

Review Article

The Sulu Zone Revisited

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Iranun and Balangingi. Globalization, maritime raiding and the birth of ethnicity

By JAMES FRANCIS WARREN

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James Warren's rewarding Iranun and Balangingi (2002) expands on his classic The Sulu Zone (1981) but retains the explanatory model: Southern Philippine slave-raiding (1768–1898) was caused by the capitalist world economy's demand for commodities. This essay suggests that Warren's depiction of servility is too undifferentiated, that he may have overestimated labour needs and elite control while underestimating free trade.

It is now more than twenty years since James Warren published his path-breaking study of *The Sulu Zone*.¹ Because of its combination of a strong thesis, human drama and a powerful sense of place the book soon became a favourite of students and specialists alike. Very much a work of its time, it combined fashionable neo-Marxist interest in the articulation of modes of production with the micro-historian's fascination with the details of individual lives. It rapidly became a classic, riding a wave of growing interest in ecological history and the impact of economic and political incorporation on seemingly marginal societies. As indicated by the subtitle (*The dynamics of external trade, slavery and ethnicity in the transformation of a Southeast Asian maritime state*) Warren not only sensed, but indeed helped shape, historiographical trends. The book was irresistible, and perceptions of maritime history and of the interaction between cores and peripheries in Southeast Asia were strongly influenced by his work. Consequently, it is with considerable interest that we turn to the recently published *Iranun and Balangingi*. As the author himself notes, this should be seen as part of the wider project that began with *Sulu Zone*.

The new study maintains the thematic focus of the previous book, and Warren restates some of his earlier conclusions:

One extraordinary feature of the global interconnections between Sulu slavery and the advent of the capitalist world economy, was the rapid movement of systematic maritime

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1 James Francis Warren, *The Sulu Zone: The dynamics of external trade, slavery, and ethnicity in the transformation of a Southeast Asian maritime state* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1981).

raiding across the entire region as one Southeast Asian coastal population after another was hunted down . . . [I]t was under Taosog sponsorship and in the service of that interdependent globalizing economy [that raiding expanded] . . . It is worth emphasizing again the powerful economic forces that were pushing the Taosog aristocracy in the direction of acquiring more and more slaves . . . In order to trade it was necessary for the Taosog to have something to give in exchange . . . The only way for the Taosog to obtain the commodities which formed the basis of their cross cultural trade was to secure more slaves, by means of long distance maritime raiding . . . Captive people, from right across Southeast Asia in their tens of thousands, seized by these sea raiders were put to work in the sultanate's fisheries, in the birds' nests caves, or in the cultivation of rice and transport of goods to local markets in the regional distributive network.²

The market and the state are the two determining factors in Warren's explanation of Sulu Zone dynamics, and he has a very definite view of their relationship; the first receives considerably more attention than does the second. Expanding commercial integration driven by global capitalism (exemplified in the British tea trade with China) led the Taosug sultans, hungry for arms and consumer goods, to use their Iranun and Balangingi clients to obtain labour. Workers were required to produce commodities that Canton-bound skippers needed to exchange for Chinese tea, thus liberating themselves from an expensive dependence on silver.³ Local elites were happy to oblige, thereby accumulating more textiles to distribute or trade, as well as more weapons and hence more power. Readers familiar with Warren's earlier work will recognise these ideas, and even some of the text itself, not only from *Sulu Zone*, but more directly from a small book published in 1997 and 1998, entitled *The Sulu Zone: The world capitalist economy and the historical imagination*.⁴

Both *Sulu Zone* and *Iranun and Balangingi* cover much the same period (mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries) and also overlap substantively. The earlier book is divided into three parts ('Patterns of trading, 1768–1898', 'Patterns of raiding, 1768–1898' and 'Slavery'), while the 2002 publication devotes around 300 of the total 419 pages of text to the raids, adding rich detail to the previous work. *Iranun and Balangingi* takes into account some recent publications, such as studies of Sulu's precursor sultanate of Maguindanau (on Mindanao), but the interpretation remains unchanged. Chapters 2

2 Warren, *Iranun and Balangingi*, pp. 406–7. The Taosug (in *Sulu Zone*) or Taosog (in *Iranun and Balangingi*) were the dominant ethnic group in the Sulu Sultanate, which reached its peak in the period 1768–1867. Its capital, Jolo, dominated 500 or so scattered islands between northeast Borneo and the southern Philippine island of Mindanao. The piracy and slave raiding of the Maranao-speaking Iranun of Mindanao and the Balangingi Samal of Sulu were famous in late eighteenth-century Southeast Asia, while the nomadic – but often client – Samal Badjau Laut or 'sea nomads' were specialists in the exploitation of marine resources. Samal-speaking communities in north Borneo and Sulu varied in dialect, habitat and 'cultural-ecological factors (principally between sedentary Muslim shore-dwellers and nomadic animistic boat dwellers)' (p. xx).

