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Seventeenth century Bandanese society in fact and fiction: Tambera assessed

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SEVENTEENTH CENTURY BANDANESE SOCIETY IN FACT AND FICTION: 'TAMBERA' ASSESSED

I

U'tuy Tatang Sontani (born Tjiandjur, West Java, 1920), today the most significant of Indonesian dramatists, began his literary career at the age of eighteen with the publication of two novels as newspaper serials in the Sundanese press. One of these was called *Tambera* and was published as a book just before the Japanese Occupation. Translated by Sontani into *bahasa Indonesia* during the Occupation, *Tambera* reappeared in 1949 as one of the first novels of the 1945 Generation of authors. (Achdiat K. Mihadja's *Atheis* was the other, and also has characteristics of the prewar literature.) A second printing was issued in 1952 with a number of minor verbal alterations and the deletion of two, insignificant incidents.

Tambera tells of the coming of the Dutch to the spice island of Banda in 1599 and of the adolescence of the boy the book is named after: his growing up and falling in love with the daughter of the Dutch commander sent to superintend trade, his joining the Dutch army as a cadet and the final subjugation of his people in revolt. Professor A. H. Johns in an essay on the growth of a modern Indonesian literature has written: "Whether [*Tambera*] is a complete success as a piece of historical reconstruction is open to debate, but as a novel its literary merits are impressive."¹ I want here to examine how accurate a historical reconstruction *Tambera* really is, placing most of my stress — just as Sontani does — on the presentation of a picture of seventeenth century Bandanese society, and to conclude with a few literary remarks on the novel.

II

Tambera is set in Banda in the Southern Moluccas, at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The action of the novel takes place between

¹ "Towards a Modern Literature in Indonesia", *Meanjin*, 1960, p. 386.

June 1599 and 1604 (vaguely). As Sontani describes the island, it is surrounded by the sea and dominated by a smoking volcano. For Johns, "the sense of place is so vividly communicated that it is possible to feel the expanse of sea surrounding the island, and the clarity and freshness of the air in which the smoke of its volcano rises."² Throughout the book Sontani devotes a great deal of incidental detail to the describing of Bandanese life, creating in effect the picture of a simple, somewhat idyllic, village life. The following detail emerges from the book.

The village of Lontor has been built to face the sea (31, 9)³; it is clean and well-ordered and the houses are sheltered by trees (9). There are ladders to the front entrances of the houses (99). At the back of the house is the kitchen (134). Fishing gear usually hangs on the walls: in the courtyards are pig-cages (26). The houses are kept well-swept (148) and are provided with mats which are locally woven (107). Besides the pigs, people keeps goats, dogs and hens (55, 9). In the gardens they grow sweet potato (24) which when eaten by itself is a poor man's food (108), pepaya, sago, (237), singkok (117) and spices (91). The spices are harvested communally when necessary (32) but otherwise tended individually (149). They are occasionally traded with European traders (30, 71) but there have been none such for a long time (33), except for Willington, an English trader, and the Bandanese are beginning to feel that growing spices is rather a wasted effort (33). They eat their food with their fingers (168) and sit crosslegged before their hosts (27, 167).

At the head of the village is the *kepala kampung*, who acts as the first among equals. Decisions are made in informal conference with the other men of the village (24). He has no power to punish anyone (181): this can only be done by the will of the people. Everyone has free access to him (174). Imbata claims to be lord over all Banda and over all the nearby islands (48), that is over the five hundred people living on Banda and the fifteen hundred on other islands (48).

Each family is a nuclear family and consists of the father (*bapa*), who acts as head, the mother (*ibu*) and the children, who are subordinate to both. Other kinfolk may be invited to share accommodation with the nuclear family (Swamin and Wadela, Tambera's mother's

² *ibid.*

³ The numbers in parentheses in this section refer to the page of the 1952 edition from which the preceding statement has been drawn.

brother and his daughter) but there is no specific obligation for them to always continue so. The women guard the kitchens and, so they feel, the *adat* (113), while the men tend the gardens. Towards the men, women display reverence (168), towards their children, intense love and concern. The men however disregard the women because they are weaker than themselves (113, 126). Usually men are married at sixteen (117) and the marriage is arranged by the parents, generally with the consent of the children and after consideration of their opinion (120). After the wedding there is a dance to celebrate the occasion (149). The man then moves to live with his wife's people (134).

Generally boys have a great deal of freedom. They can eat out easily at other people's houses (125) and can roam at pleasure (177): they can go sailing (112, 115), or watch their elders chase pigs (115) or fighting cocks (119) or they can fly their kites on their own (189). The girls wear a sarong (41). They have much less freedom than the boys and are only supposed to mix with others of their same sex or with boys of their family (166) although mixed games of chasings are played on the beach after nightfall on the night of Kawista's wedding (150).

Despite the fact that one can see little specifically Islamic about the society under description, the faith is taught by Swamin, Tambera's uncle (108), who has studied in Java (14). He fasts and recommends the practice to others (109). He prays to the Lord (*Gusti*) (14) and regards himself as "a servant of the Lord" (*kawula Gusti*), a mystical idea of mixed Islamic and syncretic origin.⁴ He lives as a hermit and is given the title "Adjar" (24).

