



# Maritime Networks and the Indonesian Revolution: Ports, Blockade Evasion, and the Making of an Archipelagic State

Arditya Prayogi<sup>1\*</sup>, Riki Nasrullah<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

E-Mail: <sup>1\*</sup>[arditya.prayogi@uingusdur.ac.id](mailto:arditya.prayogi@uingusdur.ac.id), <sup>2</sup>[rikinasrullah@unesa.ac.id](mailto:rikinasrullah@unesa.ac.id)

Korespondensi: [arditya.prayogi@uingusdur.ac.id](mailto:arditya.prayogi@uingusdur.ac.id)

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**Abstrak** - Artikel ini menelaah Revolusi Indonesia 1945–1949 dari perspektif maritim dengan menempatkan laut sebagai ruang historis yang aktif, bukan sekadar latar geografis. Dengan metode sejarah dan pendekatan sejarah maritim, penelitian ini melakukan telaah pustaka, kritik eksternal–internal sumber, serta interpretasi relasional untuk memetakan bagaimana pelabuhan, jalur pelayaran, dan jaringan antarpulau bekerja sebagai simpul mobilisasi, distribusi sumber daya, dan sirkulasi informasi di tengah blokade Belanda. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa dominasi laut dan kebijakan blokade diarahkan untuk memutus konektivitas republik, namun justru memicu strategi adaptif berbasis pengetahuan lokal: pemanfaatan rute sekunder, kapal kecil, titik singgah tersembunyi, serta peran krusial pelaut, buruh pelabuhan, pedagang, kurir, dan komunitas pesisir. Praktik penerobosan blokade tidak dapat direduksi sebagai perdagangan ilegal semata, melainkan teknologi politik-ekonomi yang mengonversi komoditas pesisir menjadi devisa, logistik, dan perlengkapan perang, sekaligus membentuk tata kelola informal dan “kedaulatan berlapis” di ruang pelabuhan. Secara konseptual, pengalaman rapuhnya konektivitas antarpulau selama revolusi menjadi bahan pembelajaran yang mengarah pada imajinasi teritorial Indonesia sebagai negara kepulauan, yang kemudian terartikulasikan dalam diplomasi maritim pascarevolusi, terutama Deklarasi Djuanda 1957. Kajian ini menegaskan jaringan transnasional pelabuhan, yang menopang diplomasi dan arus barang-kabar dan dapat mendorong eksplorasi arsip pelabuhan dan laporan patroli laut.

**Kata Kunci:** Jaringan maritim; Pelabuhan; Blokade Belanda; Penerobosan blokade/penyelundupan; Ekonomi revolusi.

**Abstract** - This article examines the 1945–1949 Indonesian Revolution from a maritime perspective, positioning the sea as an active historical space, not merely a geographical setting. Using historical methods and a maritime history approach, this research conducts a literature review, external–internal source critique, and relational interpretation to map how ports, shipping lanes, and inter-island networks functioned as nodes for mobilization, resource distribution, and information circulation amidst the Dutch blockade. The results of the study indicate that maritime domination and blockade policies were aimed at severing republican connectivity, but instead triggered adaptive strategies based on local knowledge: the use of secondary routes, small vessels, hidden transit points, and the crucial role of sailors, dockworkers, traders, couriers, and coastal communities. The practice of breaking the blockade cannot be reduced to mere illegal trade, but rather a political-economic technology that converted coastal commodities into foreign exchange, logistics, and war supplies, while simultaneously shaping informal governance and “layered sovereignty” in the port space. Conceptually, the experience of fragile inter-island connectivity during the revolution became a learning material that led to the territorial imagination of Indonesia as an archipelagic state, which was then articulated in post-revolutionary maritime diplomacy, especially the 1957 Djuanda Declaration. This study emphasizes the transnational network of ports, which supports diplomacy and the flow of goods and news and can encourage the exploration of port archives and maritime patrol reports.

**Keywords:** Maritime network; Ports; Dutch blockade; Breaking the blockade/smuggling; Revolutionary economy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The history of the Indonesian Revolution (1945–1949) is often understood through two broad channels: diplomacy and land warfare, yet the newly established republic also lived on a “waterfront” that determined the flow of goods, people, and news. In a situation where the Dutch imposed a blockade and blocked trade access, the sea was no longer a geographical setting but rather an arena for a struggle for sovereignty that operated through ports, shipping routes, and inter-island networks. Maritime studies are therefore crucial because they help us understand how the republic survived not only with weapons, but also with its ability to manage the circulation and connectivity of the archipelago.

