge raids intended to restore the balance.

WARS IN STRATIFIED SOCIETIES

The scale changes completely when we turn to the stratified societies of the East. The event that triggered the military conquest of the island by the Dutch at the beginning of the 20th century was the plan of the raja of one of the aristocratic domains, Lewa-Kambera, to take the small port of Waingapu, which served as a commercial bridgehead for the colonial power (Vel, 2001, p. 146). War was a structural feature of aristocratic domains. After having, in all likelihood, helped to conquer power, it then constituted one of the most effective means of retaining it. These complex chiefdoms constituted unstable systems in which the raja, in order to preserve his position, had to constantly renew and enrich his slave population and produce, through looting, the wealth that enabled him to retain the loyalty of the members of his clan and of other noble clans. According to accounts from the 19th and early 20th centuries, warfare appears to have been one of the pillars of Sumbanese stratified pre-state societies.

In addition to the lure of booty, military expeditions led by expansionist "war lords" (Hoskins, 1996a) were motivated by a desire for territorial conquest and could result in a restructuring of borders. The aim was clearly to expand one's territory by imposing one's supremacy on neighboring aristocratic domains. The conflicts pitted royal families, who also exchanged wives, against each other. As in the egalitarian societies of the West, looting and the capture of prisoners destined to become slaves or to be ransomed were commonplace. The shield and spear were the most common weapons (fig. 7). The troop was led by the raja or another aristocrat and included mercenaries and slaves. The latter were not former prisoners of war, who belonged to a lower category, but "hereditary" court-slaves (*ata mema*), who were also used as domestic servants and enjoyed a number of privileges, such as being inalienable and being buried next to the monumental tomb of their master (Hoskins, 1996a and 1996b, Forth, 1981, pp. 215–216). To designate the members of this category, created according to cosmogonic myths with the nobles or commoners at the beginning of time, terms borrowed from the vocabulary of kinship were used, in the context of a relationship comparable to a form of paternalism. The closeness of the relationships of personal dependence is illustrated by the practice of voluntary accompanying death, which persisted long after the legal prohibition of slavery and the effective colonization of the island by the Dutch.

Mercenaries came from traditionally warrior groups originating from neighboring islands of Sumba, especially Savu, Flores and Sulawesi. J. Hoskins mentions the example of a war waged by the raja of Kapunduk with the help of mercenaries from these three regions, among others (Hoskins, 1996b, p. 236, note 4) and also the case of the raja of Lewa, who recruited Ende mercenaries from Flores and paid them with items taken from the spoils, including slaves (Hoskins, 1996b, p. 227). Some sources indicate that the majority of war victims were slaves killed by other slaves (Hoskins, 1996b, p. 227). The fighting between aristocrats took place separately. The organization of conflicts included the formation of temporary

Fig. 7 – A raja and his warriors around 1930 (photo Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, collectie.wereldculturen.nl).

war alliances between domains. These were therefore real small armies that identified, at least temporarily, with one or more aristocratic domains. Peace was concluded in ceremonies marked by exchanges of goods that reproduced those of the bride price (Hoskins, 1996b, p. 232) and where the victor assumed the symbolic superiority that usually went to the giver of women. The exchange of women between "royal" families resumed once peace was concluded.

The issue of relations between aristocratic domains and egalitarian ethnic groups has so far attracted little interest. It is more than likely that the former engaged in raids to fuel the slave trade. We know from Dutch reports that at least some rajas acted as intermediaries with external merchants and that their capitals were gathering places for slaves captured in the interior.[6]

CONCLUSION

Despite the absence of overarching institutions above the clans, the egalitarian societies of the West had real political boundaries. Internal conflicts were modest in scale, limited in time, and settled by customary legal procedures. Between neighboring ethnic groups there was a situation of endemic warfare, of low intensity as far as can be judged, with "rebalancing" conflicts provoked by murders at the borders and acts of predation such as the capture of slaves, the taking of heads and the theft of livestock. The quest for prestige among young men played a driving role in triggering operations. In some cases at least, the raids were carried out by specialized clans. They always ended with a territorial status quo, as the conquest of territories was never one of the war objectives. The fact that neighboring ethnic groups were seen as reservoirs of heads and slaves, and therefore prime targets for predation, denotes a particular, highly ethnocentric conception of otherness.

