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The Hegemony of the *Vikings of the Eastern Seas* in Borneo during the 18th and 19th Century

ABSTRACT: The 18th and 19th centuries saw the emergence of the Iranun and the Balangingi originating from the Philippine islands and the Sea Dayak of Sarawak as heroes or seafarers; and it was a nightmare for European and Chinese sailors whose sailing to the waters of Borneo and Southeast Asia at the time. This article – using historical methods, qualitative approaches, and literature review – seeks to analyze the actions of the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayak who often rob Western trade ships, and make their ships a commodity of commerce, that is in the form of slaves, has led to the origin of their own identity, from a nation called Iranun and Balangingi in the ancient Sulu islands and Sea Dayak of Sarawak (Borneo), to a new nation known as a “pirate” nation created by the West. In this context, their redefinition of a new nation gradually eroded and lost their original identity and became widely accepted by local communities in the Malay archipelago of the 18th century. This article is not intended to make moral judgments about the views, interpretations, and views of Western sailors and merchants from the deck of their sailing vessels in Southeast Asia. Thus, this article aims to reinterpreting the history of piracy based on the Malay cultural world.

KEY WORD: Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayak; Malay Piracy World; Historical Interpretation.

ABSTRAKSI: “Hegemoni Viking dari Laut Timur di Borneo pada Kurun 18 dan 19 Masihi”. Abad ke-18 dan ke-19 telah menyaksikan kemunculan orang-orang Iranun dan Balangingi yang berasal dari kepulauan Filipina dan orang-orang Dayak Laut dari Sarawak sebagai hero atau jaguh di laut; dan sekaligus menjadi mimpi ngeri kepada para pelayar Eropah dan China yang berlayar ke kawasan perairan kepulauan Borneo dan Asia Tenggara pada waktu itu. Artikel ini – dengan menggunakan kaedah sejarah, pendekatan kualitatif, dan sorotan literatur – mabukan menganalisi tindakan orang-orang Iranun, Balangingi, dan Dayak Laut yang seringkali merompak kapal-kapal dagang Barat, dan menjadikan anak-anak kapal sebagai komoditi dagangan, iaitu dalam bentuk hamba, telah menyebabkan berlakunya dalam asal-usul identiti mereka sendiri, iaitu dari sebuah bangsa bernama Iranun dan Balangingi di kepulauan Sulu dan Dayak Laut di Sarawak (Borneo), yang telah lama wujud, kepada satu bangsa baru yang dikenali sebagai bangsa “lanun” yang dicipta oleh Barat. Dalam konteks ini, pengidentifikasian semula mereka menjadi satu bangsa yang baru secara perlahan-lahan telah menghakis dan menghilangkan identiti asal yang mereka miliki dan mula diterima-pakai oleh masyarakat setempat di kepulauan Nusantara pada abad ke-18. Artikel ini tidak bertujuan untuk membuat pengadilan moral berhubung tanggapan, tafsiran, dan pandangan para pelayar dan pedagang Barat dari atas dek kapal mereka yang berlayar di kawasan Asia Tenggara. Justeru, artikel ini bertujuan untuk mentafsirkan semula sejarah perlanunan dari perspektif dalam tamadun Melayu.

KATA KUNCI: Orang Iranun, Balangingi, dan Dayak Laut; Dunia Perlanunan Melayu; Pentafsiran Semula Sejarah.

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INTRODUCTION

During the 18th and 19th century, the Iranun and Balangingi of the Philippine islands, and the Sea Dayaks of Sarawak, were well known as the “conqueror” of the sea. They became the nightmares for the European and Chinese sailors, who traveled on the waters of Borneo and Southeast Asia. The hegemony and the domination of the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks on the waters around Borneo and Southeast Asia during the 18th and 19th century had caused lots of difficulty to sailors and merchants in the Malay archipelago and China (Warren, 2002; Ali, 2007a; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

According to James F. Warren (2000), and other scholars, the practice of piracy in Southeast Asian in the nineteenth century was to a very large extent a continuation of a phenomena, which was widespread from the ancient beginnings of sea traffic in the straits and along the coasts of the area. There were, however, several strong and organized *Lanun* (Pirate) communities on the northern coasts of Borneo. Many young Muslim Malay seafarers from Borneo were led on marauding expeditions in the nineteenth century by Arab sheriffs. Their allies were Iban of Sarawak on the northeast coast of Borneo (Defoe, 1999; Warren, 2000; and Ali, 2007a).

The control of the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks as *Raja di Laut* or meaning “King of the Seas” on the waters around Borneo and Southeast Asia had terrified famous European sailors like Alexander Dalrymple, William Dampier, Thomas Forrest, J. Hunt, and others on the waters around South China Sea, Sulu, and Celebes seas during the 18th and 19th century was referred as the “age of the

pirate”. These Europeans also labeled the months of August-October as the “pirates seasons” or “pirate wind”. Based on the early notes of 18th and 19th century, the famous sailor such as Alexander Dalrymple in *Oriental Repertory* (1808); William Dampier in *A New Voyage Round the World* (1960); Thomas Forrest in *A Voyage to New Guinea and the Moluccas* (1972); and others had already reported the piracy activities on the waters around Southeast Asia (Dalrymple, 1808; Dampier, 1960; Forrest, 1972; and Ali, 2007a).

For example also, Owen Rutter, in his book entitled *The Pirate Wind* (1986), regarded the Iranun and Balangingi of the Sulu islands and the coast of Southeast Asia as the “Vikings of the Eastern Seas”, as their supremacy resembled the Viking, the most terrorizing group in Europe. According to Owen Rutter (1986) that:

[...] no merchant ship of the colonial powers and no shore village was immune from their attack which, in their rampant ferocity, made the threat of extreme violence and anarchy an everyday fact of life for the coastal populations of Southeast Asia for long periods of time [...] fierce, dangerous and merciless [...]. European, American, Chinese, and native vessels who had been sold into slavery (Rutter, 1986:19).

This article – using the historical method, qualitative approach, and literature review (Ahmad, 1991; Creswell, 1998; Sjamsuddin, 2007; Zed, 2008; and Mohajan, 2018) – tries to elaborate pertaining: (1) *Concept and Meaning of Pirate and Piracy*; (2) *the Origin of Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks*; (3) *the Settlements and Bases of the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks in Borneo*; and (4) *the Maritime Raiding Expedition of the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks on the Waters Around Borneo*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Concept and Meaning of Pirate and Piracy. From the historical perspective, the marauding activities of the Southeast Asia had long existed since the emergence of Funan reign during the first century. The Funan had raided ships that passed by their waters. It was once told that the queen of Funan, Liu-ye, had led a troop of Malay sailors to raid merchants' ships that passed by the waters of Funan (Braddell, 1980:27; Vickery, 2003/2004; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

However, A.P. Rubin (1974) defined "piracy and pirates" as robbery at the sea by a ship to another ship without the state authority and for personal gain (Rubin, 1974:10). Chancellor Kent from House of Commons in England, as cited also in A.P. Rubin (1988) and James Francis Warren (2002), on the other hand, defined piracy and pirates as a robbery, or a forcible depredation on the high seas without lawful authority, and done *animo furandi*, and in the spirit and intention of universal hostility (Rubin, 1988; and Warren, 2002:2).