Despite this, the historiography of the revolution still retains a “land-centric” tendency, often leaving the role of ports and sea routes as mere asides. A number of studies have indeed highlighted the financing of the revolution and efforts to break through the economic blockade, including smuggling practices and the use of export commodities to support state coffers. However, these discussions often stop at a list of economic actions and figures, without fully linking them to how the maritime space functioned as a network connecting the republic's points—from coasts and straits to connecting ports abroad [1].

Another gap is evident in the limited readings that position ports as political and social hubs during the revolution. Yet ports were not merely loading and unloading points, but also meeting spaces for officials, traders, ship crews, couriers, and local communities, forming the republic's “informal infrastructure.” Studies of the Mandar seafaring network, for example, show that the orientation of shipping in the early revolution could be political and shift in response to the pressures of the blockade and colonial policies in the eastern region. Such findings suggest that the dynamics of revolution



at sea operated through route adaptations, course changes, and local negotiations that were rarely mapped out in the broader narrative of the revolution [2].

The gap is also apparent in how the revolution's maritime economy is viewed, often reduced to mere "illegal trade." On the one hand, smuggling to Singapore proved to be one of the republic's efforts to fill cash gaps and circumvent the blockade, but on the other, this activity relied on shipping routes, rendezvous points, port choices, and intermediary networks that were very characteristic of the archipelago. By reading these economic practices as maritime processes—rather than mere violations—it can be seen how the republic built resilience through a combination of economic strategy, maritime mobility, and networked operations [3].

Beyond the 1945–1949 period, maritime issues also crossed over into the post-revolutionary agenda as the country sought to assert its territorial identity as an archipelagic state. The Djuanda Declaration (December 13, 1957) is frequently discussed in studies of maritime law and international politics, but its connection to the experience of the revolution—namely the lessons about the fragility of archipelagic connectivity when the sea is treated as a space that can easily be “severed”—is rarely explicitly drawn. In other words, there is room to link the experience of the revolution in maritime routes with the emergence of Indonesia's territorial imagination that positions the sea as a unifying, not a dividing, force [4].

Starting from this issue, this article discusses the maritime as a field of struggle for independence through three interrelated entry points: (1) ports and transportation networks as channels for mobilization and information circulation, (2) the maritime economy of the revolution as a strategy for survival and financing the struggle under blockade, and (3) the political-territorial consequences that later strengthened in the idea of an archipelagic state. With this framework, this article positions the sea as an active historical space that shaped the practice of struggle and influenced the way the state imagined and asserted its sovereignty in the future.

## 2. METHOD

This article employs historical methods with a maritime history approach to interpret the sea as a socio-political space that shaped the mobilization, distribution of resources, and practices of struggle during the Indonesian Revolution. This framework ensures that ports, shipping routes, and inter-island networks are not treated as geographical settings, but rather as nodes of activity that influence the dynamics of conflict, the economy, and the formation of sovereignty.

Data collection was conducted through a heuristic literature review of sources, including books, journal articles, and previous research on the revolution, the wartime economy, smuggling, ports, and the history of Indonesian maritime law, including studies that discuss the Djuanda Declaration as part of the formation of the concept of an archipelagic state. The next stage is external and internal source criticism to assess the authenticity, context of production, authorial interests, and narrative tendencies of each source. External criticism is used to determine the document's origin, publication date, and relevance to the events discussed. Internal criticism is used to test the consistency of content, compare sources, and assess the credibility of information, particularly on issues prone to bias such as smuggling, claims of successful blockades, and the role of local actors in ports [5].

Data analysis was conducted through interpretation, linking the findings to three discussion points: first, ports and transportation networks as channels for the mobilization and circulation of information. Second, the maritime economy of the revolution as a survival strategy under the blockade, and third, the political-territorial consequences that led to the idea of an archipelagic state. At this stage, the author applies a relational reading of events, assessing how changes in blockade policy, the security situation, and funding needs influenced the choice of routes, transit points, and the working patterns of the maritime network. The results are presented through historiography (historical writing) with a thematic-chronological argumentation pattern. The author structures the narrative based on the sequence of the revolution's dynamics, while still highlighting the themes that are the focus of maritime studies. This ensures that causal relationships are clearly legible and each sub-topic remains linked to the research question of the role of maritime space in the struggle for independence and the establishment of Indonesian sovereignty.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Maritime as a Strategic Space for the Struggle for Independence