Beneath the strict Islamic teachings there are the superstitions of the *dukun* or *ki dukun*, who sells charms, spells and magic potions (97, 123). He burns gum as he chants his incantations (164). As the basis of his prognostications for the future, he uses the astrological value of the day of the week upon which a person was born (122). He prays to the ancestors, *nenekmojang*, to whom most of the villagers make reference at least in their oaths. The ancestors permit people to be happy (128) and protect them from hate and all evil (280, 163) and the diseases which are caused by the *hantu*, spirits of the forest (274). At the end of life lies death (276) but even while alive a man may lose his soul

⁴ B. Schrieke: *Indonesian Sociological Studies* (The Hague 1955) Vol. I, p. 236. G. W. J. Drewes: "Indonesia: Mysticism and Activism" in (ed.) G. E. von Grunebaum: *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilisation* (Chicago 1955), p. 299.

(*semangat*) (120, 123). The soul may also absent itself from a person's body (262) or just not be in accordance with the times (260). A man's spirit (*njawa*) may either wander after death (254) or merely finish then (254).

The flute is a known musical instrument (77). Stories of *Si Kantjil* the mousedeer, are told to children (77), such stories having both content and moral purpose (97). The people speak *bahasa Banda* (69, 73) which the Dutch can only manage at a rough level (*kasar*) (243).

Among the common gardening tools are the hoe (*tjangkul*) (11) and the club (*pentung*) (10). There are various cutting tools used in the kitchen, including a machete (*golak*) (258) and a long knife (*pisau*) (258).

Money is unknown (73) and indeed there is a lack of much economic activity at all, apart from the sporadic spice-trading. Willington trades *kain santung*, cloth from China, for spices (19) and receives goods as well from Japan and Java (51). There are no markets (123). The basis of the whole functioning of society is socio-economic reciprocity, or mutual cooperation (*gotong rojong*) (34) which is destroyed by the introduction of a money economy (133).

The accumulation of this detail and the exactness with which it is presented gives the reader a quiet confidence that he knows this particular village of Lontor and the texture of Bandanese social life intimately: that he understands just how it and its inhabitants looked and even how they might have been expected to act in most circumstances. This he could generalise from his own experience of Indonesian village life, making due allowance for the idyllic nature of the setting. He would agree with H. B. Jassin, dean of Indonesian critics, that "the way of life in Banda was probably not very different from that in other parts of Indonesia as regards the experiences and relationships of its inhabitants."⁵

Such confidence is sadly misplaced as a perusal of contemporary records will show.

III

There are ten islands in the group properly known as the Banda

⁵ *Kesusasteraan Indonesia Modern dalam Kritik dan Esei* (Djakarta 1962) Vol. I, p. 203.

Islands.⁶ Five of these were uninhabited at 1600: Pulau Pisang, Pulau Kapal, Pulau Sewengi, Pulau Seten and Gunung Api, a double-cratered volcano.⁷ Of the inhabited islands Banda Lontor and Banda Neira were the most important because the spice trade and the social organisation centered on them.⁸ Banda Lontor is about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles long and half a mile wide: in the period we are concerned with it supported four main *negeri*, Ortattan, Lontor, Selamon and Wayer. Ortattan was in the sixteenth century the principal state in the islands, but by 1600 she was an insignificant state and few paid any attention to her still persistent demands for privilege: "Once there were a thousand houses in Ortattan, but now there are no more than seventy".⁹ The lead passed to Lontor, although not the same political dominance. Under Lontor were three villages, Madjangi, Lacai and Sammer: the latter was composed of four *kampung*. Wayer ruled two villages,

⁶ Longitude $4^{\circ} 11' - 4^{\circ} 39' S.$, Latitude $129^{\circ} 17' - 130^{\circ} 31' E.$ The Banda Islands are nearly all volcanic in origin and represent three distinct formations:

- (i) the Central Banda volcano, composed of an old caldera wall shattered and inundated by the sea: represented by Banda Lontor (518 m), Pulau Kapal and Pulau Pisang.
- (ii) a younger volcanic group: represented by Banda Neira and the cone of Gunung Api.
- (iii) Some of the smaller 'islands' are actually elevated coral reefs e.g. Rosengain which rises to 170 m. above sea level (R. W. van Bemmelen: *Geology of Indonesia*, The Hague, 1949, p. 464).

The climate of the islands is equatorial: the average temperature is $80^{\circ} F$: the average rainfall of 104", spread over approximately 201 days, is caused by the north western and south eastern winds: the driest season is from July to October.

The Banda Islands are 60 miles to the south of Ceram and 125 miles to the south east of Amboina.

⁷ This volcano-island is still active. It is about half a mile in diameter and roughly circular: 658 m. high: covered with vegetation almost to the top. In the sixteenth century slaves were kept there to grow spice but the settlements were abandoned after eruptions in 1568 and 1598.

⁸ A. R. Wallace, the zoologist wrote: "Banda is a lovely little spot, its three islands [Banda Lontor, Banda Nekra and Gunung Api] enclose a secure harbour from whence no outlet is visible and with water so transparent that living things and even the minutest objects are plainly seen on the volcanic sand at the depth of seven to eight fathoms. The ever-smoking volcano rears its bare cone on one side while the two other islands are clothed with vegetation to the summit of the hills... On the beach are huge blocks of lava and scattered masses of white coralline limestone." *The Malay Archipelago* (London 1872), p. 286.

⁹ (ed.) P. A. Leupe: "Beschrijvinge van de eijlanden Banda", *BKI*, Vol. III, p. 74. This and the record of the Second Dutch voyage to the East Indies in 1598-1600, edited by J. Keuning for the Linschoten Vereeniging, are the main sources available on Banda at the turn of the seventeenth century.

Selamon two, one of which was Kombir, "where the water is calmest", and which was destroyed in battle in 1601. Banda Neira is smaller, a mile longwise and a half a mile across: in the north Labetaka ruled four villages on the west coast, Neira in the south ruled three. Neira was the principal trading port in 1600.

