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Eastern Indonesia and the Writing of History

L'Est indonésien et l'écriture de l'histoire

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Eastern Indonesia and the Writing of History

Introduction: Queries and Problems

The last four to five decades have seen an improvement in the breadth of historical research on Indonesia, with the application of recent analytical tools – gender studies, postcolonial perspectives, *la longue durée*, etc. There is now an ample supply of studies on economic, political and cultural developments, general surveys, historical atlases, and source publications. Much of this concerns the last two centuries, and is written from the perspective of the centre (Java, Jakarta/Batavia, the major Islamic polities). At least from an internal Indonesian perspective, the very management of Soeharto's New Order state favoured the view from the centre; its somewhat over-centralized policies were far from conducive to local history.² However, historical studies based on regional or local cases have had their fair share. The Aceh Sultanate, the Makassar Kingdom, the southern Sumatran states Jambi and Palembang, and the micro-states of Bali are some of the pre-modern polities that have found avid researchers in the last decades. The anthropological inspiration looms large in some of these studies which points to interesting interdisciplinary possibilities. There is no denying that the scholarly output is largely European, American and Australian; however, Indonesian scholars, sometimes undergoing international research training programmes such as the Dutch Encompass, have increasingly produced finely crafted studies.

1. Linnaeus University, Sweden.

2. Suwignyo 2014: 114-5.

Nevertheless there is reason to note the precedents. Indonesian history has been written in a scholarly fashion for at least 200 years. The early colonial presence in the region ensured a strong scholarly Dutch interest in its past, fuelled by the material remains of the Indianized kingdoms and the perceived grandeur of the Dutch overseas enterprise. No-one browsing the hefty issues of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century periodicals such as *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, *Indische Gids*, *Koloniaal Tijdschrift* or *Djâwâ* needs to doubt the Dutch interest in Indonesian culture, archaeology and history. Multi-volume source publications such as *Bouwstoffen voor de geschiedenis der Nederlanders in den Maleischen Archipel* (ed. Tiele & Heeres, 1886-1895) and *Dagh-Register* (1887-1931) are much used by scholars to this day. Colonial officials and missionaries with an intimate knowledge of specific places wrote lengthy pieces on cultures in the outer islands which are often still to be superseded. The problem, from an outside perspective, was that nearly all of this was written in Dutch, a language seldom understood by non-Dutch non-specialists. Moreover, the process of decolonization in the 1940s meant that Dutch ties with Indonesia were largely abrogated, with consequences for the scholarly output. Training programmes for Dutch *bestuursambtenaren* (administrative officials) were broken off (although West Papua remained in Dutch hands until 1962) and Indonesian studies lost something of their *raison d'être*.³ The new generations of educated Indonesians did not read Dutch, the language of a large part of the written historical sources. The consequences are obvious to this day: the National Archives (ANRI) in Jakarta houses ten kilometres of colonial source materials, much more than the correspondent National Archives in The Hague, but is largely inaccessible.⁴ For Indonesians, due to the language barrier; and for foreigners, due to bureaucratic restraints emanating from the pre-Reformasi era.

The present essay will survey the development of historical writing with regard to eastern Indonesia, a vast area characterized by small-scale polities and a great diversity of languages, where historical research is arguably still in its infancy. It goes without saying that a definition of “eastern Indonesia” is arbitrary. In the context of this essay I will consider the Southeastern Islands (Nusa Tenggara, divided into the provinces Nusa Tenggara Barat and Nusa Tenggara Timur), Maluku (since a few years divided in two provinces, Maluku and Maluku Utara), and Papua. Furthermore I will consider Timor-Leste which, although independent since 2002, is historically deeply involved with its geographical surroundings.

3. For the history of the *Indologen*, see Fasseur 1993.

4. <http://www.tanap.net/content/archives/archives.cfm?ArticleID=200> (accessed 14.11.2014).

Sources and Historical-Geographical Preconditions

Five centuries ago, the area under scrutiny was at the very centre of European interests in Asia. The inflated prices of spices in late medieval Europe made access to the fabled Spice Islands a priority for seafaring nations, not to say an Oriental dream. While pepper grew in many parts of maritime Asia, cloves and nutmeg were only to be found in Maluku. It goes without saying that other groups, such as Chinese traders, had an interest in the spice-producing islands, although they documented their interest relatively scantily. A mere fourteen years after the arrival of Vasco da Gama to India, in 1512, the first Portuguese seafarers arrived in Maluku from the recently conquered Melaka.⁵ From a historiographical point of view this is a seminal year. From this time only do we possess a substantial corpus of textual sources for the Maluku area. Iberian contemporary or near-contemporary chroniclers such as João de Barros, Diogo do Couto, and Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, authored epic narratives of Portuguese expansion where the contest for the Spice Islands in the sixteenth century loomed large. This period also produced extensive reports on geography and (proto-) ethnography such as António Galvão's treatise *Historia das Molucas* (c. 1544). Spanish involvement in Maluku affairs found an expression in Leonardo de Argensola's widely read *Conquista de las islas Malucas* (1609; English translation 1708).⁶

After the withering of Iberian power in the Spice Islands in the early seventeenth century, the Dutch archival materials and travel accounts constitute an important base for the study of the region. The formation of the VOC in 1602 was an event of not only commercial and political significance, but also historiographical. The organization, partly inspired by the Portuguese Estado da Índia but significantly more efficacious, ensured that reports, economic figures, correspondence with indigenous leaders, and copies of local logs and legal matters were submitted by the many local trading posts that dotted the maritime areas east of the Cape.⁷ The materials were assessed at the hub of the Company in Batavia and further copies and reports found their way to the VOC chambers in the Netherlands, forming the basis of allocation of resources and strategic decisions. This made for a very comprehensive category of historical documents which conveyed data which was on the one hand selective and biased (as any source material) but on the other hand gave detailed insights in local political and economic structures. As sometimes remarked, the VOC sources tend to be stubbornly resistant to the historian's questions, but the mass of data enables us to reach the "grass-roots" level in a way that may not

5. Andaya 1993: 114-6.

6. What is likely the manuscript of Galvão is translated in Jacobs 1971. See Argensola 1708 for an English translation of Leonardo de Argensola's work.

