
TRANS-REGIONAL INDONESIA OVER ONE THOUSAND YEARS: THE ART OF THE LONG VIEW

Eric Tagliacozzo

One of the oldest truisms about Indonesia is that it is a place of long-term and abiding “contact”; the water from many shores flows through this, the world’s largest archipelago. This is an actual observation, of course, but it is also a metaphorical one, because the currents that flowed through *tanah air* also brought people, objects, and ideas to these islands for most of recorded history. In this special issue of the journal, we have asked six scholars to chronicle something of this movement over the course of a millennium, beginning with shipwrecks in the tenth century CE and ending with the flow of pathogens (in this case, the deadly avian flu) that triggered a major health crisis only a few years ago. In between the old boats and the new microbes, we also have an analysis of VOC (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, Dutch East India Company) legal codes, especially as they related to foreigners; a study of trans-regional piracy in southwest Borneo around the year 1800; a discussion of the colonial fiction of dread (Dutch, *angst*) in *fin-de-siècle* Batavia/Den Haag; and an examination of the idea of transnational Islam in the middle decades of the twentieth century, when Indonesian revolutionaries very much had their eye on the Middle East. Can we imagine an Indonesian archipelago with arms spinning in multiple directions over at least a thousand years? Is there any coherence to examining Indonesia’s trans-regional history as a collective over a time span this large? What—if any—patterns emerge from taking such a wide-angled approach?

I want to argue that there are, indeed, some benefits in “thinking big” along these lines. First, grouping six articles into a set such as this shows how trans-local this part of the world was—and remained—from its historical origins (and by this I mean from the period when we have the writing or historical detritus to prove anything) to the

present day. Indonesia has been studied by some of the best scholars of a nation-centric bent who have ever wielded a pen, but it is also very much a trans-local place, as these same authors and many others would surely agree.¹ Second, drawing a millennium-long line between the Intan shipwreck and the avian flu emphasizes the fact that there have been many outside influences on Indonesia, which came to be incorporated into the archipelago's history over long stretches of time. This notion was *de rigueur* fifty years ago, but then became something of a reactionary trope in the age of autonomous histories in the 1960s and beyond, when John Smail and others then evolved a necessary corrective to earlier excesses in interpretation.² We may now be ready for a swing of the pendulum back in the other direction, at least if this is done carefully. I am certainly in favor of seeing more trans-regional studies of Indonesia if these can be accomplished without marginalizing Indonesians from their own histories, or from their own present.

Third, the idea of a trans-regional Indonesia fits very well into the "transnational turn" that is very much under way across the humanities and social sciences, and which can be felt in disciplines ranging from diaspora studies in history and literature to corporate responsibility movements in anthropology and the social sciences more generally. It is no accident that much of this scholarship is being produced now; the global changes of 1989 and the end of the Cold War paradigm opened many doors (and many borders) that had been kept imperfectly, but at least partially, shut for decades before this time.³ With the reemergence of global flows on a scale that can only really recall the Early Modern period, when states were too weak to try to restrict such traffic, it seems wise to pay attention to these themes in "our" part of the world. The essays in this special issue take this *longue durée* cadence seriously, both individually and as a group, and will, I hope, suggest some of the bases for writing a trans-regional history of Indonesia some time in the future. It is instructive—and a cause for hope—that the six scholars represented here cover a broad spectrum of scholarly lives in the Indonesian Studies academy, too, from "lifers" to "newbies," with some mid-career authors to boot. I believe that they suggest together an arc for what a future scholarly agenda might look like across a range of geographies, topics, and timeframes, and via a fascinating multiplicity of approaches.

