Roots of Violence in Indonesia, Freek Colombijn & J. Thomas Lindblad (eds)

Glenn Smith
graced with reproductions of the main protagonists of this embassy and a map showing the places visited by the Siamese ambassadors. The second part (pp. 27-29) is a “Translator’s Note,” detailing how the translator identified obscure proper names and decoded difficult occurrences. The third part (pp. 31-75) is the translation into English of the Diary of Kosa Pan, accompanied by a substantial critical apparatus of 167 footnotes, which enables the authors of the book to display a vast amount of scholarly detail and learning in the interpretation of this sometimes problematic text. The last part (pp. 75-76) is an “Appendix on the Thai Calendar.”

This serious work was elaborated by a Western-Thai team, composed of three scholars: Visudh Busayakul, the author of the original translation into English; Dirk Van der Cruyssse (University of Antwerp), who has introduced and annotated the translation; and Michael Smithies (former editor of the Journal of the Siam Society), who edited all the text in English.

From an historiographical viewpoint, this text is warmly welcome to renew the ‘Eurocentric view’ on this period. Indeed, scholars do not really have sources in Thai about this Siamese embassy – except the manuscript (coded 317) discovered by Predee Phisphumvithi at the Oriental Manuscripts Department (Division des manuscrits orientaux) of the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, entitled Ton Thang Farangset (“The Way to France”) and written in Siamese between 1686 and 1687 by one of the Siamese ambassadors or one of the secretaries of this embassy. So, in order to reconstruct the astonishing flurry of diplomatic exchange between France and Siam during this period, it can be said that this diary can fill in the gap.

In conclusion, this edition of this manuscript ought to be the standard point of reference for all future scholarship in this domain and, therefore, it is to be highly recommended to all historians working on this period.


**By Glenn Smith**

This volume contains papers presented at the Leiden University workshop on “Violence in Indonesia. Its historical roots and its contemporary manifestations” in December 2000. The revised papers take into account developments up to early 2001. This useful anthology of essays is divided into three parts. The first part, “Historical continuity,” paints through case studies a picture of violence as an ever-present part of the Indonesian state. The second part, “Army violence,” specifically looks at the role of the armed forces in organizing mass violence, particularly during the revolution, the New Order government (1965-1998), and in East Timor. The third part, “Communal violence,” considers the phenomena of ethnic conflict and mob justice.

In the introduction, the editors identify seven points characterizing Indonesian patterns of violence: 1) violence is legitimized by its authors; 2) for violence to be legitimate, it must be aimed at outsiders, so victims must first be constructed as such; 3) when the outsider is dehumanized, the violence is particularly brutal; 4) violence is perpetrated mainly by male youth, who gain a heroic aura by taking on attributes of the pemuda youth fighters during the Indonesian independence struggle; 5) the actual violence is carried out by thugs employed by political and military elites; 6) the state has a history of using army and police violence against its own people; 7) communal violence in its many forms is rife, even among ordinary people, and is largely condoned by the security forces. Although here the editors (and later many of the authors) seek to identify cultural patterns specific to Indonesia, they have probably identified near-universals. This is no doubt due to the uniformity of violent training dispensed through colonization and globalization.

In “A Genealogy of violence,” Henk Schulte Nordholt traces the roots of Indonesian violence to the Dutch colonial legacy, to the series of wars of pacification and repression that spanned the period from the late seventeenth century to the twentieth century. As Schulte Nordholt notes, “the colonial expansion created a state of violence which is only marginally recognized in Dutch history books” (p. 37). No more telling example than Aceh, where colonial troops killed about 75,000 Achenese (15% of the population), a figure that cannot be compared with the estimated 5,000 killed by the Indonesian army since the mid-1980s. Henk Maier’s piece (“Telling tales, cutting throats: The guts of Putu Wijaya”) on violence in Putu
Wijaya's novel, *Nyali*, would seem more appropriate in a volume on Indonesian cultural studies than in the present collection, but it has relevancy insofar as it suggests to this reader a central irony of Indonesian discourse on violence. Although so many Indonesian novels and comics are literally packed with graphically violent images, depictions in the country's television and print media of the true extent of mass violence and incivilities are meticulously excised.