7. Andaya 1993: 22-2, 41.

be possible in several Asian regions without significant European presence.⁸

It should be noted that this wealth of details mainly applies to the places where the VOC had a permanent presence: Ternate, Ambon and Banda in Maluku, Kupang in the present-day Nusa Tenggara Timur province, and Bima on Sumbawa. Other places, such as Tidore and Bacan in Maluku, and Rote and Solor in Nusa Tenggara Timur, would be extensively surveyed if they were crucial allies or were important components in the economic system. Still others, such as Papua, Alor and Lombok, would merit a mention in the reports now and then, and the same goes for trading connectivities which went on beyond the control of the Company. As the present writer experienced in the course of research for a book on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Lombok, the archival pieces will have to be located fragment by fragment in a time-consuming search through the archive bundles.⁹

However, the historiography of pre-modern eastern Indonesia should not be equated with the study of European sources. Although most of the region can be termed poor in terms of indigenous writings, there were also centres of literary production, especially where Hinduism and Islam had gained ground. Furthermore there was a limited output of indigenous texts in Latin letters in areas that came under Christian (Catholic and Protestant) influence, such as Timor.

Lombok falls into a tradition of historical and literary writings with strong parallels to Bali, to which it was politically tied for long periods from at least c. 1600 until the colonial conquest in 1894. A large number of Old Javanese and Balinese manuscripts were preserved on the island; one may mention the fourteenth-century *Nagarakrtagama* (the title used now for this text is *Deśavarṇana*) which is widely regarded as an Indonesian national treasure. But texts were also produced by the original Sasak population, including religious Islamic writings and historical or pseudo-historical texts (*babad*). The richness of the literature of Lombok has been surveyed and catalogued by Geoffrey Marrison (1994). To the east of Lombok, Sumbawa was traditionally divided into six minor states which were subjugated by Makassar in 1618-26 and formally Islamized. While it might be less literarily prominent than Lombok, recent research has unveiled a corpus of mythical, religious and historical writings, especially in Bima in the eastern part of the island; one should mention the efforts of Henri Chambert-Loir (1982; 1985) and Siti Maryam Salahudin (2007) in publishing or cataloguing this material. Going further to the east, literati in the early Muslim centres in Maluku such as Ternate, Tidore, Bacan and Hitu evidently wrote texts, including histories. Much of this seems to have vanished due to negligence or climatic reasons. As the colonial official and historian Willem Coolhaas wrote:

8. Irwin 1965.

9. Hägerdal 2001.

“The sultans of Bacan were in possession of a rather extensive collection of pieces of relevance for their little kingdom: contracts with the Company, with the British Rule and with the Government, genealogies of the Moluccan princely families, descriptions of marriages and *adat* ceremonies. Were, unfortunately, since not much is left of these pieces. Usually the imam-secretary was in charge of preserving these pieces. The person who carried this office during the last 25 years of the nineteenth century was so careless with the papers that, when he stepped down, there was little more left of the entire collection than a confused mass of paper, almost entirely eaten by white ants.”¹⁰

All this begs the question of how to make use of non-textual sources to enrich our understanding of historical processes when the written word fails us. For large parts of eastern Indonesia there are simply no indigenous texts before the twentieth century. Societies on Flores, Sumba, Alor, Halmahera, Aru, Kei, Papua, etc. were characterized by small-scale communities where world religions crept in slowly and piecemeal and genealogical precedence was more important than conventional political hierarchy. The importance of origins and the maintenance of the status of genealogical groups nevertheless gave rise to a lively oral historiography which sometimes can be compared with written or archaeological data.¹¹ This material has been increasingly used by researchers, although not primarily by those whose principal affiliation is history. There are likewise important bridges to linguistics, archaeology and anthropology. The great multitude of languages even in geographically limited areas (fifteen on Alor, fourteen on the Aru Islands, and so on) makes it worthwhile to trace migrations and cultural contacts via comparative methods and the study of loan-words. Archaeological research in this part of Indonesia is still in infancy and it goes without saying that the region lacks the monumental architecture of the central and western parts of the Archipelago. There are nevertheless patterns of graves, stone fortresses, etc. which have just begun to attract serious attention and may be compared to other data. The researcher may also make use of anthropological findings that give clues to societal changes in the past, for example by noting issues of precedence and dualistic classification in a local community.

With this background I will survey the trends of historical scholarship on eastern Indonesia since the emergence of academic research, moving forward roughly chronologically.

Documentation and Colonial Conquest

Given the importance of securing a monopoly of the spice trade, it does not come as a surprise that Maluku looms large in the first major work to summarize the Dutch East Indian endeavour, François Valentijn’s *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indien* (1724-1726). Among the mass of data filling the enormous

10. Coolhaas 1923: 474. My translation.

11. Hägerdal (ed.) 2011: 1-8.

tomes, Valentijn traces Maluku history from the prism of Ternate, the most important spice sultanate, from legendary beginnings centuries before the European arrival until the heyday of the VOC. The colonial power relations forming the basis of his multi-volume work are obvious, but he nevertheless shows an intention to tell a story that is not necessarily centred on European persons and dispositions. His work contrasts with a publication that appeared six years later, the Portuguese *Historia de S. Domingos* (1733), based on Dominican missionary reports. Part of the work dealt with Portuguese and Catholic exploits in the Solor Islands and Timor. While the chronicle contained some valuable pieces of information about indigenous societies, the narrative was entirely subordinated to a vision of Christian dissemination under the Portuguese colonial project, written with an enthusiastic verve and studded with miraculous events that confirmed who was in the right and who were the baddies (Dutchmen, Muslims). While Valentijn gathered chunks of East Indian information into a somewhat amorphous complex, *Historia de S. Domingos* conveyed an idea of Lusitanian heroism and missionary progress among the ethnic groups of Solor and Timor.

