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Sacred Legitimacy and Political Failure: Religion in Balthasar Klau's Movement in Southern Belu, 1950–1965

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Abstract

The makdok movement led by Balthasar Klau in Southern Belu (1950–1965) reflected complex religio-political dynamics that went beyond mere heresy or local political events. Previous studies on Klau have largely emphasized historical perspectives, leaving a gap in understanding the symbolic meanings and spiritual role of the makdok as an instrument of political resistance in postcolonial society. This gap highlights the need for an anthropological inquiry into how Tetun cosmology, Catholic symbols, and modern political networks (PKI and BTI) were interwoven. The main research question addresses how the makdok functioned as an alternative authority negotiating power relations between adat, the Church, and the state. This study employed a qualitative-descriptive approach, with its locus in Southern Belu, using an ethnohistorical method grounded in archival research, literature review, and field testimonies. Data analysis was conducted interpretively within the framework of symbolic and political anthropology (Geertz, Comaroff & Comaroff). The findings reveal the hybridity of religious and political authority, which constructed a utopian imagination of a world without labor, fair economic distribution, and the promise of prosperity from the sea. The novelty of this study lies in the concept of a "political makdok" as a form of decolonialism from below. Recommendations emphasize further studies on the interrelation between local spirituality and modern organizations, as well as the potential of hybrid authority to form alternative models of power in postcolonial contexts.

Keywords: *political makdok*, *religio-political hybridity*, *Southern Belu*, *alternative authority*, *decolonialism from below*

Introduction

Local religious movements are often understood as a cultural response against structural oppression experienced by marginal groups, especially in both colonial and post-colonial conditions. Various phenomena such as millenarianism, cargo cults, and local messianic movements are not mere religious expressions but also symbolic forms of resistance against a hegemonic power structure (Worsley, 1968; Burridge, 1969). These movements are

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spearheaded by charismatic figures believed to have special access to spiritual powers. They often show themselves as both spiritual and socio-political leaders in their own communities.

One of the prominent figures in this context is Balthasar Klau, a makdok from southern Belu in West Timor. He led a political and spiritual movement between 1950 and 1965. In the Tetun society, a makdok is a figure believed capable of bridging the gap between the material and spiritual worlds, possessing healing powers, and even predicting the future (Nuryahman & Sugianto, 2019). However, in the case of Klau, that role was also used for both political expression and resistance against three dominant institutions: the feudal lord (king), the Catholic Church, and the post-independence state structure (Farram, 2002; Steenbrink, 2015).

What differentiated Klau from other makdoks was that his movement also exhibited characteristics of a cargo cult, a belief that material prosperity would come through spiritual and mystical means (Lindstrom, 1993). He promised prosperity through a union between the spiritual and material worlds, which, in turn, would bring luxurious goods from the seas (Muskens, 1974). His involvement with left-wing organizations such as the PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia; Indonesian Communist Party) and BTI (Barisan Tani Indonesia, Peasants' Front of Indonesia) underscored the undeniable political dimension of his movement (Van Klinken, 2014). Klau's position as both spiritual and political leader, which combined religious symbols, revolutionary rhetoric (i.e., Nasakom and Resopim), and a network of cooperatives, placed him as a liminal figure challenging the border between the spiritual and the profane, between local traditional authority (adat) and the state.

Several studies had previously discussed Klau and his movement (Farram, 2002; Steenbrink, 2015; Muskens, 1974). However, the approach used was limited to a historical one. Few anthropologists had specifically examined how a makdok's role could articulate political resistance through a symbolic and spiritual lens. Studies on prophetic movements in Southeast Asia, such as Kamma's study of the Herut movement (1972) and Kartodirdjo's study of Saminism (1984), showed how local spirituality often served as a means for peasants to express their discontent with structural inequality and social exclusion.

In this context, this research analyzed Balthasar Klau's movement as a manifestation of a "political makdok" who combined local spiritual beliefs with resistance against hegemonic authorities in post-colonial Timorese society. By adopting a symbolic and political approach to religious anthropology (Geertz, 1973; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991), this article examined how ritual practices, spiritual narratives, and existing social structures each contributed to creating a religious movement that served as an instrument of social struggle.

