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The Dutch and radical Islam in nineteenth-century Sumatra

The Padri War (1821-1837), the Aceh War (1873-1903) and their aftermaths¹

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Introduction

In 1855 H.A. Steijn Parvé, a lower ranking civil servant, wrote an article in a colonial journal about the Islamic *Padri* 'sect' in the Minangkabau region in West Sumatra whose programme for religious and political reform was based on a very orthodox interpretation of Islam.² The *Padri* had caused a long and bloody civil war which the Dutch colonial government had been involved in since 1821 but the *Padri* were finally defeated in 1837. Most Dutch writers had very negative opinions about the *Padri*, but Mr. Steyn Parvé was more positive. He thought the movement was very promising at first and could have accomplished much in society. He even went so far as to describe the colonial state as 'an enemy from overseas that brought the resources of civilisation and the art of war' and characterized Islam as a religion 'so loved by eastern peoples, fulfilling by its outward forms the heated imagination of these

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² . Steijn Parvé, 'De secte', 249-278

people' i.e. the population of the *Padangsche Bovenlanden* [Padang Upper Countries].³ Steijn Parvé, who had been working in the region for about ten years, was fairly well informed about the Minangkabau of West Sumatra, but his views on Islam are typical of a European white man living in a colonial environment.

On Sumatra in the nineteenth century the Dutch colonial government was challenged by two long wars: the Padri War (1821-1837) and the Aceh War (1873-1903). Both ended in subjugation by the Dutch but only after many years of fighting, requiring huge efforts and causing heavy losses on each side. Most historians agree that radical Islam played a role in these wars. In this article I will analyze and compare the wars. I will start with a few basic questions such as what were the causes, how was the colonial state involved in them, what were the aims and intentions of the opponents and why did it take so much time to end the wars. Then the focus will shift to Islam in its different forms. This religion had been important in the Indonesian archipelago, long before the Europeans arrived. Their governments were confronted with the problem of how to tackle a religion which was basically anti-Christian and which did not separate state from church. Radical movements constantly pressed for a purer form of Islam and a *prang sabil*, a holy war, against a government led by Christian infidels. Was the *prang sabil* and the wish to purify Islam an autonomous movement which would have taken place anyway or just a reaction to the European colonizer striving to tighten its grip on an indigenous society?

After a short introduction about Islam in Indonesia, orientalism and the Dutch policy with regard to religion, I will describe the course of both wars and the consequences they had for the colonial government and the indigenous population.

³ . Steijn Parvé, 'De Secte' , the quotes on p. 250 ('Een overzeesche vijand, die met zich de hulpmiddelen der beschaving en der oorlogskunst voerde, verscheen') and 251 ('zoo bij de oostersche volken geliefd, en welke door hare uiterlijke vormen de verhitte verbeeldingskracht dezer menschen voldoet') respectively.

There follows a comparison of the wars, stressing the main lines of historiography concerning the causes of the strong resistance and the long time the Dutch army needed to defeat its opponents. This will lead to an analysis of the role Islam played and the article will end with some concluding remarks.

The Western mind-set with regard to Islam

Many Dutch writers and Dutch and English missionaries, as well as (at the end of the nineteenth century) the orientalist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, all observed that Indonesian Islam contained numerous non-Islamic elements. The majority of Indonesian Muslims did not live up to the Islamic rules from the Quran and the Hadith. Most Indonesians could not even read Arabic and learned the Quran by heart without understanding what it really meant.

Before going further it is worth paying attention to how Westerners used to view 'the East'. Norman Daniel thinks that a system of beliefs about Christianity and Islam developed in the period c 1050 – c 1350, partly through prejudice.⁴ In the West, Islam was considered a heresy and Mohammed described as an imposter and a false prophet. By adopting this mind-set the European intellectual elite was able to justify and propagate crusades. The mindset persisted even though Western Christianity split up into several churches after 1500 and after the Enlightenment. In his *Fanatisme, ou Mahomet le prophète* Voltaire attacked the Prophet as many writers before him had done, although using different arguments and words.⁵

When Europe resumed the offensive against the Middle East with Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798 a new branch of scholarly knowledge arose called 'Orientalism'. During the nineteenth century these scholars built up a pattern of

⁴ . Daniel, *Islam and the West*, .

⁵ . Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 310-312.

thinking opposing ‘the West’ against ‘the East’. A dominant theme was the superiority of the European race and the corresponding condescending way of looking at ‘the other’ as being backward and underdeveloped. Islam was considered a backward religion, which was expected to disappear sooner or later.⁶ The East was sensual and irrational, weak and female, the West was rational and cool, resembling the male sex.⁷ Non-Europeans were supposed to do only one thing: to develop and climb up to the ‘civilized’ level of the West. Their institutions had to give way to ‘modern’ ones coming from the Western world.

The Palestinian scholar Edward Said went a step further, seeing orientalism as a tool of colonialism. Orientalists constructed ‘the East’ by acquiring more and more knowledge about people, languages and religion. This enabled West European powers like France and the United Kingdom to divide the Middle East among themselves and transform the Arab states into European colonies.

Although Daniel, Said and other authors following this path have concentrated on the Middle East, and Said is sometimes exaggerating certain aspects, the Western feeling of superiority also dictated the mindset and behaviour of Dutch army officers, civil servants and intellectuals in the Netherlands East Indies. As most of our sources are of European origin, they contain biased information, so we have to be careful about taking explanations and interpretations for granted.

