Publication Trends in International Indonesian Studies: The Asia-Pacific Region as New Gravitation Centre

By Arndt Graf

This analysis surveys some basic quantitative trends in international Indonesian Studies in the 1990s. The source material is taken from Excerpta Indonesica, the bibliographical periodical published twice a year at the KITLV in Leiden (the Netherlands). Excerpta Indonesica provides a unique source in that it renders annotated citations of “almost all” research contributions (mostly articles) in journals and readers published on Indonesia. The disciplines covered are mainly from the humanities and social sciences, although certain other disciplines also appear (geography, medicine, etc.). The claimed scope is worldwide, although certain countries and journals are more favoured than others. This is traditionally true for articles published in the Netherlands, since they naturally find their way more easily into the holdings of the KITLV library, which constitutes the material basis for Excerpta Indonesica. The inclusion/exclusion policy of Excerpta Indonesica is often problematic in the field, since this bibliographical journal acts an important gatekeeping function in the dissemination and, hence, the production of knowledge in Indonesian Studies. This makes it knowledge-generating that is interesting to look at the representation of international Indonesian Studies in this influential journal. Equal attention is paid to the production of additional service, important for the purpose of the present study, in every edition since the early 1990s: the introduction typically includes general statistics indicating the numbers of contributions on Indonesia listed according to country of publication. Such a helpful indication suggests what the net balance of publications in journals, readers, and so on, would be. Since the production of these publications is usually linked to centres of Indonesian Studies, this also tells us something about the international drawing power and importance of the various national centres of Indonesian Studies. On the other hand, it also betrays a certain bias, disfavoring small countries with few researchers as well as less publicized publication opportunities for an international audience.

The analysis of the aggregate numbers of the 1990s shows in which regions and countries the contributions on Indonesia appeared. Some interesting results should be highlighted. The ranking of Indonesian Studies in Asia is in line with the following:(1) the third rank at a third of world publications) demonstrates that the enormous investments in the education sector since the independence (1945) has in the end been detrimental to the production of knowledge concerning Indonesia to the former Dutch colonial power itself. In other words, increasingly more Indonesians are writing their own story, on their own terms, thus forcing the international community of scholars to shift not only their assumptions concerning what is or is not a viable ‘primary source’, but also its requirements concerning language acquisition. It is no longer possible to carry out viable research concerning Indonesia without the ability to read, write, and speak in Bahasa Indonesia.

In this context, it is interesting to see that the Netherlands, as the former colonial power, has lost most of its overwhelming global predominance in Indonesian Studies that lasted at least until the 1990s. If we only count the statistics available for the 1990s’ via the people in conflict-related violence. Boys, the Muslim Acang and his Christian bosom friend Obet, a public service announcement broadcast on national TV and several commercial channels some months after the break-out of violence. The spot was meant to foster peace among the combatant religious groups in Ambon. It featured two young boys, the Muslim Acang and his Christian bosom friend Obet, who are discussing the tense situation in their city. In order to understand why this comes to the conclusion that they do not understand. ‘It is a problem of adults, and we are the victims’, Acang says. The camera zooms in on the two friends, who are posed with one another, while they voice the hope and mutual promise that ‘even if Ambon is destroyed like this, our bond of brotherhood should not be broken’. Spyer: ‘All the Ambonese took from the spot was a name and for the first time, we Ambonese can only possibly when substantial groups of Ambonese were thinking of themselves as living lives parallel to those of substantial groups of people in the Middle East. Her interviews with Ambonese refugees showed her that the local population feels neglected by the political elites in Jakarta. She thinks that the borrowing of names and terms from other conflict grounds might thus serve a specific purpose. ‘Twisting these war-torn places may be one way of lending local suffering in Ambon larger than local meaning.’* 