The area of the stratified estates was the stage for wars between equal sovereigns, who were also partners in the networks of matrimonial exchange. The wars involved the entire male population, including court slaves. Real armies led by rajas comparable to war lords and partly made up of mercenaries recruited through a regional market encompassing the neighboring islands, waged conflicts that could lead to territorial conquests. Borders were no longer ethnic boundaries, but political lines separating the areas controlled by the various ruling families. War had become a factor of internal cohesion. A good raja supplied his allies from the aristocratic clans with warrior prestige and booty, the latter also serving to reward the mercenaries. This mode of operation developed in the 19th century, borrowing some of its characteristics from the Muslim principalities of the neighboring islands. These principalities were a kind of maritime state that had an administration and pursued genuine trade policies based largely on the exploitation and distribution of products—including slaves—extracted from areas populated by acephalous tribal societies, in their own hinterlands or on more or less distant islands such as Sumba. In my opinion, the stratified non-state societies of Sumba provide a very useful model for understanding certain socio-political contexts of recent European prehistory, for example the system of "principalities" of the Hallstatt-Early Iron Age sequence (Jeunesse, 2019).

In Sumba, the stark contrast between the two forms of socio-political organization is coupled with a marked opposition in terms of external violence. The seemingly rapid transition from a democratic ethos to an acceptance of submission to arbitrary authority is not unique to this island. This is known to occur in other contexts such as that of the Kachin of Burma (Leach, 1954) and the Konyak Naga (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1969), with clear contrasts between communities living under a democratic regime and others dominated by autocratic chiefs (*gumlao* vs. *gumsa* systems among the Kachin, *thenko* vs. *thendu* among the Konyak). Among the Konyak, the village chiefs with an autocratic regime behaved like "war lords", waging military campaigns aimed at subduing other villages and forcing them to pay tribute. War was therefore used, at least in part, to establish small principalities through territorial conquest. Here too, the practices in force in egalitarian societies have been abandoned, as illustrated by the situation in egalitarian societies of western Sumba, where the logic of conflict remains close to that described by C. Darmangeat for Australian hunter-gatherers (Darmangeat, 2020 and 2021). For him, "Aboriginal collective armed action is characterized by its vindicatory nature" (Darmangeat, 2020, p. 81); it "embodies a particular form of justice; […] the continuation of justice by other means" (Darmangeat, 2020, pp. 88–89). The triggering factors are mainly disputes over the right to women (60%) and revenge against a hostile act of witchcraft. Territorial conquest is not a motive for aggression. With the Sumbanese tribes, we have moved into the world of farmers. In addition to disputes over women, other causes of external conflict include cattle rustling and headhunting. The first has no economic motivation (it is not a way to get rich or improve the daily ration), but it is a means for young people to show their bravery and thus gain prestige. As with the capture of slaves, the aim is to seize goods that are reinvested in internal social competition or, as with heads, are necessary for certain rituals. The absence of territorial conquests is another illustration of the irrelevance of the economic factor. Conflicts related to headhunting testify to a desire for rebalancing that can be assimilated to what C. Darmangeat places in the "judicial" drawer, a notion that we are inclined to avoid when it comes to inter-ethnic relations. We have seen that headhunting stems from a structural dimension. The constant need for new heads and the revenge that their acquisition provokes explain the endemic nature of the conflict between neighbors.

In the complex chiefdoms of the east of the island, there has been a shift to "modern" forms of warfare, similar to those generally associated with state contexts. War is used to conquer territories, impose one's will and

establish lasting domination over the adversary. With the shift to stratification and the emergence of dynasties of supreme chiefs, it has acquired a geopolitical dimension, illustrated by alliances between chiefdoms and, at least in some cases, the annexation of the territories of the defeated. At the same time, armies became partially professionalized, with the use of outside mercenaries having no family ties with their "employer" and motivated purely by material gain. The idea of rebalancing dissolved, along with the tribal system and the democratic ethos, in favor of a cynical behavior intended to satisfy the will to power of the *raja*. The sacred and immutable boundary of the western ethnic groups gave way to shifting limits separating the zones controlled by supreme chiefs who were also the owners of the arable land of their respective domains. The contrast between the way external conflicts are conceived in the two socio-political forms represented in Sumba is a fruitful source of meditation on the modalities of warfare in pre-state societies. It is important to point out, however, that the observed pattern cannot be generalized without caution to the whole debate on "primitive warfare". To cite just one example, territorial conquest, even if it is rare, is indeed part of the repertoire of forms of violence among groups with egalitarian political organization in the New Guinea highlands, particularly in densely populated areas such as the Mount Hagen region (Berndt, 1964). While the situation among hunter-gatherers today seems to be generally well understood, thanks in particular to the work of C. Darmangeat, that which characterizes the numerous and diverse group of non-stratified agrarian societies remains largely to be elucidated, particularly through large-scale comparative studies.

