CHAPTER FIVE
PAPUANS AND HALMAHERANS:
RAIDERS AND WARRIORS

Papua was a term generally unceremoniously thrown together under the pejorative label Paspase Zeerovers (Papuan Pirates) by the Dutch. The term Papuan in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as Gerrit Knaap has observed, refers not only to the Papuans of Raja Ampat but was also applied to Tidoran subjects in the south-eastern part of Halmahera—the Gamrange, and Bird’s Head Peninsula on the New Guinea mainland. In a number of cases of raiding, the sources also refer to Papuans living in islands around Geelvink Bay and to the Papuans of Onin residing around the west coast of New Guinea. During the rebellion of Prince Nuku, the Papuan role in strengthening the rebel forces was decisive in a number of skirmishes. From 1791, the involvement of the Gamkonora group from North Halmahera, namely Galela, Tobelo, and Tobaru who had formerly been subjects of the Ternate Sultanate, was also quite significant.

Information about these Papuans is scanty, scattered throughout the VOC sources. Frequently mentioned are the raiding enterprises of the Gamrange Halmaherans from Maba, Weda, Patani, and Gebe, and of Papuans from Salawati and Misool in the Raja Ampat. The other two groups, the Waigama and Waigeo, appear less often. In the sources the Gamkonora raiding groups are mentioned after 1791, following their involvement in Nuku’s rebellion. The raiding enterprises of the Onin people were sporadically reported in the seventeenth century and attracted less attention in the eighteenth century because the Dutch focused more on the Raja Ampat and Gamrange. The Papuans inhabiting the areas between Onin and Kobiai used to ally themselves with the East Seramese who traded regularly in the region between New Guinea and East Seram. These Papuans of Onin were well known for the swiftness of their vessels and their sudden attacks with such traditional weapons as arrows, their traditional spears which the Dutch referred to as assegais, and swords. The involvement of the Papuans of the Geelvink Bay area in the raiding was embedded in their alliance with the Raja Ampat groups, particularly Misool. Because the situation of the region during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries was not much written about, it is virtually impossible to piece together a complete account of these people.

The Dutch descriptions of the Papuans in the seventeenth century and even in the nineteenth century tend to be denigrating, especially when
they deal with the physical appearance and character of these people. Leupe described them as follows: ‘Men and women are completely naked, except that they cover their private parts with loincloths and decorate their necks and arms with all sorts of beads, broken bits of pipes, and the like. They are very innocent and ignorant, but nevertheless cruel, rapacious, and murderous. Their weapons are bow and arrow, shield and ‘sword’, and javelin as well.’6 The description of the coastal people was slightly different. They were portrayed as good sailors who employed long, narrow, but very swift canoes. The majority of the heads of the coastal people originated from Tidore and Seram and sported long hair and clothes according to the fashion of the rest of the Malukans. As Leupe says, they went through the motions of being Muslim, but in daily life they still practised the local religions. They hid their local religious practices as they were more afraid of Tidoran law than of that of Mohammed.’7

The Papuans of the Raja Ampat

The oldest report mentioning the name ‘Papua’ appears in the travel account of Pigafetta in 1521. He talks about a Raja-Papua who had resided in Jailolo (Halmahera). The name ‘Papuan Islands’ which probably refers to Raja Ampat, was mentioned for the first time in the journal of the Spaniard Martin de Uriarte in 1527.8 Two myths of the origin of the Malukan Kingdoms, recorded by Galvao in 1544 and Coolhaas in 1923, suggest that Bacan had a relationship with the Raja Ampat (Misool and Waigeo) earlier than Tidore. In 1610 Adriaen van der Dussen, who wrote an account of the areas for the Gentlemen Seventeen, also confirmed this suggestion. In the myths, Ternate, Tidore, and Jailolo were not even mentioned. It probably means that the relationship between Raja Ampat and Tidore occurred in a later period.9

The Raja Ampat Kingdoms were ruled by four Raja: Salawati, Waigeo, Misool, and Waigama. The Raja Ampat Islands are a mountainous archipelago lying between Northern Maluku and the West New Guinea mainland. Of its main islands, only Salawati and Batanta were situated in any proximity to the mainland. Longer distances from the mainland separated these from Waigeo to the north and Misool to the south. The description of the area is elaborated by a Dutch expedition in 1705 which had visited Salawati and Waigeo. The ‘kingdom’ of Salawati was located on the south-eastern and south-western part of the island, surrounded by numerous tiny islands and reefs. Raja Salawati and his jogugu lived in a separate settlement located on the opposite side of a large river, located in the south-eastern part of the island. The houses stood on high piles and were perched over the river. The people in the interior and the mountains