In a way these two variants are typical for early historiography about eastern Indonesia, far into the twentieth century. The collector who retells or prints the material he has gathered, and the narrator who arranges his materials around European-led progress. The hefty issues of the Dutch periodicals of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, referred to above, contained both. At the same time it must be stressed that the output of historical writings was relatively small during the colonial period, in spite of a sizeable amount of ethnographic and geographical studies and published travel accounts. As everywhere in the colonial world of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, colonial officials – residents, controleurs, military officials – had a great role in publishing local studies.¹²

To the documentary type belong mere translations of the comparatively few written indigenous texts from the area, such as Petrus van der Crab's translation of Naïdah's chronicle of Ternate (1878). Eastern Indonesia also loomed large in a few multi-volume works containing printed archival pieces of interest for the construction of colonial history. Among the more useful was Pieter Tiele's and Jan Heeres' *Bouwstoffen voor de geschiedenis der Nederlanders in den Maleischen Archipel* (three volumes, 1886-95) which includes numerous original reports from the Dutch possessions in Solor, Timor, Ternate, Banda, and Ambon in the seventeenth century. The very title shows what it was about: building materials which were not primarily intended to illuminate indigenous societies but rather the Dutch enterprise. Nevertheless this and other series, such as *Corpus diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum* (1907-55) and *Dagh-Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia* (1887-

12. For instance, De Clercq 1890, and Van Suchtelen 1921.

1931) are immensely useful to this day and will save the researcher of the East Indonesian past many archival woes.

A few intrepid souls attempted to write master narratives that set out a historical chronology and traced the roots of colonial rule in the eastern regions. Success varied considerably. The somewhat idiosyncratic missionary Geerloff Heijmering wrote a lengthy account of the Dutch establishment on Timor, the title of which revealed the tentative nature of the project, "Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van Timor" (*Tijdschrift van Nederlandsch Indië* 1847). Most of his statements do not stand up to strict critical scrutiny, but his study has a principal interest for the use he made of local oral traditions. Very few people took care to record the rich historical traditions of non-literate societies in the region in the nineteenth century, making his text valuable to compare with oral data recorded in more recent times. A different approach was taken by Frederik de Clercq who presented a plain historical chronology in his *Bijdragen tot de kennis der Residentie Ternate* (1890), essentially a collection of data with very little analysis.

An unending series of armed conflicts marked the progress of the Dutch colonial state, in particular with the implementation of control in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some of these evoked attention among the Dutch public and inspired historical studies to trace the background of the encounter. In eastern Indonesia the Lombok War of 1894 was such an event. The passions that the brief war aroused in Dutch media directly inspired two important studies, Willem Bijvanck's "Onze betrekkingen tot Lombok" (*Indische Gids* 1894-95) and Wouter Cool's *De Lombok expeditie* (1896), the latter containing verbose historical and ethnographic descriptions and a multitude of rare illustrations. Both are interesting for the use they made of VOC sources, generally hard to locate when it comes to islands where there were no colonial outposts. Their hostile view of the Balinese rule on Lombok, their slightly ironical edge, and the non-use of indigenous sources, nevertheless detract from their usefulness as pieces of research. Colonial expansion was also what directly motivated Antonie Haga to publish a two-volume survey about Dutch affairs with Papua and the Papuan Islands, *Nederlandsch Nieuw Guinea en de Papoesche eilanden* (1884), at a time when it was essential for the Dutch colonial state to stake a claim in these easternmost quarters. For later generations of scholars the work has been a mine of information about Dutch-Malukan-Papuan relations.

A factor of some historiographical importance is the improvement in education of the Dutch *bestuursambtenaren*. As investigated in detail by Cees Fasseur, the authorities increasingly took care to provide future officials training in language and ethnography during the later stages of the colonial era.¹³

13. Fasseur 1993.

To draw up extensive reports on local conditions in a residency or division belonged to the duties of a colonial headman, and they sometimes contained extensive ethnographic and historical descriptions that went far beyond what was formally required, and bore witness to an intellectual curiosity about the cultures they encountered in the areas assigned to them. The bulk of these reports were not published. Detailed histories of the *zelfbesturende landschappen* of Sumba, Flores, West Timor, etc. remain hidden in the Nationaal Archief. Some of the more interesting pieces formed the bases for publications, however, such as B.C.C.M.M. van Suchtelen's hefty volume *Endeh (Flores)* (1921) which contained a historical part among all the geographical details.

While the historiography of Maluku, Papua and Nusa Tenggara was meager in comparison with that of Java and Sumatra, the one part of eastern maritime Southeast Asia that belonged to another colonial power was the subject of a considerable output of bona fide historical research. This was Portuguese East Timor, where Europeans were established since at least the early seventeenth century, and was the only remainder of the Portuguese possessions in Southeast Asia. The former governor Affonso de Castro set an example with his influential *As possessões portuguesas na Oceania* (1867), written at a time when Portuguese rule, as he himself put it, was no more than fiction. The work had a clear utilitarian purpose since it referred to the Dutch methods of engineering profit as a possible way forward on Timor. But his study was also based on archival research which established a chronological narrative of Timorese history since the seventeenth century and became paradigmatic. As common in much Portuguese historiography he took care to print key documents in an appendix. De Castro's book was, for a long time, the only major work on the Timorese past. It was only under the Estado Novo (1933-74), with its exaltation of the Portuguese overseas enterprise and historical mission, that a number of historical studies were published. They tended to focus on the early-modern era. Among the more important were A. Faria de Moraes, *Subsídios para a historia de Timor* (1934), Humberto Leitão, *Os portugueses em Solor e Timor de 1515 a 1702* (1948), and Luna de Oliveira, *Timor na história de Portugal*, Vol. 1-3 (1949-52). All were heavily empiricist and not always academically successful. The perspective was the Lisbon interpretation of history, and the authors almost exclusively used Portuguese sources. The lack of knowledge of Dutch historiography, and the ignorance of local historical tradition, gave them a quite insular character. Nevertheless, the Portuguese output on Timor has often proved useful for later researchers since the works include large numbers of printed archival pieces. The only non-Portuguese to write substantially about East Timorese history was the well-known British writer Charles Ralph Boxer who published a brief but classic study of an influential mestizo group on the island, *The Topasses of Timor* (1947).