There were three lesser islands which were also inhabited and which, like Banda Lontor and Banda Neira, grew spice. Pulau Ai supported two *negeri*: there was no water on the island and it had to be got from either Neira or Kombir, two miles away, or by catching rainwater in sponges. Pulau Run also supported two states, without water. The people of Pulau Ai and Pulau Run were alleged to dislike the people of Neira: they said their ancestors had kept their slaves there (a contemporary form of abuse). The final island, Rosengain was the smallest inhabited island; it supported three states and was well provided with fresh water and fish.¹⁰ Apparently Rosengain was at the bottom of the pecking-order, its people were generally regarded as "a bad crowd and boors".

The total population was estimated to be 15,000 people, of whom 4,000 were "able-bodied men, bearing shield and sword".¹¹ According to Tome Pires the people had "straight black hair",¹² which suggests they were of basically Indonesian stock, although A. R. Wallace's claim that "there can be little doubt the aborigines of Banda were Papuans"¹³ has at least the advantage that Wallace had been to the islands. De Jonge's comment is singularly unflattering: "It is generally agreed that the Banda Islands were populated by exiles, vagabonds, those who jumped ship, and slaves: all sorts of people, none of them of the best kind. They came from Ceram, Kei, Aru, Timor, Solor, Buton, the Tanimbar islands and from other areas, thus forming a great jumbling together of all sorts of nations."¹⁴ Unflattering, and probably untrue: the complex social organisation of the Bandas, slaves apart, supposes a high degree of integration.

The ecology of the islands was organised around the growing, trading

¹⁰ Other superior fishing areas were to the north of Lontor and to the north of Labetaka. Valentijn gives an account of the main fishing methods, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indië* (Amsterdam 1724-26) III/2, p. 31.

¹¹ P. A. Leupe: *op. cit.*, p. 76. The present population of 13,036 persons gives a population density of 180 persons to the square mile.

¹² *Suma Oriental* (Hakluyt Society, London), Vol. I, p. 206.

¹³ *op. cit.*, p. 290.

¹⁴ *De Opkomst van het Nederlandsch Gezag in Oost-Indië* ('s-Gravenhage, 1862), Vol. II, p. 172.

and defending of spices.¹⁵ Cloves were harvested once a year, with a bumper crop every four years; nutmeg was harvested three times a year, in July, October and February. Van Leur estimated the harvest of mace to have averaged 2,500, 600 and 480 Dutch hundredweight a year (roughly 126, 30 and 20 English tons respectively) and the harvest of nutmeg to have averaged 2,825, 678 and 425 *bahar* a year (roughly 693, 168 and 104 tons).¹⁶ Some fruits were grown but most food, and certainly sago and rice, were imported.

The social structure, which apparently included the people of all five islands, was organised on oligarchial lines, superimposed upon a division of the people into two warring factions.¹⁷ At the beginning of the sixteenth century the islands had been ruled by four kings, those of Labetaka, Selamon, Wayer and Rosengain,¹⁸ probably ruling by the grace of the king of Ternate,¹⁹ with whom Banda had had trading relations as early as the fifteenth century.²⁰ At this time — according to Pires, our only source — the population was small, only two to three thousand, and quite defenceless: there was a village in the mountains "where they foregather when they feel they are in any danger along the sea coast; and they collect everything up there in the mountains; and Banda is so weak and small that it is at the mercy of any junk that goes there, whether it be Javanese or Malayan".²¹ As the kings did not represent the main cities, Selamon, Ortattan, Lontor and Wayer, they were deposed early in the century and the rule passed to a group of *orangkaya* (or nobles) who met in council at Ortattan. The descendants of the four kings continued, however, to bear the name of kings and took over the role of *shahbandar* (or harbour-master), with a degree of authority many Europeans considered

¹⁵ Wallace describes the "handsomely shaped and glossy-leaved" spice trees, growing to a height of 20 to 30 feet and bearing small yellowish flowers. "The fruit is the size and colour of a peach but rather oval. It is of a tough fleshy consistence, but when ripe splits open and shows the dark brown nut within, covered with crimson mace, and is then a most beautiful object. Within the thin dark shell of the nut is the seed, which is the nutmeg of commerce." *op. cit.*, p. 288.

¹⁶ *Indonesian Trade and Society* (The Hague, 1955), p. 123.

¹⁷ It is interesting to compare the following with F. A. E. van Wouden: *Sociale Structuurtypen in de Groote Oost* (Leiden 1935). A summary of the latter can be found in Koentjaraningrat's *Metode Anthropologi* (Djakarta 1958), p. 418-420.

¹⁸ Valentijn: *op. cit.* III/2, p. 35.

¹⁹ Peter Saris in *Purchase's Pilgrimages* (Glasgow 1905), Vol. III, p. 511.

²⁰ De Jonge: *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 172.

²¹ *op. cit.*: Vol. I, p. 207.

to be "tyrannous". "But" — says one authority — "they had no more power than an *orangkaya* and so were kings only in name."²² He perhaps underestimated them.

The council of forty *orangkaya* convened at Ortattan under a tree which had a foursided base, two feet high, of stones set in position, and filled with earth. At the meetings the *orangkaya* took the highest position on this foursided base, according to their family and their age. The descendants of the four kings still took the highest places: the king of Labetaka sat paramount, then those of Selamon, Wayer and Rosen-gain. The people of the land, who were called *bujang*, sat on the ground under the tree. Those who belonged to a party called the Ulisiwa party sat on the western and southern sides, those belonging to the Ulilima party sat on the eastern and northern sides. Foreigners were seated "according to the *orangkayas*' whims".²³ Decisions were made by the *orangkaya* in such a way that "if the *bujangs*, or the community, did not agree, the matter went no further".²⁴

Below the common people were the slaves: they came from Malaya, Java, Macassar, Amboina, Ceram, Kei and Timor, although people from Bali were said to make the best slaves. The *orangkaya* had "many" slaves, we are told, sometimes adopting their children as their own. The slaves gathered the spices and taught the sons of the nobles, whose slaves they would later be. Children of the marriage of a free person and a slave were regarded as free: if the man who married a slave died, his younger brother could marry her but not his elder.