Elsbeth Locher-Scholten ("State violence and the police in colonial Indonesia circa 1920: Exploration of a theme") revisits the Cimareme affair, a 1919 police shooting in rural Bandung resulting from the refusal of a religious teacher to make a forced rice delivery. Her careful description and analysis reveal the extent of the colonial government's fear of the indigenous and the latter's potential for dissent. Similarly, Erwiza Erman ("Generalized violence: A case study of the Ombilin coal mines, 1892-1996") explores in detail the institutionalization and socialization of violence through the use of convict and contract laborers in one West Sumatran coal mine. It is, again, ironic that the image of the *urang rantai* (men in neck and ankle chains, who worked in what can only be described as an underground hell) is today proudly held up by local officials as an emblem for promoting tourism.

The institutionalization of violence in Northern Sumatra is also discussed in Budi Agustino's short article, "Violence in North Sumatra's plantations." William H. Frederick ("Shadows of an unseen hand: Some patterns of violence in the Indonesian revolution, 1945-1949") carefully analyzes rogue violence during the Revolutionary period in East Java, beginning with the story of an exceptionally brutal commander, Sabaroeddin, and going on to explore activities of the many rural *rampok* gangs of violent thieves. The army's use of these gangs for supply and operations left villagers wondering who exactly were their allies, and who their tormenters. Frederick concludes that the society of this period — more due to the exceptional circumstances that it was traversing than to any sort of amok culture — exhibited strong violent tendencies, which could be manipulated by the shadows of an unseen hand, though oftentimes that hand had an unsure hold on the violence subsequently unleashed.

The independence struggle had a profound impact on Indonesia's second president, Suharto. R.E. Elson ("In fear of the people: Suharto and the justification of state-sponsored violence under the New Order") examines the roots of Suharto's obsession with controlling popular dissent, in essence, his lack of political sophistication and his fear of popular debate. Liem Soei Liong ("It's the military, stupid!") details the role of the military and intelligence community in perpetrating a culture of violent solutions during the New Order, and what perspectives there are for reform following Suharto's demise.

The next two articles treat East Timor, occupied by Indonesia from 1975 to 1999. Both are controversial in their tentative findings, going against the conventional wisdom that the crimes in East Timor resulted from a malevolent design of Islamization, terror, or even genocide on the part of the Indonesian army. Robert Cribb ("From total people's defence to massacre: Explaining Indonesian military violence in East Timor") seeks an explanation other than evil design for why the occupation of East Timor was so violent, particularly in the first five years. Use of obsolete military doctrine from the Revolution, he finds, coupled with newfound arrogance, "a triumphalist culture of impunity," and contempt for civilians, led to brutalities, and inevitably the alienation of the local people. Geoffrey Robinson ("The fruitless search for a smoking gun: Tracing the origins of violence in East Timor") critically evaluates the evidence for Indonesian army complicity in the violence that followed the 1999 referendum for independence: torching, looting, and forced displacement carried out by pro-Indonesian militias. Although longstanding formal and informal links existed between the army and militias, Robinson analyzes each piece of evidence separately and finds that the sum falls short of incontrovertible proof of army responsibility. In his view, the violence could owe more to assimilation by militia groups of the institutional character and culture of violence proper to the Indonesian military, which created them. Cribb's and Robinson's provocative essays will invite challenge, but scholars still interested in getting straight the full history of East Timor must not disregard them.

The last two articles, by Kees van Dijk ("The good, the bad and the ugly. Explaining the unexplainable: *amuk massa* in Indonesia") and Freek Colombijn ("Maling, maling! The lynching of petty criminals"),
try to interpret the seemingly irrational, and often horrific behavior of groups at the grass roots. They attribute similar causes to such violence: societal divisions, ineffective law enforcement and legal system, and the tendency to consider victims as outsiders, even less-than-human.