Balthasar Klau and the *makdok* movement: 1950-1965

Balthasar Klau began his career in Makdok around 1950. At that time, he lived in Aubot, a hamlet in southern Belu (now Malaka Regency). The hamlet was close to Masin Lulik, a spot believed to be inhabited by ancestral spirits. Masin Lulik's existence enhanced Klau's prestige in his followers' eyes (Farram, 2002). However, Klau's prestige did not only originate from his activities as a makdok.

Balthasar Klau was born around 1916. He still had blood ties with Benediktus Leki, the loro (king) of Lakekun, a kingdom in southern Belu. However, Leki was appointed by the previous Loro as his matamusan or successor. As a result, Klau became disappointed and jealous of his relative in the future. In 1925, like many in southern Belu, Klau was baptized as a Catholic in Kada by Father Hubert Schmitz SVD (Muskens, 1974, pp. 1323-1324).

Klau went to a school in Solo (not to be confused with the city in Central Java) for three years. After graduating, he went to the standardschool in Halilulik and studied there for three years as well. A Dutch missionary, Jos Duffels SVD, saw in him an erudite boy. He

taught him Dutch, which allowed Klau to study in the HIS (Hollandsch-Inlandsche School) in Atambua in 1932. Apart from studying, Klau also assisted Father Duffels with administrative duties (Muskens, 1974, pp. 1323-1324; Steenbrink, 2015, p. 300).

For six years, Benediktus Leki studied. In the seventh year, Leki stopped doing so in order to pay for his brother-in-law's study, Samuel Meak. Slamet, a Javanese teacher, then paid for Klau's education. This, aside from the strange circumstances of his father's death and the succession conflict with Leki, made Klau hate him. Klau believed his father was intentionally hurt during a hunting session, which made him feel ill and pass away a year later. He attempted to bring this matter to court in 1950, but Klau lost (Muskens, 1974, p. 1324). His efforts to convince local elders that he deserved the Lakekun throne also failed (Farram, 2002).

After the end of the Second World War, Klau served as a representative of southern Belu on the local council (after 1950, the Dewan Pemerintahan Daerah Sementara/DPDS), based in Kupang. He sat from 1948 until 1952 and was a member of the Catholic Party. His marriage to Hoar Berek of Besikama, which was never recognized by both the church and local elders, made him an object of suspicion among fellow party members and Catholic clergymen (Steenbrink, 2015, pp. 300-301; Farram, 2002). L. Kape, also a member of the Catholic Party in the DPDS who would later be elected as a member of the DPR in the 1955 general election, once hit Klau for unknown reasons. After the incident, Klau was expelled from the council. He then joined PNI (Partai Nasional Indonesia, Indonesian National Party) before ultimately joining the PKI (Muskens, 1974, p. 1324; Farram, 2002). Klau also joined the BTI and became one of its figures in Belu (Van Klinken, 2014, p. 179).

As previously mentioned, a makdok was believed by the Tetun to be capable of seeing into the spiritual world and healing diseases. They believed that the sacred or spiritual world had an overarching influence on human lives (Nuryahman & Sugianto, 2019, p. 58). Aside from the abilities mentioned before, Klau was also believed by his followers to be capable of resurrecting the dead. As a result, many people around Aubot came to his village to witness the resurrections he claimed to do. According to Father Simon Schaper SVD, who often paid a visit, some of those visitors were members of his own flock in Namfalus (Steenbrink, 2015, p. 301).

Klau told his followers that, through a series of ceremonies, he would successfully unite the spiritual and the material world, so that they would never again see the need to work, nor would local and religious customs chain them. They would even lose the ability to age (Farram, 2010). Even though local elders dismissed Klau's claims as impossible, their doubts led his followers to believe he was more potent than the elders. The anti-feudal and anti-church nature of his movement attracted the hearts of poor peasants in southern Belu (Farram, 2002).