The political situation was one of great fluidity and bitterness, as the two parties, Ulilima and Ulisiwa,²⁵ were engaged in constant civil

²² P. A. Leupe: *op. cit.*, p. 78.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 75.

²⁴ Heer van Bergel, in Valentijn: *op. cit.*, Vol. III/2, p. 34.

²⁵ The nature of *Ulilima* (literally, "a unit of five") and *Ulisiwa* ("a unit of nine") parties and why they were opposed to each other is extremely unclear. J. Jansen ("Inheemsche Groepen-Systemen in de Ambonesche Molukken", *Adatrechtbundel*, Vol. 36, p. 445 ff.) shows the mythological significance of the numbers in the entitlement of a state formed of a number of regions. R. Kennedy, anthropologist, (*Field Notes on Indonesia: South Celebes*, New Haven, 1949, p. 80) claimed that they were parties who gave their support for Tidore and Ternate respectively; although the *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch Indië* is confused in its various articles as to which party supported which kingdom. Cooley (*Ambonese Adat*, New Haven 1962, p. 13) suggests that in Ambon at any rate the difference refers to *adat* systems, "though [the division] means nothing of practical importance to [the Ambonese] now and they do not know what it meant formerly."

Perry's correlation of the areas with opposing pearl fishing brotherhoods

war.²⁶ In 1600 the islands were fairly equally divided among the parties. To the Uulilima party belonged Lontor and Samar on Banda Lontor, Neira on Banda Neira, Pulau Run and Pulau Ali: all the western section of the islands. To the Ulisiwa party belonged Kombir, Selamon, Wayer, and Dender on Banda Lontor, Labetaka at the north of Banda Neira and Pulau Rosengain: all the eastern section of the islands.²⁷ Ortattan, in the middle, was neutral²⁸ and formed presumably "a unit of one", an *uli-asas*. The parties were probably bound internally by *pela*-ties.²⁹ As a result of this assumption of blood-brotherhood between villages, the parties were obliged to support each other in war and, in need, to share their foodcrops; the ties were ritually entered into and supernaturally validated.

The author of the "Second Voyage", which described the voyage of van Neck and Wybrant to the Indies in 1598-1600, had this to say about the "civil war", in summary:

(*Megalithic Culture of Indonesia*, London 1918, p. 113-114) is unlikely, to say the least; Deacon's distinctions between the two ("The Kakihan Society of Ceram and New Guinea Initiation Cults", *Folklore* 1926) useless because of his failure to say which group had which distinctive characteristics; van Wouden's suggestion of moieties inadequate, if one accepts that moieties are composed of clans or lineages whose memberships are based on descent, because of the rapid changes in the political groupings (see the next footnote).

J. P. Duyvendak's explanation of the two groups as the realisation of an idea of a dual social structure (*Het Kakean-genootschap van Seran*, Leiden 1926) may well be an illustration of Professor A. H. Johns' claim that in the early twentieth century in certain circles of Dutch orientalists 'it became an article of faith that Indonesian social development was governed by primeval concepts of cosmic dualism, themselves a reflection of a dualistic social structure' (*Indonesian Studies in Australia: An Open Horizon*, Inaugural Lecture, A.N.U., Canberra 1964). Nevertheless his explanation of the concretisation of the groups in councils, religious meetings and extended celebrations casts light on the council meetings and the importance of the Bandanese 'popes'.

²⁶ An illustration of the fluidity: Labetaka ruling over four states joined in alliance to make an Uulilima with Neira some time between 1590 and 1592; then joined with the Ulisiwa party — in opposition to Neira — in 1600, only eight to ten years later.

²⁷ (ed.) J. Keuning: *De Tweede Schipvaart der Nederlanders naar Oost-Indië onder Jacob Cornelisz van Neck en Wybrant Warwijck* (Linschoten Vereeniging, 's-Gravenhage), Vol. IV, p. 71-72.

²⁸ P. A. Leupe: *op. cit.*, p. 74.

²⁹ This is conjecture. Van Leur mentions the *pela* league linking the islands of Ambon and Hitu to those of Banda (*op. cit.*, p. 142; this is also mentioned in the *Hikajat Tanah Hitu* in the 'Alkisah pahlawan Tachelele ketanah Bandan minta tolong kepada ugama rasulu'llah); and T. Wittermans ("Functional Aspects of 'Pela' among Ambonese Refugees", *Indonesië*, Vol. 8) spells out the implications of *pela* on the village level, arguing its special importance in periods of political instability and personal insecurity.

"They fight great battles against the other cities" (which were often less than a mile from each other). One reason given for these battles was that some people from "Labbetacke" cut down some of the trees that belonged to the people of "Nera", the main state on the island. In the fighting neither gave nor received quarter against the other but they killed one another "like dogs". One of the favourite tactical devices was the use of the ambush.

Often they fought by ship and they could row "as fast as a ship could sail with a good breeze". Ships carried four cannons (which could be used to good effect). As they rowed they smacked the water with the oars, sang and hit gongs.³⁰ Manual weapons included a long sabre sword called a "padang" and a shield — even children were taught to handle the sword well. Besides this they had small throwing spears made from hard wood and a weapon that was "like a small harpoon". "All these weapons they use daily and are skilled at using against their enemies."