Taken as a whole, this volume has wide intellectual implications. The cases reviewed here advance the study of conflict and violence in Indonesia, and no doubt have relevance further afield. By promoting new thinking on one of the more salient aspects of Indonesian society and history – the ever-present potential for violence – this volume merits a place on many Indonesianists’ shelves.


Par Michel PICARD

Shinji Yamashita, professeur d’anthropologie culturelle à l’Université de Tokyo, est de ces ethnologues qui, après avoir vaimen tenté d’oblitérer la présence imporante des touristes sur leur terrain, ont fini non seulement par les intégrer dans leur champ d’observation, mais aussi par faire du tourisme l’objet même de leur investigation. Il s’en est d’ailleurs expliqué dans un précédent volume collectif. Arrivé à Sulawesi en 1976, avec l’intention d’étudier le système rituel traditionnel des Toraja, il s’est trouvé en face de touristes intéressés tout comme lui à leurs spectaculaires cérémonies funéraires : « At first, he disliked the tourists, because he felt that they were an eyesore, and because they interrupted his research on “traditional” culture in Toraja […] Later, however, he realised that this was a mistake. It was wrong to see Toraja culture as something “pure”, and as isolated from the rest of the contemporary world system […] It thus appeared to be necessary to take tourism into account in writing a “dynamic ethnography” of Toraja society, and to regard tourism as one of the primary objects of research on the Toraja ».

Après achevé ses recherches en pays Toraja, Yamashita décida de se rendre à Bali, principale destination touristique de l’Indonésie, pour y étudier les implications culturelles du tourisme. Plus précisément, il s’est intéressé à la manière dont les Balinais ont utilisé le tourisme pour construire et faire reconnaître leur identité culturelle. Il nous présente dans ce livre les résultats de son étude, augmentés de divers travaux relevant d’une anthropologie du tourisme telle qu’il l’appelle de ses vœux.

Le programme qu’assigne Yamashita à l’étude anthropologique du tourisme n’est rien moins qu’ambitieux, puisqu’il concerne la conceptualisation même de la “culture”. En l’occurrence, nous dit-il, il n’est plus possible de concevoir la culture en termes d’usages coutumiers inconscients, mais il s’agit de l’appréhender au contraire comme faisant l’objet de manipulations conscientes. Dans un univers marqué par la globalisation et l’érosion des frontières, il n’est plus de culture isolée et statique car, prises comme elles le sont dans des flux continus de populations, d’argent, d’objets et d’informations, les cultures sont déterritorialisées et tendent en conséquence à devenir hybrides et hétérogènes. Dès lors, les oppositions entre tradition et modernité, entre local et global, se révèlent caduques, et l’anthropologue doit désormais s’intéresser aux processus par lesquels les cultures se transforment et se renouvelent.

Dans un tel contexte, le tourisme a vocation à devenir un objet d’étude privilégié pour l’anthropologie. Car avec le tourisme, nous avons affaire non seulement à des déplacements de personnes en quête d’ailleurs, avec les aménagements destinés à les recevoir et les activités commerciales qui leur sont liées, mais aussi à un rapport inédit à l’histoire et aux traditions des peuples du monde, qui débouche sur une recomposition en profondeur de leur culture. Dans cette perspective, le tourisme fournit un lieu d’observation approprié pour saisir les processus culturels à l’œuvre dans le monde contemporain. Mais pour ce faire, il faut au préalable se déprendre de la tendance à appréhender la promotion touristique internationale comme un vecteur d’homogénéisation et d’érosion des cultures traditionnelles, pour y voir au contraire un lieu d’émergence et d’invention culturelle.

Il est clair que, pour Yamashita, ce processus d’invention culturelle n’est nulle part plus manifeste qu’à Bali. Car la “culture balinaise traditionnelle” que les touristes viennent contempler et consommer n’est pas une tradition culturelle transmise et entretenue depuis des temps immémoriaux, mais une création contemporaine que les Balinais ont négociée et développée en dialogue avec leurs divers interlocuteurs depuis le tournant du XXe siècle : à savoir, non seulement les touristes et les opérateurs touristiques qui, avec les artistes, les orientalistes et les ethnologues,