3 Els M. Jacobs, *Koopman in Azië. De handel van de Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie tijdens de 18de eeuw* (Zutphen: Walburg Press, 2000), pp. 137–52.

4 This study originally appeared as James Francis Warren, 'The Sulu Zone, the world capitalist economy and the historical imagination: Problematizing global–local interconnections and interdependencies', *Tonan Ajia Kenkyu (Southeast Asian Studies)*, 35, 2 (1997): 177–222. It was republished as *The Sulu Zone: The world capitalist economy and the historical imagination* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1998). It will be referred to as 'The Sulu Zone (1998)' when cited in this article. David Henley published a valuable review in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 156, 4 (2000): 834–8.

through 12 of *Iranun and Balangingi* offer a detailed description of slave raiding in the Malay world from the late 1700s to the mid-1800s, focusing on the Iranun and Balangingi and their relationship with the Taosug. The first and last chapters use their story to demonstrate wider, indeed global, relationships. Consequently, as an ethnohistory that aims to contribute to globalisation theory, the potential contribution of this book is twofold. However, 'the birth of ethnicity' promised in the subtitle is really only considered directly on pp. 309–10 and 410–13. The author's primary concern is to deconstruct the image of the bloodthirsty 'Lanun' or 'Moro' rather than to join the discussion on Southeast Asian identity formation. *Sulu Zone* contains more relevant information on 'ethnogenesis'.

Warren's heart is certainly in the right place: he wants to put the 'little people' back into history. Milking naval accounts and archival records for illuminating examples, he makes effective use of testimonies by captives and sailors to describe the organisation of raiding (including ships, crews and bases) as well as the colonial context and the aims of Tausug sultans and Iranun raiders. Like *Sulu Zone*, which it so ably supplements, *Iranun and Balangingi* will be an indispensable source for anyone interested in the history of piracy and slavery in Southeast Asia.

However, Warren explains the dramas he describes as the almost inevitable results of the interlocking of competitive local politics with global capital. This gives his analysis a mechanical logic, within which the demand for commodities – and hence for labour – is the central link between market and state. Global capital seeking produce for the China trade – while offering weapons and other goods – represents the former, while the Taosug-led trading and raiding polity represents the latter. Ironically (given Warren's commitment to historiographical justice), this emphasis on the forces of capital seems deterministic, with the Taosug almost as trapped as their own miserable captives. In such a scenario, the weight of agency is external.

Insofar as agency did lie in Sulu, it was in the hands of the Taosug *datu* (chiefs, aristocrats) and sultans, who dominated trade, backed raids and, according to *Sulu Zone's* subtitle, transformed the state. This state was and (as far as we can see from Warren's work) remained highly segmented. The sultan's authority was primarily religious; chiefly competition and patron-client ties were dominant. In *Iranun and Balangingi* Warren ably documents elite accumulation of wealth through raiding, which was highly structured and financed by profit-sharing stakeholders, 'principally Tausog aristocrats and Iranun merchants' (p. 185), although the sultan himself also participated (p. 167). However, the actual relationships that linked followers to leaders in both economic and political spheres remain largely implicit, and there seems to have been no structural change in the polity, which was similar to that of such Borneo neighbours as Brunei, Sambas and Pontianak (p. 181).⁵

5 See also Warren, *Sulu Zone*, pp. 149–214. Although the sultanate was unusually highly structured for the pre-Hispanic Philippines, Laura Lee Junker observes that even in the nineteenth century it was still segmentary and weakly centralised, and based on an exchange of tribute and 'taxes' for chiefly services; Laura Lee Junker, *Raiding, trading and feasting. The political economy of Philippine chiefdoms* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), pp. 68, 72. Local leaders, with their power rooted in 'fluctuating alliance networks' of varying strength, had similar roles 'in adjudication, control of markets and commerce, collection of tribute, control over land tenure, sponsorship of religious rites, and mobilization of participants in warfare'. If they obtained royal recognition, they could bear the *datu* title (pp. 70–1). She draws heavily on the work of Thomas Kiefer.