Understanding the maritime landscape in Indonesia's struggle for independence is inextricably linked to the way the sea has been positioned as a strategic space since the colonial era. In the Dutch colonial tradition, the sea served as the primary means of controlling the archipelago, both through commercial shipping and military domination. Sea routes served not only as inter-island connections but also as instruments for ensuring commodity circulation and colonial political stability. Major ports were positioned as hubs of power, where economic, administrative, and security interests converged [6], [7]. In this context, the sea has long been a political arena that determines relations between the central government and the regions. This legacy was inherited, and challenged, by the Republic of Indonesia after the 1945 Proclamation.



Post-independence, the sea underwent a significant shift in meaning within the framework of the national struggle. Previously understood as a medium of colonial domination, in the context of the revolution, it transformed into a space for the struggle for sovereignty. The newly established Republic of Indonesia faced the geographical reality of being an archipelagic nation fragmented by the sea. Nevertheless, this situation opened up strategic opportunities in confronting colonial powers seeking to regain power. The sea was no longer merely a transportation route, but a battlefield that determined the republic's survival. This understanding spurred the emergence of revolutionary maritime practices that adapted to limited resources. Thus, maritime space began to be articulated as an integral part of the independence project.

In the dynamics of the revolution, maritime politics cannot be separated from the military conflict that has developed since 1945. The Dutch saw control of the sea as the key to suppressing the republic, especially through control of ports and main shipping routes [8]. This strategy was rooted in a long colonial experience that placed the navy as the backbone of power in the Dutch East Indies. Through maritime domination, the Dutch sought to limit the republic's mobility and sever ties between regions. Within this framework, the sea became a space of conflict that determined the balance of power. This situation required the republic to develop a counter-strategy that was not always symmetrical but adaptive to the maritime conditions of the archipelago.

One of the most visible forms of colonial maritime policy during the revolution was the implementation of a naval blockade against the republic's territory. This blockade aimed to cripple the republic's economy and logistics by restricting access to international trade and the movement of ships between islands. Strategic ports were closely monitored, while ships suspected of carrying aid to the republic were subject to inspection or seizure. The impact of the blockade was felt not only in the form of a shortage of goods but also in the weakening of the republic's administrative and military capacity. The sea, in this context, was projected as an effective tool of political pressure. However, the effectiveness of the blockade did not entirely work according to Dutch plans [3].

Facing the naval blockade, the republic did not remain silent but instead developed various responses that demonstrated the flexibility of its maritime strategy. The limited naval fleet did not prevent the emergence of alternative shipping practices that exploited gaps in colonial oversight. Secondary sea lanes and remote waters were utilized to transport logistics, weapons, and diplomatic supplies. Small ships, traditional boats, and local seafaring networks played a crucial role in maintaining the circulation of revolutionary materials. This strategy demonstrated that the republic's advantage lay in its local knowledge of maritime space. In this practice, the sea transformed into a space of resistance that was difficult for colonial powers to fully control [3], [9], [10].

Besides serving as a direct battlefield, the sea also served as a war infrastructure that supported the mobilization of the struggle. Given the archipelagic geography, sea routes became the primary means of connecting the republic's regions separated by water. Troop movements, weapons distribution, and food supplies depended heavily on smooth shipping. Small ports, previously overlooked, acquired strategic roles within the revolutionary war network. This function demonstrated that the sea was not merely a geographical setting, but rather a material structure that enabled the war of independence to proceed. Without the utilization of maritime space, the republic's armed struggle would likely have faced far greater obstacles [11], [12].

In practice, control of sea lanes did not always mean complete military control of the waters. The Republic often relied on its ability to move flexibly and unpredictably within maritime space. This strategy differed from the colonial approach, which emphasized territorial control and the presence of large fleets. By exploiting Indonesia's diverse maritime geography, the Republic was able to create a situation where the sea became a fluid and difficult-to-completely map space. This situation benefited the independence struggle, which required high mobility and adaptability. This approach demonstrates a fundamental difference in how the two sides interpreted the sea as a strategic space [13], [14].

The role of ports in this context also underwent a significant transformation. Ports became more than just loading and unloading points for goods, but also evolved into coordination centers for the struggle. In many regions, ports served as meeting spaces for military and civilian actors, as well as local economic networks. This interaction enabled the formation of maritime solidarity that underpinned the republic's survival. The dynamics of ports during the revolution reflected the close link between maritime affairs and the politics of independence, where ports became hubs where information, logistics, and strategy converged [15], [16].