Klau himself was anti-feudal and anti-church, despite his personal ambitions being the primary motivation rather than ideology. He was active in various movements challenging the various rights of the Loro, such as the right to harvests. Klau also challenged the local adat authorities. Despite his self-proclamation as a "defender of local customs", he rarely attended ceremonies and often broke local customs, which resulted in his exclusion by the elders. For Father Schaper, Klau's involvement with the PKI was a form of resistance against the three aforementioned authorities (Farram, 2002).

His membership in the PNI mirrored his political views. The PNI in Timor, which campaigned during the 1955 general elections through the Front Rakyat (People's Front), garnered support from a population discontented with the rule of their kings through its anti-feudal campaign, especially in Central South Timor (Timor Tengah Selatan/TTS). The PNI, through the Front Rakyat, displayed itself as the vanguard of people's sovereignty. Its anti-

feudal stance in Timor reflects the views of its regional leader, Elisa Rame Herewila (E.R. Herewila), and its chairman, Sidik Djojosukarto, who was a leftist (Van Klinken, 2014, pp. 170-171; Rocamora, 2023, p. 46). As the PNI's influence waned after the elections and the party became a haven for patronage just like its rivals, the Catholic and Parkindo (Partai Kristen Indonesia, Indonesian Christian Party), the PKI acquired a leading role in the anti-feudal movement in Timor (Van Klinken, 2014, pp. 171-172).

Klau's base of support encompassed the villages of Manumutin, Brubit, Bolan, and Fahiluka, all of which are currently located in Central Malaka District (Muskens, 1974, p. 1324). Throughout the 1950s, his movement saw vast growth. Two female makdoks expelled from their villages joined him and were often seen as his concubines. Schaper noted that the two lead ceremonies were held at night, with dances and spells. These ceremonies were conducted in a language understandable only to the makdoks. Several words in Latin were also inserted. The two women took off their clothes and danced naked. After that, they fell into the ground, and the young men who joined the ceremony "could do whatever they wanted" (Steenbrink, 2015, p. 301).

Apart from the two women, Klau was assisted by several others. Kolen, a wrestling teacher from Sumbawa, sold amulets claimed to heal the sick. There was also Akin from Alor and Masabu from Java, the latter a red-bricklayer. Sisik from Sumbawa taught "tiger practices," and finally, a group of crocodile hunters from Makassar joined Klau and brought new amulets. Klau's followers left the Catholic Church. There was indeed a decline in church attendance (Muskens, 1974, pp. 1324-1325; Farram, 2002; Steenbrink, 2015, p. 301).

All of them were close to Willem Asa, a former schoolteacher who, in 1962, became the PKI's secretary (head) in southern Belu. Asa was one of Klau's prominent supporters. Klau was also close with Edja, secretary of the PKI sub-section committee (comite sub-seksi/CSS) of Atambua and Fanus Pinai, head of the BTI in southern Belu (Farram, 2002). Klau's relation (and membership) with the PKI played an important role in his movement, especially in the 1960s.

Thanks to the vast growth of his movement, Klau was able to open a cooperative sometime between 1950 and 1953. The cooperative then stagnated, but in 1956, he tried again, only to fail again. Many of his followers joined his cooperative, paid entry fees, and never received their money back. It appears that Klau used those cooperatives to enrich himself (Steenbrink, 2015, p. 301).

On the eve of the 1960s, Klau's movement saw a change in its character. No longer a mere messianic movement promising the destruction of authorities and a world without work or obligations, his movement became a cargo cult closely tied to politics. Now, he taught that through a union between the spiritual and material worlds, both everyday and luxurious items will arrive from the seas in large numbers (Muskens, 1974, p. 1325). In October 1964, based on a dream, Klau sacrificed a red bull, three red pigs, and a red rooster in a large ceremony on the coast near Aihun. The ceremony was intended to expel demons and prepare the site for a final ceremony scheduled for 1965 (Farram, 2002; Muskens, 1974, p. 1325).

Around January 1965, Klau opened a savings cooperative. He claimed that white people originally came from Timor and, in the distant past, had left the island along with their wealth. However, Klau promised they would return, bringing wealth and prosperity with them. As a result, his followers are obliged to join his cooperative and pay an entry fee of around Rp50 to fund the last ceremony (Steenbrink, 2015, p. 302; Muskens, 1974, p. 1325). Klau also formed three other cooperatives and no longer had difficulties in attracting new members. In exchange, he gave them PKI membership cards (Farram, 2002; Muskens, 1974, p. 1325).