Sulu Zone reflects the debates of the 1970s, when post-colonial scholarship sought new ways of understanding Europe's economic and political place in the world. While some writers strove to restore agency and hence dignity to once-subjugated societies by stressing autonomy, others emphasised the detrimental effects of long-term unequal exchange relationships. Dependency theory ('the development of underdevelopment') and modes of production and 'world system' models all stressed how the wealth of the West derived from the exploitation of the rest.⁶ While Warren does not discuss these issues explicitly in either of the two books, they frame his approach to Sulu. Indeed, the impression is that they have become so central and accepted in his thought that they require no overt consideration. It is remarkable that while the on-going search for an explanatory framework for global relationships has made impressive strides in recent decades, Warren's ideas of causality remain unchanged. This is all the more surprising as the titles of his books indicate that he has the ambition to contribute to this discussion.

'To explain social interaction between ethnic groups within the region', remarks Warren in the introduction to *Sulu Zone*, 'I have used the framework of a "centre-periphery" concept' (p. xxi). In *Iranun and Balangingi* he regularly refers to 'the world capitalist economy', as if its existence – and indeed its nature – are well established and unquestioned. While the terms recall the work of Immanuel Wallerstein, there is no indication of how they might relate to the quite rigorous model of world system core-periphery relations that he proposed.⁷ Few now would accept Wallerstein's Eurocentric ranking of societies, but explicit engagement with his ideas encouraged a systematic consideration of the relationships between 'trans-national' exchanges, state mechanisms and labour organisation. This imposed an essential discipline on the debate. Echoes of this underpin Warren's vision of the Sulu Zone, with its emphasis on the state, slavery and the incorporation of regional trade into Western-dominated long-distance commerce. Yet although Warren's ideas resonate with an almost moral force, they remain uncoupled, as the actual interaction of the parts that are assumed to form a dynamic structure is stated rather than demonstrated.

A brief look at the other, western fringe of the Indian Ocean should suffice to show how attention to this interaction could have focused the *Sulu Zone* model. In 1998 Michael Pearson reassessed the impact of 'unequal' trade on 'peripheral' and pre-colonial East Africa, acknowledging but reworking Wallerstein's ideas. In East Africa, writes Pearson, two types of polity coexisted: inland territorial tributary empires and coastal city-states. The former were uninterested in commerce, except on a discretionary basis; they valued land, cattle and women, not gold or ivory. However,

6 Michael Pearson and R. J. Barendse have considered these themes in relation to the opposite edge of the Indian Ocean; see Michael Pearson, *Port cities and invaders: The Swahili Coast, India and Portugal in the early modern age* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp. 105–13; R. J. Barendse, 'Trade and state in the Arabian Seas: A survey from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century', *Journal of World History*, 11, 2 (2000): 173–203; and the introduction to Barendse, *The Arabian Seas: The Indian Ocean world of the seventeenth century* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe East Gate Books, 2002). The debate is of course much wider; the point of departure is typically Immanuel Wallerstein, *The modern world system. Capitalist agriculture and the origins of the European world economy in the sixteenth century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

7 Central to Wallerstein's notion of a core is 'a strong state machinery coupled with a national culture'. Relations between cores, peripheries and the necessary (semi-periphery) links between them reflect the international division of labour, and are characterised in turn by different forms of labour mobilisation: coerced labour in the periphery, market mechanisms in the core (*ibid.*, pp. 349, 355, 100–1).

these commodities were exported by the city-states to India and other markets where they were highly desired. Differences in use values covered traders' considerable costs of transport, risk and protection, including the high taxes levied in the ports. The problem for merchants, as many early European visitors complained, was how to generate adequate supplies of goods that had little value in the producing societies: 'if only the natives could be forced to consume'.⁸

Although Pearson characterises both the Indian state and the inland African 'authority structure' as 'tributary', there was a major difference: tribute was paid in kind in Africa but through taxation in India. This taxation, primarily in cash, monetised India's rural economy, and as a consequence market relations penetrated to the level of the peasant. In East Africa, by contrast, the market remained peripheral; only surplus labour was used (coerced) to produce goods for tribute or allocated to meet an immediate need. 'In both areas, merchants provided the crucial linkages to keep exchange and production going and to connect the state and the producer.'⁹ If we make the logical inference explicit, it would seem that traders in East Africa's ports could obtain commodities either by accessing power-holders' surplus tribute or by creating a demand for imports that could only be satisfied by increasing the production of goods for export.