The sea, as a strategic space, also exhibits an equally important social dimension. Coastal communities, sailors, and ship crews were directly involved in revolutionary maritime practices, both consciously and due to the demands of the situation. Their involvement broadened the social basis of the struggle and demonstrated that revolution was not confined to land. The collective experience of facing maritime blockades and surveillance fostered a new awareness of the importance of the sea to the republic's survival. This awareness grew from everyday practice, not merely from elite political discourse. In the context of maritime history, this underscores the role of non-state actors in the struggle for independence.

When viewed within the broader framework of maritime history, the experience of the revolution strengthened the sea's position as a strategic space in the formation of the Indonesian nation. The sea was no longer understood merely as a divider between islands, but as a space that united and determined the direction of the national struggle. Maritime practices



during the independence era—and even before—demonstrate that control of maritime space had direct implications for political sovereignty [17], [18]. This awareness arose from concrete experiences facing blockades, mobilizations, and conflicts in Indonesian waters. Therefore, the maritime context in the struggle for independence can be read as the initial foundation for understanding Indonesia as a sovereign archipelagic nation.

### Maritime Networks and the Circulation of Revolutionary Information

Ports during the Indonesian Revolution cannot be understood solely as economic infrastructure, but rather as socio-political spaces of strategic importance. From the end of the Japanese occupation to the early years of independence, major ports such as Tanjung Priok, Tanjung Perak, Belawan, Makassar, and Semarang developed into meeting points for various social actors [19]. In this space, sailors, dockworkers, inter-island traders, republican fighters, and activists promoting nationalist ideas interacted. The intense mobility and openness of the port's social structure enabled the exchange of information and the formation of cross-group solidarity. These conditions made the port an informal political arena that was relatively difficult to closely monitor by both colonial and Allied authorities. The port's cosmopolitan character contributed to the spread of independence ideas beyond mainland political centers [15].

As a socio-political space, ports have a different relational configuration than inland areas. The fluid working relationships within the port environment bring together individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds, regions of origin, and social experiences. Dockworkers and ship crews often act as intermediaries between movement groups and coastal and hinterland communities. Daily interactions at docks, in warehouses, and on ships form effective networks of trust for the transmission of political messages. In this context, ports function as a social medium that allows the idea of independence to move beyond colonial administrative boundaries. Port spaces are thus fraught with processes of power negotiation and practices of resistance [20].

Ports also served as hubs for the production and distribution of information during the revolution. Information about the Proclamation of August 17, 1945, changes in the political landscape, and developments in the military situation was often first received in coastal areas before reaching inland areas. Leaflets, newspapers, and word of mouth traveled from ships to docks, then disseminated through local networks. Sailors and port workers were key actors in this process due to their high mobility. This mechanism demonstrates that the sea and ports were integral parts of the revolutionary communication system [21]. Without the support of maritime infrastructure, the dissemination of information about independence would be slower and more fragmented.

The spread of news of the Proclamation by sea demonstrates the importance of inter-island communication in shaping national consciousness. Merchant ships and traditional boats carried news of independence from Java to various islands across Indonesia. This process generally took place through the initiative of individuals or groups affiliated with the Republic. This pattern emphasizes the role of the sea as the primary link between the republic's geographically separated regions.

The sea served as a unifying medium for the republic amidst post-1945 geopolitical fragmentation. While land control was often hampered by the presence of Allied and Dutch forces, sea routes provided a relatively flexible mobility alternative. Small ships and traditional boats were used to connect isolated regions by land. This activity enabled political and logistical coordination between the republic's regions to be maintained. Awareness of Indonesia's territorial unity grew through the collective experience of utilizing the sea as a shared space. This dimension demonstrates that national integration had a strong maritime foundation from the beginning [3].

Regional maritime networks extended the scope of Indonesia's independence struggle to the Southeast Asian region. Indonesian sailors had historical ties to ports in Singapore, Malaya, Southern Thailand, and the Philippines. These networks were utilized to obtain moral support, logistics, and information on international dynamics. The movement of people and goods through regional sea lanes created a mutually reinforcing circulation of anti-colonial ideas. The Indonesian Revolution unfolded within a broader regional context. The sea served as a space for political interaction across colonial borders [22].

