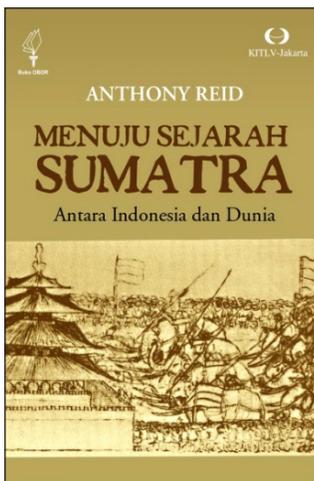


## BOOK REVIEWS

Anthony Reid, *Menuju sejarah Sumatra; Antara Indonesia dan dunia*. Jakarta: KITLV-Jakarta, Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2010, 434 pp. ISBN 9789794617755. Price: IDR 72,250 (soft cover).



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The renowned Australian born international historian, Anthony Reid is one of the few foreign historians who consistently tried to come to grips with one specific Indonesian region for over forty years. The book under review is a compilation of no less than fifteen articles taken from the book *An Indonesian frontier; Acehnese and other histories of Sumatra* to which at the end a new article has been added.

Tony, as the author is usually called by his friends, did not intend his articles to deal with the region in a comprehensive way, as William Marsden did in his *The history of Sumatra* of 1781 which has already been translated and was published by Komunitas Bambu in 2009. In *Menuju sejarah Sumatra*, the author invites other historians to fill in the gaps so that we may arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of Sumatra's long history.

The book is interesting because it follows the journey of the author who has studied this area since the 1960s. The first publication on Sumatra by his hand was his doctoral dissertation which he defended in Cambridge in 1965 and which was published under the title *The contest for North Sumatra* (1969). Reid reveals the development of Sumatra through his writings and observations. In his own words "I have occupied myself with the history of Sumatra for over forty years and the island has seen many changes, as I have myself changed a lot. In the 1960s, the island occupied the fourth place in the chain of weak islands in the Indonesian Republic. Its transport infrastructure was in shambles, [...]. Under Suharto's regime, the island as a whole has become rather prosperous. An exception has to be made for Aceh which remained restless and suffered so many problems that the Acehnese no longer consider themselves Indonesians" (pp. xii-xiii).

He admits that in the book he focuses on Aceh, the northernmost part of Sumatra rather than on any other region. Four articles deal exclusively with the region whereas another four articles are also mainly concerned with Aceh. Reid's reason for this is "Aceh's conspicuous political role in the early modern period and its decisive position in the present survival of the Indonesian project" (p. xii). With only one tenth of the population of the whole of Sumatra, Aceh would seem, in fact, unable to "represent the others".

As a follower of the leading French historian, Fernand Braudel, time and again Reid emphasizes the importance of history's fundamental structures: geography and demography and thus as a Braudelian historian, he strives to explain history through looking at changes over a long period of time (*longue durée*), medium long time (*conjuncture*), and short-term (*l'événementielle*). His expositions therefore put more emphasis on history's constructive structures although he does not ignore the processes that describe events.

### SUMATRA'S IDENTITY

It is not necessary to read the articles in this book consecutively. However, four loose units may be seen in order to understand the book's structure. The first concerns "Sumatra's identity" and consists of three chapters in which Reid modifies the Braudelian approach by exposing the structures (geographical and demographical) in his explanations in a comparative manner.

Three factors are behind the historical patterns that portray Sumatra's identity: geography, migration, and politics (read: nationalism). Sumatra's large area and the variety of its geographical settings has given it its special form: wild and open although often strategically located with large rivers, swamps and marches in the east and Bukit Barisan, the mountainous chain that stretches from the north to the south, providing protection to the inhabitants of the interior and thus enabling them to develop their own civilization free from foreign influences. The open sea-bordering areas and the rich pepper cultures ensured that European traders frequently visited North Sumatra, especially during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The dispersed regions of the island could only unite after the island became part of the Indonesian nation state.

In this first part, Reid looks at Sumatra's identity from a geo-historical division into three main regions: North, Central, and South Sumatra. These units also became provinces shortly after Indonesian independence. Undoubtedly, the name Sriwijaya needs to be mentioned first in identifying Sumatra. However, the collective memory of the Sumatran peoples about their history is concerned with the myth of Bukit Siguntang, the small hill near Sriwijaya's capital, or with Andalas and Pulo Percha, the kingdoms at the upper end of the Musi and Batanghari rivers.

