

## The History and Character Entities of Gotong Royong in the Bajo Tribe Community

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**Abstract.** The most concerning social problem today is anomalous behavior and the erosion of collective collegial values. Therefore, character development, especially related to collective values such as mutual cooperation, has become an important issue in Indonesia. This research aims to provide a comprehensive description of the history and character entities that are characteristic of the Bajo Tribe community in Wanci Island, Wakatobi Regency. This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method to obtain objective data through three data collection techniques: interviews, observations, and documentation. The results of this research indicate that the migration of the Bajo tribe to the Mola region on Wanci Island began in the 1960s as a means of avoiding social conflict and accusations of involvement with the DI/TII rebellion movement on Kaledupa Island. The character of mutual cooperation upheld by the Bajo Mola community reflects a fair and inclusive social system, where the practice of mutual aid is manifested regardless of social status, age, or individual background. The conclusion of this study emphasizes the need to maintain mutual cooperation as a pillar of solidarity and social harmony in order to embody virtuous people.

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**Keywords:** History; Mutual Cooperation; Bajo Tribe; Character; Social Solidarity; Coastal Culture

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### INTRODUCTION

History as knowledge plays an important role in ensuring ethics, morals, and wisdom, all of which are closely related to human values. Human life is closely related to its environment, so it cannot be denied that the environment significantly influences the character that an individual will possess. Character is understood as the distinctive or typical traits possessed by an individual (Suardi, 2023) and in the current reality, it is understood that discussions about character are essentially endless. The issue of character development in Indonesia has become crucial (Sanur & Dermawan, 2023), as highlighted in

the National Education Day speech in 2010 by Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who emphasized that character building is very important (Sulistiyawati & Setyawan, 2019).

There are 18 national character traits that were formulated in 2011, based on four fundamental elements: religion, Pancasila, culture, and the goals of national education. (Kemendiknas, 2011). However, during the administration of President Jokowi and Jusuf Kalla, there was a movement to strengthen character education (PPK), which continued the national character education movement initiated in 2010. The 18 national character traits that had been developed earlier were

ultimately crystallized into 5 core values that became the focus of PPK: religiousness, nationalism, mutual cooperation, independence, and integrity. This is even stated in Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 and formulated by the Ministry of Education and Culture, known as character as the axis of education (Kemendikbud, 2017). In the second period of Jokowi's administration, there is a noble Vision and Mission aimed at realizing an advanced, sovereign, and characterful Indonesia based on mutual cooperation (Sanur, 2023). In this regard, the Ministry of Education and Culture also supports the President's Vision and Mission to achieve an advanced, independent, and characterful Indonesia, through the creation of Pancasila Students who are critical thinkers, creative, independent, faithful, devoted to God Almighty, and possess noble character, mutual cooperation, and global diversity, known as the Pancasila Student Profile (Sanur & Saripudin, 2022).

Understanding some of the statements above, leads to the journey of a concept of knowledge about the development of the importance of the character of a nation that must be owned in the personal people in Indonesia. It is highly expected that Indonesian culture will be stronger and develop in a multicultural society, so that individuals are able to increase a sense of unity by deeply internalizing the attitude of pluralism in living, in order to support the

manifestation of Indonesian civilization (Agustian, 2019; Saputra, 2023). Thus, it can also be interpreted that a person with character is able to become a locomotive in reaching the Golden Indonesia in accordance with the ideals of the nation.

Human life in a social environment is inseparable from social interactions between one another, whether between individuals, individuals and groups, or between groups (Syahyudin, 2019; Tuerah et al., 2023). Participation in society fundamentally makes humans interdependent and unable to live alone. Therefore, mutual cooperation is understood as a form of social solidarity, formed due to collaboration in the form of assistance from others for personal interests (Dila, 2022) or group interests, so that within it there is a sense of loyalty from each member as a unity (Fitria et al., 2022).

Similarly to what happens with the Bajo tribe, its community relies on each other to carry out their daily activities, whether in the economic, social, political fields, and so on. One unique aspect of the Bajo Tribe, which is one of the tribes in Indonesia, is that the activities of the entire community are predominantly centered around the sea, including building homes for living. The Bajo Tribe considers the sea to be the ideal place for carrying out all productive activities. This means that the sea and the Bajo Tribe are an inseparable unity (Sinapoy & Djalante, 2021; Yunus & Mondong, 2021).

