

Susanto Zuhdi, *Sejarah Buton yang terabaikan; Labu rope labu wana*. Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, Yayasan Kebudayaan Masyarakat Buton, 2010, xli + 350 pages (including illustrations and maps). ISBN 9789797692292. Price: IDR 65,000 (soft cover).



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*Sejarah Buton yang terabaikan; Labu rope labu wana* relates the dynamic period of sixteenth/seventeenth century Buton, a period, which, according to the author, has been neglected due to the hegemony of Gowa and Ternate. In fact, historians have solid information to understand Buton as an Island that tried to respond to internal and external influences by taking its own perspective and by making use of all means available to survive: that is, through cultural and structural relations. The book consists

of six chapters: (1) Introduction; (2) the realm of Buton; (3) Labu Wana; (4) Labu Rope; (5) Kumpeni Walanda; (6) the Kumpeni from the Butonese perspective; and (7) conclusion.

Negligence seems to be a key word in the history of Nusantara which, to some extent, was not only influenced by the “mainland” but also by the sea and its islands, which, at the time of the arrival of the first fleet of colonialism, played an important role. The book gives us an important account of how colonialism contributed to our knowledge of the complex relations between the “native” sultan and the colonials. It sketches Buton as having to face not only the power of Gowa and Ternate but also that of the Dutch masters of the sea. For me one of the most interesting points the author reveals is that “culture” and “social structure” provide meaning, and are resources as well as constraints at the same time. The sultans used tradition and other cultural expressions to legitimize themselves and to position themselves among their people and in relation to neighbouring islands. However, these positions were instable in terms of social relations with other sultans and later, with the colonials. Contestation, precedence, and the need to regulate access to economic recourses were important. The latter was to become crucial for the Dutch but the locals needed cultural legitimation too.

In relating these phenomena, the author tries to identify the following core issues: (1) social relations between the islands and their neighbouring authorities on one side and the Dutch on the other which created the ambiguous relation between vassals and overlords (pages 10), which in turn, influenced (2) the unstable relations among them. The colonials perceived this situation in terms of a “partnership” so for them it was possible to force the local authorities into signing treaties. Multi-level external threats forced

them to adopt certain strategies but also cost them due to their failure to make allegiances even leading them to change positions from that of winners to that of losers in the modern era. The book thus provides a significant contribution in terms of “island of history” and “island in history”, or in semiotic terms in those of “sign of history” and “sign in history”.

*The legacy of Sahlins*

Social sciences and humanities tend to reciprocally borrow each other's concepts. We just need to look at terms like narrative, discourse, spatial metaphor, dramaturgy, performance, orality, signs, structure, ideology, production-consumption, identity, rhetoric, symbolic structure, and many more.

Recent historical studies, which I see from a distance since I am not a historian, seem to be affected by a kind of duality - not by some sort of dualism, in the way they see social structure. Structure is considered to be part of a process. In addition, grand narrative is abandoned and replaced by little narrative and the consideration of every day practices. Subject and agency are thus given emphasis. However, it soon becomes clear that in these studies greater emphasis is put on discursive strategies and power relations.

As an “outsider” in the study of history, I am interested in the author's efforts to present Sahlins who often said (1976: 178) “The object stands as a human concept outside itself, as man speaking to man through the medium of things.” In this case Sahlins emphasizes the adoption of the functional analyses of the “institutionalization” of culture. How do cultures become a real part of the structure and social system? By only considering the creation and the movement of goods from the perspective of their pecuniary properties (exchange-value) one ignores the cultural code behind the concrete properties governing the utility concept and still remains unable to account for what is in fact produced.

One who chooses Sahlins' framework thus needs to pay attention not only to the ‘exchange-value’ among the Dutch and Butonese in terms of economics but also to see these activities in terms of culture. He states (1976: 101) “By the systematic arrangement of meaningful differences assigned the concrete, the cultural order is realized also as an order of goods. Operating on a specific logic of correspondence between material and social contrast, production is thus the production of the culture in a system of objects.” Through transactions with the colonials some sultans felt they were accepted culturally, as Zuhdi states, when Buton needed to qualify the Dutch either as “friends” (*sekutu*) or as enemies (*seteru*). Accordingly, the author needed to examine a number of local narratives recorded in manuscripts and oral traditions. This is a method which is no longer very popular among historians due to the ontological status of traditional narratives.

Not surprisingly, Zuhdi is concerned with “spatial metaphors”. By taking into account the cultural views of his subject, he is able to posit the view that culture provides meaning for history. This view can be identified

in his approach to the spatial concepts found in Buton, for example, “spatial metaphors”: *labu wana labu rope*, meaning harbouring in the ‘bow’ and ‘stern’ positions. Understanding this metaphor culturally leads to understanding historical processes in Buton which are actually difficult to comprehend if we try to understand historical processes without taking cultural perspectives into account.

*Labu rope* and *labu wana*, which are associated with cultural resources, provide a variety of options for social interactions. The choice is then regulated by the social interaction between the Butonese, neighbouring landlords, and the VOC. Indeed, I find the legacy of Sahlin’s symbolic transaction here. Since the book is written by a historian, concepts of ‘events’ and ‘moments’ of the past are critical to the author.

Ironically this starting point is also a subject of discussion among readers interested in the impact of the past on the contemporary historical discourse which is often questioned by anthropology and sociology. From different perspectives, for instance, we find that the connection between Bajo and Wolio needs to be explored further since not all the locals, for instance, agree that Bajo can be equated with Wolio in contemporary terms.

This book has filled the gap between historians and anthropologists or between students of conservative historians and those who feel that the study of culture can help them to reveal the meaning of the past for the present.

#### REFERENCE

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Victor Pogadaev, *Kamus Rusia-Indonesia/Indonesia-Rusia; Русско-Индонезийский и Индонезийско-Русский Словарь*. Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2010, x + 1323 pp. ISBN 978-979-22-4881-4. Price: IDR 280,000 (hard cover).

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Russian lexicography with regard to Malay/Indonesian has a history of more than two centuries, culminating in the *Большой индонезийско-русский словарь / Kamus besar bahasa Indonesia-Rusia* (R.N. Korigodskiy ed., 1990, Moskwa: Russkiy Yazik; two volumes). The lexicographical products that were the result of all these efforts were published in Russia and intended for the Russian market: the earliest works were meant for Russian readers to get a glimpse of a language as exotic as Malay while the aim of most later ones