The role of Indonesian sailors and the Indonesian diaspora abroad was a crucial part of the international maritime network. They not only disseminated information about the republic's struggle but also fostered sympathy among foreign port communities. This activity was evident in Singapore and Australia, where Indonesian sailors interacted with labor unions and progressive groups. International support for Indonesian independence was partly shaped through these maritime contacts. The diaspora network demonstrates the contribution of non-state actors to revolutionary diplomacy [23]. This dimension emphasizes the maritime character of the Indonesian revolution which transcends territorial boundaries.

The transnational dimension of the Indonesian revolution was evident in its use of sea routes as a means of diplomacy and resistance. Information about Dutch military aggression and the Republic's position was conveyed abroad via sailors and merchant ships. Maritime networks enabled the Republic to reach international public opinion despite not yet achieving official recognition. These activities demonstrate that the sea functions as a global political space that can be exploited by non-hegemonic actors. The Indonesian revolution exploited gaps in the international maritime system to fight for legitimacy. This practice enriches the understanding of revolution as a transnational process [24].



This series of dynamics demonstrates that maritime networks and the circulation of information were structural elements in Indonesia's struggle for independence. Ports, ships, sailors, and regional networks formed an ecosystem of communication and mobility that sustained the republic's survival in the early days of independence. A maritime approach positions the sea as an active historical space that influenced the strategy and direction of the struggle. This perspective provides a more balanced reading of the Indonesian revolutionary experience. In a historiographical context, this emphasis challenges the dominance of land-centric narratives in national history.

### Maritime Economy and the Resilience of the Revolution

The Dutch not only attempted to defeat the Republic through military operations, but also by disrupting the circulation of commodities and foreign exchange, which relied on shipping. In colonial logic, control of the seas meant controlling the entry and exit of goods, people, and currency, forcing the republic to operate under conditions of scarcity. The economic blockade policy placed ports, river estuaries, and inter-island waterways as both vulnerable and opportunistic points. This situation emphasized that the resilience of a revolution was not merely a matter of combat ability on land, but also of "survival" within a tightly controlled maritime ecology. When official channels were narrowed, maritime space gave rise to adaptive practices that shifted the struggle economy from a regular to an opportunistic mode. In many cases, the republic's strength was tested by a simple yet crucial question: how to transform coastal commodities into sources of funds, food, and weapons [25].

The pressure of the blockade forced the republic to read the sea as a risky economic space, where every voyage was a negotiation between necessity, security, and the possibility of capture. A crucial shift emerged here: shipping was no longer understood solely as a trade infrastructure, but as a political technology for maintaining fragile sovereignty. The practice of breaching the blockade shaped a fast-paced, networked economy, often dependent on secret information about patrols and landing points. Consequently, the revolutionary economy tended to be poorly documented in state statistics, but emerged in intelligence reports, diplomatic memos, and the testimonies of perpetrators [3]. This economic pattern is in line with the findings of studies on the relationship between conflict and illegal trade, namely that when state control strengthens, the incentive to smuggle actually increases and forms a new "market".

Under the blockade, export commodities became strategic assets, possessing not only economic but also political value. Commodities that could be transported quickly and sold at regional ports gave the republic access to foreign exchange, broker networks, and imported goods unavailable within the republic. The need to finance government spending and purchase weapons drove the shipment of commodities from Indonesia to nearby ports with greater openness, giving rise to illicit trade. In this mechanism, the sea acted as a "conversion machine": rubber, copra, or other products were converted into Straits dollars, gold, or war equipment through intermediary traders. Interestingly, transactions did not always involve cash; cross-regional barter often provided a solution when Republican currency was difficult to accept or when access to banks was limited. This kind of barter demonstrates how the revolution's maritime economy operated within a hybrid value regime: market value, war value, and interconnected trust value [3].

The Southeast Asian regional market, particularly Singapore, became a hub that brought together the interests of the republic, Chinese merchants, the colonial apparatus, and the British authorities, each with its own calculations. Commercial relations and clandestine activities in Singapore provided opportunities for the republic's strategy to operate outside of direct Dutch oversight. However, these opportunities also created "pressures" in the form of prices, commissions, and dependence on brokers, leaving the republic in a bargaining position that was not always strong. In this situation, the maritime economy of the revolution must be read as a brokerage economy heavily influenced by reputation, access to ships, and route security [26].