Similarly, the reality of the Bajo Tribe located on Wanci Island in Wakatobi Regency shows that its people still engage in their primary activities on the sea, even though they have experienced a development that is moving towards a more modern settlement pattern. However, the daily activities of the Bajo community on Wanci Island are still heavily reliant on each other for their livelihoods, in other words, they are interdependent. It can be understood that the character possessed by the Bajo community on Wanci Island is greatly influenced by its environment.

Research on the Bajo Tribe has been extensively studied by several researchers, such as the study conducted by Utina (2012) which explains that the Bajo Tribe in Torosiaje Village possesses ecological intelligence. Nurhaliza's research (2016) *Deschooling* Bajo Sampela Tribe in Sea Culture, concluded that the culture of fishing is inherited through effective communication with a harmonious approach. Research by Yunus & Mondong (2021) discusses the character of the Bajo ethnic group from the perspective of ethnic identity. The findings indicate that the character possessed by the Bajo people is shaped through a collective consciousness as a community. The La Ode (2019) also examines the settlement strategies of the Bajo community in Mola Village, Wangi-Wangi Selatan District, Wakatobi Regency, and the findings indicate that the values of Paturu

Ma'abal serve as the foundation for the settlement strategies of the Bajo community. The research by Syefriyeni & Rosie (2020) discusses the ancestral values of the Bajo Tribe in fostering a tolerant attitude, concluding that the tolerance exhibited by the Bajo Tribe aligns with the values found in the religion they adhere to, which is Islam. As for Ali's research (2021) on "Angigall Dance" in the Duata Procession of the Bajo Mola Tribe in Wakatobi Regency, his findings show that rituals with dance accompaniment will be held by the Mola community when one of the tribe members is sick and cannot be helped medically.

Based on some of the articles described above, it can be understood that there is a research gap, namely that no one has specifically discussed aspects regarding the history and most prominent characters in the Bajo tribe community on Wanci Island. Therefore, this article will focus on a thorough examination of the history of the Bajo people on Wanci Island and the unique character traits possessed by the Bajo community. Thus, the aim of this research is to comprehensively describe the history and character values that are distinctive features of the Bajo community on Wanci Island in Wakatobi Regency.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach that requires the researcher to be involved in the situations (Suyitno et al., 2024)

and phenomena occurring during the research process. The researchers chose to use a descriptive method because it only objectively describes the existing variables, symptoms, or realities (Arikunto, 2019). This is done with the aim of presenting a comprehensive picture of the history and character entities of the Bajo tribe community on Wanci Island, Wakatobi Regency, specifically in the villages of Mola Bahari, Mola Samaturu, Mola Nelayan Bakti, Mola Selatan, and Mola Utara in the South Wangi-Wangi District.

Data collection was carried out by means of observation of social behavior that occurs throughout Mola Village and in-depth interviews with Bajo Tribe individuals and documentation in the form of taking photos that naturally capture the behavior displayed by the Bajo Tribe community. Data analysis using the Miles and Huberman model (2014) includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and the last this conclusion drawing/verification. The validity of the data used by the researcher is internal validity, which involves testing the credibility of the research data presented by the researcher so that the results of the research conducted can be more scientific (Sutopo, 2006), concerning the Bajo tribe.

## **DISCUSSION**

Discussing the Bajo community means talking about the existence of the Bajo people who have the distinctive characteristic of living on the shoreline or even above the sea

(Baskara, 2016). This tribe has its own history in the spread of human tribes in Indonesia. The development of the Bajo tribe in the concept of population legality always follows and falls under the territorial authority where they reside. The life of the Bajo tribe is closely tied to the sea (Hasanah et al., 2024), which can be regarded as a distinct culture. This culture encompasses beliefs and practices that govern human life in a relevant way, including how these cultures are understood, constrained, structured, and regulated.