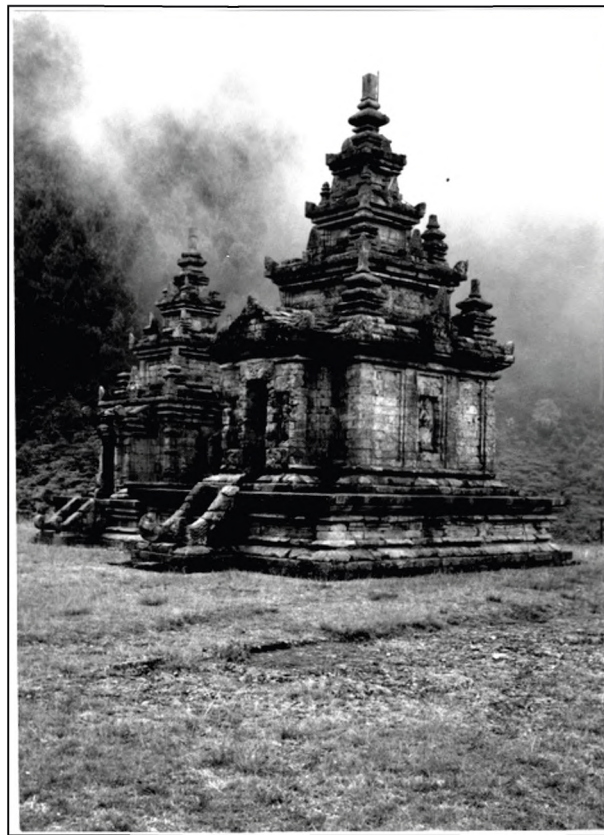
The first article is by Kenneth Hall. Hall's essay combines an examination of recently recovered ninth- and tenth-century shipwrecks with an accounting of temple reliefs, archaeological remains, and paleography to address the importance of international maritime trade, as this institution helped to evolve societal transitions in

¹ Only a few of these authors might be mentioned here, but Cornell University traditionally has loomed large in this discussion, with George Kahin, Benedict Anderson, Jim Siegel, and Takashi Shiraishi deserving special mention.

² The most important single text here was John Smail's seminal article of fully fifty years ago, still regularly cited today; see John Smail, "On the Possibility of an Autonomous History of Modern Southeast Asia," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 2,2 (July 1961): 72–102.

³ It would be instructive to look at syllabi both before and after 1989 in many of these disciplines; the tilt toward transnational approaches after this year would be readily apparent, I think. This does not mean that studying the nation after 1989 has not happened, or that this avenue of inquiry has not been done well; the dissolution of the Soviet empire, for example, gave scholars of nationalism much fertile new ground to pursue their own approaches, of course. But I would argue that after 1989, the movement toward a trans-regional vision in the academy has been quite clear, and that there is evidence of this across most of the social sciences, and the humanities.

ninth- and tenth-century Java. Previous historiography of Java has been mostly oriented toward the agrarian kingdoms of the epoch after Dutch contact, and has examined how the loss of power over ports forced the Javanese to focus on agriculture. New archeological data, Hall posits, assists in correcting this imbalance, but as yet, and despite the growing proof for the involvement of Java's *pasisir* (coastal areas) in heavy sea-trade by the ninth century, no port site of this time has been found, and there is little real evidence of *hulu-hilir* (upstream-downstream) relations.⁴ Thus, the coast and the interior have been seen in past studies, Hall tells us, as two very divergent realms, with ports-of-trade as virtually self-standing "foreign" entities on the outskirts of the Java hinterland. To remedy this narrative, Hall provides evidence of direct tenth-century interventions by east Java kings to bring the *hilir* (coastal) deltas of east Java under cultivation, very much against the wishes of their regional antagonists, who were based in productive *hulu* (upland) ricelands.⁵



Classical Temples in Upland Java (photo: E. Tagliacozzo)

⁴ The idea of upstream/ downstream contacts—both commercial and political—is not only important in Java and Indonesia, of course, but elsewhere in Southeast Asia, too. Bennett Bronson was among the first to tease out the theoretical implications of this model for Southeast Asia as a region, and his ideas (and the further elaboration of these ideas by others) eventually have come to exert great explanatory power for much of this arena's history as a whole.

⁵ See, for example, Jan Wisseman Christie, "Trade and Settlement in Early Java: Integrating the Epigraphic and Archaeological Data," in *Early Metallurgy, Trade, and Urban Centres in Thailand and Southeast Asia*, ed. I. Glover, P. Suchitta, and J. Villiers (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1992).

Tenth-century kings built dams to support agriculture in the *hilir* deltas and to provide protected anchorage for international shipping. A stable, fecund delta ensured that the agricultural needs of the international traders would be satisfied. Coastal-based traders and artisans provided commodities of foreign origin or specialized services, especially the fabrication of iron, gold, and silver products and iron weaponry, which were sustained by metal imports to metal-deficient Java. Hall argues that agricultural tools and a variety of imported goods entered the Javanese *hulu* networks either laterally, through direct barter between producers and consumers, or vertically, through political or religious institutions. Barter was the most significant means of exchange in this period, but by the tenth century monetized commercial transactions using a variety of imported gold and silver coinage and metallic bars became alternative standards in larger-volume marketplace exchanges (or what we would now call “wholesale trade”). In both types of exchanges, tenth-century trade relied on units of standardized weight as opposed to commodity price indexes based on monetary value.⁶

