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Juniator Tulus (2012), Family stories; Oral tradition, memories of the past, and contemporary conflicts over land in Mentawai-Indonesia

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the people of the Belgian colony in the Congo. These parallels are interesting.

In 1919 Morel published the book *Red rubber; The story of the rubber slave trade which flourished on the Congo for twenty years, 1890-1910* which recalls at least because of the title to Multatuli's/Eduard Douwes Dekker's 1860 published novel *Max Havelaar; Or the coffee auctions of the Dutch trading company*. Of course, the first one is a non-fictional book, but Morel had the literate of the colonial horror on his side: Joseph Conrad's 1899 publication of work *Heart of darkness* dealing with the colonial violence in the Congo, even though it is also not so fictional. Conrad wrote many more stories, quite a few of them set in the Malay Archipelago but none focusing on the colonial brute force. He deals much more with the individual fate of Westerners in the colonial society as for example in *Almayer's Folly*. The literary processing of facts are even more evident in *Lord Jim* where Conrad for the second part of the story used intensively the 1866 published memoirs *Ten years in Saráwak* of Charles Brooke (Rajah of Sarawak).

In contrary to Morel who did succeed in his fight against King Leopold II of Belgium and Congo the endeavour of Brandstetter has not been that effective but that should not diminish the interest of today's reader in the work and the historical setting of this excellent Swiss dialectologist and Austronesist.

This collection of articles in *A world of words* stimulates readers to have a deeper look at some more reading in Brandstetter's publications which are now all online made available by the Swiss Electronic Academic Library Service, the fact that they are in German and his style needs getting used to nonetheless. As a start, I would suggest his writing on Malay loanwords in Swiss dialects and the short article from 1916 "Die Katze im Schweizerdeutschen und im Indonesischen. Eine sprachwissenschaftliche und volkskundliche Parallele" – a comparison of the cat in Indonesian and in Swiss German language.

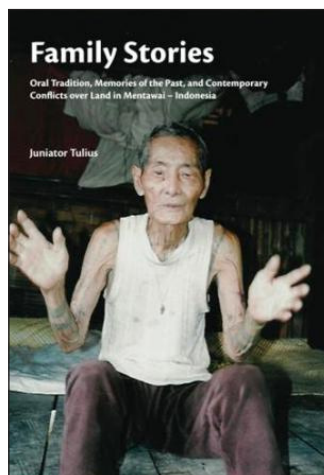
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Juniator Tulus, *Family stories; Oral tradition, memories of the past, and contemporary conflicts over land in Mentawai-Indonesia*. PhD thesis, Leiden University, 2012, 313 pp. ISBN: 978-94-6203-160-9.

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There used to be a romantic notion that primitive peoples (non-western societies) were harmonious, peace-loving societies. In the seventeenth century, the sentimentalistic term "the noble savage" began to circulate. The noble savage was pure and unadulterated, in contrast with the modern western man who was seen as egotistical and individualistic. The idea behind this notion was that mankind, in its most original (primitive) form was good.



The notion of the noble savages was contrasted with Western society, especially French, which was almost continually in upheaval, plagued by social unrests. Even though Thomas Hobbes in his book *Leviathan* (1657) had criticized the idea, many – including those in Indonesia today – thought that a peaceful and harmonious life was to be sought in rural societies, especially those far from the competitiveness and struggles of urban life.

Juniator Tulus, however, in his doctoral thesis *Family stories; Oral tradition, memories of the past, and contemporary conflicts over land in Mentawai, Indonesia* – which links oral tradition to conflict – launches an interesting and unique viewpoint.

In Mentawai, there are several genres of oral tradition: *pumumuan* (stories about the creation of man, fauna, flora, and the universe); *pungungan* (legends, folktales, and fables); *patura* or *pasailukat* (riddles); *sukat* or *bujai* (incantations); *urai kerei* (ritual songs); and *urai simata'* or *leleiy* (folksongs). In his thesis, Juniator Tulus discusses another genre altogether, namely *gobbui* or *tiboi*, that is family stories (which falls under the category of folktales and legends).

Gobbui or *tiboi* is a folktale that belongs to a kin group and is passed on to the younger generations through storytelling. In Mentawai, only specialized storytellers are allowed to recount family stories. Similar to all folktales, family stories recount an event that happens and influences the lives of the members of a particular kin group at particular moments in time.

There are innumerable family stories in Mentawai, but in his thesis Juniator Tulus discusses only three: the mango story (a story about conflicts about the division of mango harvest from a tree); the pig story (a story about conflicts arising from the killing of a pig); and the wild boar story (a story about conflicts arising from joking about failure to catch a wild boar). This is very interesting, because of the contrast to the idea of harmony in a society living far (and separated) from urban society, Mentawai family stories show a different picture. The family stories of Mentawai actually show that conflict is common. In fact, all three stories start with an account of conflicts occurring within a kin group.