As stated by Joan Rawlins (1969), and other scholars, pirate is a robber on the high seas, and there were many of them in the Eastern Seas at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Opium, tin, tea, silk, cotton, gold, crockery, and pepper were only a few of the goods that might fall into the hands of a lucky pirate, but more valued than all of these were the slaves. Sometimes, the crews of captured ships were sold as slaves, but more often the pirates raided small coastal towns and villages and carried off the women and children. The life of a pirate was an exciting one and probably many men preferred it to a life of paddy-planting or fishing (Rawlins, 1969:38; Defoe, 1999;

and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

In the English language, the word "pirate" refers to someone who is sailing on the seas, attacking other boats, and stealing things from them; while the term "piracy" refers to the crime of attacking and stealing from ships at high sea. In Western legal terms, the concept of "robber and pirates" are distinctive. Normally, a "robber" refers to an individual who forcibly robs others' belongings and rights on the land; whereas a "pirate" refers to an individual who forcibly robs others' belongings and rights on the high sea and outside of his or her state's jurisdiction (Liss, 2003; Randrianantenaina, 2013; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

The Western people categorized these individuals involved in the high sea robbery as "pirate", and not *lanun*, then. The term *lanun* used by the Malays nowadays comes from the word "Iranun" or "Illanun". Later, during the end of 18th century, the word *lanun* or "Illanun" has been over generalised and has been widely used to refer to pirate of any ethnicity (Young, 2004; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).¹

In this context, Nicholas Tarling, in his book entitled *Piracy and Politics in the Malay World: A Study of British Imperialism in Nineteenth Century Southeast Asia*, questioned the use of the term "piracy" to explain the slave raiding and marauding activities of the Iranun and Balangingi at the Southeast Asia. He suggested that the activities should be regarded as "honorable activity" from the perspective of ethno-history (Tarling, 1963).

James F. Warren (2002:43) also stated that marauding activities and maritime

¹See also, for example, "Lanuns and other Pirates" in *The British North Borneo Herald*, on 17 January 1938. Available also at Arkib Negeri Sabah in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia.

slave raiding by the Iranun, from the perspective of cultural history of Iranun, as following here:

honorable occupation [...] no stigma associated with the cultural label "marauder" [...] the Iranun world saw them as "born and bred" to a life of maritime marauding which they simply regarded as a means of living and not as a notorious criminal occupation (Warren, 2002:43).

Anne Lindsey Reber (1966) said also, in her thesis entitled *The Sulu World in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries: A Historiographical Problem in British Writings on Malay Piracy*, that there is a *historical misconception* by the British about "Malay Pirates". The British regards that the culture of robbing is not the norms of the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks. It is merely because of the needs of labors, due to the development of Western-China trade and pressure from the Spanish in Philippines (Reber, 1966).

Besides that, Cesar Adib Majul (1978), in the book entitled *Muslim in the Philippines*, viewed the action of robbing and raiding Spanish merchants' ships by the Iranun and Balangingi as a *jihad*, or holy war, of the Sulu people who were against the spread of Christianity by the Spanish in the Philippines (Majul, 1978).

The Origin of Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks. The word "Iranun" in their language means "loving each other", which shows the close social relationship among them (Alang, 1992:1). Historically, the Iranun are said to be originated from Mindanao island in the Southern Sulu island. They lived at Lanao Lake (in Iranun, it is called *Ranao*) and they were known as the Meranao; they also lived at Illana Bay (in Iranun, it is called *Teluk Illanun*) and they were called the

Iranun. Some lived along the coast and the estuary of Pulangi and also Polok Port in Mindanao island (Alang, 1992; Ali, 2007a; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

Apart from the their Iranun name, they were also referred to few names by the colonists and Western scholars, such as *Illanoons*, *Hilanoones*, *Iranon*, *Irranun*, *Illanun*, *Iranon-Meranao (I-Lanawen)*, or *Merano*. For instance, during the 19th century, the Spanish record referred the Iranun of Mindanao island, who were at that time under the reign of Sultan Pakir Maulana Kamsa of the Maguindanao sultanate, as the *Illanun* or *Illanoons*. This was to distinguish them from the other ethnics of Sulu (Nicholl, 1996:24; Ali, 2007a; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

William Dampier (1660), a famous British sailor during the 17th century, who once lived in Sulu for seven months (1686-1687), disagreed with the proposition which said that the term "Iranun" or "Illanun" was used to refer to the sailors of Maguindanao-Sulu during the end of the 18th century. He, further, stressed that this term was only applicable to the people of Lanao Lake. William Dampier (1660), and other scholars, also argued that not all Iranun were *lanun* or pirate, as they were also farmers, traders, and craftsman. They hunted slaves as a part-time job to assist them in their works, as done by the Iranaun-Maranao of Lanao Lake (Dampier, 1660; Ali, 2007a; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017). Again, James Francis Warren (2002) portrayed them as a community of:

[...] prosperous and stable with a developed commercial life [...] they build good and service able ships and barks for the sea [...] they were a martial race that had build some ships of war (Warren, 2002:5).

During the 1760s, a massive ethnic migration of the Iranun-Maranao from Mindanao island to other islands in Sulu (*Sooloo*), such as Basilan island, Zamboanga, Tawi-tawi, and North Borneo (Tampasook, Pandassan, Marudu, and Tawarran) took place. This was due to several factors, such as ecological catastrophe such as flood at Pulangi river; and volcano eruption in 1765 that had destroyed many villagers, paddy fields, and poultry. The migration was also due to social mobilization and status, when the eldest son of an Iranun *Raja* (King) married the daughter of the *Raja Muda* of the Cotabato, and also when Sultan Kibad Sahrijal of Maguindanao pledged his support to Spain in 1794. His action had caused the whole villages of Iranun, who were led by Datu Camsa (the son-in-law of Sultan Sharaf ud-Din), Anti, Datu Tabuddin (a son of Camsa), and another Visayan named Impa, shifted their allegiance to the Sultan of Sulu and Dato Taosung in Jolo and Basilan (Osman, 1985; Singh, 2000; and Ali, 2007a).