Therefore, Hall asserts that the primary sources prove that international shipping and local use of imported goods derived from this shipping were both everyday occurrences by the ninth century. Tenth-century inscriptions record the adaptation of maritime diasporas into local worlds through the active effort of *pasisir* elites. Negotiated settlements, such as those noted in the tenth-century inscriptions, established networked relationships among merchant diasporas; concentrated “urban” production-center metalworkers; and allowed local kings to accommodate legally these trading “foreigners” into their own administered *hilir* worlds. These traders were attached to the *hulu* areas by a band-width of “delta traders” and “peddlers” who were, in the end, accountable to the trading elites among the urban-based communities. Hall says that these early transactions were the source of later stable multicultural communities, which themselves then contributed to the Indian Ocean trade boom that would appear in the eleventh century.⁷

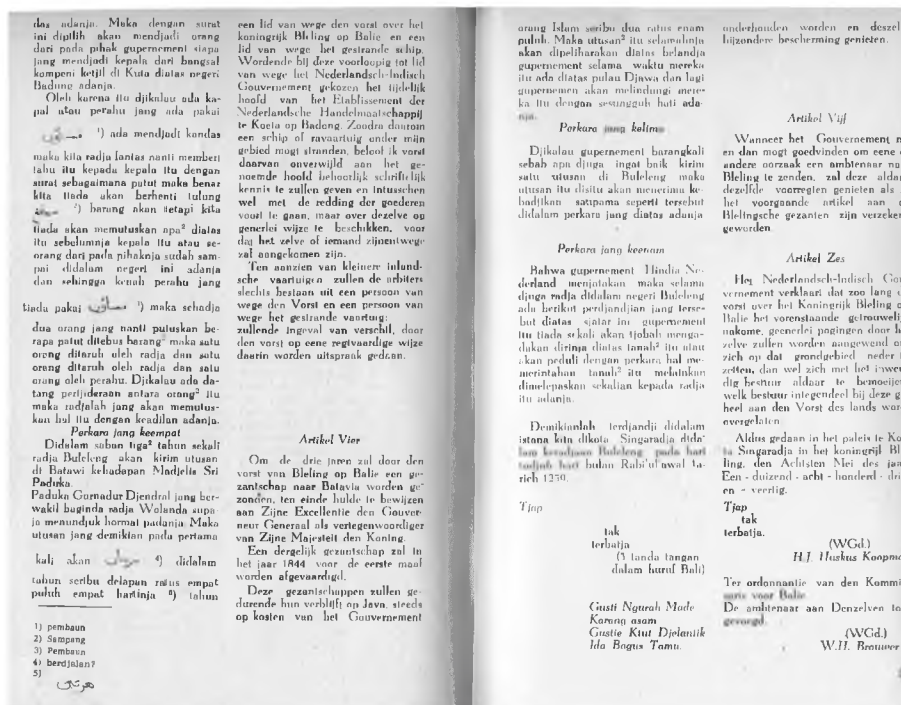
Robert Cribb argues in his contribution that the Dutch colonial order in Indonesia was based on a system of encompassing legal pluralism, under which both state-sanctioned ethnic categories and the legal powers of indigenous elites within the colony created a large spectrum of overlapping legal jurisdictions. The Veerenigde Oostindische Compagnie used legal pluralism for the most part as a tool to get around the high cost of administering law to its native, local subjects. The price of unifying legal practice remained a problem after the onset of Netherlands-based control over the colony at the end of the eighteenth century, but legal diversity slowly became also a matter of colonial policy. In this context, Holland was rather unusual among colonial governments for its relative lack of interest in a “*mission civilatrice*.”⁸ Legal diversity in

⁶ A good source for background reading on this is Robert S. Wicks, *Money, Markets, and Trade in Early Southeast Asia: The Development of Indigenous Monetary Systems to AD 1400* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1992).

⁷ For a sense of some of these networks, especially as illustrated by the lives of individual people, and less through systems, see Stewart Gordon, *When Asia Was the World* (Philadelphia, PA: DaCapo Books, 2008). Also see, as a corollary, Jan Wisseman Christie, “Javanese Markets and the Asian Sea Trade Boom of the Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries AD,” *JESHO* 41,3 (1998): 344–81.