In battle they wore a helmet with a bird of paradise on it.³¹ Some nobles wore corselet or harness in battle and they believed this would protect them from injury. They were courageous in battle and he mentions that heads were taken in battle and brought back to Neira, strung on a rope and carried on the boats as ornaments. In one battle he witnessed they captured a woman and the *shahbandar* kept her as a slave. "They are an amazingly tyrannical people" and "showed off their swords for five or six days (after the battle) with the blood not even dried upon them". The heads were buried with great splendour:

³⁰ These boats or *koera-koera* were about 60 feet long. At the front the helm rose about 15 feet above the water in the form of a bird's-head: at the stern there was a representation of a tail of about the same height. The rowers sat on outriggers: the passengers in the middle of the boat and on a top deck. The myth of the first *koera-koera* which took the five Bandanese culture heroes to Mecca is told in Ph. van Ronkel: "Een Maleisch geschrift, met Nautische illustraties, over de geschiedenis van Banda", *Cultureel Indië*, Vol. vii, 1945. (This description of a historical manuscript is remarkable in that it omits all the history contained in the manuscript with the phrase "not so interesting for us, but naturally of great interest to the inhabitants of that country" and only retells the folktales).

³¹ Whole birds of paradise are still worn as decorations in New Guinea. The birds were imported to the Banda Islands from Kei and Aru islands: Camoens' description of "the Banda Islands, gay with the many-hued flower of the nutmeg, from which the numerous species of birds extract their tribute" (*Lusiads*, trans. C. Atkinson) refers to pigeons if we are to trust Wallace (*op. cit.*, p. 286). Wallace describes the method of preservation of the birds of paradise in *op. cit.*, Chapter 38.

after they were skewered on a pole, they were taken up to the *shahbandar's* house (which was under a tree) where there was a very great stone on which all the heads were placed³² for about an hour before they were wrapped in white cotton, placed in a dish and buried. A great deal of incense was burnt over them, "which is their usual custom". The women wailed over the death of their friends hoping they would come to life again, but after they realised their friends were still dead a great meal was celebrated to which their friends are invited as well as those who had been to the funeral. The corpse was buried "in the same manner as in our country" with a cloth of fine white cotton material placed over him. He was carried to the grave on the men's shoulders and behind them followed other men and then the women. Incense was burnt night and day over the grave, and "a small house" was built over the grave, in which a lamp burnt at night-time. In the morning and afternoons all degrees of society came and said their prayers by the graveside.

When we asked them why they did this, they asked us if we did not do the same, when one of us died; then when we asked them what they were praying about, they told us they prayed that the dead man should not rise up anymore, which they steadfastly believed was possible, thinking that if they didn't pray at his grave he would indeed rise up again.³³

To the outsider, the name of the Banda Islands was synonymous with the spice trade. As François Pyrard wrote, these islands were "very rich in nutmeg and mace. This place supplies the whole world with these products for they are grown nowhere else... On this account many foreign merchants resort thither".³⁴ The trade followed fixed routes and ports of call, and was divided into regular crossings.³⁵

We can reconstruct a two-way movement in the archipelago arriving and leaving from Malacca, then via various northern ports in Java, Bali, across to the lesser Sundas, the Moluccas and the Banda Islands, and back finally to Makassar and then home again. Floris records this when he tells of "Orancaya Raja Indra Mouda, who in person embarked himself being fyrste to go for Bantam (from Petani) and thence to Jortan, and so forward to Amboina and Banda and coming

³² A pre-Islamic custom. See Deacon: *op. cit.* and J. Ph. Duyvendak: *Het Kakean-genootschap van Seran*, Almelo 1926.

³³ Keuning: *op. cit.*, p. 86-90.

³⁴ *Voyage of François Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies* (Hakluyt Society, London), Vol. II, p. 167.

³⁵ See M. A. P. Meilink-Roelofs: *Asian Trade and European Influence* (The Hague, 1963), p. 87.

back again to putte to Macassa and so hither again".³⁶ The complete trip, according to Pires, took two to three years, "because of extremely poor Moorish seamanship", and because the mariners are all slaves, "it is all the same to them if they are in Java or the Moluccas".³⁷

The dangerous aspect of going on such a long journey, especially as "many junks are lost" (Pires), is emphasised by Linschoten:

The islands where (the spices) grow, especially Banda, are very unwholesome countries; as also the Islands of Malucco, many that traffic there die (before they leave) or (if they escape they) are in great perill of their lives by sicknesses; not withstanding great gain maketh men to travel there.³⁸

Great gain, indeed, to draw 1,500 Javanese merchants to Banda in the one year (1609).³⁹

The traders came from Java, China, India, Arabia, particularly, but the Javanese were numerically the most significant group, as the position of Jaratan and Grisek in north Java made these places the stapling port for spices from the east and it was here, on the north coast, that the trade from Malacca and the Moluccas meet. The importance of these towns is emphasised in the following quotation from the *Verhaal van eenige oorlogen in Indië* (An account of some wars in the Indies, written in 1622):