Lineages of the Nation

The Revolution of 1945-49 and the formation of an Indonesian unitary state in 1950 fundamentally changed the preconditions for writing local or regional history. Dutch *bestuursambtenaren* were repatriated and new ones were obviously not trained, with the exception of Papua which remained in Dutch hands until 1962. Clearly, this caused a general downturn in cultural studies of Indonesia, if not qualitatively then at least in quantity. The eastern parts of the island nation were seldom visited by Western scholars, and educated Indonesians could still not quite fill the role of the old colonial *Indologen*. Knowledge of Dutch, the language of much of the source material, was discouraged, which inevitably had consequences for the production of new historical research. Moreover, the Indonesian nation, being born out of anti-colonial struggle, fostered a historiography that was plainly Indonesia-centric and streamlined a complicated and multifaceted past into a central narrative.¹⁴ Its effort to erase competing stories also affected the occurrence of local studies.

As far as the present writer has found, very little Indonesian research about eastern Indonesian history was produced during the first democratic era (1949-57) and the Guided Democracy era (1957-66). A ponderous exception was Elvianus Katoppo's well-crafted study of the Tidorese rebel and sultan Nuku (1738-1805), *Nuku, Sulthan Saidul Djehad Muhammad el Mabus Amirudin Sjah, Kaitjil Paparangan, Sulthan Tidore* (1957) which combined a nationalist perspective with serious archival research. It was only with the advent of the New Order after 1966 that histories of individual Indonesian regions were again written to a degree. Characteristically, however, the most visible examples were state-produced series of books, often published by the Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan (Department of Education and Culture) and written by teams of authors. For Nusa Tenggara Timur we have titles such as *Sejarah Daerah Nusa Tenggara Timur* (1978), *Sejarah kebangkitan nasional Daerah Nusa Tenggara Timur* (1979), and *Sejarah perlawanan terhadap imperialisme dan kolonialisme di Nusa Tenggara Timur* (1982). We may take a look at the first-mentioned work. The layout of the *Sejarah Daerah Nusa Tenggara Timur* is somewhat mechanical with a periodization which in effect follows colonial historiography in the successive chapters. Moreover, the presentation of the general aims of the book gives little doubt about the perspective:

1. Save the national culture.
2. Build up the performance and development of the national culture.
3. Build up the endurance of the national culture.
4. Strengthen the identity of the people.¹⁵

14. Suwignyo 2014: 115.

15. *Sejarah Daerah* 1978: 1. My translation.

As common with Indonesian textbooks in history there is an emphasis on the anti-colonial struggle from the time of the coming of the Europeans. Numerous names and dates are provided over the pages, frequently misspelled and incorrect—a result of the indirect access that the authors have had to Western research volumes. The Japanese occupation (1942-45) and the Revolution (1945-49) are given prominent place though perhaps less so than in many comparable textbooks, maybe as a consequence of the lack of physical struggle against the Dutch in this part of Indonesia. On the other hand, it is not merely a history of political developments. The chapters contain sections on society, culture, and ideas, often drawn from anthropological studies. Ethnographic data collected during the last century by scholars such as Paul Arndt and James Fox are used to flesh out the pre-historical era, however without discussing the methodological hazards.

Of individual works on eastern Indonesia, a few studies did surface during the New Order. Indonesians with a background as colonial officials or assistants to Western researchers had a part in this. The Rotenese Yacob Y. Detaq, who served as *bestuursassistent* on Savu in the 1930s, wrote *Memperkenalkan kebudayaan suku bangsa Sawu* (1973), which, although basically an ethnographic work, discussed historical-genealogical tradition on the small island. More explicitly historical in scope was *Sumba di dalam jangkauan jaman* (1976) by Umbu Hina Kapita, who was the assistant to the Dutch scholar Louis Onvlee for many years (1928-50). This was a pioneer work which made use of both indigenous oral data and Western materials to picture the historical course of Sumba. There were also the inevitable works about anti-colonial heroes. Among the hundred or so official *pahlawan nasional* in Soeharto times, a tiny few originated from the islands east of Bali, such as the Ambonese Pattimura (1783-1817), Sultan Nuku of Tidore (1738-1805), and the Papuan Frans Kasiepo (1921-79). Naturally these tended to be Christians rather than Muslims as the great majority of the heroes were; and the way they were presented, as having proto-nationalistic or nationalistic agendas, fitted well into the religiously inclusive Pancasila ideology.¹⁶ A plethora of booklets surfaced, often intended for young readers. However, no national hero from the newly occupied East Timor was ever proclaimed and historical writings about this recalcitrant Catholic province remained scanty.