Coastal communities are known as groups that live and engage in activities by utilizing marine resources, such as working as fishermen, practicing fish farming, and making the sea a part of their lifestyle (Ansaar, 2019; Setiadi et al., 2021). History records that the Bajo Tribe is one of the largest coastal communities in Indonesia and is considered a tribe whose life depends on the ocean. This is also stated by Syefriyeni & Rosie (2020) who note that the Bajo Tribe spends its life at sea, holding the philosophy that the ocean is their life, garden, and yard or backyard (Hasrawaty et al., 2017; Lahamendu et al., 2019). That statement has become a common thing expressed by various individuals who know, even if only briefly, about the Bajo tribe.

According to Poedjowibowo (2016) the Bajo tribe has a distinctive coastal cultural tradition of living or residing on boats, with some also settling along the shoreline. The Bajo ethnic group is considered to isolate its

community from the life of societies outside its own, such as land communities, and the government even classifies them as a minority group (Stacey et al., 2018; Syefriyeni & Rosie, 2020). That opinion has been refuted by the reality of the Bajo tribe's life in several places, as research by Rahim et al., (2018) states that the houses of the Bajo tribe initially were semi-permanent and have partially transitioned to permanent structures (Arisaputri et al., 2020), and the residents are not only fishermen; some have even become civil servants and police officers (Capalulu et al., 2016; Yunus & Mondong, 2021). It should be understood that the Bajo Tribe should not be underestimated as merely a community of fishermen; beyond that, the Bajo community can even become civil servants and hold positions in the executive branch.

The Bajo people can be found in various countries in Southeast Asia such as Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei, and Indonesia. In Indonesia, the Bajo tribe is spread along the coasts of Sumatra, Kalimantan, Maluku, Sulawesi, and Nusa Tenggara (Nasir, 2022). Particularly in the Southeast Sulawesi region, the Bajo tribe can be found in almost all existing districts, including Wakatobi Regency. Regarding the Bajo ethnic community located on Wanci Island in Wakatobi Regency, they reside in the South Wangi-Wangi District, specifically in Mola Village (Tahara, 2013), which has now expanded into five villages. It is known that the

Bajo people in Mola originated from Mantigola, which is part of Kaledupa Island, an area that still falls within the administrative region of Wakatobi Regency today.

The results of Fachriyadi & Yani research (2024) state that the Bajo tribe's involvement in guerrilla actions in the waters of Bone Bay strengthened the DI/TII movement. However, this statement is very contrary to the historical reality that occurred to the Bajo tribe in Mola Village. Based on an interview with Mr. HK (on April 28, 2024), information was obtained that, during the DI/TII rebellion against the Indonesian State, many of them were forcibly recruited to become boat crews and as rowers by members of the DI/TII guerrillas. The Bajo people were merely used as tools, meaning they were only utilized to transport rebel troops by sea using boats to travel to other islands. This has created an impression among the people of Mantigola that the Bajo people are part of DI/TII, leading to accusations against the Bajo community that have caused disharmony in relationships and ultimately resulted in conflict between the people of Mantigola and the Bajo tribe. Even from the interviews obtained, it was reported that several individuals from the Bajo Tribe community became victims of the Mantigola society.

The incident that resulted in casualties for the Bajo tribe became one of the reasons for them to leave Kaledupa Island. Another reason was that they no longer wanted to be



used by DI/TII. Due to the fear that arose from the event they experienced, they decided to flee and seek a new place to live by boarding a boat called "Soppe." The evacuation was carried out gradually or in waves by the Bajo tribe, numbering up to hundreds of individuals, and the location designated as the refuge for the Bajo tribe is Wanci Island. They chose the island for a strong reason, as at that time in the Wanci Island area there were military and police posts that made them (the Bajo tribe) feel safe. This serves as the historical basis for how the Bajo Tribe Community first came to be on Wanci Island.

Understanding the behavior of a tribal community, it cannot be denied that the treatment manifested in their daily lives is greatly influenced by the environment in which they reside. Similarly, the reality observed in the Bajo Mola tribe, based on observations made in several Mola villages in Wakatobi Regency, it shows that the Bajo tribe is very happy to carry out activities together, both in social work and in economic activities, such as sea fishing and this is in accordance with the statement of Syam et al., (2017) which states that doing activities at sea is the same as maintaining ancestral heritage and as a source of life. The fishermen in Mola Village, during their sailing activities, consist of several crew members, and based on interviews, these crew members are made up of various individuals, all of whom are originally from the Bajo tribe. This activity reflects that the Bajo community

consistently practices mutual cooperation. Even Hasanah et al., (2024) in their study state that the Bajo tribe highly prioritizes solidarity among fellow Bajo community members, and it is believed that this can enhance happiness, as they hope to always nurture or maintain the spirit of mutual cooperation. Despite the known reality that the bajo tribe has always been a minority in all districts or provinces where they live (Nuraini, 2016).

