

# A personal account of what I did during my stay at

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## As things stood

Before coming to the Netherlands, I had been studying the modernization of the Endenese people of central Flores, eastern Indonesia, focusing on the impact of recent immigration to Malaysia and cash cropping. Regarding the former, I had published a mildly critical article (Nakagawa 2003) on modern anthropological theories about 'place' (e.g. Gupta and Ferguson 1997), in which I concluded that there were two discrete language games operating in Ende which we might label the 'traditional' and 'modern' language games. The traditional language game includes 'modern' phenomena as one of its constituent parts, by treating schools and labour migration as outside the meaningful world of kinship, and hence as non-gifts and non-places (see Augé 1992). For its part, the 'modern' language game includes 'traditional' phenomena, by representing *adat* and ceremonies as conservative, as in the way of the progressive world of development ('pembangunan'). In a way, these two language games – with which most Endenese are fluent – are like two legendary serpents eating each other's tail.

A few months after my arrival, I read a paper at an IIAS public seminar entitled 'From Paddy to Vanilla, Elephant Tusks to Money' (hereafter the 'vanilla paper') which dealt with three generations in an Ende village, from around 1960 up until now. Beginning with the idea of the Endenese tripartite economy (comprised of the subsistence, gift, and market spheres), the vanilla paper criticized the idea of money being an all-destructive agent, as advanced by P. Bohannon (1967), who described a society with a similar multi-layered economy (Tiv). The vanilla paper described how the Ende people, with the aid of some indigenous conceptual devices, managed to make the idea of money fit into their own cosmology – to tame and domesticate its power.

## I had been fairly fed up with post-modernist hegemony in my old territory (cultural anthropology) and this was one reason why I temporarily converted to ecological anthropology

I came to the Netherlands with its vast colonial archives with the vague hope of acquiring data on cash cropping in colonial times, thinking, again vaguely, of writing a historical analysis of cash cropping in Ende or perhaps in Flores more generally. At least, I thought, I could expand the time-span of my vanilla paper (three generations) to more than 100 years. Even if I could not find any data of theoretical interest, I said to myself, I could still collect numerical data and do some very primitive economic-cum-ecological-anthropology-type-of-analysis. Truth to tell, I didn't have a clear idea of what I would find and what I hoped to prove – in a way, the result would depend on the documents I would find in the archive.

The only idea I had of any theoretical relevance came from the controversy between Marshall Sahlins (1985, 1993) and Nicholas Thomas (1992, 1993, etc). Sahlins emphasizes the importance of Fijian traditional exchange, called *kerekere*, in understanding Fijian history while Thomas contends that *kerekere* was an example of 'invented culture' in the Fijian's struggle against western influence. In a sense, it was a debate about facts – whether *kerekere* had existed or not. My argument in the vanilla paper can be compared to Sahlins's argument, in that I, like Sahlins, emphasize the importance of the 'traditional institution' to fully understand Endenese history. Thus it is conceivable that one could devise a similar argument against mine, insisting that Endenese ritual exchange was another example of 'invented culture'. With this controversy in mind, I entertained a hazy hope of finding some historical data on Endenese ritual exchange in the past.

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I have a CD by Rowan Atkinson, a British comedian. One of his punch lines wonderfully describes my situation upon

arrival in the country: 'like a blind man groping in the dark for a black cat that wasn't there.' I was hoping there *was* a cat, though.

## In the beginning

I arrived in Amsterdam at midnight on a Sunday in April 2005. I was hungry so I wandered around near my apartment, to find that I was in the centre of the (seemingly) busiest part of the city. Surprise...

I began by picking up two books, one a 'scriptie' (MA thesis, perhaps) by a former University of Amsterdam student on the history of Flores (Oele 1995), and another by an agricultural scientist on the Sikka people adjacent to the Ende (Metzner

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1982). I chose Oele's book as it contained references to economic data in the colonial archives with numbers attached to the cited documents; these numbers, later on, made my search in the National Archive easier. The second-hand data collected by Oele helped me to form an idea of what kind of data I could expect to find in the archive and thus what kind of theoretical line(s) I should pursue. Unfortunately, the only conceivable line I could take, as far as Oele's data suggested, was the one I called an economic/ecological anthropology type of analysis.