The Balangingi (Samal), on the other hand, came from the small island known as the *Balangingi*, which is situated between Jolo island and Basilan in Southern Philippines. They lived in kampongs, such as Kampung Satan, Kampung Pahat, Kampung Lion, Kampung Qussu, Kampung Qullmunung, and others. Besides Balangingi, they also settled in a few islands, such as Simosa, Bangaloo, and Tunkil islands, which were called as the “pirate nest” by the Spanish (Ali, 2007a; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

At Balangingi, they built four forts that were Balangingi, Sipac, Bucotingal, and Sangap in order to guard the island and the slave hunting boats. According

to Western source, a Balangingi Muslim sailor was described as a slave hunter, who once had defeated the Iranun of Singapore and West Coast Malaya in 1830s. In the early 1838, the battleship of Diana had destroyed some Iranun boats at the west coast Malaya. These Iranun later settled in the Balangingi island and regarded themselves as Balangingi in accordance to the island they live on. Since then, the Balangingi’s name had been mentioned mostly in European records as *lanun* or pirate, replacing the Illanun. The Balangingi called themselves as Samal or Sama, whereas the Iranun called them as Ballanghinin. The main Balangingi’s chiefs in Sulu were *Panglima Alip* and *Orang Kaya Kullul* (Warren, 1985; Warren, 2002; Ali, 2007a; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

In terms of their faith, it was said that the Iranun embraced Islam through Syarif Kabungsuwan, who traveled from Johor and arrived at Malabang in Mindanao island in 1475. Syarif Kabungsuwan married a royal Iranun lady named Puteri Anginbatu and later married a Magindanao princess named Puteri Tinuna. He eventually founded the Islamic sultanate in Magondanao and Mindanao (Ali, 2007a; Hays, 2015; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

Meanwhile, the Balangingni converted to Islam through the Sulu sultanate. The traditional social class of Iranun and Balangingi comprised a few stratifications that were the ruling class, the middle class, the people, and the slaves. For example, the social class of the Iranun people in Mindanao was divided into few classes that were the royal class which comprised the *Sultan*, *Radia Moda* or *Kabogatan*; the middle class which comprised *Datu*, *Panglima* (the highest rank political

leader), scholar, layman that consisted of the *Dumata* and *Sakup*; the slave class which was also called the *Oripen* and *Baniaga* (Baradas, 1968; Alang, 1992:12; Ali, 2007a; Ali & Tarsat, 2017; and Campbell, 2018). See figures 1 and 2.

Similar to the other traditional Southeast Asia sultanates, the Iranun and Balangingi stressed the importance of slavery or *oripen* in their social stratification. It must be noted that the slavery concepts and practice by the Iranun and Balangingi are different from those practised by the Western slavery. Here, the concepts and practice of slavery are mostly towards the social obligation and values between rulers and the people; while the Western slavery is mostly based on economical and political obligation, and always related to oppression (cf Wright, 2002; Ali, 2007a; Subedi, 2013; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

Economically, Iranun and Balangingi were well known as sailors who are active in fishing and processing sea products. Besides that, they also involved in farming, crafting, and trading around the Sulu island. In contrary, the Sea Dayaks lived at the river banks and interior of west coast of Borneo, namely Sarawak and Kalimantan. The word *Dayak Laut* or “Sea Dayaks” was not the original name for this particular ethnic, but was given to them by the Westerners during the Brooke reign in Sarawak. Among the ethnics of Sarawak, the Sea Dayaks are known as the Ibans. Although they are Sea Dayaks, maritime is not their culture unlike the Iranun and Balangingi in the Sulu (Tarling, 1971; Singh, 2000; Young, 2004; Ali, 2007a; and Darmadi, 2017).

The Ibans are agrarian people who practice shifting cultivation and hunting.

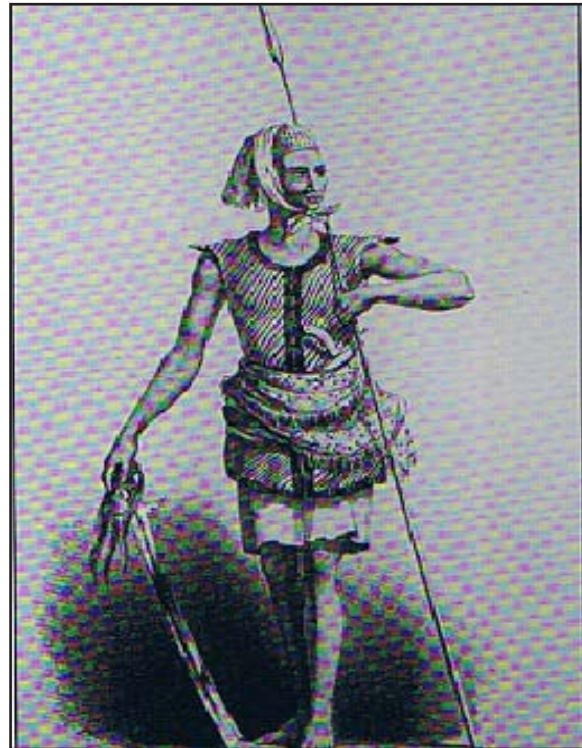


Figure 1:
A Potrait of Iranun Warrior
in Tempasuk, North Borneo
(Source: James F. Warren, 2002:198)



Figure 2:
A Potrait of Sea Dayaks Warrior
in Sarawak, North Borneo
(Source: James F. Warren, 2002:213)

Before the coming of Christianity, the Sea Dayaks who lived in long houses believed in animism and were classified as the “Pagan of Borneo”. They hunt human heads as part of their culture. Unlike the Iranun and Balingingi, the Sea Dayaks do not practise slavery in their social stratification (Sandin, 1967; Abas & Bali, 1985; and Ali, 2007a).

The Settlements and Bases of the Iranun, Balingingi, and Sea Dayaks in Borneo. By the end of the 18th century and the early 19th century, the Iranun, which were originally based in Mindanao; and the Balingingi, which were originally based in Balingingi island, migrated to Jolo in Basilan that was under the Sultan of Sulu’s reign. They started slave hunting and ships raiding expedition around the waters of Sulu, South China Sea, and Celebes sea which were dominated by the *Datus* of Tausog. Since the early 19th century, the Iranun and Balingingi began their slavery and marauding activities at the Mindanao, Balingingi, and Tawi-Tawi islands as well as Basilan (Jolo) together with *Datus* of Tausog in the waters around Southeast Asia, such as Sulu, Borneo, Sulawesi, Java, and Sumatera of Indonesia; Malaya to Siam (Warren, 1981; Lopian, 2004; Warren, 2007; Ali, 2007a; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

During their expedition to Celebes Sea, Sulawesi and Java, the Iranun and Balingingi had established a few settlements at Sulawesi, such as Tontoli, Dampelas, Tobungku, Tanah Jampea, Lambok, and others. Under the leadership of Datu Malfalla (brother-in-law to Raja Muda Cotabato), Tontoli had become the base in Celebes Sea (Lopian, 2004; Ali, 2007a; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017). In 1812, J. Hunt (1967) described Tontoli as following here:

[...] the great piratical establishment, a settlement for thousands of Iranun who were led by Raja Jailolo and his son, Niru (Hunt, 1967).

In the early 1820s, Tobungku and Tontoli had become a primary staging center for financing and outfitting Iranun slave raiders in East Sulawesi and the Moluccas (Warren, 2002:156). By making Tontoli and Tobungku as the bases, the Iranun and Balingingi, apart from hunting slaves, started to attack and raid trading ships owned by the Dutch and Bugis. These ships were loaded with various valuable commodities, such as spices, tin, and others. To reinforce their position in Celebes Sea, the Iranun and Balingingi had cooperated with the Tobello and Gilolo. The Tobello and Gilolo settled in Maluku, hunt slaves and attack the Dutch and Bugis interest in Makasar, South Sulawesi (Warren, 2002; Lopian, 2004; and Ali, 2007a).