A Fresh Look into the Archives

The pre-WWII scholarship of Southeast Asian history was characterized by a tendency to view the past of this region as shaped by external influences, and also by a compartmentalization with little incentive to regard the region as a

¹⁶ It should however be recalled that this inclusiveness did not extend to ancestral religions, which were still strong in eastern Indonesia in some areas, and are denounced as not being bona fide religions.

whole.¹⁷ However, these conventions were challenged in the post-war era. With the development of specialized research centers, the old Dutch scholarship of Indonesia was increasingly supplemented by American, Australian, German, French, and British efforts, especially from the 1970s. The forced stability of Indonesia during the New Order facilitated travel even to remote places in Nusa Tenggara, Maluku and Papua. Also, the traditionally Java/Batavia-centric view of Indonesia's past was challenged by studies of local dynamics in the outer regions. The trading routes of pre-modern Indonesia had been charted by work of early scholars such as Bertram Schrieke (posthumously published as *Indonesian Sociological Studies*, 1955-57) and Antoinette Petronella Meilink-Roelofs (*Asian Trade and European Influences in the Indonesian Archipelago between 1500 and about 1630*, 1962). Both discussed trade flows east of Bali in terms that were not only centered on the European enterprise. A new generation of predominantly Anglo-Saxon scholars followed in their lead by mastering the old Dutch language and posing new questions to the colonial archive. The enormously detailed information preserved from even minor VOC posts such as Banda, Ternate, and Ambon was enticing.

In his popular work *Indonesian Banda* (1978), the American writer Willard Hanna remarked that “[t]he Moluccas have almost been ignored in recent times even by writers of travel books and fiction” and that Indonesian scholars had merely produced a few highly derivative studies of the region.¹⁸ However, the 1980s saw some important additions.¹⁹ The Indonesian historian Adrian B. Lopian (1984) began to explore the traditional territorial divisions of the northern sultanates of Maluku, and a similar theme was taken up by Christiaan van Fraassen in his comprehensive but unfortunately unpublished Ph.D. thesis *Ternate, de Molukken en de Indonesische Archipel* (1987). From a very detailed reading of Dutch colonial sources van Fraassen combined a historical study of the Ternate Sultanate with a comprehensive investigation of the territorial unit *soa* found in northern Maluku, a task that required over 1,200 pages of text. Shortly after, in an interesting concurrence, two further works on the northern spice sultanates were published. These were a popular survey by Willard Hanna and Des Alwi, *Turbulent Times Past in Ternate and Tidore* (1990), and a scholarly work by the prolific Leonard Y. Andaya, *The world of Maluku* (1993). Andaya, who had previously studied the Malay world and South Sulawesi in the early-modern era, based his study of the sultanates on VOC *dagregisters* and other Dutch and Portuguese archival documents, covering

17. Legge 1992: 4-6.

18. Hanna 1978: 154.

19. The community of Maluku people, in particular Ambonese, who came to the Netherlands in the wake of the independence of Indonesia, made efforts to preserve their heritage and history in museums and cultural events, and also issued a number of historical Dutch-language works; see for instance Soei Liong Liem 1988.

the period from the eve of the European arrival to the early nineteenth century. He structured his investigation around the clash between the discursive worlds of the Maluku elite and the European colonizers which eventually ushered in the revolt of Nuku in about 1800.²⁰

Andaya's study was followed by several others of the precolonial and colonial periods which employed a critical reading of colonial sources to reconstruct indigenous structures or analyze the colonial-indigenous encounter. Of Dutch efforts one may mention Gerrit Knaap's studies of the early Malukan port town Ambon, founded in 1576. These include "A city of migrants: Kota Ambon at the end of the seventeenth century" (*Indonesia* 1991) and *Kruidnagelen en Christenen* (2004). Knaap built further on a rising interest for early colonial ports, in turn connected with increasing attention to maritime history, and showed in detail how a small VOC city followed a European organizational layout but was by and by adapted to the Southeast Asian context. The archives, while written from a supreme European viewpoint, revealed patterns of marriages, legal affairs, division of responsibilities, the status of slaves, and ethnic interaction, what postcolonial scholars would term contact zones and hybridity. Indonesian scholars have recently begun to explore political agendas that went on beyond the control of the Dutch but can still be followed via the colonial sources. In his work *Halmahera Timur dan Raja Jailolo* (1996), R.Z. Leirissa explored the dynamics of the fourfold political division in northern Maluku, focusing on the revivalism associated with the long-defunct Jailolo kingdom in Halmahera which challenged Dutch rule in the nineteenth century. This revivalism also played a role in Muridan Widjojo's book *The Revolt of Prince Nuku* (2009) which continued the line of inquiry started by Katoppo and Andaya and re-explored the trajectory of the reputable Tidorese ruler. From a fresh study of the VOC documents, an intricate story was unearthed about relations and encounters between Tidorese, Ternateans, Seramese, Papuans, Dutch and Britons, assessed against a background of social relations and economic networks.²¹ The prematurely deceased Muridan Widjojo was trained in the Dutch TANAP programme in Leiden which introduced a new generation of Asian historians to the Dutch language and colonial archival resources.

The literate cultures of Lombok and Sumbawa likewise received fresh attention in the last decades of the twentieth century. Alfons van der Kraan published a detailed study of the transformation of Lombok from Balinese to

20. Differences in interpretation of the political, ideological and cultural structures of Maluku society between van Fraassen and Andaya resulted in a critical scholarly debate; see especially Reid 1995.

21. As for (West) Papua, it has mainly been treated in the context of its relations with Maluku in historical research. A rather subjective account of its modern history has been written by the journalist Dirk Vlasblom (2004).

Dutch rule, *Lombok; Conquest, Colonization, and Underdevelopment, 1870-1940* (1980). The work drew some criticism for its way of handling economic data, but was nevertheless a pioneering effort to explore the unfortunate effects of colonial rule on a little-known island that had so far been the subject of very few historical writings. Van der Kraan initially held a quite critical view of Hindu-Balinese rule over the Sasak majority population before 1894 which was modified in some of his later work. The process of Balinese penetration in Lombok in the early-modern period was explored by the present writer in the monograph *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Lombok and Bali in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (2001). The study took advantage of scattered VOC references in combination with a reevaluation of Balinese and Sasak historiography to draw a picture of the intricate power struggles on the island from the 1670s to the 1740s, and discussed possible cultural explanations for the unusual arrangement of a Hindu minority ruling a Muslim majority.