According to Klau himself, during the final ceremony, two canoes will sail from the river into the Timor Sea. They are Ro Kukun (dark canoe) and Ro Roman (light canoe). Klau will board one of them carrying a red chicken, while the other canoe will carry a white chicken. During the night, the canoes will sail to the middle of the sea, and after the two chickens are sacrificed there, the two will return to the shore full of everyday and luxurious items as promised (Muskens, 1974, p. 1375; Farram, 2002; Steenbrink, 2015, p. 303).

On the eve of October 1965, the movement had grown so much that the Catholic Church became alarmed. Even though Klau's followers had (or considered) left the church, it was only during this period that the Archbishop of Atambua officially excommunicated Klau and his followers, Theodorus Fransiscus Maria van den Tillaart SVD, after the archbishop had previously given them a warning (Farram, 2002). However, not much changed as a result. Klau's followers still increased. People even began to stay for three to four nights in Aubot to wait for the final grand ceremony. They also sang songs in Tetun that were variations of various revolutionary songs at the time, such as "Nasakom Bersatu" and "Resopim" (Muskens, 1974, pp. 1325-1326; Farram, 2002).

Simon Schaper SVD managed to write two of the many songs that they sung. He translated the lyrics from Tetun to Dutch. The first one is a hymn based on a revolutionary song popular at that time, "Nasakom Bersatu". However, Klau's version stressed the union between earth and heaven rather than the union among nationalists, kaum agama (religious-based political groups), and communists to achieve socialism and fight conservatives (kepala batu). The second hymn, based on the song "Resopim", contains lyrics that have been adapted to local conditions and thus heavily differ from the original song. Both the translated lyrics of the hymns and their original counterparts (in Indonesian) are shown below (Steenbrink, 2015, p. 302; Astuti et. al., 2013, pp. 43-44; Setiawan, 2004, p. 343):

Nasakom Bersatu
Acungkan tinju kita satu padu
Bersatu bulat semangat kita
Ayo terus maju
Nasakom bersatu
Singkirkan kepala batu
Nasakom satu cita
Sosialisme pasti jaya

A NASAKOM hymn (based off "Nasakom Bersatu")
Clench your fist
Come on, come on, onwards
Earth and heaven may become one
Let flee all adversaries
Earth and heaven may become one
The bloodsuckers of the people must disappear

Resopim
Resopim, resopim
Revolusi Agustus empat lima
Resopim, resopim
Sosialisme cita negara
Kita tuntut pimpinan yang jujur
Rakyat haus hidup adil makmur

Resopim, resopim
Maju, maju, resopim
Kita tuntut murah sandang pangan
Minggir nyingkir pimpinan yang curang
Resopim, resopim
Hidup, hidup resopim

A RESOPIM Song (based off "Resopim")
Resopim, Resopim
The old must change, the new will be born;
Holes must be filled
In the year 1965
The old must change, the new will be born;
The land longs for the prosperity of the people
We do not like traitors
The land longs for a good life.
We long for cheaper food.
May live, may live the world
They become one community

Eventually, the long-awaited ceremony never took place due to the drastic political change that followed the 30 September Movement's failure. Klau fled from Aubot and hid in a judge's house in Atambua, where he was arrested and summarily executed in early 1966. The same fate befell Fanus Pinai, head of the local BTI branch, who also fled to Atambua. His head was severed by soldiers and displayed above an oil drum to be witnessed by PKI members in southern Belu who came to Atambua at the soldiers' urging (Farram, 2010; Steenbrink, 2015, p. 303).