The "legal-illegal" practices of the revolution did not emerge in a vacuum; they were shaped by the institutional needs of a nascent state that lacked a well-established fiscal system. A study in the journal *Lembaran Sejarah* (History Sheets) reveals the existence of illicit trade operations conducted under the auspices of the Republic's representatives in Singapore, involving figures who managed networks, shipments, and negotiations [3]. This is important because it demonstrates the shadow economy as part of the state's operations, not a purely criminal enterprise in its own right. At the same time, the shadow economy presents a dilemma: the state needs quick funds, but the use of illicit channels can potentially create intergroup competition, leakage, and conflicting claims over the "right" to manage commodities.

In many ports and landing beaches, authority is not always singular; paramilitaries, local officials, and traders can form micro-regimes that regulate levies, escorts, or distribution. From a maritime historical perspective, this situation demonstrates a "layered sovereignty" that operates through control over docks, warehouses, and ships, not just through state symbols. The variety of financing methods—including smuggling—used by various actors in the struggle to support war needs suggests that the revolutionary economy was not entirely centralized; it pulsed through dispersed networks and often relied on local initiatives [1]. Therefore, smuggling in revolution is best understood as an arena of political-economic negotiations that produces informal forms of governance.

The revolution's resilience was also bolstered by coastal communities, who provided labor, local knowledge, and social networks to conceal commodities and secure ship movements. In some cases, the success of clandestine voyages was determined not simply by "who owned the ship," but by who could negotiate small spaces: sheltered bays, night routes,



or inconspicuous unloading points. These contributions are often overlooked in the grand narrative of the revolution's history, yet they suggest a maritime-based social mobilization distinct from land-based mobilization. Practices of barter, storage, and distribution in coastal villages connected the family economy with the struggle economy, often blurring the boundaries between civilian and military needs. From a historical economic perspective, this blurring of boundaries gave rise to a "moral economy" in which coastal residents' decisions to assist, delay, or refuse cooperation were heavily influenced by food prices, family security, and political proximity [1].

The involvement of coastal communities also reveals a more intractable aspect: the shadow economy can create new inequalities when access to routes and commodities is controlled by a few. Conversely, the shadow economy provides a "lifeline" when blockades cause prices to soar and supplies to be cut off, so it can be seen as both a mechanism for social adaptation and a source of tension. At the micro level, many transactions depend on trust and reputation; a single betrayal or leak of information can disrupt networks and endanger actors. Within the framework of maritime history, these unwritten rules often operate through crew solidarity, merchant patronage, or the protection of local officials familiar with the waters. Therefore, the maritime economy during the revolution functioned as a social laboratory, bringing together state needs, community strategies, and market calculations [27].

In the historiography of revolution, the economy is often treated as the backdrop to the "crisis" that explains scarcity, while the narrative is centered on military operations and diplomacy. The literature on Indonesian economic history reminds us that economic decolonization did not always coincide with political decolonization, so the period 1945-1949 should be read as a transitional period full of compromise and improvisation [28].

At this point, maritime economics provides an analytical tool to bridge the narratives of war and economics, as the sea is a medium connecting commodities, foreign exchange, weapons, and information. A study of republican smuggling in Singapore adds to the empirical evidence that filling the state treasury, financing foreign delegations, and purchasing military equipment were directly linked to the ability to breach the blockade via sea routes. Meanwhile, a discussion of war funding sources during the revolution demonstrates that smuggling and commodity trade were part of the funding repertoire, alongside other methods that demonstrate the elasticity of the Indonesian republic's struggle.

#### **Maritime Economy and the Resilience of the Revolution**

During the Indonesian Revolution for Independence, the sea served not only as a corridor for mobility but also as a space that forced the Republic to learn about geopolitics in practice. As land areas were fragmented by demarcation lines, landing operations, and the reoccupation of port cities, inter-island connectivity relied heavily on small shipping lanes, coastal routes, and adaptable port hubs. This experience fostered the realization that "Indonesia" was not merely a political name, but a spatial field that must be connected through the flow of people, goods, and news across the water. In many regions, the continuity of administration and the coordination of struggle required the ability to read straits, bays, estuaries, and the rhythms of people's navigation, making maritime space a material prerequisite for political unity. This practice prompted a shift in perspective on the ocean, where the sea became not a divider between islands but a medium that enabled unity to work in crisis situations. The geopolitical awareness that grew from this experience was not always formulated theoretically during the revolution, but was tested in everyday decisions regarding safe routes, transit points, and ways to avoid colonial control.