Between 1774-1798, the Iranun and Balingingi had committed series of robberies on the Dutch and Spanish trading ships around Sulu and Sulawesi by using 100-200 prahus, *joanga*, and *garay* that reach almost 130 feet long. In their expedition to South China Sea, the Iranun and Balingingi had landed at the west and north of North Borneo and settled in Teluk Malludo (Marudu), Tempasuk (Tampasook), Tuaran (Tawarran), and Pandasan (Pandassaan) at the west coast of North Borneo. These places had become the bases for their settlement and operation for slave hunting and ships raiding in the South China Sea (Othman, 1988; Ali, 2007a; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

While in Kalimantan, the Iranun and Balingingi had started settlements at Sambas, Bangkeleen, and Berau. The Iranun and Balingingi had extended their

named Si-Mirantau. Apart from Tempasuk (Tempassook, Sungai Pandassan, and Tawarran), the Iranun and Balangingi had also settled in northern of North Borneo, that was Teluk Marudu (Malludo). This was their reaction towards the opening of a new British trading base Pulau Balambangan (Malambangan) of North Borneo by Alexander Darlymple in 1761 (Singh, 2000; Ali, 2007a; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

Among the prominent leaders of the Iranun and Balangingi in Marudu was Sherif Usman, a mix parentage Arab-local merchant who married to Dayang Cahaya, a sister to Datu Mohammad Buyo (Raja Muda Sulu). He was said to have about 1,500 – 2,000 followers in Marudu and had gained approval to dominate the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Bajau in Balabac and Palawan islands by Sultan of Sulu, so that he can form “Tempasuk-Marudu Bay region of northwest Borneo”. Sherif Usman, who was also known as “a man of character and energy”, succeeded to transform Marudu into “the most fruitful, populous, and valuable district in all Borneo” (Nicholl, 1996:17; Kotung, 2003; and Ali, 2007a).

Among the major settlements in Marudu are Bawengun, Tandik, Malansingin, Sipuni, Kudat, Tambalulan, and Malubang. Under the Sherif Usman reign, Marudu had become Iranun regional satellite network between Straits of Malacca, North Borneo and Sulu, and Sulawesi; funneling captives and guns between Tempasuk and Tungku (Baharom, 1999; Warren, 2002:130; Kotung, 2003; Ali, 2007a; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

With the strength of 1,000 people, the Iranun had also established a few temporary settlements at Tungku River

of east coast of North Borneo under an Iranun leader named Rajah Muda. About 70 houses were built in that temporary settlement. The settlements were situated in Sibahat River and Mekawa River, Peninsular Unsang, Paitan, Sugut, and Labuk River. Unlike the Tempasuk and Marudu, the settlements of the Iranun and Balangingi along the coast of the east of North Borneo was not equipped with forts as they were not exposed to the English, Dutch, and Spain’s attacks (Tregonning, 1965; Bhar, 1980; Singh, 2000; Ali, 2007a; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

In the 1830s and 1840s, Tungku River was ruled by Raja Laut, an Iranun leader, who was related to Sherif Usman in Tempasuk and Pandassan. Since the attack on the settlements in Kota Marudu, Tempasuk, Pandasan in the west coast of North Borneo, and Tontoli and Tobungku in Sulawesi by the English and Dutch in the middle of 1850s, the settlements in Tungku River and Sihabat River had become crucially important for the Iranun and Balangingi. The attack had caused them to flee to east coast of North Borneo (Baharom, 1999; Kotung, 2003; and Ali, 2007a).

In this context, Captain Edward Belcher (1848), who had headed many British fleets to attack the Iranun and Balangingi’s settlements in North Borneo, once described Tungku River in the 1840s as “slave market and pirate” and he, further, added that Tambisan Island was the main base for the Iranun in the east coast (Belcher, 1848).

Even though the Iranun and Balangingi can be classified as the second class community in the Sulu Sultanate’s social system, their figure as the *Raja di Laut* and their contribution in leveraging the rank of Sulu Sultanate as the “sea power”

in Malay archipelago during the 18th and 19th century were undeniable. For instance, when there was a conflict to gain control over the trading power of the Sulu Sultanate in Marudu (which was under in Brunei in 1771), Mohammad Israel, an Iranun leader, led a fleet of 130 large prahus – *joanga* against the Sultan of Brunei (Bornean Sultanate). In 1820s, the Iranun and Balangingi, who were based in Marudu Bay, succeeded to defeat Brunei. Brunei at that time was regarded as a competitor by Sulu Sultanate. In 1775, with the help from the Iranun and Balangingi and Spain, Sultan Israel from Sulu attacked and destroyed the Alexander Darlymple's trading base in Balambangan (Tarling, 1971; Ahmat, 2006; Ali, 2007a; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

Besides serving Sultan of Sulu and Tausog's local leaders in Sulu Sultanate's district, the Iranun and Balangingi had contributed a lot and had helped the Sultans and other local leaders in Malay archipelago to fight the Westerners. For example, it was said that Sultan of Brunei was once asked Sherif Usman of Marudu Bay to assist him to defeat James Brooke reign in Sarawak. It was said in *Tuhfat al-Nafis* that Sultan Mahmud sent a group of people to Tempasuk headed by Talib, to request for help from Raja Ismail, an Iranun King, to defeat the Dutch in Riau, Indonesia (Halim & Jamillemar, 1958; Brown, 1970; Tarling, 1971; Matheson, 1979; Baharom, 1999; Bala, 2005; and Ali, 2007a).

In 1787, Raja Ismail and Tuan Aji (a Bugis), under the leadership of Sultan Mahmud, attacked and drove the Dutch away from Riau. Later in 1789, Syed Ali, a royal from Siak, requested the Iranun and Balangingi's assistance to attack Songkla in

the southeast Siam. Despite slave hunting and marauding activities at sea, the local leaders of Sulu used the Iranun and Balangingi to mobilize the local people living along the coast (Samal) and interior (Ida'an and Murut), so that they could yield the marine and forest's sources, as an *ufti* or a contribution to Sultan of Sulu and also to be traded in Jolo port (Forrest, 1972:192-193; Ali, 2007a; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

Here, the Iranun and Balangingi were regarded as the soldier and the oarsman to wade main rivers in North Borneo in order to reach the interior. Normally, they would bring with them salted-fish, dried fish, salt, and weapons to be traded with the forest yields planted by the people of the interior. On the other hand, the Ibans (*Sea Dayaks*) in Sarawak had frightened the people, because of their courage and popularity as headhunters. It could be said that maritime raiding activities among the Sea Dayaks in the 18th and 19th centuries were not the original culture of their forefathers, but merely an influence from outside. The history of the Ibans' involvement in maritime raiding activities was very much predisposed by the Iranun leaders, the Malay local leaders of Sarawak, and the local leaders of Brunei, such as Sherif Sahap (an Iranun), Pangiran Indera Mahkota (Brunei ex-Governor in Sarawak) in Patusan, Sherif Jaffir (an Arab descendent) in Lingga, and Sherif Mulla (an Arab descendent) in Undup. In the meantime, two prominent Sea Dayaks leaders, Linggir and Luang, together with Sherif Sahap, Pangiran Indera Mahkota, Sherif Jaffir, and Sherif Mulla, were active in maritime raiding activities in the coast of North Borneo (Edwin, 1954; Halim & Jamillemar, 1958; Ariff, 1995; and Ali, 2007a).