⁸ As the term implies, the mother-spring of this deep well of ideas and attitudes was French, and the *mission civilatrice* was attempted by France from the Caribbean to Africa, and from Paris’s tiny Indian Ocean islands to what eventually became French Indochina. The idea of a civilizing mission eventually became current among other colonial powers, too, though these attitudes and policies took on different complexions in places like British India, the Spanish (and later American) Philippines, etc.

the governing codes came to be viewed, by its champions, as a genuine and serious gesture of respect to local cultures, while its detractors, who opposed the extension of colonialism, perceived this legal patchwork as the product of a cynical divide-and-rule doctrine.⁹



Dutch East Indies Legal Contract with Bali, 1843

Resistance to legal pluralism from inside colonial circles centered on the punitive legal atrocities that it clearly allowed—such as arbitrary treatment of “Natives” by Dutch officials, flogging, and capital punishment. Yet the notion that legal pluralism made room for different norms in local societies remained current among many Dutchmen. Progress towards any kind of overarching legal system was therefore slow. Although policies were put forward in 1847 to create a unitary legal code for all denizens of the colony, the unified law did not come onto the books until 1918. Even at that time, divergent legal procedures applied to the various ethnic groups. Cribb argues that the colonial legal pluralism tolerated by the Dutch effectively blocked Indonesians from engaging with universal law, and, as a consequence of this, Indonesians as a society also developed in their history only a marginal respect for the rule of law in and of itself.¹⁰

⁹ The most important source on ethnicity and legal categories in the colonial Indies is still C. Fasseur, “Cornerstone and Stumbling Block: Racial Classification and the Late Colonial State in Indonesia,” in *The Late Colonial State in Indonesia: Political and Economic Foundations of the Netherlands Indies, 1880–1942*, ed. Robert Cribb (Leiden: KITLV, 1994), pp. 31–56.

¹⁰ On this concept, see also Peter Burns, *The Leiden Legacy: Concepts of Law in Indonesia* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004).

Ota Atsushi then analyzes socio-economic transformations in Southwest Kalimantan over a half-century period from roughly 1770 to 1820, with a special focus on the local Orang Laut (Sea People) of the area. Orang Laut in this essay are described as those who lived in the coastal areas, maintaining their maritime lifestyle and freedoms to some degree.¹¹ This epoch in Southwest Kalimantan is generally thought to have been one of anomie, but, in reality, the surviving sources show that the level of Kalimantan's trans-regional trade was maintained through shifting locations. In the 1770s, Sukadana and Pontianak were the largest and most active cities in Southwest Kalimantan. They exported diamonds and gold extracted in the interior areas of the island, while they imported Chinese and Javanese basic goods. The Bugis, who had arrived in the region mostly since the mid-eighteenth century, were the most significant actors in the longer-distance trades and in the commerce with the interior mining regions. During the 1780s, diamond exports seem to have fanned out to other regional ports, while gold exports were phased into the orbit of the Chinese miners (of whom there many thousands).¹²



Early Cargoes: Edible Sea Cucumbers (Trepang) (photo: E. Tagliacozzo)

¹¹ The term *Orang Laut* actually signifies not one distinct people but rather several different groups of sea-populations that live scattered amidst the coastal worlds of Southeast Asia, from Burma all the way out to the borders of Oceania, in what is now Eastern Indonesia. What these groups have in common is that they make much—and sometimes all—of their livelihoods from the sea. A number of these groups have been nomadic or semi-nomadic during their histories; however, over time, more and more of these disparate populations began to cling to distinct coastlines in more or less settled littoral communities.

¹² Several good sources for the warp and weft of this period and geography can be found; see, for example, Mary Somers Heidhues, "The First Two Sultans of Pontianak," *Archipel* 56 (1998); and J. van Goor, "Seapower, Trade, and State Formation: Pontianak and the Dutch," in *Trading Companies in Asia, 1600–1830*, ed. J. van Goor (Utrecht: HES, 1986).