From these places abovementioned, namely Grise, Jaratan and Sedayu, great commerce is carried on at sea on all ports of the Indies, for they have a multitude of ships. In those places there can be a thousand or more boats of twenty, fifty, to two hundred ton with which they steadily carry on their trade, and it must be taken into account that one never sees these ships at home for they sail with the monsoons. With the eastern monsoon they go to the Straits of Malacca, Sumatra, Palembang, Borneo, Patani, Siam and a hundred places too many to tell. With the western monsoon they go to Bali, Bantam, Bima, Solar, Timor, Alor, Salayar, Buton, Buru, Banggai, Mindanas, the Moluccas, Ambon and Banda, which has now been taken from them (in 1621). Also to the islands of Kei, Aru, Ceram and other places too many to relate where they do business in bartering goods and make at least two or three hundred per cent profit before they return home... Where ever they go, namely while they wait for the other monsoon to go back home again, they pull their junks or ships onto the beach, which they are able to do very skilfully. First they make little huts of the sort of booths at fairs, where they bring all their merchandise and display it...⁴⁰

It seems that it was easier to sail to the Banda Islands than to Makassar because of the advantages of island hopping.⁴¹ Admiral van der Hagen in 1607 recorded that its prince

³⁶ *Voyage to the East Indies* (Hakluyt Society, London), p. 44.

³⁷ *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 211.

³⁸ *Voyage of J. H. Linschoten to the East Indies* (Hakluyt London), p. 115.

³⁹ B. Schrieke: *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 24.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 20.

⁴¹ Unless one assumes traders sailed across the Flores Sea to Makassar and then down to the Banda Islands: I am quite prepared to be convinced here.

expressly keeps an agent on Banda whom he supplies every year with rice, cloth and everything wanted there; in order to get as much mace in his land as possible and thus to attract some traders thither; he can also buy up large lots and is able to give gifts to the Bandanese popes so that it gives him a great advantage there...⁴²

Spices were brought to Makassar yearly.⁴³ The prince of Makassar was in fact once described as "a mighty prince of men who owns a land that is overflowing with rice and all sorts of cloths, so that he regards Malacca favourably, as he does Banda, for the latter has an arrangement to receive rice from him all year round".⁴⁴

Banda acted as a centre for spices from Ceram and Ambon.

Among goods traded were "Cambaya clothes, some of cotton and some of silk, and much copper, vermilion, tin, lead, certain hairy caps from the Levant and large bells, for each of these they give 20 bahars of mace".⁴⁵ (Not a particularly high price to Barbosa for "the abundance [of mace] is such that they burn it and it may be had almost for the asking".⁴⁶) Mace fetched seven times as high a price as nutmeg did (which was proportionate as mace grew seven times as much as nutmeg). Basically the trade consisted of the exchange of food, clothing and metal-work for spices, for "they have scarcely any food stuffs",⁴⁷ apart from a few fruits ("durians, pineapples, bananas, oranges, apples, coconuts, etc." recorded one observer).⁴⁸ The rest, "such things as

⁴² quoted, *ibid.*, p. 68. The Islamic religious officiants in time came to hold an important position in decision making, second only to the rule of "the old men of the land". (P. A. Leupe: *op. cit.*, p. 75). Islam was introduced shortly after 1480 according to Pires (*op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 206), although at his time of writing only the coastal regions had been affected. By 1599 the inhabitants were "all heathen holding to the Mohammedan faith, in which they show great devotion" (Keuning, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 82). The culture hero who actually brought Islam to Banda was called Kakijay according to Van Ronkel's account from the local *hikayat*. This was in fact the name of the tattooing priest in indigenous head-hunting cults and these priests may have retained their power by this myth. Kakijay also took a Moslem name, Dato Maulana Hasan Hoesin which is no doubt equivalent to Datu Mulla Husayn, who according to Ternatan legend brought Islam to Ternate in 1465. (T. Arnold: *The Preaching of Islam*, Lahore 1956, p. 389; from Valentijn: *op. cit.*, III/2, p. 73.)

⁴³ John Jourdain: *Journal* (Hakluyt Society, London), p. 294.

⁴⁴ Cornelis Matelief de Jonge in J. van der Chijs: *De Vestiging van het Nederlandsch Gezag over de Banda Eilanden* (The Hague, 1886), p. 30.

⁴⁵ Barbosa: *Book*, II, p. 198. Cloths of course were made into garments but may also have been part of bride-wealth payments (as still happens in Ambon: Cooley, *op. cit.*, p. 26-50).

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 197.

⁴⁷ Pires: *op. cit.*, p. 207.

⁴⁸ van Soldaten in Van der Chijs: *op. cit.*, p. 29.

rice, shallots and vinegar", came from Makassar, Java, and to a lesser extent, from Malacca.⁴⁹ Sago came from Ceram and was regarded as a basic part of the diet: it was also brought from Aru and the Kei Islands in exchange for textiles and rice.⁵⁰

In 1600, the standard circulating medium when necessary was nutmeg,⁵¹ as sago had been a century before,⁵² but bartering was the most usual practice, although the Bandanese did not have a good reputation in this matter: "the traffic consisteth mostly in barter... but they are not to be trusted".⁵³ Jacob van Heemskerck had a good deal of trouble in 1599 when his weights were stolen, his goods adulterated and his gold debased.⁵⁴ Harbour portage taxes were paid to the *shahbandar*, or harbour master, of Ortattan, on arrival before trade could be begun. It was generally paid in terms of *bahars* of mace and the Bandanese bahar was 50 lbs. heavier than the usual 500 lbs. (Dutch). This was also subject to barter, although too much rigidity on behalf of the newcomer could lead to a very difficult visit later on. Those foreign traders who had been there for some time usually advised the newcomers to pay whatever was demanded: Jacob van Heemskerck was advised by an Arabian trader "not to inconvenience the natives in the least thing... for they are a crude and awkward people".⁵⁵ It was no use trying another *shahbandar* for a lower price either, for they worked in league with each other.