The past of Sumbawa was not entirely untouched by local scholars during the New Order Era. The two foremost sultanates on the island found their chroniclers with Lalu Manca, *Sumbawa pada masa lalu* (1984) and H. Abdullah Tajib, *Sejarah Bima Dana Mbojo* (1995). Both of them employed indigenous written sources, giving a reign-to-reign account of the respective sultanates coupled with extensive traditional accounts of the introduction of Islam and the flow of *adat* governance. The information does not always accord with Western sources, but here lies part of its value. Being members of the local elites, the authors use manuscripts and information otherwise inaccessible that gives other perspectives than those of the colonial archive or travel accounts. Of Western researchers the long-time director of the KITLV, Jacobus Noorduyn, elaborated on the historical connections between Sumbawa and the Bugis-Makassar of South Sulawesi in his article "Makassar and the Islamization of Bima" (*Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 1987). The impact of the huge volcanic eruption of Tambora in 1815 is traced by Bernice de Jong Boers, "Mount Tambora in 1815: A volcanic eruption in Indonesia and its aftermath" (*Indonesia* 1995) which explains the far-reaching ecological and demographic consequences of the disaster.

Finally we should not forget the impressive footwork done by a number of scholars to publish colonial, missionary and indigenous manuscripts in the last decades. Noorduyn edited and footnoted a few unpublished Dutch pieces of historical and archaeological relevance in *Bima en Sumbawa* (1987b). Henri Chambert-Loir has edited a long series of historical and legendary texts from the eastern sultanate Bima, including *Syair Kerajaan Bima* (1982), *Cerita asal bangsa jin dan segala dewa-dewa* (1985), and *Bo' Sangaji Kai* (with Siti Maryam R. Salahuddin, 1999). Of European sources the missionary effort has been documented in some detail. In the possibly most monumental enterprise, *Documenta Malucensia I-III* (1974-84), the Jesuit Hubert Jacobs collected

materials from the Catholic mission in Maluku in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, with introductions and English summaries. Dutch colonial reports have also found their editors; one may mention Gerrit Knaap's *Memories van Overgave van gouverneurs van Ambon in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw* (1987), and *Kontrak perjanjian wilayah perbatasan Republik Indonesia, Jilid II: Wilayah Laut Andaman, Selat Malaka, Laut Sawu, Timor* (2007). The latter was published by the Indonesian National Archive and had an obviously utilitarian purpose, to historically anchor the sea borders of Indonesia.

The East Timor Issue and its Consequences

There is no denying that the titles mentioned so far have had a very limited audience.²² While traveling to eastern Indonesia became easier in the backpacker boom in the heyday of the New Order, the interests of the Western visitors and armchair travelers lay in other matters than history. However, there was an event of international ramifications that turned the eyes of the world on this part of Southeast Asia. The Indonesian invasion of East Timor in November 1975, after twelve days of independence, evoked reaction from human rights groups, journalists, and intellectuals in the West. Although the issue was limited compared to many other political crises in Asia in the late twentieth century, the brutal and genocidal aspects of the occupation led to the creation of East Timor groups in a number of countries. A large number of studies and reports surfaced, by journalists, activists, and scholars. Sometimes they contained historical perspectives though not written by trained historians, such as John Taylor's *Indonesia's Forgotten War: The Hidden History of East Timor* (1991), and Gudmund Jannisa's *The Crocodile's Tears: East Timor in the Making* (1997), both authored by social scientists.

As the East Timor issue received new attention after the Santa Cruz Massacre of 1991 and the country slid towards secession from Indonesia in the late 1990s, studies with a deeper historical perspective began to appear. A number of general surveys of the East Timorese past were published, such as Geoffrey Gunn, *Timor Lorosae: 500 years* (1999), Frédéric Durand, *East Timor, a Country at the Crossroads of Asia and the Pacific: A Geo-Historical Atlas* (2006), and Andrea Molnar, *Timor-Leste: Politics, History, and Culture* (2010). None of these provided much that was new in terms of historical sources before the 1970s but rather offered much-needed syntheses of the existing literature, including old inaccessible works in Portuguese.²³

22. This is perhaps the place to mention a work that did become a best-seller. Giles Milton's book *Nathaniel's nutmeg* (1999) depicts the struggle between the English and Dutch in the East Indies, culminating in the dramatic events in Banda and Ambon in the early 1620s. The work, belonging to the category of popular history, is based on a somewhat selective reading of sources and employs a strongly pro-English perspective.

23. In this context one may also mention Durand's survey of cartography and travel writings related to Timor (2006b).

But interest in the roots of colonialism on Timor also made for a concurrence of specialized studies. The origins of the Portuguese and Dutch interests in Timor were researched by Arend de Roever, *De jacht op sandelhout* (2002) who focused on the Asian sandalwood trade which gave the otherwise unprofitable Timor a role in the struggle for commercial hegemony. Similarly the present author studied European-Timorese encounters during the early-modern period in the monograph *Lords of the Land, Lords of the Sea* (2012), using a combination of Dutch and Portuguese documents, and oral tradition. Studies of hitherto neglected groups such as women, slaves, and the Chinese minority have also been published in the last years.²⁴ Even before that an avid interest in the nature of colonialism in this part of Asia surfaced. Within the span of two years no less than three works focused on the full implementation of Portuguese rule from the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century: Katharine Davidson, *The Portuguese Colonization of Timor: The Final Stage, 1850-1912* (Ph.D. thesis, 1994), Monica Schlicher, *Portugal in Ost-Timor: Eine kritische Untersuchung zur portugiesischen Kolonialgeschichte in Ost-Timor, 1850 bis 1912* (1996), and René Pélissier, *Timor en guerre: Le crocodile et les Portugais (1847-1913)* (1996). A little later Steven Farram complemented this with a comprehensive investigation of the other half of the island, *Political History of West Timor, 1901-1967* (2010). This was a pioneering effort, not only in tracing the Dutch colonial period from archival reports but also in elucidating aspects of the post-Merdeka history of eastern Indonesia, including the infamous mass killings of 1965-67. The social and political history of outlying regions after 1949 has often been hard to study due to the lack of regular archival materials; for example, the provincial archive in Kupang on West Timor burned down in the 1960s. Facing the lack of written documentation, Gerry van Klinken of the KITLV used oral history methods when writing an urban history of Kupang, *The Making of Middle Indonesia: Middle Classes in Kupang Town, 1930-1975* (2014).²⁵