So I began re-reading the book by Metzner to guide me in the kind of data I should collect and what kind of arguments I was expected to advance in these new (to me) fields of economic and ecological anthropology. Manon Osseweijer's thesis (2001; she was kind enough to give me a copy) was of great help in versing me in the anthropology of ecology. I read a few works cited in her dissertation and then others cited in those. I think I expanded my vocabulary immensely at this stage – I was being trained as a part-time economic/ecological anthropologist.

Armed with ideas of what kind of data I would find as well as the theoretical lines I was expected to take in assembling those data, I plunged into the formidable corpus of colonial documents at the National Archive in Den Haag. As the door to the archive announces to the visitor: '100 km of 1,000 years of history'.

## Population density and other dull matters

I attained some tentative results from my library work at this stage – these were not to my personal taste, though (I found out that I'm definitely a *cultural* anthropologist.) First of all, the population figures are as follows:

### Colonial Period

District	1855	1915	1918	1924	1930
Manggarai	n/a	124908	n/a	120500	155283
Ngada	n/a	92227	n/a	69000	99767
Ende	n/a	82054	n/a	66000	116015
Sikka	n/a	93159	n/a	83000	123132
East Flores	n/a	89752	n/a	120500	89752
Flores	250000	482100	336885	480000	716165
	-280000				

### Indonesian Period

District	1952	1954	1975	1983	2004
Manggarai	204987	211278	320543	n/a	n/a
Ngada	98142	101164	143763	n/a	n/a
Ende	141620	145804	179331	211851	242898
Sikka	141868	146216	189871	n/a	n/a
East Flores	173693	179044	57227	n/a	n/a
Flores	760303	785505	890735	n/a	n/a

One could make an almost coherent and plausible story out of the above (besides natural population growth) by referring to the political situation (the gradual expansion of the colonial

government) and the world economy (especially the Depression). Yet, one may be puzzled by the figures. To make the puzzle clearer, I calculated population density for each year for each district, and sometimes for each sub-district where data were available. Most of the figures are quite high for slash-and-burn agriculturists. One of Metzner's arguments is as follows: the population density in Sikka district is much higher than expected for a slash-and-burn agricultural population, and the key to understanding this abnormality (so to speak) lies in the specially-Sikka-way of agriculture, one of the elements of which is cash cropping.

The second task was therefore to collect data about cash cropping, in Ende in particular, and in Flores in general. So far so good – the research progressed as expected. It was rather dull, though.

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'Have you been to Mauritshuis yet?' asked Walter Hauser, one of my fellow fellows at IIAS as well as a good neighbour, and his wife, Florence. They urged me to go to Mauritshuis, an excellent museum located near the National Archive. The visits to Mauritshuis added some flavour to my routine.

## Cash cropping and other dull matters

In my investigation I came across data on the import and export of various cash crops, data about the amount of the land used for *sawah* and *ladang*, etc. These were not as extensive as I had expected, and copying numbers was an exhausting as well as dull task – I know I am not a good historian. But I did come across data which might, I hoped, enable me to pick up a few more lines along which to pursue my research in a wider context.

The first was the role played by such outsiders as Makassarese and Buginese. The most important cash crop in Ende (and in Flores generally) has been coconut palm. In my library research, I found that the coconut palm economy had been flourishing long before the colonial power arrived in Flores. Palms were sold to Makassarese and Buginese merchants and then taken to Makassar in southern Sulawesi and sold in local markets. Thus, to make the historical study of the Endenese economy reasonably more extensive, one had to investigate trade between the islands in pre-colonial times (pre-colonial in Flores but not in the rest of Indonesia).