Togetherness in collaboration is something that is considered normal by the Bajo community, and this behavior is almost evident in the daily lives of the people and has begun to be established from an early age. That behavior is categorized as mutual cooperation and is regarded as a character trait evident in actions taken to accomplish a task collectively. This provides a subjective view that happiness is not solely created from wealth and power, but rather, in a simple sense, their togetherness enables them to become happy beings because it is interpreted positively. The culture of mutual cooperation is still very well preserved and is often manifested in the daily lives of the Bajo Tribe community in Mola Village. One example of this is the image presented below.



**Figure 1:** source from the author

The mutual cooperation activity that can be understood from the displayed image shows how natural the behavior of collaboration is being implemented. The communal activity on the boat is a manifestation of cooperation among several crew members; on one side, there are those who row, others who provide shade for the elderly, and at the front, in addition to rowing, there is someone responsible for steering towards the destination. From that activity, the spirit of mutual cooperation that has been manifested is very emancipatory, regardless of gender status, and also provides the perspective that various ages and genders participating actively make the character of mutual cooperation an inclusive activity, as it has involved the entire Bajo community without regard to differences. The phenomenon illustrates the values of equality and appreciation for diversity that form the foundation of social solidarity among the Bajo people. This is in line with the concept of Strengthening Character Education, which states that mutual cooperation is an action that values the spirit of collaboration and working together to solve common problems, and encompasses sub-values of solidarity, empathy, and inclusiveness (Kemendikbud, 2017).

The practice of mutual cooperation above can serve as an inspiration for other communities to engage in similar cooperative activities, even if they are not identical.

Although it is just a small act of mutual cooperation, it can serve as an example that motivates others to care for fellow human beings regardless of status and encourages unity in achieving common goals for the overall well-being of the community. Thus, the image not only captures important moments in the life of the community but also spreads a positive message about the importance of cooperation or mutual assistance in leading a better communal life.

The spirit of mutual cooperation in Mola Village is not just as depicted in the image above; based on observations, the author has also seen the Bajo tribe collectively caring for the coastal environment, maintaining the cleanliness of the canals so that they appear lush. There are also activities among groups of fishermen who work together to clean their boats, repair nets, or even repaint their boats to maintain durability and optimal function. This activity not only showcases a spirit of collaboration (mutual assistance), but also underscores the Bajo community's dependence on boats as the primary means of livelihood and accessing marine resources.

Mutual cooperation and togetherness of the Bajo Tribe are two essential elements in building a harmonious and sustainable community. That represents a manifestation of noble values that emphasize cooperation and mutual assistance in carrying out activities for the common good. As stated in the research by Yunus et al., (2023) on the Bajo Tribe in

Torosiaje, character values such as mutual cooperation are passed down through generations, and this can also be observed in the reality within the Bajo community in Mola Village, Wakatobi Regency. Where is the character of mutual cooperation that has been manifested, in line with Suri, (2017) opinion which explains that the culture of mutual cooperation is a concrete manifestation of the social life of the Indonesian people, and through mutual cooperation, the community can create harmonious social relationships and support one another (Nur et al., 2023). Even Siradjuddin (2020) has confirmed through his research that mutual cooperation characterizes the social life of the Bajo tribe and it is very necessary to continue to be preserved.

Although nowadays, many Bajo stilt houses have transformed into permanent houses due to natural processes and land reclamation (Rianse et al., 2023). Despite some changes, this has not affected the Bajo tribe's habits in preserving the environment. Because the reality is that the Bajo community still maintains canals that are very important in their daily lives. It is understood that the canals serve as docking areas for boats, playgrounds for children, as well as for the maintenance of fish, turtles, and so on. The most interesting thing is that the cleanliness of the Bajo tribe's canals is well maintained, reflecting the great care and responsibility the Bajo community has towards their environment.