Among the main settlements of the Sea Dayaks in Sarawak were Saribas River, Skrang River, Batang Lupar River, and Rejang River. These settlements were also labeled as “Pirate River” by James Brooke. During James Brooke voyage in 1841 from Singapore to Sarawak (Kuching) in the ship named *Royalist*, he encountered a few large prahus owned by the Iranun and Sea Dayaks (Ibans) at the estuary of Sarawak River (in Warren, 2002:44). Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi (1963) had also experienced similar encounter during his journey to Kelantan, where he was overwhelmed by the Sea Dayaks and Iranun presence at the east coast of Malaya in 1830s (Munshi, 1963).

The existence of the Sea Dayaks who dominated a number of main rivers, such as Lupar River, Saribas River, Rimbas River, and others, had threatened the Brunei sultanate in Sarawak, which was at that time headed by a Brunei local leader named Raja Muda Hashim. The strategic location of their settlements had also allowed them to raid English and Dutch trading ships easily (Halim & Jamillemar, 1958; Tarling, 1971; Richards ed., 1992; Gin, 1995; Ali, 2007a; and Pringle, 2010). See figure 3.

One interesting point in discussing about the Sea Dayaks early involvement in maritime raiding activities on the waters around North Borneo, in the 18th and 19th century, was their main motives. Unlike the Iranun and Balangingi, the involvement of the Sea Dayaks in Sarawak was not about slave-taking and theft, but head hunting. Their practice of head hunting, or *ngayau* in their language,

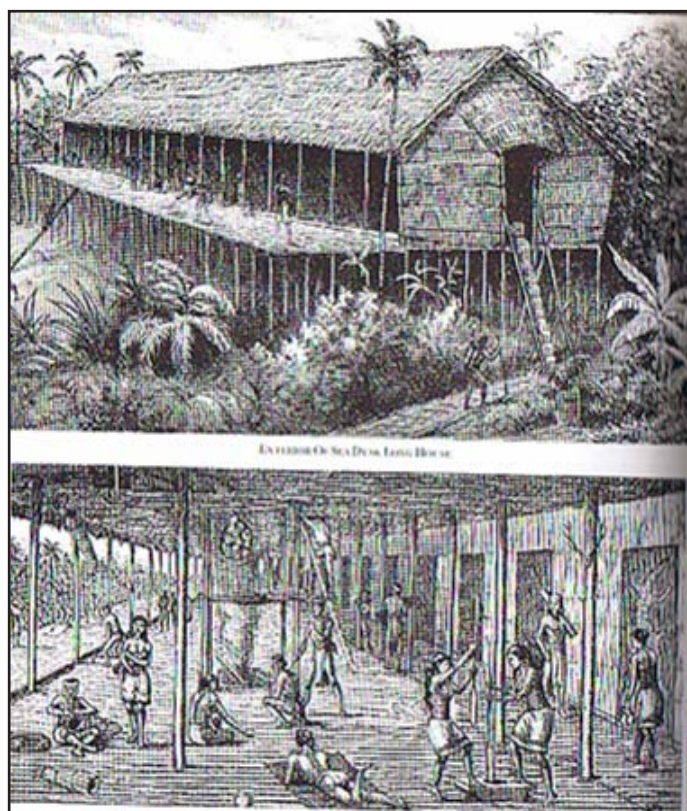


Figure 3:
The Illustration of the Sea Dayaks Settlement in Sarawak
(Source: D.J.M. Tate, 1988:116)

means “attacking enemy for human head”. *Ngayau* was one of the tactics or strategies of battle or war, which was very essential in their culture. The practice was very much related to revenge or bloodletting. Besides that, *ngayau* was also the obligation that they should apply in many aspects of their lives, for example, it is a symbol of adulthood, a wedding dowry, a gift to deity on establishing new land or settlements, a cure for epidemic, an end of an abstention for a deceased family member, an appointment of new leader, and a beginning of the paddy planting season (Tregonning, 1965; Osman, 1985; Ariff, 1995; Singh, 2000; Bala & Bee, 2002:6; and Ali, 2007a).

Thus, *ngayau* is a practice to fulfill the socio-cultural requirement that had been

practiced by their forefathers for centuries. This is in line with Bob Reece (2002), and other scholars, who argued that it is the result of continuous education, culture, and experiences from generation to generation which had become the obligations in the cultural practice (Singh, 2000; Reece, 2002; and Ali, 2007a). See figure 4.

The Maritime Raiding Expedition of the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks on the Waters Around Borneo. With the establishment of bases and settlements of the Iranun and Balangingi in Tempasuk (Tempasuk, Tuaran, and Pandasan); Marudu, and Turku; and a number of Sea Dayaks settlements in Sarawak, such as Saribas River, Krian River, Batang Lupar River, and Skrang River; and in Sulawesi such as Tontoli, Dampelas, Tobungku, Tanah Jampea, Lambok, and others, was implicitly permitted them to run their maritime raiding activities on the waters around Borneo. Thus, before 1840s, the maritime raiding activities of the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks were vastly done on the waters around Borneo and Southeast Asia (Abas & Bali, 1985; Warren, 2002; Young, 2004; Ali, 2007a; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

According to Nigel Heyward (1969), and other scholars, for 40 years the pirate chiefs, unchecked and unopposed, grew stronger and more numerous, and their exploits became more audacious and impudent, organized communities with well defended strongholds here they could keep their booty, womenfolk, and slaves. From these bases, they ranged far and wide over the Indies, all around Borneo, the coasts of the Philippines, Celebes, Sumatra, Java, and the Malay Peninsular, even reaching the Bay of Bengal

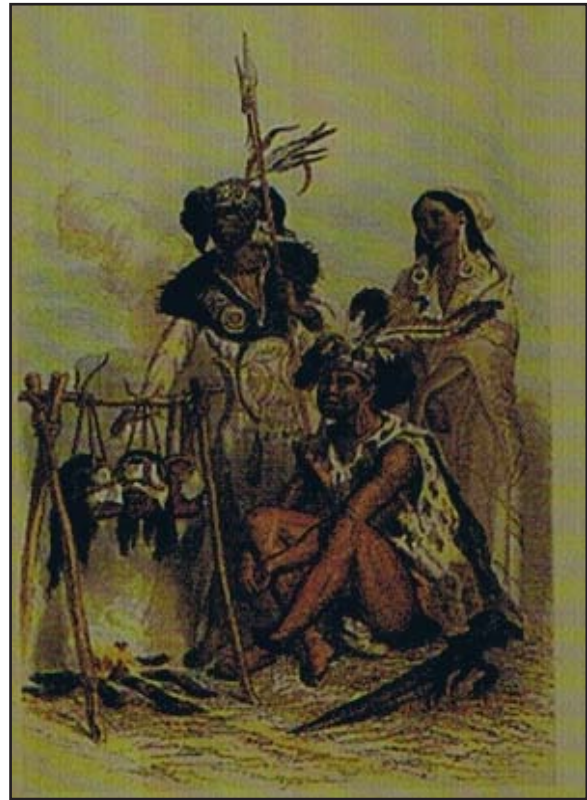


Figure 4:
The Practice of Head Hunting or *Ngayau*
and Smoking Ceremony of Human Head
(Source: Bob Reece, 2002:42)

(Heyward, 1969:69; Lopian, 2004; and Ali, 2007a).