The second was closely related to the first – if I should research Buginese and Makassarese traders and their role in trade in and out of Flores, then I could not do without mentioning the slave-trade in this part of Indonesia, especially around Flores and Sumba (the Endenese were famous slave-traders). Fortunately there is a booklet on slavery in this region by an anthropologist (Needham 1983) who claimed himself not to be a real historian. I decided to let the booklet cover this part of my research, at least for the time being.

## A turning point – have I seen you before?

While doing library research as a Sunday historian, my training as a part-time ecological anthropologist continued. Then, groping in the darkness, I came across something familiar: some ecological anthropologists claim to be 'anti-essentialists'. Some even refer to Foucault. This was rather unexpected – I had grown fed up with the names of Foucault and other philosophers and post-modernist hegemony in my old territory (cultural anthropology) and this was one reason why I temporarily converted to ecological anthropology.

I found out, however, that these 'new' ecological anthropologists have done nothing new – they are pure, old-fashioned, ecology-oriented anthropologists; it is only the surrounding atmosphere that has changed. Before they said that 'tribal' people were practical; now they say the same thing, the only difference being their additional comment that tribal people are not culturally bound as some of the muddle-headed cultural essentialists claim them to be.

By 'being familiar' I don't mean merely those philosophers' names but the rhetoric in general. Replace 'practical' with

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'rational' and voila! – you get the moral economy controversy, revolving around the book(s) by James C. Scott (1976) and Popkin (1979); you could go back to find the same issue in Geertz's *Involvement* book (1963) and Geertz's bashers, and further back to the controversy between formalists and substantivists (Polanyi 1957) and maybe even to Weber (and Marx, perhaps – though not as opposed to Weber). Something clicked in my head. I found myself standing on familiar ground.

## Sea women and devils and other exciting matters

I looked around and saw various loose ends of my research coming together to take shape (still vague, though). And I began to remember things.

Early on in my stay here in the Netherlands, I attended (actually, just went and listened to the papers at) the Borneo conference held by IIAS. There I met my old friend, Greg Acciaoli, who is, incidentally, a superb *cultural* anthropologist. Since then, from time to time, I have been reading Greg's articles without any definite aim in mind; just for our old friendship's sake, I suppose. Most of Greg's articles deal with the Bugis in their migration place in Lindu. I reread his articles, which try to analyse Buginese 'commercial' activities in *cultural* terms.

Memory works miracle sometimes; the situation he describes in those articles, where the commercially-oriented strangers (Bugis) and the subsistence-oriented natives (Lindu) live in one place reminded me of – apart from almost the same situation in 19th century Ende – the Aru islands described by Osseweijer, and Spyer (1997). Spyer describes the parallel relationships between the Chinese merchants (the commercially-oriented strangers) and the Aru natives, and the Aru natives and the legendary sea women; the 'analogical' relationships remind us of the baptizing of money described by Taussig (1980).

Let me here recapitulate a small part of Taussig's elegant analysis. The black plantation workers in Columbia had to reconcile themselves to the new, powerful capitalist ideology. They had been familiar with the idea of money, but only in so far as money was evaluated for its use-value. The important aspect of money in capitalism is its exchange-value, in other words, money as capital, whose strange function is that it grows bigger as time passes. The black workers knew about animals, which reproduce themselves – that is, the number of animals grows as time passes. Thus, money in capitalist ideology is in some ways similar to money as they know it and different in others, while money in capitalist ideology is similar to animals in some ways and different in others. 'They must explain the transformation of money into interest-bearing capital and the conversion of use-value into exchange-value' (Taussig 1980:131).

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In this context, the 'baptism of money', a strange and seemingly unintelligible custom among some of the black planters, made sense. Money as they knew it (money as use-value) was natural but barren, as opposed to money in capitalism which was, to them, unnatural and fertile. 'Barren money can become unnaturally fertile when transferred to God's domain and stamped with his life-giving properties' (Taussig 1980:132). In a way, the baptizing of money was how the black planters tried to understand the new and overwhelming capitalist money economy, using all of their cognitive devices – a process which a structuralist would be willing to call *bricolage*.