Yet a new trade in edible commodities for the China market, such as birds' nests and *trepang* (holothurians), soon became crucial export items, too. From the 1790s, the exported items from Pontianak became ever more eclectic—such as agar-agar (a sort of edible seaweed) and eaglewood—and were more strongly pulled towards the China market. British country traders played an ever-more important role during this period, especially after the VOC's abandonment of Pontianak in 1791, as the British traders began to import more and more Indian opium and textiles. By 1810, the Chinese, who had settled in the environs of Pontianak in very sizable communities, became paramount in the commerce with the interior, while the Bugis focused on the trans-regional trade. Commerce at this time was even more strongly slanted towards the China market, and the trade in textiles, especially Indian and Bugis cloth, exploded after 1820. These undulations in local trade and demographics were especially linked to the rise of migration and commercial *savoir faire* of the region's Sea Peoples.¹³



Bugis Ships at Anchor, Makassar (photo: E. Tagliacozzo)

Ota asserts that after the mid 1780s many Orang Laut—especially those from Sulu, the Malay Peninsula, and among the Bugis—migrated to the littoral areas of Southwest Kalimantan. Indigenous elites in Kalimantan often helped along their migration by giving these migrants lands on which to settle. A Dutch field report from 1822 explains that these migrant Sea People were predominantly occupied with the gathering of China-oriented marine products, though they all raided passing vessels when given half an opportunity to do so. Consequently, small ports such as Simpang and

¹³ See Eric Tagliacozzo, "A Necklace of Fins: Marine Goods Trading in Maritime Southeast Asia, 1780–1860," *International Journal of Asian Studies* 1,1 (2004): 23–48.

Bengadong evolved into export centers of marine and forest products for the China market. For the protection and privileges on commerce offered by indigenous rulers, Sea Peoples provided, in exchange to their local lords, a portion of their collected and/or plundered goods, and their martial assistance if needed. The Orang Laut also evolved their own cultural formations, which centered on Islam, seafaring, and a cosmopolitan connection to other sea peoples in the region. Their desire for imported textiles was a result of—and also further fostered—the rise of the regional textile trade after 1820. In this way, the Sea People became important international actors in the history of Southwest Kalimantan during this time.¹⁴

Laurie Sears's contribution then contrasts Dutch metropolitan culture, as seen in Louis Couperus's turn-of-the-century novels of The Hague, with Indies colonial culture as portrayed in the fiction of Tirta Adhi Soerjo, an elite Javanese journalist, editor, and writer of the *fin-de-siècle* period. Both Tirta and Couperus rejected occupations in the administration of colonial Indonesia that their families had hoped they would enter, and both instead became well-known and productive authors of fiction and non-fiction. The Indonesian Tirta was, in fact, the model for the fictional Minke in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet*.¹⁵ Notions of imperial colonial modernity and sexual freedom exist in the works of both writers, leading to explicit tensions between the new possibilities that were in the air of the time, and a deep ambivalence toward these same possibilities in the writing of both men. The Indies civil servants and city folk of both The Hague and Batavia in Couperus's and Tirta's novels show the kinds of phased existences that were taking shape at the time. Couperus's novels are strewn with terminology from the colonies, and Tirta's parallel world in the Indies is also linguistically hybrid, making use of French, English, and Arabic—all of which had entered into *fin-de-siècle* Batavia's speech.¹⁶

Both of the authors' renderings of the Indies' capital around 1900 show the manner in which native and European elite writers presented the Indies administration with power and cachet. In both authors' accounts, the inner workings of the government employees, closeted in their buildings, are obscured from the common masses. Tirta and Couperus were penning their accounts of the Dutch empire at the moment that psychoanalytic ideas were becoming current in European intellectual life. Sears argues that the hidden worlds of these urbanites of the Dutch empire, therefore, were transposed into colonial specters by these two authors. These specters included notions of European racial dilution, "sexual quickening" among young people, and the ambivalent bonds between reality and allegory in a trans-oceanic colonial empire. Sears's contribution sketches the transnational circuits of humans, ideas, fears,

¹⁴ See Adrian B. Lopian, *Orang Laut, Bajak Laut, Raja Laut: Sejarah Kawasan Laut Sulawesi Abad XIX* (Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu, 2009); and Timothy P. Barnard, "Celates, Rayat-Laut, Pirates: The Orang Laut and Their Decline in History," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 80,2 (2007): 33–49.

¹⁵ Pramoedya's famous *Buru Quartet* is generally considered to be one of the masterpieces of modern Indonesian writing, if not the masterpiece of twentieth-century fiction in the language. The tetralogy is composed of four novels: *This Earth of Mankind*, *Child of All Nations*, *Footsteps*, and *House of Glass*.