In general, these activities would take months and would be headed by a Balangingi leader, who was sponsored by Iranun leaders. For this purpose, the local Tausog leaders as well as the Malay leaders of Sarawak and Brunei had sponsored and supplied boat equipment, ships, and weapons for the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks to hunt slaves and also to raid trading ships from the West and China. Sherif Sahib (an Iranun) from Sadong (East coast of North Borneo), for example, had sponsored the Balangingi to raid the Dutch and English trading ships sailing on the southern coast of North Borneo until Banjarmasin. Sherif Usman, who

governed Marudu and involved in the slave hunting and ships raiding on the South China Sea, had also sponsored the Iranun and Balangingi in his territory to hunt and raid ships at sea by supplying them ships, prahus, gun-powder, weapons, food, salt, and others (Dickson, 1954; Tarling, 1971; Singh, 1984; Osman, 1985; Ali, 2007a; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

This operation involved helmsman (*julmuri*), cabin crew (*sakay*), boatswain, preacher, judge, and elderly influential people in the society. The Malay leaders in Sarawak like Sherif Sahap, Sherif Jaffir, and Sherif Mulla; and the local leaders in Brunei like Pangeran Usop Pangiran, Pangeran Indera Mahkota (a Brunei ex-Governor in Sarawak), Sherif Masahor (a Brunei ex-Governor in Rejang), and others; and also with the cooperation of the Iranun and Balangingi leaders in North Borneo had sponsored the Sea Dayaks for the slave hunting and ships raiding on the waters of Sarawak. To raid the Western ships at sea, the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks used various types and sizes of small and large prahus, which were called with various names, such as *salisipan* (*vinta* or *baroto*), *garay*, *joangga*, *penjajap* (*gubang* or *panco*), *barangayan*, *prahu*, *kora-kora*, *bangkong*, and others (Halim & Jamillemar, 1958; Singh, 1984; Osman, Abdullah & Hakip, 2001; Warren, 2002; and Ali, 2007a). See figures 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11.

In order to raid trading ships, apart from the use of traditional weapons,

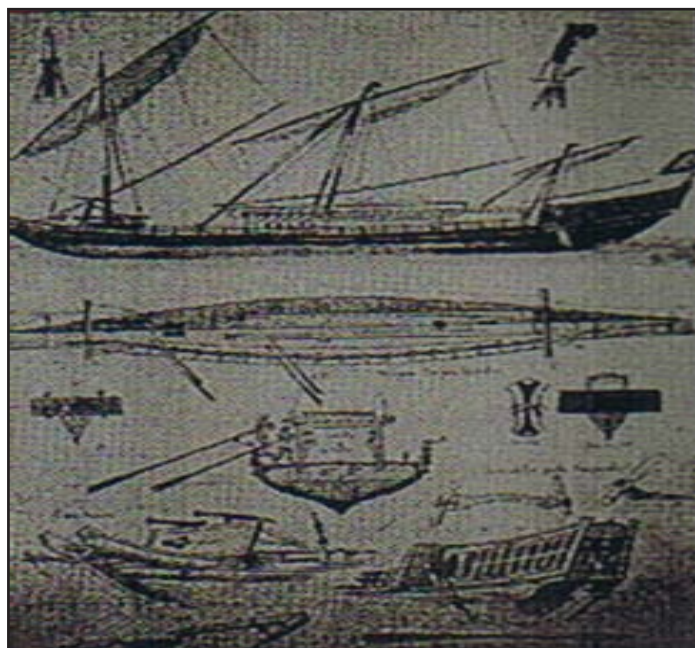


Figure 5:
The Structure of a *Lanong*
(Source: James F. Warren, 2002:199)

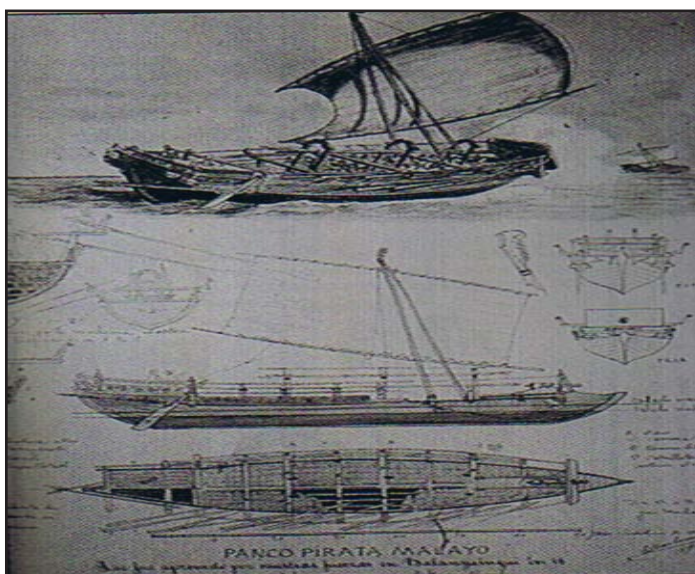


Figure 6:
The Structure of a *Garay*
(Source: James F. Warren, 2002:199)

the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks facilitated their ships and large prahus with modern weapons invented by the Westerners, which were supplied by the Iranun and Tausog leaders as well as the

Malay leaders in Sarawak (Dickson, 1954; Ali, 2007a; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017). As for the slave hunting activities at the coastal area, the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks would normally use types of prahus called *lanong*, *kakap*, and *prahu*. These prahus were smaller and lighter, and suitable to be used along the curvy and shallow coast of Borneo that was rich with reef, as reported by Captain Kolff and Captain Henry Keppel in 1831. This was also reported by Captain Ridney Mundy of the British Royal Navy. As Captain Ridney Mundy was sailing on ships named *Royalist* and *Ringdove*, he encountered three *lanongs* owned by Sherif Usman in Tempasuk and Pandasan in 1846. The *lanong* raised a “black flag” to signify “sinister and threatening, symbolizing death and evil” (*cf* Keppel, 1847; Mundy, 1848; Baharom, 1999; Warren, 2002:253; and Ali, 2007a).