## Rebellion and cargo cults – more and more curious

The problematique of money with its two aspects, use-value and exchange-value, fits well with my position in the vanilla

paper: the market economy and the gift economy stress the exchange of the things transacted (though in strikingly different ways), while the subsistence economy stresses the use value of the things transacted. I was searching for a way to integrate the point in my vanilla paper and Taussig's arguments.

I went back to the archive with this new insight. Besides data on economy and ecology, I began collecting data on 'onlusten' or rebellions, as rebels' ideologies must have expressed their attempts to grapple with the new capitalist ideology. I knew that scholars such as Stefan Dietrich and Robert H. Barnes had done similar research. Their analyses, however, were almost always political while I wanted to approach these rebellions from the cognitive (as it were) point of view – that is, as a cognitive struggle to reconcile old ideologies with the new capitalist ideology embodied in the idea of money as capital.

I collected data of rebellions, not only in Flores, but in the residency of Timor and the surrounding islands. Some of the descriptions were detailed, but only in numbers (of casualties, etc) and dates; the administrators did not pay much attention to what the rebels wanted.

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Meanwhile, outside the archive, I extended my research into the so-called cargo cults, the kind of 'movements' explicitly aiming at money and wealth. While some analyses, such as the famous *Trumpet* book (Worsley 1968), focus exclusively on politics, Burrige's (1960) analysis and data were most insightful. Burrige presents Mambu and other prophets' and followers' activities as trials to regain their integrity, and convincingly shows how traditionalism failed to help people grasp the new capitalism- and church- oriented changes in society, and how the cargo-cults filled the gap. His data deserve thorough re-analysis.

Data were collected in other fields as well, including Javanese millennium movements and headhunting rumours. I initially thought headhunting rumours were promising in more than one way: they might address a loose end (about the slave-trade) in my research and, second, I had encountered similar rumours in my field. Though it turned out that only Erb's analysis (1991) touched upon cognitive aspects, I think the data I found will be helpful as comparative material when considering the meanings attached to similar rumours in Ende. Especially the line that Erb (1991 and 1999) pursued looks, to me, promising: even though the Ende people I know have had little contact with tourists, their experience abroad (as wage labourers in Malaysia) is comparable to what Erb argues (1999).

So, at the time of writing this essay, I am: (1) an average part-time ecological anthropologist (versed in a few theories current in ecological anthropology); (2) a moderate Sunday historian (with a fair amount of data available at hand), and, above all; (3) a very willing (cultural) anthropologist with a hope of analysing old data (rebellions and 'movements' so far analysed in political terms) in a new light, that is, in cognitive terms.

## An abrupt ending

Cash cropping (capitalism), ecology, headhunting/slave trades, stranger-businessmen (Bugis and Chinese) and labour migration, all these bits and pieces were beginning to merge into one configuration, revolving around: (1) the idea of money in capitalism, and (2) traditional societies' encounter with it when, regrettably, my time was up.

Even though I can no longer visit the archive, I can pursue the line I now see clearly in front of me, and will, hopefully within a short period of time, present the result in a lengthy article, or, better yet, in a book.

I really appreciate all the help and kindness I received during my stay in the Netherlands. I was going to mention all the names I could remember when my foster father's wisdom occurred to me. One day, in Ende, I was playing back the day's recordings to Bapak Epu, my foster father. One of the recorded pieces was a recital of a ritual chant. Any ritual chant in Ende begins by invoking ancestors; before coming to the main part, the chanter was reciting all the ancestors' names he could recall when Bapak Epu said, 'This is not good; not good at all. If one should drop an ancestor's name, then he (or she) feels affronted and will do something harmful, not only to the reciter but to the society as a whole. It is much better to say merely *embu kajo//iro aro*, 'grand parents and great grand parents// ancestors and forebearers' because, in that way, nobody will ever be affronted.'

Still, some names deserve special mentioning – Wim Stokhof, Heleen, Wouter. And let me continue – all other staff members and fellow fellows. I really am grateful to you all. ◀

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