The religious policy of the Netherlands East Indies government

After the fall of the Dutch Republic and the transformation into the Batavian Republic in 1795, state and religion were separated and the privileged position of the *Gereformeerde Kerk* (Dutch Reformed Church) came to an end. Governor General

⁶ . Snouck Hurgronje, *The Achehnese*, 338-351.

⁷ . Said, *Orientalism*, 207.

Herman Willem Daendels introduced the new ideas on Java in 1808.⁸ All religions were considered equal and the government was supposed not to favour any one more than another. Not all government interference disappeared, however. Christian ministers stayed on the governmental pay roll after 1808 and Batavia subsidized the building and restoration of Christian churches (Protestant and Catholic alike) and even some mosques. Catholic vicars and *penghulu*, high-ranking leaders of Islam in Java, also received an allowance: the latter was nevertheless much lower than that which the Protestant and Catholic clergy received.

The Governor General and his civil servants were responsible in the first place for the maintenance of public order. If a regional governor could report that everything had been quiet in his district during the year, he had done well and deserved promotion. As Batavia wanted to prevent collisions and conflicts between Christianity and Islam, Christian missionaries, intent on spreading the gospel to new converts, needed a special permit before they were allowed to start work in a certain area.⁹ In practice this meant that they were seldom able to preach the gospel in regions where the purer form of Islam was influential. Allowing missionaries into regions like Bantam or the Preanger Regencies, areas considered to be ‘orthodox’, could have caused unrest. So the principle of religious neutrality was subordinated to another policy, i.e. that of the maintenance of public order. The situation on Sumatra was different from Java because only a small part of Sumatra was under Dutch control. The Hague had decided, in 1841, that Dutch power would not be expanded further. This so-called ‘abstention policy’ remained in force until at least 1873.¹⁰

⁸ . Reenders, *Alternatieve zending*, 43-45 and Müller-Krüger, *Der Protestantismus*, 77-79 and 188-193.

⁹ . Staatsblad Nederlandsch Indië 1855:2 (Regeringsreglement 1854), art. 123.

¹⁰ . J.J.P. de Jong, *De waaier van het fortuin. Van handelscompagnie tot koloniaal imperium. De Nederlanders in Azië en de Indonesische archipel 1595-1950* (Den Haag 1998) 232-235. A formal decision to stop this policy was never taken; it was gradually left between 1873 and 1891.

Although the Netherlands itself received a new constitution in 1848, which further separated the church and state, the influence of this constitution on the affairs of the colonial possessions remained limited. The *Regeringsreglement* of 1854 only declared everyone free to confess the religion of his choice, while the government had the obligation to protect religion.¹¹ Despite more liberal principles, Catholic priests, Protestant ministers and Islamic *penghulu* remained on the pay roll of the Indies.

The Padri War (1821-1837)

The Minangkabau region, enclosed by two mountain ridges, was very fertile and already densely populated by about 1800. Trade in gold, the traditional export product declined in the eighteenth century, which was disadvantageous to the kings of Minangkabau as they drew a large part of their income from the gold export. This greatly hindered the capacity of the central government to curtail the authority of local chiefs.¹² As a result the political situation showed a lot of fragmentation. Trade in coffee and cassia, a surrogate for cinnamon, increased, however, at the same time as the region was getting prosperous. Nevertheless, frequent warfare between clans and kampongs caused a problem for the traders not only because of the lack of security as such but also because the legal system did not suit their needs, since it was based on local judges and diverging explanations of the *adat*, i.e. customary law.

At the end of the seventeenth century the Islamic mystic Jamal al-Din started the reformation of the Islam in Minangkabau. Islamic brotherhoods like the Naqshabandiyya and the Qadiriyyah were the driving force behind this movement, which had acquired much influence in the region at the end of the eighteenth century. The *surau*, schools training boys and young men in reading and reciting the Koran,

¹¹ . Staatsblad Nederlandsch Indië 1855, nr. 2, Regeringsreglement 1854, art. 119-124.

¹² . Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, 60-67.

were the centres of the reform movement. Their leaders had frequent contacts with the holy cities Mecca and Medina.¹³ Between about 1770 and 1803 the reformers were able to impose *sharia* law. It seems that the country was safer.¹⁴

A fresh impulse came from three pilgrims who returned from Mecca shortly after the Wahhabis had conquered the holy cities of Islam in 1803. The Wahhabis followed a very rigorous interpretation of Islam and rejected ideas of the dominant mystic schools in Mecca. These three found allies among the political leaders and set up a new system using elements of the first reform wave. The new movement acquired the name *Padri*. According to Drewes the word is derived from Hindi and originally meant religious leader. It would have been brought to Indonesia by the English in about 1800 and taken over by the Dutch. Most other authors, however, like Dobbin, think the word meant ‘men from Pediri’, the Aceh harbour from where most pilgrims departed for Djeddah.¹⁵

The *Padri* imposed strict rules with regard to clothing, food and social intercourse. They obliged women to wear veils in public and men to wear beards, prescribed white clothing for everybody, prohibited cock fighting, gambling and smoking of tobacco and opium. New mosques were built. It is still not clear whether the *Padri* were really Wahhabi or were only inspired by them.¹⁶ The new regime suited the needs of many Minangkabau people because it was beneficial to trade and industry.¹⁷

¹³ . Azra, *Transmission of Islamic Reformism*, 563-566 and Azra, ‘The Surau’, 64-85.