Sriwijaya's main heir is the Minangkabau, the densely populated rice and gold producing region in the central mountainous area. In the thirteenth century, Adityawarman claimed to descent from the Majapahit and Sriwijaya empires and he established his kingdom near the upper course of the

Batanghari River. Countless statues and inscriptions that remain of that time portray him as the ruler of Central Sumatra. It is thus not the northern part of the island that occupies an important place in the Sumatra's collective memory, despite the strong sultanate of Aceh and that of Samudra-Pasai which preceded it.

Aceh is located on the northern tip of the island. It was an immense sultanate that forged international relations and obtained heroic characteristics thanks to its opposition to and its battles against the Dutch colonizers. Under the moniker: "Mecca's Veranda" it was as if Aceh had set itself apart from the rest of Indonesia. Pasai, which came up in the fourteenth century was apparently unable to incorporate the areas now known as North Sumatra into its collective memory network. In the central plains, the Batak paid homage to the Kings of Pagaruyung in the Minangkabau region, the successor of Adityawarman's realm.

In the nineteenth century, Islam more and more penetrated into the regions at the southern tip of Bukit Barisan. Reid does not discuss this part of the island, however.

In his discussion of population and the migration currents, Tony asks the exiting question why, living in the most "maritime" region in Asia, the Indonesian peoples never talk of the sea but rather of the mountains in their mythology. Tony lists five factors why the plateau was more appropriate for human habitation. *Firstly*, agriculture with modest technology on a family scale was much easier in the valleys and river estuaries than in the often-flooded low plains. *Secondly*, the natural surroundings provided a healthy atmosphere. *Thirdly*, in the absence of a "state" land was free to beget. *Fourthly*, the mountains provided a natural bastion needed for security and *fifthly*, cultural factors. Before the arrival of Islam and Christianity, cultural borders existed between the rural areas and the towns and between the mountains and the coast.

#### ACEH AND SUMATRA

As the collective memory shows, for the Acehnese there is no other Sultan than Iskandar Muda (1607-1636). During his time, Aceh reached the height of its power and splendour. The Dutch in 1598, the English in 1600, and the French in 1602 arrived in Aceh as it was the first hub in Asia and because of the abundance of pepper there. In this period, Aceh was the major power in Southeast Asia and its authority reached from Tiku in West Sumatra up to Asahan in the East, and Pahang, Johor, and Kedah on the peninsula. Thousands of prisoners were taken during expeditions, they enriched the number of inhabitants in Aceh's capital and they engaged in the labour with which they were familiar.

Aceh had relations in Europe and even in America (Chapters 4-8). In the eighteenth century, the French intended to forge relations with Aceh but they failed causing the English to see possibilities to make a bridgehead there. Because of the French movements, the English feared that France would

occupy Aceh and destroy Bengkulu. Therefore, the English established trade relations with Aceh in 1784 which, although unproductive, was their first major step after having established a base in Penang. One small detail of interest is the presence of the French "James Brooke", Mayrena.

The Aceh War which lasted from 1873 until about 1900 occupies an important place in Acehnese collective – the intensity of foreign involvement in Aceh's history. Is it a historical coincidence that the Dutch attacked Aceh in 1873 when oral history has it that Aceh was taking diplomatic steps by trying to invoke the help of the Turks for protection? The Turks officially offered to act as intermediary. The date the Turkish envoy to sail, however, was postponed but the Acehnese had set the diplomatic tie with Turkey much earlier to the time of Sultan Iskandar Muda (p. 71). Apparently, the Acehnese were mesmerized by Aceh's lustre under Sultan Iskandar Muda even though it is, of course, anachronistic. In their collective history, the Acehnese are extremely proud that they were able to entertain diplomatic ties with the Turks, French, and English (Chapters 4-8).