The issues that cause conflict in the stories Tulus recounts vary: unfairness in dividing mango harvest, violation of ownership rights to a pig, and social criticism (through public mocking) of a man's failure in hunting. However, the differing issues have similar impacts of conflict within the kin group and division and separation through migration to new (living) locations. Mentawai family stories are unique in that they not only recount the cause of conflict and its impact, but also document the concurring patterns of kin group migration, division, and alliances. More importantly, the family stories also document the allocation of all land on Mentawai Island and its natural and man-made territorial boundaries.

Studies on conflict show that a society uses several strategies to cope with conflict: avoidance, accommodation, competition, cooperation, and conciliation. Often, societies choose not only one but several or a mixture of strategies, but usually each society has a tendency to choose one sort as its main strategy. The Mentawaians – at least in the past – choose avoidance. Avoiding conflict causes kin groups to leave their original home regions and move to new locations on the island.

On the one hand, conflict and migration led to the splitting up of kin groups, but in time, families allied and formed new kin groups through marriage ties, similarity of regional origin, and ownership of the same family stories. This means that family stories do not only record kin group migration, but it also functions as a marker of shared identity.

Oral tradition is usually viewed as an element of culture which needs to be known and conserved as a part of a society's cultural heritage. It is not often thought of as something that is practical and applicable in the project of Indonesia's development. Mentawai family stories are special because they record patterns of migration and land allocation on the island and furthermore, they are used to settle land disputes.

In order to fulfil the last function of dispute settlement, all the elements of family stories – the storyteller, the audience, and their context – have to work together as a whole system. Two cases of land disputes are presented. The first is a dispute between several kin groups that had split up and formed new alliances, followed by new allocation of land. The storyteller was knowledgeable about the kin group's migratory history and land allocation among separate kin groups. The disputing parties had faith in the storyteller and in the truth of his account. The dispute as a result was settled amicably.

The second dispute was more complex as it involved not only several kin groups but also the Dutch colonial government and later on, the Indonesian government. In this context, one element of the storytelling had changed. The audience had been enlarged with the Dutch and Indonesian governments' involvement. However, both new audiences did not support the historical truth as accounted in the family stories, nor did they acknowledge the authority of the storyteller as a key informant on land allocation on the island. This dispute as a result remains unsettled.

It is clear in the thesis that family stories can be used to settle land disputes is not a straightforward matter. Family stories are orally told (thus, legally unsound) and it is unable to detail the number and names of people involved in the case. Another constraint is the unwillingness of a part of the audience to acknowledge the authority of the storyteller and his account. Yet despite their small chances of success in mediating and settling land disputes, the idea that family stories can play such a function is still worthy of further development.

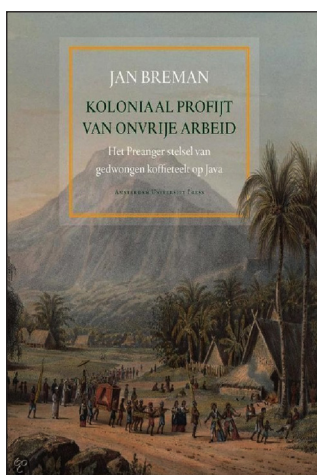
A question thus can be raised relative to Juniator Tulus' work as to why he has not elaborated on the role and function of family stories in dispute settlement, as it concerns not only with the issues of land allocation and ownership but also with other matters pertaining to social conflict. The issues

he has presented underline the need to study oral tradition and its role in cultural advocacy of dispute settlement in Indonesia.

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Jan Breman, *Keuntungan colonial dari kerja paksa; Sistem Priangan dari tanam paksa kopi di Jawa, 1720-1870*. Translated by Jugiarie Soegiarto, Christina Suprihatin, and Indira Ismail, and edited by Susi Moeimam and Nurhayu W. Santoso. Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2014, xvi + 400 pp. ISBN: 978-979-461-874-5. Price: IDR 120.000 (soft cover).

Jan Breman, *Koloniaal profijt van onvrije arbeid; Het Preanger stelsel van gedwongen koffieteelt op Java, 1720-1870*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010, viii + 455 pp. ISBN: 978-908-964-264-6. Soft cover.



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INTRODUCTION

The work of Jan Breman, *Keuntungan kolonial dari kerja paksa; Sistem Priangan dari tanam paksa Kopi di Jawa, 1720-1870*, investigates how colonialism provided vast areas of plantation for capitalism. His work is an important contribution to the historiography of the social, political and economical condition of Indonesia because it invites the rewriting of the Indonesian colonial history. The rewriting has to be done in order to put global economy as a context of the implementation of colonial policies and by showing the conditions of people those days who had to experience the impacts of the policies.