¹⁴ . Kraus, *Zwischen Rebellion und Reform*, 14 and Dobbin, ‘Padri’.

¹⁵ . Drewes, ‘De etymologie’, 146-150 and Dobbin, ‘Padri’, 237-238.

¹⁶ . Paulus *Encyclopaedie Nederlandsch-Indië*, vol. 4, 661 (entry Wahhâbieten) . Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs*, 21. The critical remarks of Franz von Benda-Beckmann about this book predominantly concentrate on the matriarchate and matrilineality in Minangkabau. See: Benda-Beckman, ‘Review’. Kraus, *Zwischen rebellion*, 15.

¹⁷ . Teitler, *Einde Padrie-oorlog*, 11-12.

This more fundamental course caused conflicts with leaders who wanted to remain loyal to Minangkabau *adat*. The *Padri*'s reaction was merciless: he who did not want to adhere to their interpretation of Islam, was an enemy of Islam and had to be subjugated, if necessary by force. After killing almost the complete royal family of Minangkabau and waging many wars against kampongs that resisted their ideas, by about 1820 the *Padri* were in power in large parts of Minangkabau. They reorganized government by installing in every kampong a *toewankoe imam* for religious affairs and a *toewankoe khalif* or *katib* for police and justice.¹⁸

The Dutch and the British did not have any authority in Minangkabau yet. An exploratory expedition led by Thomas Stamford Raffles, the British Governor of Bencoolen on the southwest coast of Sumatra, to the *Bovenlanden* clashed with the *Padri* and had to withdraw in 1818. A few members of the royal family, who had survived the massacre, then asked the Dutch resident J. du Puy at Padang to help them fight the *Padri*. Du Puy wrote to Batavia that it was advisable to give assistance, as he feared the *adat* party might otherwise turn for help to Raffles. Without asking Batavia for permission the resident concluded a treaty with the leaders of the *adat*-party in 1821. In exchange for military assistance they ceded all rights on the kingdom of Minangkabau to the Dutch. So the Dutch became sovereign. When Batavia heard about what the resident had done, the Governor General was not pleased but hostilities had already started.¹⁹ At first the Dutch military made good progress, but resistance was much stronger than they had expected. Lieutenant-colonel A.T. Raaff, the commanding officer and new resident, made an agreement in 1822 in order to stabilize the situation. The government promised to abstain from any intervention into religious affairs, the *Padri* consented to pay the salt tax, which had been introduced

¹⁸ . Lange, *Westkust Sumatra*, vol. 1, 10-21.

¹⁹ . NA, Decision Governor General in counsel 1 June 1821, nr. 22, CO: 2774.

by the Dutch. However, this did not end the war. Colonel Raaff waged some minor battles later.

After the Java War had broken out in 1825, the Dutch withdrew a large part of their forces from Sumatra and sent a new commander and resident, H.J.J.L. de Stuers. In contrast to the ‘hawks’ Du Puy and Raaff, De Stuers was a ‘dove’. He thought if the *Padri* were left in peace, the old order would return and so would prosperity.²⁰ All operations were stopped and another treaty was concluded with the *Padri* leaders in 1825.²¹ It agreed that both parties would not attack one another, the Dutch would keep all fortresses, would recognize the *Padri* government and abstain from interfering in religious matters. In 1825 the Governor General was informed that the *Padri* had split into a radical and a moderate wing.²²

De Stuers left for Europe in 1829 and after the Dutch in Java had won the Java War, his successors resumed fighting. The *Padri* proved to be good warriors and experts in converting kampongs into fortifications, which had to be sieged. In 1832, the *Padri* leader Tuanku Imam Bondjol received news from pilgrims, sent by him to Mecca, that the Wahhabi had been driven out of the holy cities, Mecca and Medina, and that Wahhabism had given way to a less radical approach to Islam. Imam Bondjol decided to enter an alliance with his former enemies, the *adat* leaders. Nevertheless, the Dutch won a first battle in 1832 and the war seemed over. However, owing to the tactless behaviour of the Dutch troops, a general revolt broke out in 1833 and the war started again. colonial government was back to zero. The last phase of the war concentrated on the siege of the fortress of Bondjol, a *Padri* stronghold with two mosques, which was captured in 1837. Once the most important leaders, who had

²⁰ . Veth, *Vestiging en uitbreiding*, 1, 91-94.

²¹ . Veth, *Vestiging en uitbreiding*, 1, 104.

²² . NA, Decision Governor General without counsel 13 June 1825 nr. 15 (letter from the resident of Padang informing the Governor General about discord between *Padri* leaders), CO 2484.

survived, had been arrested and banished to other parts of Indonesia, the war was over.²³

Apart from a local revolt at Batipo in 1843, the population of the Minangkabau remained quiet until the beginning of the twentieth century. The *Padri*-movement collapsed and the *Padangsche Bovenlanden* were brought under direct Dutch rule. Minangkabau did remain an Islamic region with very influential Islamic brotherhoods.²⁴

The Aceh War (1873-1903)

The sultanate of Aceh was an important political influence on Sumatra and the Malayan peninsula in the seventeenth century.²⁵ Although the power of the sultans declined after 1700, Aceh continued to be an independent state, the sovereignty of which had been guaranteed in the first Sumatra Treaty between the United Kingdom and the Netherlands in 1824. The sultans, however, had lost all power to *ulèëbalang*, local grandees governing a certain area. They combined the functions of army commander, governor as well as judge. According to Snouck Hurgronje arbitrariness in justice was normal.²⁶ The frequent wars the *ulèëbalang* waged among themselves were considered a nuisance by European merchants active in the area. Dutch observers wrote about a state of anarchy. Normal state-like phenomena such as taxation, coinage and a permanent army were absent but trade in the *ulèëbalangs'* most important export article, pepper, was still booming.²⁷ An important source of *ulèëbalang* income consisted of robbing ships passing through the Straits of Malacca.