The power of the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks fleet in this maritime raiding expedition on the waters around Borneo was illustrated by Nigel Heyward (1969) as following here:

Their boats commonly exceeded 90 feet in length, and were rowed by double tiers of oars worked by many as 100 slaves, while 30 or 40 fighting men, arrayed in scarlet and coats of mail, and armed with keris, spears, and long swords, went into action from the upper deck. The boats carried a six to twenty-four-powder gun in the bows, with numerous small brass swivel guns mounted along the sides and upper works. They cruised in squadrons of twenty to two hundred sail, which did not hesitate to attack stray European ships if they were ill-armed or difficulties (Heyward, 1969:69).



Figure 7:
The Structure of a *Barangayan*
(Source: James F. Warren, 2002:197)



Figure 8:
The Structure of a *Prahu*
(Source: James F. Warren, 2002:197)

Similarly, in other places around the waters of Southeast Asia, the maritime raiding activities of the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks in the 18th century focused on slave hunting rather than

raiding the Westerner trade ships. James F. Warren (1981 and 1998), in his books entitled *The Sulu Zone, 1768-1898: The Dynamic of External Trade, Slavery, and Ethnicity in the Transformation of a Southeast Asian Maritime State*; and *The World Capitalist Economy and the Historical Imagination*, argued intensively the importance of slaves in the economic and political systems as well as in social system of the Sulu Sultanate (Warren, 1981 and 1998). James F. Warren (2002), further, emphasized and summarized the importance of slave hunting in his book entitled *Iranun and Balangingi: Globalization, Maritime Raiding and the Birth of Ethnicity*. He pointed out that as following here:

The slaves played an important socio-political and economic role in Tausog statecraft, society, and culture as they were used for house, field, fishery, trading, raiding, and craftwork [...]. Slave labor supported this form of military organization and specialized communities that were always on a war footing [...] did all manner of heavy work, including house and fort construction, boat building, harvesting tripang and pearl beds, fishing, and transporting rice and copra (Warren, 2002:40).

Besides exploiting the forest and marine sources, slaves were also used by the *Datus* of Sulu to row and navigate lanong (*joanga*), garay (*panco* or *penjajap*), and salisipan (*vinta*, *baroto* or *kakap*), which were loaded with all kinds of sea and forest products from the northeast coast of Borneo, to cross Sulu Sea to get to Jolo port. To hunt slaves, the Iranun, Balangingi of Tempasuk and Marudu, and Sea Dayaks of Sarawak had sailed



Figure 9:
The Structure of a Salisipan
(Source: James F. Warren, 2002:200)

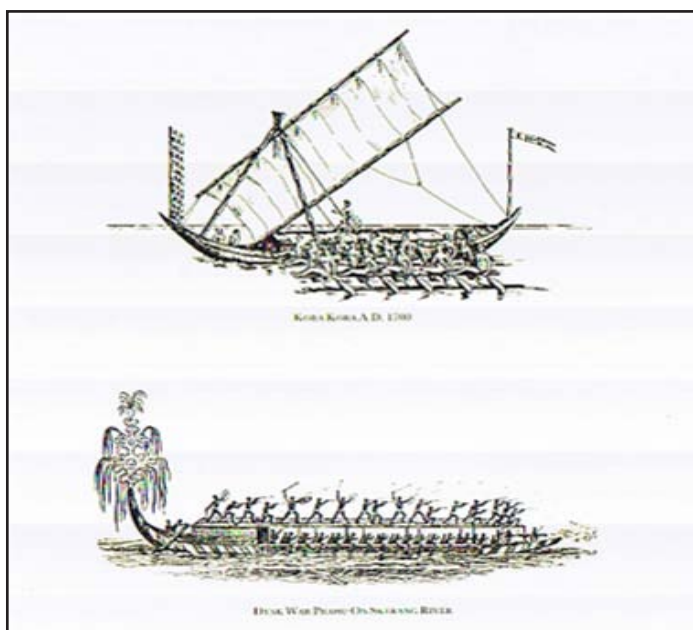


Figure 10:
The Structure of a Bangkong, a Type of Sea Dayaks Battleship
(Source: D.J.M. Tate, 1988:28)

along the west coast of North Borneo and interior to go to places, such as Brunei, Labuan, Sarawak, and Kalimantan. This included sailing through South China Sea to Sumatera and Strait of Malacca to

hunt the people who lived along the coast and interior. These people were, then, forced to become slaves for economic, political, and social purposes. These slaves were also sold or captured for ransom at Brunei and Jolo ports. They were exploited to do all kinds of jobs, from collecting the marine and forest yields to rowing the prahus (Osman, 1985; Othman, 1988; and Ali, 2007a and 2007b).

With the development of economy on the land, the unskilled slaves, who comprised Brunei, Sarawak Malay, Murut, Dusun, Ida'an, Kayan, Kenyah, Kelabit, Punan, Bugis, and others, were forced to collect bird nests, *camphor*, *damar*, wax, rattan, and many others. Among the yields, the bird nests collected from Gomantong Cave in Magondora was among the most essential commodity for the Sulu Sultanate. The importance of bird nest in the international market, especially in China, began when a Suluk named Abdullah brought sags of bird nest to Sultan of Sulu as an *ufti* or contribution (Bala, 1993; Ali, 2007a and 2007b; and Pringle, 2010).

In addition to slave hunting, the maritime raiding activities that were conducted by the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks includes the marauding of the ships belongs to English, Spanish, Dutch, Chinese, and Bugis sailed on South China Sea. This was for the purpose of trading and also attacking the European trading bases. For instance, in 1870s, the Iranun from Tempasuk in North Borneo and Reteh in Sumatera raided tin from the Arab, Chinese, and Dutch ships in Bangka



Figure 11:
The Structure of *Kora-kora*
(Source: Robert Nicholl, 1996:49)

island (Abas & Bali, 1985; Ahmat, 2006; and Ali, 2007a). William Wyndham, a merchant in Jolo, stated that the Iranun and Balangingi in Tungku River had raided three English ships and a few Bugis ships; and had killed the crew (in Warren, 2002).

To date, the use of the term “pirate” or *lanun* to identify the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks on the waters of Southeast Asia by the sailors, merchants, and Western colonials during the 18th and 19th century has triggered different arguments among the scholars of Western centric and Eastern centric. The Western’s proposition on labeling the *lanun* in the Southeast Asia as identical to the pirates in European (the Vikings), who raided only European trading ships on an open sea, has confused people on what were actually done by the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks, who were actually

done it due to their social and cultural obligation, particularly around the waters Borneo and Southeast Asia generally (Warren, 2002; Ali, 2007a; Casumpang, 2015; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

It is transparent that the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks involvement in these maritime raiding activities include the slave hunting on sea and also jobs on land, such as farmers and fisherman, which were not done by the pirates in the West. The term “pirates” given by the colonial and Western scholars to the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks of Borneo and Southeast Asia is merely an external evaluation as well as political and economic interest of the West, who refuses to understand the historical and socio-cultural background of the society (Ke, 2006; Ali, 2007a; Casumpang, 2015; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

The same things happen when James Brooke, Captain Edward Belcher, Captain Henry Keppel, and Captain Ridney Mundy picture the Sea Dayaks of the estuary and upstream Batang Lupar and Batang Saribas rivers, which are well known for its headhunter’s culture, as “uncivilized, hostile, and perilous”. Overall, the Western colonials during the 18th and 19th century describe these tribes as “savage sea borne terrorists” and “robbers of the sea” (*cf* Keppel, 1847; Mundy, 1848; Tarling, 1971; Warren, 2002; Ali, 2007a; Casumpang, 2015; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017). According to James F. Warren (2002), this description was due to:

[...] on the eighteenth century, the Iranun and Balangingi world was still usually “observed from the deck of the ship”, the ramparts of the fortress, and the high gallery of the trading-house; and consequently this world remained “grey and undifferentiated” (Warren, 2002:13).

