

Geneviève Duggan and Hans Hägerdal, *Savu: History and Oral Tradition on an Island of Indonesia*.

Singapore: NUS Press. 2018, 720 p. ISBN: 978-981-4722-75-9.

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discours complémentaires et en partie contradictoires, dont la combinaison ne constitue pas un ouvrage cohérent ni même complet, mais offre plutôt un instrument de travail, précieux certes, mais qu'il faudra de nouvelles recherches, dans les mêmes sources et dans les archives, pour en faire une véritable « Histoire de Sumbawa ».

Un tel texte hybride pose la singulière question d'en désigner l'auteur. Ce volume est le deuxième présentant des éditions savantes de textes relatifs à l'histoire de Sumbawa dûs à des auteurs néerlandais. Le premier contenait des textes de A. Ligtvoet et G.P. Rouffaer édités par J. Noorduyn en 1987 (voir un compte rendu dans le *BEFEO* 77, 1988). Dans les deux cas, le nom des éditeurs s'est surimposé à celui des auteurs originaux : les textes de base sont ceux de Ligtvoet, Rouffaer et Held, mais les livres sont signés Noorduyn et Hägerdal. Ces deux éditeurs ne sont certes pas à blâmer : l'habitude est prise depuis très longtemps de référencer des textes d'auteurs connus sous le nom de leurs éditeurs, voire leur traducteur. La *Sejarah Melayu* est référencée sous le nom de Shellabear, le *Desavarnana* sous celui de Robson, la *Suma Oriental* sous celui de Cortesão. Il n'en reste pas moins que tous ces ouvrages sont des travaux remarquables, et tel est certes le cas de cette *Histoire de Sumbawa*.

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Geneviève Duggan and Hans Hägerdal, *Savu: History and Oral Tradition on an Island of Indonesia*. Singapore: NUS Press. 2018, 720 p. ISBN: 978-981-4722-75-9.

This lengthy, well-produced, and richly illustrated book concerns the small, geographically remote, ethno-linguistically homogeneous, and relatively impoverished island of Savu, located in eastern Indonesia between the islands of Timor and Sumba. This in itself is a distinctive feature, especially nowadays when such comprehensive works on small-scale non-Western societies are a rarity. But the volume is positively unusual in other respects as well. It is co-written by an anthropologist and a historian. The anthropologist (Duggan) has been conducting ethnographic fieldwork on Savu for the last two decades. The historian (Hägerdal) is a senior scholar with a long record of research mostly concerning eastern Indonesia.

Partly because of its geographical isolation, Savu has received less attention from ethnographers than surrounding, mostly larger islands, and one value of the book is a wealth of ethnographic description and analysis of indigenous institutions and traditions. Nevertheless, the book's primary focus is the history of Savu. The cooperation of an anthropologist and a historian in this historiographic endeavour is made possible by a feature of Savunese

society itself—the creation of long clan and lineage genealogies and oral histories, recited on major occasions and related to such matters as claims to political and ritual offices and land rights. Remarking on the “incredible depth of [Savunese] genealogical memory”, the authors note that “for reasons that are not entirely clear, such genealogical identity is much more precise than in the surrounding island societies” where people are “[s]eldom...able to state the connection [of far shallower lineages] to their ancestors” (p. 425). With the obvious exception of the island of Roti (or Rote), it would therefore be difficult to compose a book of this sort for many other parts of eastern Indonesia.

At the same time, this detailed history of Savu is facilitated by the island’s geographical position, which has allowed the Savunese to play a disproportionate role in the history of European activity in the Timor region and has resulted in the Savunese receiving fairly regular mention in Portuguese and Dutch commercial and colonial reports (including in the second case, the records of the Dutch East India Company). As is revealed throughout, the European sources and Savunese narrative traditions complement, confirm, or correct one another to quite a remarkable degree. Thus the book provides ample testimony to the value of oral history for the study of history in general.

One product of this approach is a demonstration that the Savunese were by no means passive recipients of European influence but were in several respects active agents in commercial and colonial enterprises—taking advantage of opportunities for trade, serving political roles, and providing the Dutch with military services. Relative to other eastern Indonesians, they were also early adopters of literacy, Western-style education, and Christianity. Indeed, Savunese were able to do some “colonizing” of their own, notably in parts of the larger islands of Sumba, Flores, and Timor. This history of Savu thus contributes significantly to an understanding of the wider history, during the last five centuries, of a far larger part of Indonesia. To cite just one specific example, the last three chapters (8 to 10), concerning changes on Savu from the late 19th century to the present, provide an insightful discussion of the process and effects of Christianization in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries that bears useful comparison with what was occurring in other parts of the archipelago during the same period.

It may therefore go without saying that the authors have produced a very substantial book that should appeal to a wider audience than students of Savu or the Timor region. On the other hand, detailed accounts, drawn mostly from indigenous narratives concerning clan histories, local disputes, rivalries, marriages between prominent families, and the like, might prove hard going for all but very specialized readers. Such perhaps is the trade-off with informed and thorough scholarship, and these materials certainly play their part within the whole. By the same token, it is rare nowadays to find a single, sizeable volume comprising such copious literary and ethnographic evidence, and the

National University of Singapore Press is to be congratulated for publishing a work of this kind. Speaking only as an anthropologist, it is additionally pleasing to have a book that performs its advertised task without resort to extraneous “theory” or contrived linkage with trendy paradigms or epistemologies that typically results in slimmer volumes very light on empirical substance.

Perhaps especially for anthropologists, one merit of the book (evidently mainly attributable to Duggan) is its attention to the relatively prominent place of women in Savunese society, including the importance of female genealogical ties in the constitution of descent groups. Savu has long been known for its system of “double unilineal descent”, whereby patrilineal clans and lineages coexist with matrilineal moieties further divided into matrilineal sub-groups. But Savu is by no means unique in this regard. For example, the importance of lineal connection through women, often in the context of otherwise “patrilineal” organization, has been shown in ethnographic accounts dealing with the neighbouring islands of Flores, Sumba, and Timor. Yet none of these other cases is mentioned, so no broader point is made. In the same vein, the statement that “There are no other known cases of female land ownership in the islands surrounding the Savu sea” (p. 366) ignores instances from Flores Island, including the matrilineal Tana ‘Ai (Lewis 1988) and other institutionally more limited uses of matrilineal relationship from central Flores (Forth 2001). This is curious, since Lewis’s book is cited in another connection, as also is my own (p. 211), though it is not listed in the Bibliography.

Possibly connected with this apparent lack of attention to the constitution of neighbouring societies, there are some surprising linguistic inaccuracies. For example, Sumbanese place names are not rendered in their more accurate modern transcriptions, a shortcoming that sometimes reduces clarity (for example, where “Melolo” evidently refers to the eastern Sumbanese domain of Umalulu rather than the nearby Savunese settlement of the first name). There are other inaccuracies, such as when “sea cows” are referred to as “manatees”, whereas for this part of the world the correct reference is necessarily to dugongs (*Dugong dugon*). Still these are relatively minor flaws that do not significantly detract from an otherwise impressive work.

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