Makdok movement in Anthropological perspective: hybridity of politics, religion, body, and post-colonial resistance

The makdok movement, led by Balthasar Klau in southern Belu during the 1950s and 1960s, involved an orchestration of religious-political dynamics far more complex than a mere case of "heresy" or a local political event. This phenomenon created a cultural hybrid arena in which Tetun cosmology, Catholic symbols, Indonesian political idioms, and postcolonial societal aspirations were interwoven to address both social and economic grievances at the time. In accordance with Clifford Geertz's view (1973) that stressed the importance of rituals as a cultural text that simultaneously shape and represent reality, makdok practices such as bull or pig sacrifices, transformative forms of dances, and the use of a ritual language based on a mix of Latin and Tetun could be read as a production of value that imagined an alternative world, a utopia without work, full of prosperity and unity between men and their ancestors' spirits. Contemporary anthropological studies highlight that such movements were not born out of space, but rather a form of resistance towards a nation-state power structure that removed locals' access to their own resources and symbolic sovereignty (Scott, 2012; Kapferer, 2015). As a result, the makdok movement could be understood as a subversive religious and political expression. It articulated the longing for social justice and at the same time negotiated the global-local power relations in a postcolonial context (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012; Robbins, 2020; Bubandt, 2017).

On a symbolic level, the movement can be understood as a production of value that imagined an alternate world. On a practical level, it also displays a significant political

dimension. As shown by Rushohora and Silayo (2019), religion in both colonial and postcolonial contexts often functions as an arena of resistance, a medium through which people articulate their criticism of a dominant structure. Klau's promise of prosperity from the sea resonates with the cargo cult phenomenon prevalent in Melanesia (Trompf, 2012). However, the formation of cooperatives and the establishment of relations with modern political organizations such as the PKI and BTI gave Klau's movement a distinct character. From a contemporary political anthropology perspective, such practices show that local spirituality not only functions as a passive response to modernity but is also mobilized as a symbolic resource to challenge local feudalism, Catholic Church hegemony, and nation-state intervention (Robbins, 2020). As such, the makdok movement could be viewed as a form of imaginative politics (Kuusisto, 2022), in which eschatological narratives intersect with material strategies and organizational networks, resulting in a new configuration of religion, economy, and power in a postcolonial space.

If the political dimension of the makdok movement stresses how religion can be mobilized as a form of resistance, then its syncretic dimension displays a cultural strategy, one that is more subtle in its articulation of power. Aspects of Tetun animism, such as lulik and its relation to ancestral spirits, were combined with Catholic symbols in the form of Latin words and liturgical structures, then framed within national political idioms such as Nasakom (nationalism, religion, and communism) and Resopim (socialist revolution and national leadership). In a contemporary religious-anthropological perspective, such syncretism is not merely a result of doctrinal mixing, but rather a creative strategy to bridge different value systems to build new socio-political legitimacy (Bezklubaya, 2021). Klau's charisma strengthened such legitimacy as a makdok, a figure believed to have direct access to the otherworld. In a Weberian frame, charismatic authority works through believers' faith in the extraordinary quality of their leader. However, in the context of postcolonial Timor, such authority did not stand alone. It maintained a strong bond with a network of modern organizations, which gave birth to a hybrid form of authority, that is, an authority whose character was both religious and political (Feijó, 2019).

If a hybrid authority, as shown by the makdok movement, was built through links between religious symbols, political idioms, and leaders' charisma, then body and gender provided a different arena in which that authority was to be negotiated. Records of female makdoks dancing naked, falling into ecstasy, and opening a room for sexual interactions during the ritual showed that the body was not a mere instrument of expression, but also a sacred medium as well as a source of power. Victor Turner (1969) emphasized that rituals were liminal moments in which social norms could be frozen, giving way to the formation of communitas. In the context of Klau's movement, the female body became the liminal locus that simultaneously mediated the relation between ancestral spirits and negotiated the limits of morality. On one side, it strengthened the movement's spiritual legitimacy. On the other hand, it sparked controversy among the church and colonial and postcolonial authorities, who saw it as a threat to their moral order. A study (Jacobson et al., 2016) on body and religion has shown that bodily practices in rituals are always tied to gender and power politics, where ecstasy, sensuality, and sexuality could function as a strategy to challenge the dominant hierarchical structure.