¹⁶ For a general overview of the literature of this period, see Rob Nieuwenhuys, *Mirror of the Indies: A History of Dutch Colonial Literature* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982); and E. M. Beekman, *Troubled Pleasures: Dutch Colonial Literature from the East Indies, 1600–1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

fantasies, and memories between Holland and the Indies, and it does so by examining the fiction of these two men in opposition—and in connection—with one another.¹⁷



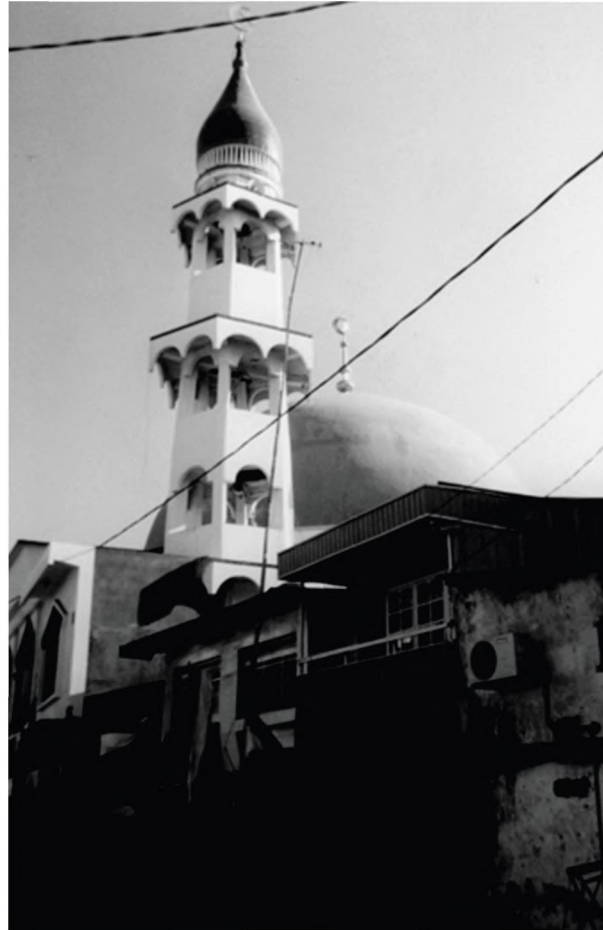
Couperus' *De Stille Kracht* (1900) and Tirta Adhi Soerjo

Chiara Formichi then argues that during the period 1900–50 the world's colonial polities were being inundated by a stream of unprecedented nationalist sentiment, inspired everywhere by notions of independence and social justice. These ideas were often put forward in a religious idiom, and, especially across the *dar al-Islam* (or Muslim world), these notions often represented the fight for the elevation of Islamic above Western values. The mixing of Islamic modernism, pan-Islam, and anti-colonialism in the Middle East has been studied carefully, yet the ways in which these same mechanics functioned in Southeast Asia have not received equal attention.¹⁸ Formichi's piece analyzes how the desire for a self-governing nation-state in the East Indies interacted with and against a powerful discourse articulating a *supra*-national expression of Islam during this time. Formichi analyzes programmatic documents of the Islamic party Sarekat Islam Indonesia in the 1920s. Through the writings of Sarekat

¹⁷ On these ideas, see especially Ann Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1995).

¹⁸ This is true of other parts of the Muslim world as well; Southeast Asia is not really an exception in this case. It would not be an exaggeration to say that these dynamics are not well studied yet in South or Central Asia, either, or in West Africa or the Maghreb, some of the other important landscapes of the outstretched Islamic World. The patterns mentioned above are really best understood at present in the "heartland" or "core" of the Middle East, as it has been identified by scholars—Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Jordan, and the Arabian Peninsula.

Islam's famous leader, S. M. Kartosuwiryo (1905–62), she follows the phasing patterns of emphasis between the setting-up of an Indonesian Islamic nation-state, and the idea of the creation of a "transnational" Islamic state, within which the leaders of Sarekat Islam hoped the Indonesian Muslim community would have a leading role.¹⁹



Mosque with Middle Eastern Influence, Sulawesi (photo: E. Tagliacozzo)

Kartosuwiryo joined Sarekat Islam in 1927, and by the late 1930s he had become an important party figure at the archipelago level. West Java became Kartosuwiryo's main seat, and when the Indonesian Revolution occurred in the second half of the 1940s, Kartosuwiryo concentrated his efforts on the erection of an independent Islamic State of Indonesia (Negara Islam Indonesia), to be set in the Priangan region of West Java. The NII was established in 1949 and kept its seats of power in South Sulawesi, South Kalimantan, and Aceh until the 1960s, when it was finally decapitated by the Indonesian army. In the three decades between the mid-1920s and the 1950s,

¹⁹ For a general sense of the foment of the period, including secular foment, see Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912–1926* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1990). For the larger picture that brings Islam into the equation, one of the classical statements is Nikki R. Keddie, "Pan-Islam as Proto-Nationalism," *The Journal of Modern History* 41,1 (1969): 17–28. Tracking both of these currents and contextualizing them between Indonesia and the Middle East is Michael F. Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma Below the Winds* (London: Routledge, 2003).