Markets were held on Tuesdays and Saturdays on Banda. No council meetings were allowed on those days.⁵⁶ Other than appearing at the markets the women were expected "to keep at home and to do their work" especially the drying of nutmeg and the removal of the outer shell, "at which they are very skillful".⁵⁷

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Lontor was "the mightiest at sea" and her boats went to Malacca, Petani, Java and Macassar. Samar sent five or six *prahus* to Ceram each year: Selamon, Dender and Wayer traded at Aru and to some degree at Kei. Pulau Ai traded with Kei and Aru and especially with Amboina for sago. Rosengain traded with Kei and Gorron, pots for sago. (P. A. Leupe, *op. cit.*, p. 78.)

⁵¹ Meilink-Roelofs: *op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁵² Pires: *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 67 ("as pepper is in Pasai"). The use of money was not unknown: see Schottens: *De Munten van de Nederlandsche gebiedsdeelen overzee 1601-1948* (Amsterdam 1951).

⁵³ Linschoten: *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 115.

⁵⁴ Keuning: *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 74.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 72.

⁵⁶ P. A. Leupe: *op. cit.*, p. 75.

⁵⁷ Keuning: *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 90. At the markets trade appears to have been purely a woman's matter, but otherwise little is recorded of woman in this society. They were undoubtedly much inferior to men in almost all matters.

Life in the *kampongs* could have been as Utuy depicted — there is no evidence to disprove him. Lontor was not however a *kampung* and there is no mention in *Tambera* of wars, of difficulties in trading, of rank differentiation, of councils, headhunting or slavery, or of the widespread network of trading throughout the archipelago on which the existence of Banda depended. Neither is there much relationship between the pattern of historical events to be found in the careful records of the Dutch and the fanciful reconstruction engaged in by Utuy. It can be readily ascertained (and could in 1938) that van Heemskerck arrived in Ortattan with two separate ships on the fifteenth and sixteenth of March 1599; that he was received by the *shahbandar* with scarcely any good graces at all and was not allowed on arrival to land at Lontor at all; that it took him four months of hard bartering and careful guarding of his goods before he could raise a cargo, during which time his weights were stolen and he was several times offered adulterated goods; that when he left, the twenty crewmembers who remained at Lontor and Neira did not include Mr. van Speult of later fame on Amboina (the presence of his niece on Banda in 1600 seems therefore — and in any case! — unlikely in the extreme); that these crew members were taken up again in 1602 after they had been in danger of losing their lives under Tubanese attack; that although there were a number of Bandanese attempts to fend off Dutch aggression before the islands were subjugated in 1621 by Jan Pietersz Coen, that bloody man, there was no uprising in 1603, and indeed no Dutch fort until 1609.⁵⁸

There is little to debate as to whether *Tambera* is an accurate historical reconstruction: it is a failure in the most complete manner.⁵⁹

IV

If Utuy's account is not intended to be factual then what can we make of the society and history that he has so carefully depicted, knowing, as we do, the discrepancy between the description and the reality? "Novel-writing" is the simplest answer. The publisher's advertisement to the 1949 text advances on this:

⁵⁸ See the 1886 work of J. A. van der Chijs: *op. cit.*, which is the standard and most thorough account of the Dutch-Bandanese interaction between 1599 and 1621, leading up to the extermination or exile of all but one thousand of the original population of fifteen thousand natives.

⁵⁹ As Teeuw asserts, without supporting evidence, in *Pokok dan Tokoh* (Jakarta, 1953), p. 231-232.

"the novel represents a journey between the author's fantasy of times long past and the product of his experience in a society that, although consistent, still moves in change and revolution": and it suggests that "the past time depicted is Bandanese society of the seventeenth century, the land and the sea, their dancing and music, their superstition and beliefs: these appear as an appropriate décor for the characters who act out the drama of "The Struggle of Indonesia in its fight against Western Imperialism".

Neither of these can be taken at face-value — there was no Revolution in 1938 after all — yet the latter statement contains the kernel of the answer: "the story of Indonesia . . .". This is a young man's dream of Indonesia as he believed it to be before the coming of the Dutch: pure, harmonious, holy within itself. And when the Dutch came they taught the people to look only to themselves instead of towards each other, they taught greed and they taught dissension and bloodshed. In the end they conquered her and left her in darkness. It is a story not of a "fight", so much as of a "defeat".

Most clearly we see the defeat in the character of the young boy Tambera himself, enwrapped as he is in the spell of Clara, her attractiveness a sign of something new, something foreign, a sign of the western world.⁶⁰ He it is who enters most fully into the service of the Dutch: although others will do so willingly for a few day's wages, none commits himself to the irrevocable extent he does. His growth as an adolescent is only really depicted at two points — at the period prior to the coming of the Dutch and shortly after the arrival of Clara — and he is totally absent from much of the second half of the book. Basically Tamberra prefers the world of fantasy, his childhood world, to the world of responsibility which lies before him as the son of the present *kepala kampung*. In this world of fantasy his unsatisfied wishes are fulfilled; he is exalted and he is loved, perhaps both as the values are fairly synonymous to him. Yet, although he wants to be loved, he rejects love: he scorns his mother, ignores his father and forgets Wadela, who is (if ever a character was meant to be) obviously meant for him. Too, he seeks to be exalted and admired yet never once do we see him engaged in any purposeful, meaningful activity outside the Dutch walls which could secure him this. Never does he stand with other children in their games but most always he removes himself from their company seeking the cocoon of his world of unreality, divorcing himself even from his own body. The language of this dream world, the striking rhythmic prose, builds, colours, repeats itself winding and

⁶⁰ *ibid*, p. 233.

spinning into a beautiful web but one, after all, of deceit. In his fantasy, his scorn for people and his self conceit he is an unlovely character, yet he is too, only a child. Perhaps it is this last which took Jassin's sympathy, that enabled him to write that Tambara is "a worker of dreams",

a day-dreamer, weak, with no goals at all: but at the same time, determined, honest and ready to oppose all obstacles to further his own desires. He is a type of the first *inlander* soldier who enters the service of the Dutch, not to help them conquer his own people, but for vague and romantic reasons. Tambara is a person of feeling who would probably be a poet nowadays. By mixing with the Dutch he has become a god in his own thoughts⁶¹ and offended against his own people. But when he attains stability of feeling and thoughts he will undoubtedly return to his own people, his soul more enriched.⁶²

Tambara the unrealist entranced by deceptive beauty, Indonesia at the coming of the Dutch.

