Geneviève Duggan and Hans Hägerdal, *Savu: History and Oral Tradition on an Island of Indonesia*. Singapore: NUS Press, 2018, xxvi + 586, ISBN: 9789814722759, price: USD 34.00 (hardcover).

This very rich book on the ethnography and history of the eastern Indonesian islands Savu and Raijua draws on the extensive knowledge that two scholars have accumulated through long term research on oral, written, and material sources. For transparency, I wish to point out that one of the authors, Hans Hägerdal, was one of my supervisors during my doctoral research.

Anthropologist Geneviève Duggan has engaged with Savu for decades, recording a wide range of ethnographic data, with a special emphasis on Savu textiles and genealogies, two strands of knowledge that, as shown in this book and other works by Duggan, are entangled. Meanwhile Hans Hägerdal is arguably one of the world's foremost experts on Dutch archival sources about the islands east of Java, dating from the formation of the VOC (Dutch East India Company) until Indonesian independence after the Second World War. For this book, Hägerdal has worked on additional archives from the Dutch Protestant mission in eastern Indonesia.

In the Savu book, these Protestant sources are combined in a thought provoking way with ethnographic descriptions of local religion, called *Jingi Tiu*. The very fact that indigenous beliefs in Savu have a name is interesting. There are parallel cases of named indigenous religions in the area, for instance *Marapu* in Sumba and *Wetu Telu* among the Sasak in Lombok, while religious belief systems in many other areas are either unnamed, or mentioned using derogative nomenclature. The existence of a named religion conveys an image of religion as a consistent knowledge system, rather than scattered localized beliefs—and the authors of the Savu book do emphasize systematic and pan-Savu aspects of *Jingi Tiu*.

The material in the Savu book is arranged chronologically, the first chapters being mainly ethnographic, with a shift towards a more historiographic style and content from the seventeenth century onwards. The first three chapters sketch the Savu past from an indigenous perspective, with a wealth of detailed ethnographic information. This is followed by a chapter discussing early foreign contacts, from Majapahit to the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. From 'Enter the Company' follow chapters that deal with Savu history by century, drawing mainly on oral traditions and Dutch archival sources, but also adding other narratives such as the testimonies of members of the Cook expedition that stopped by in Savu. Some centuries have more written (European) sources than others, depending on historical circumstances on the European side. Fi-

nally there are approximately 125 pages of appendixes with various information about Savu and Raijua.

The book is extensive in scope, in regard to both subjects and time span. It could have benefited from being divided into two or three volumes, or perhaps been more rigorously edited. Following the common convention of indigenous history in the region, the text encompasses a period that begins with the first ancestors and continues into the present.

I recognize the advantages of taking this broad time frame (and have followed the same pattern in my doctoral thesis dealing with nearby Alor island), but the approach has drawbacks, as the book has to cover a long time and several periods with different source materials and different historical problems. The upside is that this scope highlights an indigenous perspective on what is important in history.

In this sense the Savu book can be used as a source in itself, pointing to periods and events in Savu's past that deserve further attention. There are many possibilities for readers to draw on the Savu book in a thematic manner. I am especially thinking of more recent periods when epidemics, such as smallpox in the late nineteenth century and the Spanish flu in the early twentieth century, had devastating effects on the population. This brings to mind the well-known story about how European expansion to South America led to epidemics that wiped out a large part of the population. It is not common knowledge that the death toll in epidemics was also quite devastating in Indonesia. They occurred at a much later period, maybe not directly caused by colonial expansion, although they did coincide with the Dutch Ethical policy, which meant establishing colonial rule in the outer islands. The people of Savu had flown under the radar during earlier colonial reigns, but now were drawn into contact in a new manner. Another theme that appears frequently in the book, again turning the book into potential source material, is slavery. Again there are parallels [and differences] between the Indian Ocean and the better known Atlantic Ocean slave experience. The Savu book contributes to current research on Indian Ocean slavery.

Blending anthropology and history in the way the authors have done in the Savu book is both fruitful and challenging. A fair number of technical anthropological terms, as well as genealogies and named ancestors, appear especially in the first chapters. These elements call for an active and attentive reader. In the later chapters, written European sources are intertwined with oral traditions, which also demand attention from the reader, as the different genres of the sources, ranging from myth to colonial reports, also require genre-specific reading.

It is helpful when the analysis of oral tradition is not only geared towards discerning the historical content but also includes explicatory clues. One example is when a transcribed narrative about a war is followed by a discussion of possible explanations of lapses in the narration, especially silences concerning the losing side. One explanation is connected with land rights: "The defeated did not receive plots of land as their reward, which is the main reason for keeping a memory of a war" (p. 218). With this information, the preceding war story gains a new layer of meaning.

On one level, the book raises questions about indigenous historiography in eastern Indonesia. Chapter 5, 'Enter the Company', begins with the statement: "The foregoing period detailed in the previous chapters is, in the strict sense of historical criticism, proto-history" (p. 150). The authors' historiographic considerations surface and resurface throughout the book, for instance in one of the 'proto-history' chapters where the ancestor Hulu Ide is said to have married women in all four domains of Savu, a synchronicity that according to the authors '... established an important connection or time marker in Savu thought linking important figures at one generational level throughout the island' (p. 74). The authors state that this claim made in oral traditions creates a sense of unity across Savu, and that the factuality is less important than the effect of an ancestor creating genealogical ties between four realms: 'It is not a matter whether the story is true or constructed: this is how Savu people see and remember their past' (p. 74). This emic view is important, but does not come across as the main aim of the book, which in my understanding is geared towards a fact-finding history tradition.

I am in two minds about what to do with oral traditions in this context. In some ways it is a pity to reduce indigenous sources to history when they contain so much more, not least poetic qualities. On the other hand they contain a wealth of information about the past, or about how the past is remembered and narrated today, that it is not possible to access through other means.

What Duggan and Hägerdal have compiled here is impressive. It may well inspire further work in the form of systematic documentation based on engagement in Savu and beyond. In the best of worlds we would have archives of documented indigenous oral sources with metadata about the narrators who provided the materials—and archaeological research to pair with 'proto-history'.

Emilie Wellfelt

Stockholm University

emilie.wellfelt@historia.su.se