²³ . Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs*, 179 and Hadler, 'Tuanku Imam Bondjol', 971-1010, esp. 983.

²⁴ . Krause, *Zwischen Rebellion*, 98-108.

²⁵ . Veer, *Atjeh-oorlog*. Veer, 'Atjeh in 1873' 164-178; Reid, *Contest for North Sumatra*. and Van Swieten, *De waarheid* .

²⁶ . Snouck Hurgronje, *Achehnese*, 88-116.

²⁷ . Reid, *Contest North Sumatra*, 14-17.

In opposition to the *ulèëbalang* stood the *ulama* who were experts in explaining and teaching the holy Islamic scriptures, the Koran and the books of the *hadith*. They advocated orthodox interpretations of Islam and wanted the chieftains to live up to the Islamic law, the *sharia*.

A remarkable man in Aceh was Habib Abdurrahman az-Zahir, born in Hadramaut, the home of many Arab merchants trading in the archipelago. Zahir, who was educated in Egypt and Calicut (India) and is portrayed by Reid as a pious Muslim but also a realistic diplomat, arrived in Aceh in 1864 and managed to become the first minister and adviser to sultan Tuanku Ibrahim (1838-1870).²⁸ In alliance with the *ulama* he tried to strengthen the sultan's power. One of his proposed reforms was a transfer of justice from the *ulèëbalang* to an independent court using the *sharia*. Resistance, however, was too strong and Zahir's plans for a more 'orderly' society did not materialize.

When the Suez Canal opened in 1869 the volume of shipping through the Straits of Malacca increased and the problem of the Acehnese piracy in the Straits became urgent. British merchants trading in Acehnese pepper wanted the anarchy to end. The second Sumatra Treaty of 1872 between the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, demarcating each other's sphere of influence, enabled the latter to intervene in Aceh. When Governor General James Loudon was persuaded to believe the false rumour that Italy or the United States might intervene in Aceh, he started a war in a hurry to have Aceh acknowledge Dutch sovereignty. After a failed first expedition in 1873, a second one later that year succeeded in conquering the capital Kota Radja where the sultan's palace was located. The Dutch discovered very soon

²⁸ . Reid, *Contest North Sumatra*, 81-83.

that this was of no importance as the sultan, who died shortly afterwards, was at most a symbolic figure without any real power.

Reid thinks that one reason why attempts by Zahir and his men to negotiate a treaty failed was a lack of experience, which resulted in strong resistance by the Dutch government in The Hague. A treaty, which installed a system of indirect rule where the sultan recognized Dutch supremacy and Aceh retained a considerable amount of autonomy, would have been a real option.²⁹ The English, as well as the Dutch, were experienced with such systems, especially in their far-flung colonial territories.³⁰ Zahir capitulated and was compelled by the Dutch authorities to withdraw to his native country in 1878, where he settled in Mecca. Other, often more radical leaders, rose to take his place. The most influential of them was Teungkoë Sjech Saman di Tiro, an *ulama* and a very orthodox Muslim. Stimulated by the *ulama* the Acehnese waged a holy war against the infidel aggressors. Handwritten texts called *hikajat prang*, describing the delights awaiting the warriors for Islam who died in combat and calling on all adult men to join the holy war, were circulated.³¹

Although some of the *ulèëbalang* were allies of the Dutch, today's ally could turn out to be the enemy of tomorrow. Generally speaking, the *ulèëbalang* were divided into a pro-independence and a pro-Dutch part and allegiances tended to shift. In 1884, when the authorities in The Hague realized the war was dragging on and costs were rising to an incredible height, the decision was taken to concentrate all troops within a small area around the capital Kota Radja. Even the area within this 'concentration line' turned out to be unsafe, however. The war caused fierce political

²⁹ . Reid, *Contest North Sumatra*, 118 and 174.

³⁰ . Watson Andaya et al. *History of Malaysia*, 158-175.

³¹ . Veer, *Atjeh-oorlog*, 120 and Reid, *Contest Northern Sumatra*, 206 and 252.

debates in the Netherlands, while epidemics among the soldiers caused many deaths and large parts of Aceh were devastated and depopulated.³²

A breakthrough was effected by the official report of Chr. Snouck Hurgronje to the Governor General of May 1892.³³ Snouck Hurgronje was adviser to the colonial government on Islam and native affairs. He was an outstanding orientalist and had succeeded in visiting Mecca in 1884. Snouck despised the Islam and considered it as a religion for barbarians. He was convinced it could not be reformed and adapted to 'modern' Western thinking.³⁴ In his report he sharply criticized the policy of the colonial government, which had been in force from 1873 onwards. He said that the government should refrain from interfering in purely religious matters such as the pilgrimage, the position of returned pilgrims and the building of mosques. At the end of his scholarly report, intermingled with nasty remarks on the Acehnese, he proposed to leave the pretender sultan for what he was, a powerless and useless puppet king. Political Islam had to be repressed at all costs. The *ulama* were the real enemies and be totally defeated. Violence was the only thing they and their adherents would countenance. The Netherlands Indies government had to build up better relations with the population of the region and convince them that Batavia would bring prosperity. Snouck Hurgronje advised Batavia to ally itself to the opponents of the *ulama*, the *ulèëbalang*.