* By Jasper van der Kerkhof

Biography

Prof. Patricia Spyer (b. 1957), daughter of a Dutch father and an American mother, was born and raised in New York. Early in the 1970s, she and her parents moved to Amsterdam, where she attended secondary education. She returned to the United States, where she double-majored in history and anthropology. After completion of her dissertation, she worked for several years at the University of Amsterdam. Currently, she is Professor of Anthropology and Sociology of Contemporary Indonesia at Leiden University. In cooperation with the faculty of arts, she is currently working on the project ‘Indonesian Mediations’, which examines the role of the media in the final years of the Suharto regime and the ways reformers and the media form a well-researched topic’, she says. ‘But most scholars focus exclusively on the Internet, while it is particularly “small media” like radio, banners, and graffiti which are important in conflict situations.’ Spyer explores these issues in the conflict-ridden Moluccan Islands in Indonesia, specifically in the province’s capital. Commercial violence broke out in Ambon city in January 1999 and lasted until a fragile peace agreement was signed in February 2002. Over time, the conflict consolidated two polarized religious groups – one Christian and one Muslim – which the outside world came to see as the war’s main opponents. At least five thousand and possibly as many as ten thousand people were killed during the three years of hostilities, and an estimated 700,000 people fled from their homes. ‘I was troubled by the sense that something was missing in the account of explanations of the conflict’, Spyer does not dismiss the view that the Asian financial crisis, the drop-down of Suharto, and the subsequent period of Reformasi, as well as the intrigues of Jakarta’s political elite and the military, all played an important role. But some of these analyses are too abstract, too far removed from the everyday lives of ordinary people.

Too little attention is given to the work of the imagination and the role of the community in this and, specifically, how imagination propels particular actions and shapes those who carry them out. In conflict situations, the boundaries blur between fact and fiction, fear and fantasy, knowledge and ignorance. ‘This, I believe, is what is meant by climate, which is no mere backdrop.’ Spyer cites the examples of Voice of the Heart – Acang and Obet, a public service announcement broadcast on national TV and several commercial channels some months after the break-out of violence. The spot was meant to foster peace among the combatant religious groups in Ambon. It featured two young boys, the Muslim Acang and his Christian bosom friend Obet, who are discussing the tense situation in their city. In order to understand why this comes to the conclusion that they do not understand. ‘It is a problem of adults, and we are the victims’, Acang says. The camera zooms in on the two friends, who are posed with one another, while they voice the hope and mutual promise that ‘even if Ambon is destroyed like this, our bond of brotherhood should not be broken’. Spyer: ‘All the Ambonese took from the spot was a name and for the first time, we Ambonese can only possibly when substantial groups of Ambonese were thinking of themselves as living lives parallel to those of substantial groups of people in the Middle East. Her interviews with Ambonese refugees showed her that the local population feels neglected by the political elites in Jakarta. She thinks that the borrowing of names and terms from other conflict grounds might thus serve a specific purpose. ‘Twisting these war-torn places may be one way of lending local suffering in Ambon larger than local meaning.’

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The analysis of the aggregate numbers of the 1990s shows in which regions and countries the contributions on Indonesia appeared. Some interesting results should be highlighted. The ranking of Indonesian Studies in Asia is in line with the following: Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, India, Japan, and the US account for 30 per cent of all published articles new appear in the Netherlands. Given the ongoing cuts in Indonesian Studies in the Netherlands, these figures will probably further shrink. On the other hand, Indonesia is still the most important place for Indonesianist pub-
During his work in Vietnam, the Swedish archaeologist Olov Janse excavated numerous brick-built Han-style tombs and kilns in Than Hoa province, and the remains of the Dong Son settlement in North Vietnam. With the support of the Ecole Française d’Études Orientales et Asiatiques, Janse carried out three series of excavations in Vietnam between 1934 and 1939. During his third expedition he also excavated at the Sa Huỳnh sites in the province of Quảng Nai, central Vietnam. The ceramics he excavated were deposited in numerous museums throughout the world, one of these being the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities (MFEA) in Stockholm, Sweden.

The leading market for Indonesian Studies is now in the Asia-Pacific and North America. The leading market for Indonesian Studies is now in the Asia-Pacific countries, including Australia. This country alone, which has about the population size of the metropolitan area of Jakarta, is producing as much Indonesianist output as the entire US. An interesting result, on the other hand, is the low turn out of ASEAN studies. This reflects not just Excerpta Indonesica’s bias, but, rather, a lack of Indonesianist centres in, say, Thailand or the Philippines, one could expect to see more efforts put into Indonesian Studies in these countries in the future.

tries expand Indonesian Studies in the future.

In fact, American contributions constituted less than 10 per cent of the world output in the 1990s. The question is whether these numbers reflect a general lack of interest in Indonesian and Indonesian Studies in the USA and whether this, if unchanged, might have serious long-term consequences for American-Indonesian relations.

Reference
- Excerpta Indonesica; Leiden: KITLV Press (1970–)

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Film monteren incl kader!