After studying the dimensions of body and gender that showed how ritual authorities negotiated through the body as a medium, the makdok movement as a whole can be seen as a combination of four main anthropological aspects. First is the claim to spiritual knowledge, which, as Weber explained, strengthened charismatic authority among leaders, but in a contemporary form that worked through a complex process of social mediation. Second, the promise of items from the sea and the formation of cooperatives depict the integration of

ritual practices and economic redistribution, parallel to patterns observed in Melanesian cargo cults. Third is the anti-feudal and anti-church rhetoric that shows how religion can function as an idiom of social resistance, as demonstrated by Comaroff & Comaroff (1991) and further developed in recent postcolonial studies (Haynes & Hickel, 2016). Fourth is the ritual and linguistic syncretism that illustrates how global religions were localized into local cosmology, not as a theological mess but rather as a creative strategy. This pattern is sharper than that of the John Frum movement in Vanuatu, Saminism in Java, and the Hahalis Welfare Society in Bougainville. All three of them used spiritual symbols to articulate socio-political resistance. However, Klau's movement differed in that it had explicit ties to modern Indonesian political organizations, resulting in a form of religious and political syncretism unique to postcolonial Timor.

To clarify Klau's movement's position on the map of postcolonial religious-political movements worldwide, it is important to compare it with similar traditions in Southeast Asia and Melanesia. This comparison reveals a general pattern: the use of spiritual symbols and religious narratives as means of resistance, while also highlighting the unique traits of each movement. The following table summarizes comparisons between the political makdok movement in Timor and those of John Frum in Vanuatu, Samin in Java, and the Hahalis Welfare Society in Bougainville. Through such comparison, it is evident that although there are similarities in symbolic structures and social functions, the historical context, the relationship with the state, and the form of political mobilization differentiate them.

Table 1.
Comparison between the political *makdok* movement in Timor with John Frum movement in Vanuatu, Saminism in Java, and Hahalis Welfare Society in Bougainville.

Movement	Location & Period	Sacred Claim & Leader	Promise & Ritual Objective	Political Dimension & Mobilization	Relation with church and state	References
Balthasar Klau (political-*makdok*)	Southern Belu, Timor (1950–65)	Charismatic makdok (B. Klau)	Union of spirits and human; arrival of cargo; life without work	Connected to the PKI, BTI; economic cooperatives	Conflict with the Catholic Church and local rulers; state repression (eventually)	Local archives and research draft
John Frum	Tanna, Vanuatu (1940–present)	Messianic figure of John Frum	Return of cargo through military rituals and symbolic signs	Mobilization of local identity; opposition towards Western mission	Opposition towards Christian missions; now recognized by the state	(Lattas, 2007)
Samin (Saminism)	Java, late 19th century – early 20th century	Samin Surosentiko	Refusal to pay tax, forced	Passive resistance towards colonialism	Conflict with Dutch colonial authorities	Kartodirdjo (1981)

			labor, and colonial law			
Hahalis Welfare Society	Bougainville, 1950s–60s	Collective local leadership	Common welfare, economic access, symbolic cargo	Communal mobilization against colonial administration	Conflict with Australian colonial authorities	Worsley (1957)

Source: Analysis in several references

Table 1. places Balthasar Klau's political-makdok movement into a broader field of post-colonial religious–political movements in Southeast Asia and Melanesia. The comparison shows that these movements relied on spiritual authority and religious symbolism to articulate resistance against dominant forms of power, whether colonial administrations, missionary institutions, or post-colonial state structures. Klau's movement shares important features with the John Frum movement in Vanuatu and the Hahalis Welfare Society in Bougainville, particularly in its millenarian expectations of material abundance and its confrontation with established religious and political authorities. At the same time, it resembles Saminism in Java in its rejection of imposed authority and its grounding in grassroots resistance. Nevertheless, significant differences remain. Klau's movement was closely connected to modern political organizations such as the PKI and BTI, allowing spiritual charisma to be translated into organized political action through cooperatives and party networks, a feature not found in the other cases. Moreover, while the John Frum and Hahalis movements primarily opposed colonial regimes and Christian missions, Klau's movement operated in a more complex post-independence context, marked by simultaneous tensions with the Catholic Church, local feudal elites, and the Indonesian state. This comparison indicates that similarities in symbolic form do not produce uniform political outcomes; instead, each movement was shaped by its specific historical context, its relationship with state power, and its mode of mobilization.