However, after the end of colonial era in Southeast Asia, the Western scholars as well as the local scholars have shown great interest to re-evaluate the authenticity of these facts, which have described the Iranun and Balangingi in such a way. In relation to this matter, Western and local scholars, such as Nicholas Tarling (1963); David E. Sopher (1965); A.B. Lopian (1975); Cesar Adib Majul (1978); Datu Bandira Datu Alang (1992); Graham Irwin (1995); Clifford Sather (1997); Ahmad Jelani Halimi (2000); James F. Warren (2002); and others have argued against the accusation made by the early colonial officers, such as James Brooke, Sir Thomas Cochrane, Captain Edward Belcher, Captain Ridney Mundy, Captain Henry Keppel, Captain Congalton, Captain Stanley, Captain Talbot, and Captain Bethune (Keppel, 1847; Mundy, 1848; Tarling, 1963; Sopher, 1965; Lopian, 1975; Majul, 1978; Osman, 1985; Alang, 1992; Irwin, 1995; Sather, 1997; Halimi, 2000; Warren, 2002; and Ali, 2007a).

The scholars have also evaluated the Iranun and Balangingi from the perspective of socio-economic and cultural of the ethnics themselves, and no longer from the writer’s point of view (*cf* Warren, 2002; Ali, 2007a; Casumpang, 2015; Esteban, 2016; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017). Credit should be given to James Francis Warren (1981, 1998, 2000 and 2002), who has made encouraging study on Sulu Sultanate from the perspective of “the Sulu Zone” and has settled many confusion on the identification of the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks as *lanun*, or pirates, and has made a conclusion that “the sea was a critical fact of life” (Warren, 1981, 1998, 2000 and 2002).

From the Iranun point of view, Datu

Laut, an Iranun leader of the west coast Borneo during the 19th century, once said that whatever things done by his ethnic was:

[...] *the most honorable of professions, the only one which a gentleman and a chief could pursue, and would be deeply offended if told they were but robbers on a larger scale [...]. Notwithstanding his profession, Laut was a gentleman* (cited in Warren, 2002:41).

In the Malay traditional ruling system, the act of raiding the wealth and the rights of other people, be it on sea or land, will only be regarded as robbing and it will only commit by a robber. In this context, Datu Bandira Datu Alang (1992) and other scholars said that the Iranuns are not pirates as pictured by the West. This is because Iranun means “loving each other”, and this is clearly opposite from what is meant by “terrorists or bandits of the sea” (Alang, 1992:1; Warren, 2002; Ali, Osman & Bee, 2006; Ali, 2007a; Casumpang, 2015; and Ali & Tarsat, 2017).

CONCLUSION ²

The maritime raiding activities practiced by the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks, who are called pirates (*lanun*) from the Western point of view, should be

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re-evaluated based on worldview, history of civilization, and local culture; and not based on the perspective of the Western, who is deeply rooted in “political and economic interest”.

It could be said that moral judgment and the reality of Southeast Asia history during the 18th and 19th century should be taken into account in evaluating the involvement of the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks in the development of the history of maritime civilization in Borneo, whether or not their involvement should be classified as pirates; or whether or not these ethnics should be recognized as the only Malay heroes, who had ever captured European as their prisoners and slaves in the history of the world.³

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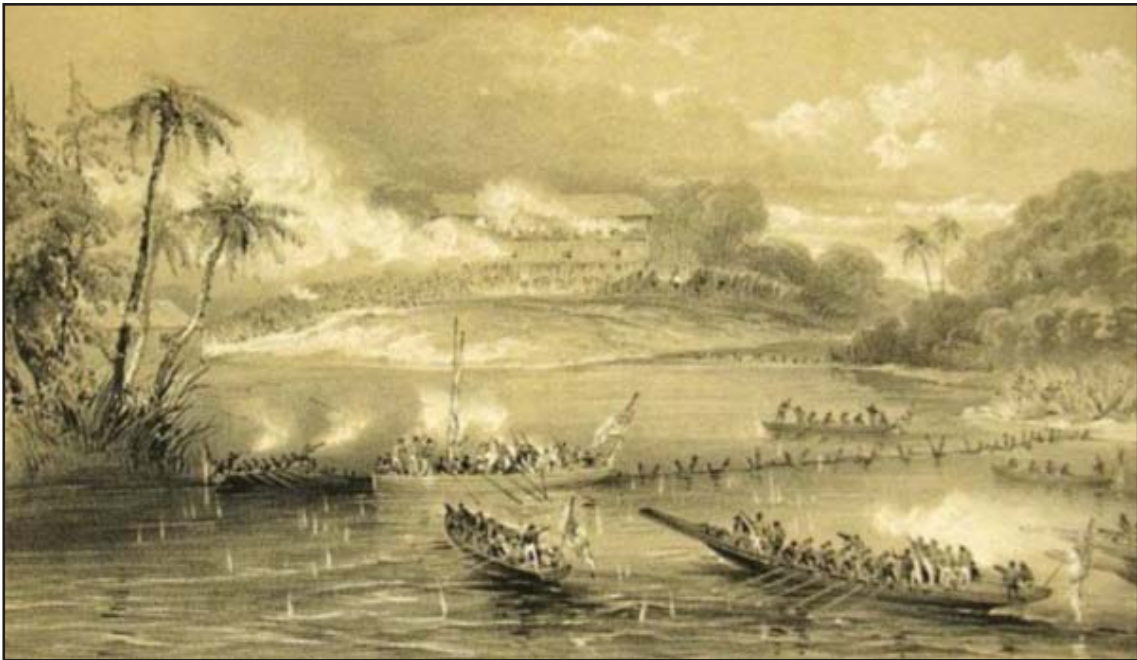
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³**Statement.** Herewith, I declare that this paper is my own original work; so it is not product of plagiarism. I will responsible academically if there are persons who claimed that this article is not original based on my concerning study.

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Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks: Pirates or Heroes from the Maritime Perspective?

(Source: <https://borneohistory57.blogspot.com/2016/10/marudu>, 16/09/2018)

It could be said that moral judgment and the reality of Southeast Asia history during the 18th and 19th century should be taken into account in evaluating the involvement of the Iranun, Balangingi, and Sea Dayaks in the development of the history of maritime civilization in Borneo, whether or not their involvement should be classified as pirates; or whether or not these ethnics should be recognized as the only Malay heroes, who had ever captured European as their prisoners and slaves in the history of the world.