Portuguese studies on Timorese history entered a long hiatus after the magisterial but highly empiricist standard work *Timor Português 1515-1769* by Artur Teodoro de Matos (1974). The post-independence era has nevertheless seen a renewed interest in the subject. De Matos's task was continued by Fernando Augusto de Figueiredo in *Timor: A presença Portuguesa (1769-1945)* (2011) which provided a systematic survey of administration, economy, society, education, and geopolitical developments during the period under scrutiny. The work drew from an enormous range of archival and published sources, however without the benefit of non-Portuguese historical and anthropological studies. Perhaps the most innovative contribution was

24. Lombard-Jourdan and Salmon 1998; Hägerdal 2010; Kammen 2012.

25. For a recent Indonesian employment of oral history methods to elucidate the 1965-67 killings in NTT, including a gender perspective, see also Kolimon 2012.

Ricardo Roque's *Headhunting and Colonialism* (2010). The author strove to gain a deeper understanding of Timorese-Portuguese relations in the colonial era by applying the concept of mutual parasitism, a process where colonizer and colonized used the capabilities of each other to further their ends. Roque's approach touches an issue to which we shall now turn: the crossbreeding between history and anthropology.

Anthropological Challenges

While historical work on eastern Indonesia was very restricted until the 1990s, the picture is rosier with regard to anthropology. The comparatively slow pace of change of social structures made places like Sumba, Flores, and pre-invasion East Timor attractive destinations for researchers. Systems of symbolic classification and kinship structures in the small-scale societies inspired a steady output of books and Ph.D. theses. In the long run this had consequences for history writing as well. The similarities between anthropology and academic history have been duly noted by anthropologists like E. E. Evans-Pritchard, an observation which is highly valid for eastern Indonesia.²⁶ Anthropological perspectives played a role for the works of Christiaan van Fraassen (1987) and Leonard Andaya (1993), referred above. Conversely, some anthropologists took an intense interest in the depth that the archival materials might give to the societies they studied. The former official Herman Schulte Nordholt, applying methods of structural anthropology, used colonial reports and published historical accounts to elucidate the structure of the indigenous polities in West Timor up to the twentieth century in *The Political System of the Atoni of Timor* (1971). This comprehensive work has remained important for the understanding of the small-scale political units of eastern Indonesia by highlighting their adherence to structural principles (male-female, cardinal directions, quadripartition, precedence of houses and lineages, etc.). Even more historical in character was James J. Fox's classic study *Harvest of the Palm* (1977), which traced the ecological, social and even political history of Rote and Savu from prehistoric times to the modern era. Fox ingeniously used a combination of oral sources, written documents and observations of contemporary geography and society to work his way back in time and highlight the agency of two minor island populations. He also made selective but purposeful forays into the VOC sources, which give detailed information about these small islands. Fox's students have continued his task, writing theses about societies in Nusa Tenggara Timur with a partly historicizing perspective.²⁷

²⁶ Barnes 2013: 2.

²⁷ See in the first place McWilliam 2002, and Therik 2004.

Anthropology has also informed the historiography of the islands to the north of Timor. The Lamaholot world (East Flores, Solor, Adonara, and Lembata) have in particular been studied by Robert H. Barnes of Oxford University. Apart from anthropological studies of the cultures of Lembata, Barnes has published a long series of studies on the history of Larantuka and the Solor Islands, based on a thorough investigation of the VOC missives and later colonial reports; these studies have partly been collected in the volume *Excursions into Eastern Indonesia* (2013). Stefan Dietrich is another author who has blended anthropological and historical analysis, notably in *Kolonialismus und Mission auf Flores (ca. 1900-1942)* (1989), which is considerably broader in scope than the title suggests. A third example is Douglas Lewis, whose *The stranger kings of Sikka* (2010) investigated historiographical traditions of a traditional kingdom on Flores where legends involving the Portuguese loomed large, and highlighted the role of local elites in marriage exchange systems in the area.

Oral tradition has been a subject of scholarly interest in much of the work in the intersection between history and anthropology. The lack of written documentation in large areas of eastern Indonesia means that political structures and commercial relations beyond the colonial or missionary spheres of interest are exceedingly difficult to pinpoint. At the same time the detailed Dutch documentation in colonial outposts such as Kupang and Ternate makes for excellent opportunities to compare written and oral imprint and see how non-written tradition develops in relation to chronologically ascertained data. So far some of the most penetrating studies have focused on Nusa Tenggara Timur. Again James J. Fox set an early example with his study "A Rotinese Dynastic Genealogy: Structure and Events" (1971) which discussed the case of Termanu, a principedom on Rote. Fox later contributed to a multi-disciplinary volume which took up the role and dynamics of tradition from a number of angles, *Tradition, Identity, and History-Making in Eastern Indonesia* (ed. Hägerdal 2011). From workshops, conferences and scholarly networks it nowadays appears that historians, anthropologists, linguists and archaeologists have been able to join forces in regions where the archival records quite simply do not suffice.