Makdok movement as an alternative authority and political decolonialism from below

The makdok movement in this matter could be understood as an effort to create an alternative authority that challenged both the rule of the Catholic Church and traditional authorities (and, indirectly, the post-colonial state). If official authority was built through bureaucratic institutions, universal dogma, and development projects, Klau's authority rested on Tetun cosmology, his own charisma, and a political-economic network based on cooperatives and affiliations with both the PKI and the BTI. This authority offered an eschatological promise as well as a material one—life without work, cargo from the sea, and a fair economic distribution—which led to a more earthly approach than the modernization narratives commonly offered by the state (Worsley, 1957).

In terms of decolonialism, this phenomenon stresses that decolonization was never monolithic. A post-colonial state often offers a top-down, elitist, and politically or militarily controlled narrative. On the other hand, the makdok movement presented a decolonial politics from below, an alternate imagination that unified local rituals with global ideologies to craft a vision of social justice. As noted by Tabani (2008) in a study of the John Frum movement in Vanuatu, charismatic leaders in cargo cults can translate collective aspirations through religious symbols and utopian promises. In the context of Timor, Klau used rituals and human bodies to show that decolonialism was not just a matter of diplomacy among

elites, but rather a struggle of the marginalized masses to attain symbolic and material sovereignty.

When compared with similar movements in Melanesia and Southeast Asia, Klau's movement shows both similarities and differences. The John Frum movement used militaristic symbols to mobilize local identities to counter Christian missions (Guiart, 1952; Lattas, 2007), whereas Saminism in Java emphasized passive resistance through social ethics and a refusal to pay taxes (Kartodirdjo, 1981). Hahalis Welfare Society in Bougainville placed greater emphasis on economic collectivity as a means of resistance against the Australian colonial administration (Worsley, 1957). The uniqueness of the makdok movement lies in its relation with modern political organizations such as the PKI and BTI, which made it not only a religious or communal movement, but also an alternative political project rooted in a national network.

As such, the makdok movement could be read as an expression of decolonialism that contains two layers simultaneously: reactive towards colonial, church, and local rulers' dominance, and proactive in offering a new model of authority based on local cosmology and political-economic network. If cargo cults in Melanesia are often seen merely as millenarian expressions or "false cults", the case in Timor shows how similar movements can serve as a means of imaginative political articulation rooted in local aspirations. In accordance with Worsley (1957) and Tabani (2008), the political makdok phenomenon showed that religion, rituals, and politics are inseparable in a post-colonial situation. They opened a space for a diverse form of decolonialism born from below, not above.

Conclusion

The makdok movement in southern Belu was an attempt by the Timorese to free themselves from both feudal and church authorities, both leftovers from the colonial era. Thus, it can be seen as a form of decolonization. Led by the charismatic yet estranged prince Balthasar Klau, the movement served as an alternate authority. As a makdok, Klau was not merely a religious figure. He also wielded both economic and political power through his cooperatives and connections with local leaders of BTI and PKI.

Although, in hindsight, similar to many so-called 'cargo cults' of Melanesia, Klau's movement had its own characteristics. Firstly, it did not start as a 'cargo cult' and only became such in the 1960s. Secondly, the movement's ties to national political organizations and its adoption of Catholic religious practices (i.e., the use of Latin words in rituals) made it significantly different from the movements of John Frum in Vanuatu or Hahalis Welfare Society in Bougainville.

Although the movement's influence in the struggle against local feudal authorities remains unknown, it was alarming to local church authorities, especially when it peaked in the 1960s. Most of the members, including Klau himself, were officially still Catholic. In an attempt to curb the movement, the Archbishop of Atambua excommunicated Klau and his followers after previously warning him. The movement's heyday in mid-1965 ended with the bloody anticommunist purge orchestrated by the military in October 1965 after the failure of the 30 September Movement. Klau himself was executed in Atambua, marking the end of the estranged prince's dreams of a world free from oppression and suffering.

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