Maritime-based geopolitical awareness also arose from the fact that Republican actors had to confront a power that had historically excelled in controlling the seas. In a situation of fleet imbalance, the Republic developed a strategy that combined technical improvisation with maritime social networks, utilizing small vessels, night sailing, and protecting coastal communities to maintain inter-island mobility. This situation taught that sovereignty is not simply proclaimed but must be exercised through control of space and the ability to channel resources. As sea lanes became an arena of contestation, territorial integrity began to be imagined as a chain of islands connected by common waters, rather than simply a collection of landmasses coincidentally adjacent to each other. This reasoning would later become crucial as Indonesia entered the post-revolutionary phase and had to formulate a legal basis for its territorial waters. The formation of the concept of an "archipelagic state" was not solely born of international maritime law diplomacy but also rooted in long historical experience, including colonial clashes over maritime space and spatial learning during times of conflict [29].

The struggle for independence left a legacy of issues often overlooked in narratives of the battle: how to assert boundaries and territorial integrity in maritime space while the colonial legal regime still loomed large. The prevailing conception of maritime law tended to treat the seas between islands as free space or passage, facilitating intervention by external powers, while the new nation needed a formula that guaranteed inter-island waters as part of its territory. This tension was evident in early governance practices. The Republic had to manage shipping, security, and trade, but its legal framework was not yet fully developed, and international recognition was still contested. In this situation, "territory" became a tug-of-war between the geographical realities of the archipelago and inherited legal boundaries. Arguments about the importance of the unity of land, sea, and airspace as a single "homeland" have long been present in national discourse, but the challenge was translating these ideas into international rules and recognition [30].



From the beginning, Indonesian nationalism not only bound people as a "nation" but also bound space as a "homeland," and that space was, in fact, an archipelago. When the experience of revolution demanded maritime connectivity, spatial awareness became part of political practice: decisions about which ports to defend, which straits to monitor, or which routes to secure all implied the concept of territorial integrity operating on water. The idea of maritime sovereignty then grew out of the tension between internal needs (ensuring integration) and external pressures (facing shipping control by colonial and allied powers). The process of decolonization in Indonesia was also often marked by a paradox where the recognition of political sovereignty did not automatically resolve economic problems and control of space, including maritime space, which had long been positioned within the logic of global interests [31]. In a historiographical framework, the emphasis on the problem of boundaries and territorial integrity helped move the revolution from merely a matter of "capturing cities" to a matter of "binding space" in the form of an archipelagic state.

The maritime experience during the revolution can be read as the embryo of the "archipelagic outlook" rationale, although the terminology and its formulation developed later through the formulation of state policy. What was apparent from the outset was a perspective that positioned the sea as the glue between islands, so that national unity was understood as a unified living space encompassing the waters between islands. This rationale gained momentum when Indonesia began to confront the legal consequences of its archipelagic form, namely how to make inter-island waters not free passage for external powers, but rather part of the national territory.

The Djuanda Declaration of December 13, 1957, was a crucial milestone in this trajectory, declaring the waters surrounding, between, and within the Indonesian archipelago as a single national territory, while simultaneously upholding the principle of an archipelagic state. The Djuanda Declaration can be understood as an articulation of policy that wove historical experience—including the experience of revolution—into the language of law and diplomacy. It demonstrates how the need for integration experienced between 1945 and 1949 was then translated into maritime territorial claims that required international acceptance [32].

The shift from revolutionary maritime practices to post-independence maritime diplomacy also demonstrates a shift in the terrain of struggle, shifting from mobility tactics to legitimacy strategies. While during the revolution, the sea served as a space for maintaining connectivity and political survival, in the 1950s, it became a space for international negotiations on borders, passage, and sovereignty. The Djuanda Declaration itself emerged from a long process of establishing the principle of an archipelagic state as a constitutional choice, not a sudden, contextless decision. At the same time, the Djuanda Declaration can be expressed within the framework of the formation of Indonesian unity, from "spiritual unity" (Youth Pledge), to "state constitutional framework" (Proclamation), to "land-sea territorial unity" (Djuanda) [32].

Maritime space also operates at the level of political imagination. It shapes how the nation envisions itself as a dispersed yet connected spatial entity. In the experience of the revolution, inter-island relations were maintained not only by political speeches, but also by concrete practices such as inter-port shipping, the distribution of news, and the workings of maritime diaspora networks. Therefore, Indonesian nationalism can be read as an "imagined geography" that is not centered solely on a single landmass, but rather on the relations between islands connected by the sea. This perspective is useful for countering the historiographical tendency to position the revolution as if it primarily moved from land centers in Java, while many archipelagic regions experienced revolution through the rhythms of ports, sea routes, and maritime encounters [33].