The Post-Soeharto Proliferation of Local Studies

As apparent from this article, studies by local historians have been relatively rare in eastern Indonesia due to a combination of factors. The pronounced national frame of the history discourse, the insufficient training of historians at local universities, language problems, and lack of access to libraries and archives contributed to this. It is perhaps significant that two of the most ambitious projects were carried out by Balinese scholars of the relatively well-endowed Udayana University in Denpasar, who wrote their Ph.D. theses at

Western universities in the waning days of Soeharto. I Gde Parimartha's thesis covered economic and political history and was published as *Perdagangan dan politik di Nusa Tenggara 1815-1915* (2002). Parimartha, being inspired by the work of James Warren about the Sulu zone, explored the hitherto relatively ignored economic networks of the middle colonial period, showed how it fit into the flows of the world market, and identified five different local trading zones in the Nusa Tenggara region. Simultaneously with this I Ketut Ardhana wrote what was in effect a continuation of sorts, *Nusa Tenggara nach Einrichtung der Kolonialherrschaft 1915 bis 1950* (2000). Ardhana followed the development of Dutch implemented rule in Nusa Tenggara, in fact relating the course of events long before 1915 in spite of the title. In this he drew on theories of imperialism formulated by scholars such as John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, who emphasized the importance of conditions in Africa (and by implication Asia), to explain the stages of colonial rule, rather than just focusing on European dispositions. Translated to the eastern Indonesian example the colonial authorities tended to wield influence by indirect means until the local inner situation motivated a more active policy around the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The end of Soeharto's authoritarian rule and the demise of the New Order system in 1998 soon made for interesting historiographical consequences. In the next year the Habibie government initiated a new policy of regional autonomy which began to be implemented in 2001. Formally it transformed one of the most centralized systems of the world into one of the most decentralized. One aspect of this was to allow for more *muatan lokal* (local content) in the school curriculum. All this gave rise to new debates about what characteristics of local and regional history to emphasize. A large number of texts have been published in the twenty-first century, partly by teams of writers with an official or semi-official mission. This is in particular the case with Nusa Tenggara Timur, a largely Christian province without early bona fide states or written indigenous historiography; quite possibly this is related to the anxieties following the initial turbulence of post-Soeharto Indonesia. The originally Javanese Munandjar Widiyatmika, based in Kupang, has been active in this field with titles such as *Lintasan sejarah bumi cendana* (2007) and *Kupang dalam kanca persaingan hegemoni kolonial tahun 1653-1917* (2010). These works are compilations based on scattered Western data, some previously unpublished, and may not offer significantly new analyses of the course of history. However, they testify to an increasing interest from the public to know their own history and question, if not the idea of Indonesia, then at least the Indonesia-centric discourse prevalent in the New Order. Not least the Christianization of large parts of eastern Indonesia from the sixteenth century to the present has prompted questions about the religious dynamics.²⁸

28. Gregorius Neonbasu, Kupang, personal communication, February 2014.

Considering the traumatic passage to independence, one might have expected intellectuals in Timor-Leste to have come up with a body of historical studies. What has surfaced so far, however, is somewhat limited. The frugal conditions of the new nation have not been conducive to fresh studies. Archival sources are only found abroad and the analysis of oral tradition, which could yield interesting results, is still in its infancy. Apart from a number of publications about the freedom struggle before 1999, the most ambitious attempts have been those of the Nobel Prize winner Bishop Belo. In two detailed volumes, *Os antigos reinos de Timor-Leste* (2013) and *História da igreja em Timor-Leste* (Vol I, 2013) the bishop has charted two institutional features that lie at the heart of East Timorese history: the traditional ruling structures in units called *reinos* (“kingdoms”), and the role of the Catholic church. His material largely consists of published works, mainly in Portuguese, which neatly illustrates the postcolonial dilemma facing the student of Timor’s past: how do we conceive a history that has left few written traces apart from those of the colonizers or occupants?

Conclusion

As apparent from this brief survey, the scholarly writing of the history of eastern Indonesia has long roots, back to the days of the Iberian chroniclers and François Valentijn. The Dutch colonial state after 1816 saw an output of some consequence, though quite limited compared to the interest devoted to the major kingdoms of Java and Sumatra, or to the development of colonial rule in more profitable parts of the Archipelago. Unlike central and western Indonesia, the pre-European world before 1500 did not easily lend itself to conventional studies, which almost by necessity gave history writing a colonial and Euro-centric slant. The region seemed to be lacking in autonomy and agency.²⁹ With the demise of colonial rule and the rise of the Indonesia-centric historiography, very little new historical research was carried out about this part of Indonesia. However, the new wave of interest for the Southeast Asian past in the 1960s and 1970s, and the proliferation of anthropological studies in small-scale and socially “conservative” societies in the same period, ultimately gave results. New methods of using colonial materials to elucidate indigenous structures combined a sound empirical basis with inspiration drawn from other disciplines, particularly anthropology. Correspondingly, several anthropologists have written studies with a historical perspective, highlighting observed social and political structures with analyses of archival source materials and discussions about the role of oral tradition. The international interest in the region engendered by the East Timor issue after 1975 was also a factor that in the long run inspired historical studies of the colonial and pre-colonial past. In sum, the last few decades have seen considerable efforts

29. Cf. Legge 1992: 9.

to address the peculiar problems affecting the study of history in eastern Indonesia, such as the paucity of indigenous written records, the bias of the colonial archive, the ambiguous but important role of oral tradition, and the prejudiced perception of this part of the Archipelago as complementary and lacking of agency in comparison with the colonial and postcolonial power centres. The post-New Order interest in local history and the formation of an East Timorese nation will likely underpin this development. There is no denying that the number of historians working with this part of Southeast Asia is still relatively modest, or that the studies are still often somewhat compartmentalized. However, interest in interdisciplinarity and new ways to scrutinize the sources are expected to yield innovative and surprising perspectives on a region long known as a colonial backwater, eventually reconstructing the role of local societies as autonomous historical subjects.

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