At first almost all officers and civil servants were strongly against Snouck Hurgronje's plans. Only a certain major J.B. van Heutsz thought Snouck Hurgronje was right. The betrayal of Teuku Umar, an *ulèëbalang* who had been a paid ally of the

³² . After the subjugation of the valley of the Aceh River in 1879 by Colonel Van der Heiden only 50,000 Acehnese remained from a pre-war population of 300,000. See: Reid, *Contest Sumatra*, 187.

³³ . NA, CO, 6219. Only a part of this voluminous report was published by Adriaanse and Gobée in *Ambtelijke adviezen*, 1, 47-124. The report's conclusion on 94-97.

³⁴ . Koningsveld, *Snouck Hurgronje en de Islam*, 24-25 and 99 (with a robust quote from his doctoral thesis defended in 1883).

Dutch, in 1896 convinced The Hague and Batavia that Snouck's solution might be worth putting to the test. Van Heutsz was given command and promoted to general-major, in 1898. He invented a new strategy, which turned out to be quite successful. What he did was organise small counter-guerilla groups of well-trained soldiers who persecuted the enemy until they could be taken prisoner or killed. The leaders of the rebellion surrendered or were killed in battle successively one by one and the pacification of Aceh was more or less completed between 1910 and 1912 some years after the last sultan Mohammed Daud had been banished to Java.³⁵

Comparison of the two wars

From military and financial points of view, both wars were a nightmare to the Dutch. They took a very long time; much longer than the usual expeditions aimed at restoring order or punishing opponents. The wars cost a considerable amount of money and took a heavy toll on the soldiers and the civilians. Both regions had old dynasties of sultans or kings although these rulers did not have much real power anymore. Such 'chaotic' areas were ripe for colonial intervention. Since the Dutch claimed Sumatra was within their sphere of influence, it was obvious they saw themselves as having priority when it came to intervention. Both wars led to a debate in the Netherlands primarily about how the war ought to have been fought and what could have been done to make a successful intrusion.

The Governor General and the army command underestimated the resistance of the enemy and switched frequently between a defensive and an offensive approach. They did notice that the indigenous population was divided internally and that the leaders did not always have the same intention, but one gets the impression that

³⁵ . Ricklefs, *History Modern Indonesia*, 146. he states 'In the minds of some Acehnese, however, the war never came to an end'(146)

nobody knew exactly what was going on.³⁶ The other side could not to be trusted; you could never conclude a lasting treaty with them or make an agreement. Both wars originated in the Outer Provinces, in the periphery of Dutch control, and led eventually to annexation of large territories. Both regions were torn between leaders who wanted to hold to the *adat* and reformers who wanted to introduce a purer form of Islam to which the *adat* had to adapt. In Minangkabau this tension caused a civil war which the Dutch were drawn into. In Aceh the unstable political situation was detrimental to trade and industry. European and Chinese merchants in the British port of Penang urged the Dutch to attack and annex Aceh. A false message from Singapore, that the United States and other foreign nations were preparing to intervene in Aceh, caused the Dutch to panic. The resulting war was poorly prepared and got off to a bad start. In Aceh, Dutch intervention more or less stimulated the rift between proponents of an *adat* party and those seeking strength from a stricter Islam.

Historiography and interpretations

Historians have interpreted both conflicts differently. Locher-Scholten used the concept of state formation and pointed to the fact that Malayan states such as the sultanate of Djambi and the kingdom of Minangkabau did not function well, from a Western point of view, as they were not able to guarantee safety and public order and so curbed the production of commodities which European and American merchants wanted to buy and export to Western countries.³⁷ These states were stuck in their development and could better be replaced by direct or indirect colonial rule from

³⁶ . Beamer, *Atjeh War*, 463 and 561.

³⁷ . Locher-Scholten, *Sumatraans sultanaat*, 291-292.

Batavia. Older authors like Ritter, Van Swieten and Snouck Hurgronje saw anarchy in Aceh and other Malayan and Indonesian states and thought likewise.³⁸

Dobbin and Kraus explain the development of Minangkabau as a combination of failing institutions, economy and religion.³⁹ Trade and industry needed more safety and a better judicial system, both of which the traditional institutions governed by the *adat* could not provide because they lacked any central coordinating power. The *sharia* seems to have made the country safer, so that could have been a solution to the problem. Both authors do not agree about the influence that Wahhabism had on the three pilgrims and their movement: Dobbin thinks that they adhered to Wahhabism, Kraus prefers to consider them as reformers of the Islam. Another expert, Ricklefs does not choose between these interpretations.⁴⁰

Graves points to the forming of a new elite group of native administrative servants in Minangkabau after the war, which had been recruited from the former *Padri* and the *adat* elite who had been opponents before 1832.⁴¹

Van 't Veer and Piekaar emphasize the opposition between chieftains and *ulama* in Aceh.⁴² Reid sets the *ulèëbalang* at the coast with commercial interests in the pepper trade and more prone to compromises with European powers against the *ulèëbalang* in interior, who were suspicious of all foreign influences, especially if they originated from Europe. After Zahir's departure to Mecca radical leaders such as di Tiro took command and the *ulama* started labelling the *ulèëbalang*, who had allied themselves with the Dutch, traitors and bad Muslims. The antagonism of *ulèëbalang* and *ulama* became stronger after 1880 and was a reaction to the Dutch attack. Van 't

³⁸ . Ritter, 'Korte aanteekeningen' 454-476; NN, 'De staatkundige verhouding', 203-205 and NA, Report by J. van Swieten governor of Sumatra's West Coast about the situation in his department in 1858, CO Memories: 161.