NOTES

1 Known mainly through the work of G. Forth on the Rende domain (Forth, 1981) and R. Needham on the Mamboro domain (Needham, 1987).

2 The conflicts that will be discussed later and an annual festival that brings together the most important traditional priests every year in Wunga, the village considered to be the oldest on the island.

3 On this aspect, particularly its interethnic dimension, see J. Bertrand, 2008.

4 For the Lamboya, for example, see D. Geirnaert-Martin, 1992, p. 254.

5 For the Kodi, see J. Hoskins, 1989, p. 427.

6 See, in particular, G. Forth, 1981, p. 215, and R. Needham, 1987.

Christian Jeunesse
Université de Strasbourg, MISHA, Strasbourg, France
jeunessechr@free.fr

REFERENCES

ADAMS M. J. (1973) – Structural aspects of a village art, *American anthropologist*, 75, pp. 265–279.

ADAMS R. (2007) – *The megalithic tradition of West-Sumba, Indonesia: An ethnoarchaeological investigation of megalith construction*, PhD thesis, Simon Frazer University, Vancouver, 506 p.

BERNDT R. M. (1964) – Warfare in the New Guinea Highlands, Part 2 « New Guinea: The Central Highlands », *American anthropologist*, New Series, 66, 4, pp. 183–203.

BERTRAND J. (2008) – Ethnic conflicts in Indonesia: National models, critical junctures, and the timing of violence, *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 8, 3, pp. 425–449.

DARMANGEAT C. (2020) – *Justice and warfare in Aboriginal Australia*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 290 p.

DARMANGEAT C. (2021) – *Justice et guerre en Australie aborigène*, Toulouse, Smolny, 350 p.

DOUBRAWA I. (2009) – *Tradition und Innovation der Indigenen Architektur auf Sumba im Kontext et ostindonesischen Inselwelt*, Diplomarbeit, Technische Universität Wien, Wien, 359 p.

FORTH G. (1981) – *Rindi. An ethnographic study of a traditional domain in Eastern Sumba*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff (Verhandelingen van het KoninklijkInstituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, 93), 519 p.

FÜRER-HAIMENDORF C. von (1969) – *The Konyak Nagas. An indian frontier tribe*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 109 p.

GEIRNAERT-MARTIN D. (1992) – *The woven land of Laboya. Socio-cosmic values in West Sumba, Eastern Indonesia*, Leiden, Leiden University, 449 p.

GUNAWAN I. (2000) – *Hierarchy and balance: A study of Wanokaka social organization*, Canberra, Australian National University, 354 p.

HOSKINS J. (1987) – The headhunter as hero: Local traditions and their reinterpretation in national history, *American ethnologist*, 14, 4, pp. 605–622.

HOSKINS J. (1989) – On losing and getting a head: Warfare, exchange, and alliance in a changing Sumba, 1888-1988, *American ethnologist*, 16, 3, pp. 419–440.

HOSKINS J. (1996a) – Introduction: Headhunting as practice and as trope, in J. Hoskins (ed.), *Headhunting and the social imagination in Southeast Asia*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, pp. 1–49

HOSKINS J. (1996b) – The heritage of headhunting. History, ideology and violence on Sumba, 1890-1990, in J. Hoskins (ed.), *Headhunting and the social imagination in Southeast Asia*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, pp. 216–248.

HOSKINS J. (1998) – Sumba, in D. Newton (ed.), *Arts des mers du Sud. Insulinde, Mélanésie, Polynésie, Micronésie*, Paris, édition Adam Biro, pp. 114–123.

JEUNESSE C. (2019) – Dualist socio-political systems in South East Asia and the interpretation of late prehistoric European societies, in S. Kadrow and J. Müller (ed.) *Habitus? The social dimension of technology and transformation*, Leiden, Sidestone Press Academics, pp. 181–213.

KUIPERS J. C. (1990) – *Power in performance. The creation of textual authority in Weyewa ritual speech*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 198 p.