Negating all that Tambara stands for is Kawista, his natural foil. It is the older Kawista, strong, self-willed and dynamic, who is continually engaged in purposeful activity: Kawista, who defends the weak, who married the proper girl as chosen for him when he is old enough; it is Kawista who leads the revolt against the Dutch, having been known from the beginning as he who will not bend to Dutch bullying or Willington's son Sambar's blustering. If the book had been drawn in stronger contrast one might have seen the story of Kawista as merely inevitable, an unmotivated tragedy, he forcefully opposing fate and the tremendous advance of the forerunners of national history as they set themselves against him, his wife dead, his father too, all he has loved swept away, even in the end himself. As it is, the force of his character gives the book its dominating structural weakness. The given hero, Tambara, is lost sight of as the book advances and he becomes increasingly irrelevant, while a subsidiary character (who is not at first a particularly attractive personality) develops to the point where he takes to himself the ideal characteristics of the national hero and takes to himself the role of the central character. At the beginning it is all Tambara with only a glimpse of Kawista, impetuous, brave and independent: at the end there is a glimpse of Tambara, a frightened arrogant child who thinks himself a Dutchman and there is all Kawista. It is as if the plot were not one plot but two so strongly does the

⁶¹ The phrase is of course from the Dutch poet, Kloos.

⁶² *op. cit.*, p. 204. Jassin goes on to surmise that Tambara will be a more heroic figure in "the second part of the novel, which (Sontani) has not yet finished". And still not.

action centered on the actual and the ideal hero bifurcate. This Kawista is the new Indonesia.

Some have even suggested that the book should have been called *Kawista* rather than *Tambera* so strongly does the figure of the new Indonesia appeal to them. In their own experience of the Revolution, Kawista to them is an inspiring figure, one worthy of the respect or the reverence of the youth of the Revolution, an incentive to their ambitions in Indonesia's fight against western Imperialism. Theirs is the viewpoint as espoused by the Social Realist and expressed so well by Nicholas Shamota: "in our books we like bold strong revolutionaries because we have known them in life . . . We want art to be the severe and irreconcilable foe of all that is false because we are building and will build a life that is just and beautiful".⁶³ To these readers the novel is not just a novel, not only a historical novel, but exists as a piece of literature with personal relevance and intent, in which the depiction of time past is relevant to here and now, to the deeply stirring moment of the Revolution as participated in.⁶⁴ As it is, Utuy's fidelity to the nature of the first hero, created as central to the book, is strong enough to prevent his falsification of the ending of the story: "slowly he was blanketed in the darkness of the night"⁶⁵ still dreaming his fancies of himself and Clara while his people perish.

This is Utuy's theme: the abasement of his society. His depiction of his characters is simple and tends already towards the stereotype: Kawista the hero; Imbata the befuddled old man lost before calamity in self-deception, doing a long accustomed job unconsciously; Clara hard, cruel, self-opinionated yet pretty; Wadela most lovely yet rejected as inadequate to Tambera's fantasy; Swamin, the archetypal ascetic; van Speult and Willington, fat, cruel, gesturing clowns; Wubani the archetypal mother, offering her protection against the ununderstood wrath to come and the evil spirits, dying for her son who regards her as very old and very ugly, an object of shame. The characters, drawn with humour as they often are, are not strong enough to maintain the weight Johns wishes to place upon them in sustaining his judgement of the merits of the novel.

⁶³ "On Tastes in Art" in (ed.) M. Philipson: *Aesthetics Today* (New York 1961), p. 32.

⁶⁴ No doubt it was such considerations which led to the translation of *Tambera* into Chinese. That, and the themes of the evil of capitalism and the need for national unity to fight in prevention of despoilment of the homeland by the west.

⁶⁵ *Tambera*, the last page.

It is hard to see in what way *Tambera* "marks a real step forward in the development of Indonesian literature".⁶⁶ Rather, it is careless with characterisation: some of the events are irrelevant and the plot accumulates rather than developing inevitably: the possibilities of the revolution are left unexploited. These are obvious faults of serial writing at any time. Despite the strengths the novel has over some of the prewar novels — a minimum of obvious moralisation, an attempted depiction of the thought processes of the characters, similar to *Belenggu*, and, if one likes, the vivid sense of place — it fails to be really impressive. It is no doubt exaggerating only a little to see the novel as another East-West love-match *adat*-conflict novel, set elsewhere in Indonesia than Java or Sumatra, given a certain amount of historical significance.

T. S. Eliot has written that "the essential advantage for a poet" — here one might substitute 'novelist' — "is not to have a beautiful world with which to deal: it is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom and the horror, and the glory"⁶⁷: Sontani's real ability as a writer develops when he turns to write of adults in serious, contemporary, moral situations to which there is no way out.

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⁶⁶ Johns: *op. cit.*

⁶⁷ *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London, 1964), p. 106.