**Figure 2:** source from the author

Samani and Hariyanto (2013) explain that character serves as a fundamental value that shapes an individual's personality, influenced both by heredity and environmental factors, distinguishing them from others and manifested in their attitudes and behaviors in daily life. The character entities possessed by a society are acquired through a long process. Its existence is the result of adaptation through social learning processes in response to the conditions and dynamics of its environment, both natural and social. Thus, it has been tested and continually contextualized, in line with the developments and changes that occur. As is the reality in the Bajo Mola community, they prominently display a spirit of mutual cooperation, and this characteristic can be considered the most prominent or dominant trait possessed by the individuals within the Bajo Mola tribe.

The Bajo community, as social beings in their lives, is inseparable from the cultural values that serve as benchmarks in their way of life (Maulidyna et al., 2021). The habit of mutual cooperation has become a character trait of the Bajo tribe, reflecting a strong sense of togetherness and solidarity in their daily



lives. Togetherness is evident in various aspects of life, such as in building houses, launching and repairing boats, as well as activities like fishing and sailing, and even in traditional events that involve the entire community. Gotong royong, according to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2022) is understood as a form of cooperation in carrying out activities together voluntarily so that the tasks being undertaken can proceed smoothly, easily, and lightly. The statement aligns with the reality experienced by the Mola Bajo tribe, where every time a communal work is carried out, it is not based on coercion, but rather arises from a shared awareness and sense of responsibility. Thus, that situation underlies the very high social solidarity among the Bajo people. The communal activities that are manifested not only enhance efficiency in resource use but also strengthen social bonds among the Bajo people. Mutual cooperation often serves as a moment for exchanging stories, knowledge, and traditions, and is an inseparable part of the cultural identity of the Bajo Mola tribe.

The mutual cooperation in the release of the boat into the waters in the image above serves as concrete evidence of the massive collaboration embodied by the Bajo people. This can be seen from their facial expressions, which are full of enthusiasm and eagerness when they are working collaboratively, and there is also a sense of satisfaction and pride that radiates from their faces when they

successfully complete a task together. Each individual in the image makes a meaningful contribution, demonstrating that mutual cooperation not only strengthens relationships among individuals but also reinforces the unity of the Bajo community as a whole. This aligns with the idea presented by Hayati et al., (2023) which states that through mutual cooperation, communities can strengthen social bonds and solidarity with one another, as well as provide benefits (Amirulloh et al., 2023).

## CONCLUSION

The history of the Bajo Mola tribe deciding to settle on Wanci Island occurred around the 1960s. This is based on an effort to avoid the conflicts and discomfort they experienced while on Kaledupa Island. The conflict arose due to accusations of their involvement with the DI/TII rebel movement, even though the Bajo tribe was, in reality, merely used as a tool (rowers) by the DI/TII guerrillas. The fear and anxiety stemming from the feud with the Mantigola community, along with the desire to avoid further exploitation by the DI/TII, led the Bajo tribe to choose Wanci Island as a safe place to seek refuge and settle, due to the presence of military and police posts there.

The entity of mutual cooperation among the Bajo Mola community reflects a fair and inclusive social system. Because the practice of mutual cooperation embodied by individuals of the Bajo tribe does not consider

differences in status and age, and uniquely, they always feel a sense of ownership and responsibility in every collective activity. It can be said that mutual cooperation has become an integral part of the life of the Bajo Mola tribe. Within the mutual cooperation activities they implement, there are values such as trust, support for one another, care, as well as a high sense of equality and solidarity. The Bajo community does not only view mutual cooperation as a physical activity, but as a means to strengthen their identity as a culturally rich and sustainable community. Thus, mutual cooperation in the Bajo Mola community not only serves to meet their practical needs in daily life but also plays a crucial role in maintaining the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of their surroundings. This aligns with the government's efforts through the Strengthening of Character Education, which emphasizes the importance of values such as solidarity, empathy, and inclusivity in building a harmonious society. This spirit of mutual cooperation is not only relevant for the Bajo community, but also serves as an inspiration for other societies to uphold the value of collaboration in achieving shared prosperity.

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