³⁹ . Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*.

⁴⁰ . Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society*, 54 and note 60.

⁴¹ . Graves, *The Minangkabau Response*, 35-40.

⁴² . Veer, *Atjeh-oorlog*, 177-178 and Piekaar, *Atjèh*, 8-21.

Veer and Reid consider the Acehese resistance as driven by religious motives but also see it as a form of Indonesian pre-nationalism and the start of an Islamic awakening.⁴³ The pact between the Dutch colonial government and the *ulèëbalang* after 1898 contributed to the final Dutch victory. In fact, the *uleëbalang* took the same position as the post-war Minangkabau administrative servants.

Generally, most explanations stress political or socio-economic factors or a combination of these together with religion. Islam is often implicated or used to mask problems of a socio-economic nature. Many writers presume that the real causes of the two wars were much deeper.

Which law: adat or sharia?

Information about the way the *Padri* governed Minangkabau is scarce and often not very exact. Many Dutch observers wrote about its government and legal system although they never visited the region themselves and had to rely on information given by spies and other indigenous sources. Officers of the KNIL considered the situation from a military viewpoint. E. Francis, who was resident on Sumatra's West Coast from 1834 until 1837, wrote a transfer report in 1837 with some remarks about the *Padri's* legal system. Francis was born of British parents and shifted from the British to the Dutch in 1816 after which he made a successful career ending as president-director of the *Javaasche Bank* in 1851.⁴⁴ Before he came to Padang he had worked on several other islands of the archipelago, so that he arrived in Padang already as an experienced civil servant. According to his report, central power in the principality of Minangkabau was weak and the three kings were only symbolic figures. The administration of justice was originally: *Hadat bersandar shera* and

⁴³ . Veer, *Atjeh-oorlog*, 117 and 251. Reid, *Contest Northern Sumatra*, 132 and 154.

⁴⁴ . For a biographical note of Francis: *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek*, vol. I, 893.

shera bersandar Hadat, which translates as: ‘customary law supports Islamic law’ and ‘Islamic law supports customary law’. Justice was based on a mixture of written Islamic law and unwritten *adat*. In principle they were on a par. The *Padri* leaders introduced ‘priests’ into the kampongs who had sole discretion and could impose heavy fines on offenders under the new rules, even though the twin systems of *sharia* and *adat* continued to exist.⁴⁵ According to Hadler, the *Padri* ‘state’, influenced by the decentralized and democratic traditions of Minangkabau polities, lacked a clear administrative hierarchy.⁴⁶

Van Ronkel, who could lay his hands upon the autobiographies of Tuanku Imam Bondjol and his son, also described the judicial system of the *Padri* as a mixture of *adat* and *sharia*. When the Imam was about to be taken away to Java and had to say goodbye to his son whom he had nominated as his successor, he gave him some recommendations. One of these, according to Van Ronkel’s translation said, ‘Another thing: recognize the authority of the adat-panghulus, follow their rules; if they cannot be executed, this panghulu is not the real one, he only bears the title. Keep to the adat as faithfully as you can, and if your judgment (*ilmu*) is not sufficient, then you should learn the twenty qualities of Allah.’⁴⁷ Notice here that the *ilmu*, a combination of knowledge, experience and insight, was regarded crucial for a judge.

The Dutch government chose to maintain the *adat* after 1841. When Lieutenant-colonel A.J. Andresen proposed in 1857 to abolish the Minangkabau heritage law, which was very different from the European systems because it was

⁴⁵ . Uitvoerig verslag aan de Gouverneur-Generaal over Sumatra’s Westkust (1837) by E. Francis, KITLV: H 535, 90-107.

⁴⁶ . Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchy*, 24.

⁴⁷ . Van Ronkel, ‘Inlandsche getuigenissen’, 1116. ‘Nog iets: erken het gezag der adat-panghoeloe’s, volg hunne regels; zijn die niet te volgen, dan is hij geen ware panghoeloe, slechts den titel heeft hij dan. Houd u zo getrouw mogelijk aan de Adat, en indien uw kennis niet volkomen is, leer dan de twintig eigenschappen van Allah’. Otherwise than on Java, on Sumatra a *penghulu* is a man invested with general political authority. The number of twenty qualities attributed to Allah could not be traced back in handbooks. The traditional number of qualities is ninety nine, but the list partly derived from the Quran had variants. See: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1, 714-717 (entry ‘al-asma al-husna’).

based on matrilineal succession, Colonel jhr. [Sir] C.A. de Brauw and A. Wiltens, the Resident of the Padang Upper Countries, were strongly opposed to this plan. They wrote elaborate notes in 1861 refuting the arguments produced by Andresen and pointing to the great advantage of the *adat poesaka* (traditional customary law): it was an excellent counterbalance to Islamic law and a thorn in the eyes of the orthodox Islamic ‘priests’.⁴⁸ According to Hadler a typical Minangkabau institution such as matriarchy survived neo-Wahhabism as well as colonialism just as it was challenged by the *Padri*. *Adat* was not a static system of unwritten rules; it was always changing and adapting. The Dutch civil servants quoted above did not see this crucial flexibility.⁴⁹