LEACH E. R. (1954) – *Political systems of Highland Burma. A study of Kachin social structure*, London, Bell and Son Ldt, 324 p.

MITCHELL D. (2007) – Tragedy in Sumba. Why neighbours hacked each other to death in a remote part of Indonesia, *Inside Indonesia,* 58, https://www.insideindonesia.org/editions/edition-5849/tragedy-in-sumba

NEEDHAM R. (1987) – *Mamboru. History and structure in a domain of Northwestern Sumba*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 202 p.

VEL J. A. C. (2001) – Tribal battle in a remote island: Crisis and violence in Sumba (Eastern Indonesia), *Indonesia*, 72, pp. 141–158.

DISCUSSION

Jean-Loïc Le Quellec: I have heard that there is a link between fertility and headhunting. And I don't know how true this is, but I read in Downs that in Sumba there is an annual ceremony around the pole where heads are hung. A myth similar to Hainuwele explains this by saying that that cultivated plants appeared by springing up above the corpse of a sacrificed woman. The woman in question had a brother, his head was cut off and hung on the pole by order of the Raja, and this is commemorated every year around the pole and is the reason for headhunting. And I wonder if this relates to the earlier question about whether archeology can help us understand this subject, which is very difficult to grasp otherwise. Do the poles and skulls leave any traces?

Christian Jeunesse: It's not certain! I think that other ways of preserving skulls are more likely to leave archaeological evidence. I didn't know the details of the myth, but it supports the fundamental role of these heads in ensuring or restoring fertility.

Sylvain Lemoine: I've got a question about borders. Do they correspond to particular geographical or topographical entities? For example, does each ethnic group live in a separate valley? Are they separated from their neighbors by mountains? And, as a follow-up question, do they speak the same languages? Are there any notable cultural differences between these different ethnic groups in terms of material culture or other aspects?

C. J.: One very interesting aspect of Sumba is that we are dealing with a population that is very fragmented ethnically and linguistically, but in which we observe a homogeneous material culture. In other words, if archaeologists were to work in a context where everything was fossilized, as we do with prehistoric European cultures, I think we would have created a single culture: The"Sumbanian". But beneath this material uniformity, lies an extremely significant fragmentation. As for the borders, in some areas, they run more or less along the valleys. But not all the regions are hilly. So there are also areas marked by a topographical continuity between two ethnic groups. What then acts as the topographical divide is the no man's land, which is very significant. This is a fascinating phenomenon. Even today, when you enter a no man's land and encounter people there, they are afraid. That's because you usually enter with members of a particular ethnic group. Those who are of a different ethnicity, or even of the same ethnicity, but who have seen them arrive from afar and are not quite sure who they are dealing with, show sheer fear since these areas are dangerous. Even now, you could be killed there by gangs of young people seeking fame.

Christophe Darmangeat: I have a comment and a question. The comment is that I'm not sure I understood what you said at the end about borders. I understood that, in your opinion, this contrasted with what we see among hunter-gatherers. In fact, nothing you say about this sense of ethnic belonging is alien to hunter-gatherers. To build on what Sylvain [Lemoine] said, we find these differences with neighbors that justify seeing them as completely unlike us, that they are much worse off, etc. If these differences don't exist, we invent them and, in any case, the smallest difference is exaggerated. There are testimonies in Australia about marriage rules that vary greatly from one place to another. For example, people might say: "Those who live 30 km away have a slightly different rule about marrying a third cross-cousin". For us, it seems completely anecdotal, but for them, it's what distinguishes "good" from "bad" people. I think it's really something that we actually find in many places: this sense of ethnic identity and, consequently, these potentially conflictual relationships. In any case, as you were saying, others are seen as people you can, or even should, take advantage of. The rules of social interaction are completely different within one's community compared to those applied to outsiders. The question now is: you mentioned Eastern societies and their rajas, saying that they have the power to force people to go to war (and they are the ones who declare it in the first place)…

C. J.: You're going to tell me that they're states.

C. D.: Indeed! And they have the power to tax the people through forced labor. Why do you call them chiefdoms and not states?

C. J.: Out of respect for the work of our fellow anthropologists who have studied these regions. These organizations do not have the same complexity found at the next level up, which is that of the larger areas. That level is the principalities, which have real royal administrations. That is not the case here.

