Jacqueline VeI’s book provides a comprehensive account of socio-political developments in one of the most understudied regions of Eastern Indonesia. Based on extensive fieldwork over the last 20 years, VeI describes how changes in national politics have affected the conduct of local politics in West Sumba, a small district in East Nusa Tenggara province. With its broad temporal scope and its great attention to ethnographic detail, it will be an important reference for scholars working on Eastern Indonesia. However, it should be noted that a significant amount of the material presented in this book is actually not new (some data is based on fieldwork in the 1980s) and several chapters or parts thereof have already been published elsewhere.

Vel argues that despite the transformation of Indonesia’s political system, the fundamental role of local politics in West Sumba remains largely unchanged. (p. 247) As local leaders gradually adjust to the new conditions, the broader sociopolitical landscape of West Sumba is inevitably being transformed. According to Vel, the incremental changes that have occurred since the 1990s have resulted in new consumers of political influence (e.g. voters who pay) and can be called ‘cosmo-patriots’.

Based on extensive fieldwork over the last two decades, Vel provides insights into the political developments in West Sumba and how these developments have been influenced by changes at the national level. The book consists of ten chapters and three additional appendices. Chapter 1, for example, explores the political landscape of West Sumba and how it has been shaped by the national and regional governments. Chapter 2 discusses the role of the local community in shaping political decisions and the influence of the national government on local politics. Chapter 3 examines the role of the local government in shaping political decisions and the influence of the national government on local politics. Chapter 4 explores the role of the local community in shaping political decisions and the influence of the national government on local politics. Chapter 5 examines the role of the national government in shaping political decisions and the influence of the local government on local politics. Chapter 6 explores the role of the local community in shaping political decisions and the influence of the national government on local politics. Chapter 7 examines the role of the local government in shaping political decisions and the influence of the national government on local politics. Chapter 8 explores the role of the local community in shaping political decisions and the influence of the national government on local politics. Chapter 9 examines the role of the local government in shaping political decisions and the influence of the national government on local politics. Chapter 10 explores the role of the local community in shaping political decisions and the influence of the national government on local politics.

The book concludes with a comprehensive summary of the key findings and conclusions drawn from the fieldwork. Vel argues that despite the transformation of Indonesia’s political system, the fundamental role of local politics in West Sumba remains largely unchanged. (p. 247) As local leaders gradually adjust to the new conditions, the broader sociopolitical landscape of West Sumba is inevitably being transformed. According to Vel, the incremental changes that have occurred since the 1990s have resulted in new consumers of political influence (e.g. voters who pay) and can be called ‘cosmo-patriots’.

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Reinventing the wheel

Hoodwinked by the enigmatic title, I expected to review a book on my preoccupation with anthropological fieldwork.1

Field work.1

VeI, however, has had the broad perspective that is at first not realised as clearly in the chapter on conflict resolution and the role of society in the resolution of conflict. Although the chapter on conflict resolution and the role of society in the resolution of conflict appears particularly relevant to specialists with a district interest in conflict resolution, alternative dispute resolution, and conflict transformation and post-conflict development, but still leave a number of questions unanswered.

In Chapter 4, for example, VeI explores the political landscape of West Sumba and how it has been shaped by the national government. VeI argues that despite the transformation of Indonesia’s political system, the fundamental role of local politics in West Sumba remains largely unchanged. (p. 247) As local leaders gradually adjust to the new conditions, the broader sociopolitical landscape of West Sumba is inevitably being transformed. According to VeI, the incremental changes that have occurred since the 1990s have resulted in new consumers of political influence (e.g. voters who pay) and can be called ‘cosmo-patriots’.

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Notes
2. VeI’s critical perspective on fieldwork and the importance of involving local communities in the research process is innovative and engaging.


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