Kartosuwiryo often modulated his approach to Pan-Islamism and to Islamic nationalism. Formichi puts forward an explanation of these gradual shifts, and she analyzes the relevant archival documents, first in the scope of politics that surrounded the anti-colonial struggle, and then in the erection of the Indonesian Republic after this.²⁰

Tracing Kartosuwiryo's strategic revisions of his own choices for a wider (and, sometimes, a narrower) vision of an Islamic state of Indonesia, Formichi argues that certain events were crucial to the unfolding of Sarekat Islam's political responses vis-à-vis transnational Islam in Indonesia. Among these defining events were the split between the Islamic and communist wings of Sarekat Islam; the Japanese invasion; the reinstatement of Dutch rule; the revolution ignited by the return of the Dutch; and, eventually, the creation of the Pancasila state. Her route of analysis shows the often-direct lines between Kartosuwiryo's political statements and the historical contingencies shaping the context in which these statements were made. She shows that strong calls to bring the Indies' nationalist struggle in synch with the freedom, and unification, of the Islamic *ummah* worldwide were inextricably bonded to phases of weakness within the ranks of the Islamic party. Yet at the same time, she suggests, it seems clear that in times of political instability for the wider nationalist movement, Sarekat Islam's Islamic front in Indonesia kept focused on the main objective of achieving independence from colonial rule. In doing this, Kartosuwiryo and his fellows constantly reached out to the external Islamic *ummah* as a source for spiritual support, and for material succor at the same time.²¹

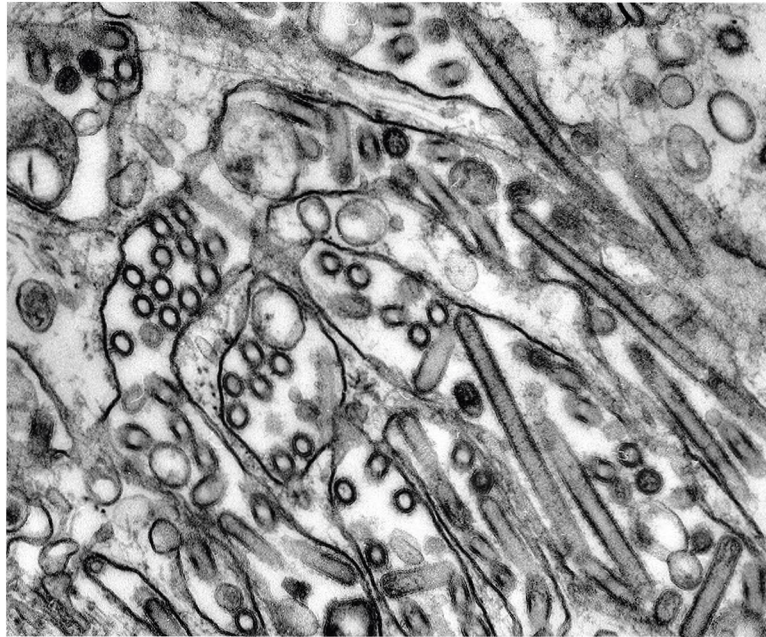
The final contribution of this collection brings us all the way up to our own time. Celia Lowe tell us in her essay that the notion of "global health" is of only very recent vintage; this is a concept that has been put forward to try to explain how local and trans-local phenomena come together in human health crises. Right around the same time that this new concept was coming into being (some ten or so years ago, around the year 2000), the avian flu (or H5N1 influenza virus) hit Indonesia in a sudden and very dangerous outbreak.²² The official, state-level reaction to the appearance of H5N1 in Indonesia was imperfect, to say the least. Faced with a huge outcry from the global health community, the Indonesian government and its local health authorities did not respond quickly or efficaciously enough to the dangers of the outbreak, at least as perceived by these same global organizations. The country was seen to foster a health risk not only to itself and its two-hundred-plus million people, but to the rest of the region, and, indeed, to the world as well. A regime of incentives and punishments was set up by international actors to try to force Jakarta into compliance with the global health community's wishes, and it quickly became clear that there was a broad difference between the organizational behaviors exhibited by a regime from the

²⁰ To hear some of these thoughts in Kartosuwiryo's own words, see S. M. Kartosuwiryo, *Haloean Politik Islam* (Garut: Dewan Penerangan Masjoemi, 1946).