C. D.: So we could rather say that they are states without administration, versus states with administration.

C. J.: Perhaps this is the most reasonable solution.

Maxime Petitjean: I had a small comment about the comparison you made at the end of his presentation between these societies and the Iron Age societies of Europe. There is also an interesting passage in Caesar's Gallic War, which you may have already come across. It is an ethnographic development about the Germanic tribes, where certain elements are very similar to what you described about these frequent raids between neighboring communities that result in the creation of a no man's land around these territories. This is exactly what Caesar describes about the village raids that Germanic communities carried out against each other. There is a no man's land and the objective of the raid is to bring back resources. Not everyone in the community takes part: it is done on a voluntary basis. A chief proposes an expedition, and then they return with livestock or other resources.

C. J.: There are similar elements in Tacitus' Germania. In my view, the Germanic tribes described by Tacitus can be likened to western Sumba. They are hierarchical, egalitarian, acephalous societies. And the comparison that I have developed the most so far is with societies that I suspect are stratified, at the transition between the first and second

Iron Ages in Central Europe, the famous Hallstatt principalities. I will not dwell on this point because it is not our main topic, but there are many similarities. For example, in the stratified societies of the east of the island, there are princely tombs, even today, with extremely spectacular architecture. These are places where gold regalia are found. They are also places with real courtyards, with court artisans, goldsmiths, etc. In fact, there are many aspects we could listed that show that there are two different configurations in Sumba, and that these can be compared to what we find in European prehistory. Hence the usefulness of these models. It is not about finding keys for immediate interpretation, but about helping us think on how Iron Age societies may have actually functioned.

Jürg Helbling: I would like to know if those who were sold as slaves were only prisoners of war, or if it also included convicts from these ethnic groups themselves.

C. J.: I don't have any information on this point. I wish I did! Not all prisoners of war were sold as slaves; some were returned to their original clan in exchange for ransom. However, some prisoners of war became slaves who could be sold later as merchandise.

C. D.: If I understood correctly, you were saying that headhunting had an ambivalent aspect: it was both a fertility cult, a means of bringing magical and religious benefits, and at the same time it was carried out as an act of revenge. This is a feature found elsewhere, and it ties in with the discussions on the aims of these practices, which sometimes overlap. In some places, revenge is clearly being carried out, without taking the enemy's head. In other places, headhunting is done specifically for a magico-religious benefits. And then there are places where there is a tendency to combine business with pleasure, or more precisely, to combine two useful things together: to kill two birds with one stone. Expeditions are launched to collect heads, and while they're at it, target those they want revenge on. This complicates the phenomenon of headhunting.

C. J.: And there is a third factor, which is headhunting by young people who want to build a reputation for themselves, which is an important aspect. Here we see a parallel with the Iroquois model: going out to collect heads is the same as capturing prisoners or people to torture and sacrifice.

J.-L. L. Q.: This ambivalence, killing two birds with one stone, applies to all trophies.

C. D.: No, because the trophy itself is not necessarily expected to bring magical or religious benefits. Strictly speaking, the term "headhunting" is usually reserved for situations where the head is brought back because, as such, if it is treated properly, it is believed to make the coconuts grow, help people have many children, allow for mourning, etc. Whereas the trophy, in the same way as a hunting trophy, is more about saying: "I have fought—for another reason—I show how much of a great warrior I have been." Here, once again, headhunting often involves a mixture of different aspects, and that is why it is a phenomenon that, incidentally, has not really been studied in depth. There is no comprehensive overview of headhunting, no book that deals with it on a global scale. There are only local studies, even though it is a quite widespread practice.

C. J.: Depending on the motivation, there are also different kinds of heads. For fertility purposes, the head of a child, a woman or an old man is enough. But for the prestige, it is obviously better to bring back the head of someone considered a great warrior.

C. D.: It depends! Sometimes bringing back women's and children's heads proves that you have been able to infiltrate to the heart of enemy territory and therefore that you have been more cunning than if you just killed a warrior.

C. J.: That's true.

J.-L. L. Q.: Its not just heads, but also parts of heads, and other body parts: scalps, teeth, jaws, ears, genitals, fingers, hands, skin… that's what I meant by "trophies". Many of these have fertilizing and nourishing value in the broadest sense, and serve as trophies ("look how successful I've been and how I deserve respect") and things that, when properly treated, possess a magical-ritual value. This goes well beyond the framework of strict "headhunting".