Aceh was governed from 1903 until 1942 by about 150 *ulèëbalang*, 50 of which fell under direct Dutch rule. Government remained their business, the *ulama* lost much of their power and the population’s interest in religious teaching decreased. The administration of spiritual justice had been transferred by the colonial government to indigenous courts called *moesapat* but was entrusted again to the *ulèëbalang* in 1919. This justice system was based on the *adat*.⁵⁰ In 1921 adherents of the so-called Ethical Policy proposed that the Governor-General should adopt more modern standards in Aceh. Military measures and repression had to give way to more and better education and tolerance of a non-political Islam.⁵¹ The governor of Aceh installed a council consisting of two distinguished *ulama* to give him advice concerning religious matters, in approximately 1920. The adviser for *Inlandsche Zaken* [Native Affairs] R.A. Kern was enthusiastic about this council, but he warned

⁴⁸ . Kielstra, ‘Sumatra’s Westkust’, 272-302. Hadler did not take any notice of this report, but he calls the new post-1837 elite a ‘false’ adat elite. Hadler, ‘Historiography’, 990.

⁴⁹ . Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs*, 179-180 and Graves, *Minangkabau Response*, 15.

⁵⁰ . Report of R.A. Kern to the governor of Aceh, 1920, Kern papers, 417, p. 26

⁵¹ . Piekaar, *Atjèh*, 8-13. Advice of R.A. Kern to the governor-general about a better government of Aceh, 1921, Kern Papers, 415.

that it should not be allowed to develop into an appeal court. His warning suggests that he still did not trust the *ulama*. As an alternative, he recommended more supervision of Islamic religious schools.⁵² It seemed that although Aceh had been pacified, the idea of a *jihad* against the Dutch lived on in certain circles. Conspiracies to murder Europeans and attacks on army posts were discovered as late as 1924.⁵³ When the Japanese invaded the Netherlands Indies in 1942 Aceh, led by the *ulama*, rose again. Under Japanese rule the *ulama* allied themselves to the Japanese and were left the entire field of justice.⁵⁴

The holy war

Many authors point to the *jihad* or *prang sabil* as a driving force for resistance. The concept of a holy war was very attractive to many young male warriors, believing that he who was killed in battle or even assisted warriors would go straight to paradise and his sins would be forgiven by Allah. Boelhouwer, a young first lieutenant on service against the Padri between 1831-1834, heard them shouting at Malayan auxiliary soldiers: ‘Convert, Malaysians! Convert! Help us to chase away those impure animals, those rascals’.⁵⁵ The Aceh leader Di Tiro, who bore the honorary title ‘chief of religion’, exhorted the Dutch to convert to Islam saying: ‘Thou wouldst receive honour, become chief over us and acquire possessions, like those having already taken our side. They have acquired possessions [...] and, moreover, a number of women who are virtuous and refrain from promiscuity, everything in harmony with the Islamic laws.’⁵⁶

⁵² . Advice of R.A. Kern to the governor general, Kern Papers, 415, p. 48 and pp. 82-88.

⁵³ . Letter governor of Aceh to the governor general 10 August 1924, Kern Papers, 419.

⁵⁴ . Piekaar, *Atjeh*, 283.

⁵⁵ . Boelhouwer, *Herinneringen*, 84.

⁵⁶ . Veer, *Atjeh oorlog*, 178-179.

Islamic scholars did not agree (and still do not agree) whether holy war was one of the Islamic ‘pillars’.⁵⁷ Moreover, the concept of *jihad* is interpreted in different ways. The most common interpretation is based on the dogma that Islam is the only true religion, that other religions are false and that ‘pagans’ have to be converted. In accomplishing this holy duty the use of violence is permitted or even obligatory. Jews and Christians have a religion with a Book, but their religion is a ‘forgery’, fortunately replaced by Mohammed, so they have to be converted.⁵⁸

A quite different explanation of the word *jihad*, popular among sufis (the mystic form of Islam), is given by Kraus and Jansen. Holy war is not a public but a private matter. Every Muslim has the obligation to fight against his weak qualities and to try to become a better human being. This so-called ‘great *jihad*’ was advocated by the Hadrami Muslim Said Uthmann in a treatise written in 1890.⁵⁹ Sayyid Uthman (1822-1913) was an orthodox Muslim, whose ancestors came from Egypt and Hadramaut in South East Arabia. He spent most of his long life in Batavia. According to Kaptein he changed his views and the interpretation of the *fiqh*-books after being appointed by the colonial government as an honorary adviser for Arab affairs in 1889.⁶⁰ Uthman was a friend of Snouck Hurgronje and received a decoration from Queen Wilhelmina which made him suspect in the eyes of more orthodox Muslims. Uthman’s softer interpretation may have been written with the silent consent of Snouck Hurgronje and was welcomed by the government. It is doubtful, however, whether this divergent interpretation of the *jihad* enjoyed much popularity among Muslims elsewhere in Indonesia. According to Azyumardi Azra Uthman was one of the leaders of reformism in Indonesia in the late nineteenth century, but although he

⁵⁷ . Jansen, *Nieuwe inleiding* 85.

⁵⁸ . Tyan, ‘Djihad’.