²¹ Many of these ideas are developed more fully in Formichi's recent PhD dissertation; see Chiara Formichi, "Kartosuwiryo's Role in the Creation of the Islamic State of Indonesia (*Negara Islam Indonesia*), 1927–1949" (PhD dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2009).

²² Avian flu was not only found in Indonesia, but in other parts of Asia as well. For example, Vietnam was another hotspot. The disease ignored political boundaries and traveled across the region easily and quickly. H5N1 has been just one in a series of Asian health crises in the same vein: SARS and other outbreaks made these afflictions part-and-parcel of international news for a number of years in a row.

developing world, and the expectations of the First World medical establishment. Lowe examines this very dangerous moment in time not from the position of the “normative narrative” (the global health vantage), but rather through what Foucault has called a “problematization.”²³



H5N1 Avian Flu virus, enlarged

A “problematization” is often defined by an event that brings about uncertainty; in this case, the event was the virus H5N1 crossing the species barrier from animals to human beings in Asia. By examining this event through the strictures and parameters of a problematization, Lowe suggests that the jump of the disease can be seen from not one dominant vantage, but rather from diverse, multiple ones. One of her most important avenues of vision in analyzing what eventually happened is that of “bio-security,” a fairly recent intellectual tack that takes as its main problem one central question: what can be done in advance to deal with a biological phenomenon that is not well known to science, yet which has the potential to harm human beings, or the planet in general? Lowe tells us that bio-security by necessity operates within three main branches of power, as described by Foucault: “sovereignty,” or the legal dynamic; “surveillance,” or the disciplinary dynamic; and “optimization,” or the security dynamic. These different branches of Foucault’s paradigm do not necessarily interact in time and space, and this means that different actors and institutions involved in any one given problematization can behave very differently, and not necessarily together as units.²⁴ Lowe suggests that when the H5N1 jump to humans is seen as a problematization, two important questions come to the fore regarding the

²³ For an overview of the Avian Influenza crisis, see World Health Organization, *Avian Influenza: Assessing the Pandemic Threat* (WHO: Global Influenza Program Publication, 2005).

²⁴ Some of the argument for this is laid out in the introduction of Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* (New York, NY: Palgrave/MacMillan, 2007).

outbreak. First, was Indonesia “prepared” in all of the necessary ways that it needed to be to deal with this outbreak of disease? And, second, how were institutions—both Indonesian and global—able to deal with the huge amount of energy, resources, and attention that were now being channeled toward dealing with avian flu? The rest of her essay traces the answers to these questions, looking at how Indonesia became a contested site—both locally, and across trans-regional medical landscapes—in the discourse of disease, action, and re-action that followed. Indonesia found itself to be one of several centers of the affliction in Asia, and Lowe’s piece shows how this played out across numerous fronts, both epidemiological and organizational, over the passage of time.



Modern Jakarta Skyline

These are the six articles that make up this special issue of the journal, and which show Indonesia in an international light spanning more than ten centuries and through vast, global geographies. In conclusion, it seems important to say that the thousand-year line drawn between the Intan shipwreck and the avian flu in this issue of *Indonesia* is only one of many that might have been inscribed in sketching out the possibilities of a “trans-regional Indonesian imaginary.” Many, many other topics might have been usefully broached and written about by these or another set of authors, as the possibilities for such connections are nearly limitless, given the exigencies of the history of this part of the world. Hindu statuary, spice routes to Maluku, the British Interregnum, and modes of coercion during the Japanese Occupation might have all been referenced, alongside a host of other topics where the transnational angle comes to the fore. What I hope, though, is that these six articles as a collective suggest some of the ways in which Indonesia’s past can be seen as an inherently international one, marked by numerous visitors to the islands and punctuated by Indonesians leaving these same shores for new pastures, either in body or in spirit or through some combination of the two. The cadence of the world’s largest archipelago, as seen in these pieces, has almost always been open to the “foreign,” in the many guises that the “foreign” has appeared. These fascinating essays seem to prove this old axiom in spades.