#### SUMATRA AND INDONESIA

The book essentially focuses on Aceh or the northern part of Sumatra even though other parts contributed to Sumatra's historic fabric. Sumatra became united into Indonesia due to Dutch colonialism. The inhabitants of the plateau were introduced to new power structures, tax systems, and the arrival and supremacy of the law. Because of the educational opportunities the Dutch offered, new elite was born which became aware that it was Sumatran and Indonesian. A breakup between the elites ensued, but not an ethnic schism (Chapter 12).

Sumatra contributed greatly to Indonesia's nationalism. We need only mention statesmen and thinkers such as Mohammad Hatta, Sutan Syahrir, and Amir Syarifuddin. Similarly, language and literature thrived in the time of revolution and Indonesian nation building.

Some final remarks need to be made. *Firstly*, Sumatra needs to be studied more comprehensively in order to produce a picture of its identity and character. Especially South Sumatra leaves much to be studied.

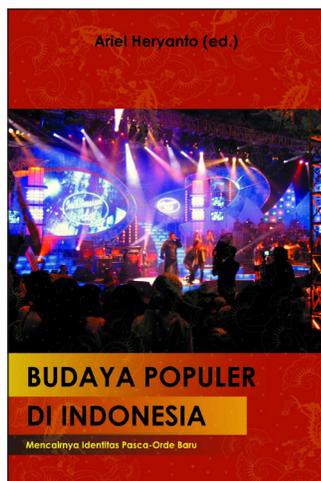
*Secondly*, some works written by Indonesian historians would have needed to be mentioned in the book. For instance, mention needs to be made of professor of history of Andalas University, Gusti Asnan's work *Pelayaran di Pantai Barat Sumatera* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2009). M. Nur (Andalas University) wrote on Sumatra's maritime history for his PhD at the University of Indonesia. He wrote about the Sibolga Harbour in the nineteenth century. Bambang Purwanto, professor at Gadjah Mada University wrote his doctoral dissertation on the rubber plantations in South Sumatra in the nineteenth century. He defended his thesis at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London in 1993. Unfortunately, both works still wait to be published. Finally, Erwiza Erman wrote *Pengusaha, koeli, dan penguasa; Industri timah di Belitung 1852-1940* (Penerbit Sinar Harapan, 1995) and *Membaranya batubara konflik*

*kelas dan etnik Ombilin-Sawahlunto-Sumatera Barat 1892-1996* (Desantara, 2005).

Finally, the book opens new perspectives and offers an approach that will make it more easy for the next generation to study specific regions in Indonesia which are very important, not only for academic circles, but also for policy makers in the regional government.

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Ariel Heryanto (ed.), *Budaya populer di Indonesia; Mencairnya identitas pasca-Orde Baru*. Translated by Eka S. Saputra. Yogyakarta: Jalasutra, 2012, viii + 317 pp. ISBN: 9-786028-252812. Price: IDR 65,000 (soft cover).



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In contradiction to the essentialist view, that perceives identity as stable and unchanged, cultural studies has always understood identity as a never ending process or a “project” (Longhurst et al. 2008: 142). In his book, *Budaya populer di Indonesia; Mencairnya identitas pasca-Orde Baru* (its English title, *Popular culture in Indonesia; Fluid identities in post-authoritarian politics*), Ariel Heryanto captures just that through a selection of chapters that discusses the formation of national identity in the post-1998 era. In the two chapters that Heryanto wrote and seven others that he edited, the book captures a crucial time in the country’s history as the Indonesian people received the utmost freedom to determine who they are. The book highlights not just how identity is indeed fluid (determined through various unfixed references, bent, and mould according to people’s wish), but most importantly, it confirms the play of identity politics in which various identities are contested and ideologies continuously compete with one another.

The chapters compiled in this book are multi dimensional, covering cinema (chapters by Marshal Clark, David Hanan, Ariel Heryanto), television (Rachmah Ida, Penelope Coutas, Vissia Ita Yulianto, Edwin Jurriëns), and music (Ariel Heryanto, Max M. Richter), looking at Indonesia on a macro level and dwelling on case studies as specific as Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and the urban-*kampung* of Gubeng in Surabaya. The method ranges from ethnographic studies of watching *Meteor Garden* together with *kampung* women, interviews with TV producers of reality shows, and close reading of plots and patterns in popular cultures in Indonesia. Reading chapter after chapter, it is clear that the fall of Suharto has opened a floodgate, and while hope and creativity in the