⁵⁹ . Jansen, *Nieuwe inleiding*, 85-86 and Kraus, *Zwischen Rebellion*, 113. About Uthman: Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood*, 85-88.

⁶⁰ . Kaptein, ‘Sayyid Uthmân’, 94.

published about 100 treatises mostly about the sharia and the hadith, Azra has his doubts about the real influence he had among Indonesian Muslims.⁶¹ If he has had any influence, this might have only been restricted to Batavia or Java and not have reached Sumatra, one of the Outer Islands.

In Western languages *jihad* is often interpreted as a violent, aggressive war against infidels, but the historian Teuku Ibrahim Alfian, referring to the Quran, emphasises that the original meaning of the word *jihad* is ‘to make efforts as much as you can’⁶². The word, however, can have different meanings, varying from peaceful ones like the *jihad al-nafs* (the war against yourself, also called the great *jihad*) to an aggressive one, called the small *jihad*. Other kinds of *jihad* are the *jihad al-lisan* (the war using the tongue, i.e. persuasion) or the *jihad al-tarbiyah* (using education and training). After this explanation, Alfian gives a short description of the violent jihads, that the Acehnese waged against European powers, starting with the Portuguese in Malacca in the sixteenth century until the Indonesian Independence War (1945-1949). Remarkably, he does not mention the Padri War.⁶³ The Acehnese *ulama* preferred the most violent interpretation of the *jihad*. They wanted that the Acehnese would fight against the kaffir until the last Acehnese was killed. They even maintained this viewpoint when other Acehnese leaders advocated a milder approach.⁶⁴

Discontent with colonial rule and social tensions existed in Indonesia in the nineteenth century. Most Indonesians were Muslims, but did not wage such long wars as in Minangkabau and Aceh. Nevertheless, Sumatra was the first island of Indonesia where Islam got a foothold and Sumatra delivered proportionally more *hadji* than

⁶¹ . Azra, ‘Hadrâmî Scholars’, esp. 14.

⁶² . Alfian, ‘The Holy War’, 523-525.

⁶³ . Alfian, ‘The Holy War’, 526-534.

⁶⁴ . Hadi, ‘Exploring Achenese understandings of jihad’, 195-196.

other parts of Indonesia.⁶⁵ Islamic scholars were already very influential in Aceh in the seventeenth century and neo-Sufism arrived in Minangkabau in the eighteenth.⁶⁶ This made Aceh and Sumatra special.

Conclusions

Indonesia, and Sumatra in particular, was already a part of the *umma* long before 1800. Networks of Islamic scholars, *ulama*, being in permanent contact with Mecca and Medina, had been spreading new views on Islam for centuries.⁶⁷ Returning pilgrims started movements aiming at reforming and ‘purifying’ the Indonesian Islam, which had acquired, especially on Java, a deviant form. Some of these movements, but not all of them, spread the idea of *jihad*, which turned out to be a strong motive to fight the Europeans and other *kafir*. The concept of the *jihad*, however, has more meanings: going from violent to peaceful. It is unclear whether the peaceful forms of *jihad* have been popular in Indonesia.

In Minangkabau a purer, more fundamental, scripture-oriented Islam was introduced at the end of the eighteenth century when the economy of the region boomed. Introduction of the *sharia* turned out to be beneficial to trade and life in general. Pilgrims returning from Mecca shortly after 1803 propagated another form of pure Islam inspired by Wahhabism. The leaders of the new movement were called *Padri*. Their aggressive approach caused a *jihad* within the Minangkabau society. The Dutch were only involved in the war in 1821. After modifying views on the correct Islam, the *Padri* leader Tuanku Imam Bondjol came to terms with his old enemies, but finally, the new coalition had to surrender to the Dutch. After the war the *Padri* movement gradually disappeared and a new elite developed consisting of members of

⁶⁵ . Heeres, ‘Sumatra’, 204.

⁶⁶ . Azra. *Islamic Reformism*, 144.

⁶⁷ . Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood*, and Azra, *Islamic Reformism*.

both former parties, the *adat* and the *Padri*. Islamic brotherhoods remained influential, but they did not cause serious political troubles.

In Aceh the situation was different. This region had been strongly Islamic for centuries. Aceh was still independent in 1872 when the second Sumatra Treaty between the United Kingdom and the Netherlands assigned this part of the island to the Dutch sphere of influence. Islam became radicalised by Dutch aggression, especially after 1878 when attempts to end the war by diplomacy had failed and the moderate Az-Zahir had returned to Arabia. Radical leaders took over the fight for an independent Aceh. While the *Padri* leaders de-radicalised out of necessity and entered a form of cooperation with their Dutch adversaries, in Aceh radical Islam came to the fore after continued but failing Dutch offensives. Snouck Hurgronje persuaded the Dutch to ally themselves with the *ulèëbalang* with a positive result: hostilities were almost over by 1913. This was achieved by isolating and hunting down the *ulama* party. After winning the war, the Dutch colonial government kept the *ulama* outside. The new elite consisted only of *ulèëbalang*. However, after the end of the war, tensions remained and caused occasional unrest until 1942 when the Dutch colonial regime collapsed and the *ulama* reappeared.

The final conclusion is that radical forms of the Islam can arouse a *jihad* against other Muslims or against infidel European powers. More research is necessary to how Islamic scholars have thought and written about *jihad* and its different forms and which form was preferred under certain circumstances.

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