At the conceptual level, "Indonesia as an archipelagic nation" is also an intellectual project that demands a reconfiguration of how the sea is viewed, shifting from an in-between space to an in-between space. The concept of an "archipelagic outlook" emphasizes that understanding the archipelago is not simply a geographical description, but a perspective that shapes policies, identities, and strategies for dealing with the outside world. In the colonial tradition, the sea was often positioned as a route of extraction and control, while in the national imagination, the sea was positioned as a medium of unity and a region of sovereignty. The tension between these two perspectives explains why the struggle for independence did not stop at the takeover of land-based institutions, but also at the effort to change the way the world views Indonesian waters. This historical context makes the formation of an archipelagic nation not merely a matter of maritime law, but also a matter of shaping the nation's territorial identity [34]. At this point, the maritime becomes the foundation of the national imaginary which is at the same time very material where it lives in maps, rules, routes, ports, and mobility practices that link the islands.

In national history writing, discussions of the revolution are often dominated by land-centric thinking: cities, battlefields, elite diplomacy, and cabinet changes. This approach is important, but it risks rendering maritime space a "periphery" that functions only as a logistical accessory, not a space that shapes sovereignty. A historiographical examination can be conducted by utilizing maritime and port sources such as shipping reports, customs archives, maritime union records, and diplomatic memos on regional ports as primary sources that portray how the republic functioned as an archipelagic state during times of crisis. Traces of the idea of an archipelagic state can be traced back to the experience of the revolution, which demanded inter-island integration, was then formulated in the 1957 policy, and ultimately gained wider recognition within the international maritime law regime in the following decades [29].

Historical reflection shows that the formation of an archipelagic state was a gradual process involving a shift in political language, from the language of resistance and mobility (1945–1949) to the language of territorial diplomacy (1950s), and



then to the language of international legal regimes and maritime governance. The Djuanda Declaration emphasized its significance as an effort to integrate the territory of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), encompassing islands and waters, and also as a foundation for the struggle for international recognition of the principle of an archipelagic state. In the context of this discussion, the significance is not simply the date of December 13, 1957, but the fact that Indonesian nationalism requires a territorial form appropriate to the reality of the archipelago so that unity does not remain merely symbolic. Here, the experience of the revolution provided the raw material for the idea of an archipelagic state, and this idea subsequently influenced how Indonesia imagined sovereignty, negotiated boundaries, and positioned itself in the global maritime arena. This line of reasoning maintains coherence between the history of events and the history of ideas, without making the maritime realm merely an afterthought.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This article asserts that the sea during the Indonesian Revolution cannot be understood as a passive "in-between space," but rather as a space of power that determined the republic's survival as a connected political entity. The central issue is not simply the presence or absence of shipping, but how maritime networks ports, small routes, crews, dockworkers, merchants, couriers, and diaspora nodes created the republic's ability to overcome the blockade's interregional disconnection. While the Dutch relied on maritime dominance to cripple mobility and logistics, the republic transformed its archipelagic character into a strategic advantage through flexible movement, the choice of secondary routes, and the use of ports as meeting spaces and information distribution. Thus, this study addresses the question of the foundations of revolutionary sovereignty, where sovereignty was maintained not only through land battles and diplomacy, but also through the ability to manage the circulation of goods, people, and news in a constantly contested maritime space.

At the same time, the revolution's maritime economy cannot be reduced to mere "illegal trade," as the practice of breaking the blockade functioned as a political technology to convert coastal commodities into funds, logistics, and war equipment that supported the administration and resilience of the struggle. Broader consequences emerged at the conceptual level, namely the experience of facing fragile inter-island connectivity during 1945–1949, which formed the practical knowledge that "Indonesia" must be bound as a single spatial entity, including the waters between the islands. From here, post-revolutionary maritime declarations and diplomacy especially the idea of an archipelagic state—can be read as a continuation of the lessons of the revolution, namely the need to transform the sea from an easily severed gap into a legally and politically recognized unifying medium. The limitation of this article lies in the predominance of recently published sources. Further research needs to explore port archives, customs records, patrol reports, and maritime labor union records so that the network map and dynamics of local actors can be examined in more detail.

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