The central problem of commodity supply was similar in Sulu. Warren holds that when the Sultan and *datu* developed an intensified need for products to exchange for imports, they turned to a 'slave mode of production' rather than to an intensification of tribute collection through patron–client ties or a skimming of profits from market exchanges. So if seemingly unequal trade was really beneficial in East Africa, in Sulu it was advantageous for the elite, but malign for producers. Coercion was thus needed at three levels: to obtain labour by raiding, to force slaves to produce and to maintain elite control of transactions with outside merchants. This credits the state with considerable capacity. However, in Sulu as in much of eastern Southeast Asia, dispersed power, proximity to major trade routes, geographic fragmentation and ease of sea access to outlying areas would seem to limit the scope for coercion. Nonetheless, Warren sees raiding and slavery as fundamental to production for a controlled market. It will be suggested, in the following pages, that he was not necessarily correct in this conclusion.

We each view our specific field of inquiry, and its potential contribution to the wider debate, from a particular angle of vision. For Warren the case study is Sulu, and the themes are the role of the state, trade, slavery, ethnicity and globalisation. In my own work the focus is upon Makassar in south-western Sulawesi (Celebes), but I share a similar preoccupation with the impact of long-range commerce. This review essay is written in the hope that the juxtaposition of my Makassar-centric perspective will better enable us to appreciate not only Warren's interpretation of Sulu, but also the broader processes that we each seek to understand.

8 Pearson, *Port cities*, p. 118.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 105, 120, 125, 127 (quotation). Pearson refers to Eric Wolf, who sees labour mobilisation through the political process as central to the 'tributary mode'. Power could be highly concentrated, or diffused among local overlords; Eric Wolf, *Europe and the people without history* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 82. Wolf notes (p. 84) that tribute extraction often coexisted with mercantile activity 'to their mutual benefit', although tension was inherent in the relationship. Colonial taxation was a favoured instrument for forcing 'uncaptured' peasants into the labour market and for stimulating cash-crop production. The process was not always linear; see, for example, Goran Hyden's polemic against those who overestimate the imperial impact through a failure to understand the rural economy: Goran Hyden, *Beyond ujamaa in Tanzania: Underdevelopment and an uncaptured peasantry* (London: Heineman, 1980).

Taking as my point of departure the quotations given above (p. 134), this review will consider whether the Taosug were ‘pushed’ into the ‘service of the interdependent globalising economy’, so that the ‘only way’ they could obtain commodities was to ‘put to work’ ‘tens of thousands’ of captives. Underlying this approach are a number of unresolved yet fundamental issues which cannot be considered here; their complexity does, however, deserve more explicit recognition in Warren’s work. They concern, for example, the balance of power within states, encompassing issues of personalised authority and degrees of institutionalisation; security and law; the role of culture, religion and ideology; differentiation between slave and free labour, and between tax and tribute; and the extent of commodification, monetisation and individualisation.

The background

Southeast Asia has been closely involved in trade for more than a millennium, with various commodities being incorporated into long-distance commerce. Sumatran forest products, Minangkabau and Kalimantan gold, pepper, tin, sugar, tobacco, coffee, marine produce and copra were all developed by Indonesian peoples and rulers for overseas exchange.¹⁰ Each required a specific knowledge of markets, production and transport, with prerequisite social and political arrangements. In some cases exploitation was dependent on importing slave labour. Pepper, which dominated Indonesian long-haul trade from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries, was initially incorporated into subsistence cycles, but by the 1600s demand was so great that specialised production sites developed, using slave and immigrant labour. As Barbara Andaya has shown, slaves were essential for South Sumatra’s pepper producers.¹¹

In other forms of production – particularly mining but also sugar – Chinese knowledge was central. Workers were drawn from local communities or through migration and/or the emergence of a labour market (local, regional or long-distance, including recruiting Chinese workers), while in densely populated areas such as Java they were accessed by political means, such as leasing, purchase or appanage. The extent to which a workforce was controlled varied. Wet-rice cultivation and mining were geographically fixed and relatively labour-intensive; swidden farmers were more difficult to tie down. The collecting sites of sea and forest products were typically dispersed, with the exception of birds’ nests and, to a large extent, pearl shell. Their gathering was usually seasonal, and required specific expertise.¹²

The China market had long been of central importance for Southeast Asia. Some commodities, like bird’s nests or *trepang* (*tripang*, sea cucumbers, *bêche-de-mer*), were of interest only to the Chinese. They were, however, so valuable that distant seaside cliffs or seemingly peripheral seas became sought-after destinations. Leonard Blussé has described how the Sandakan (North Borneo) swallow caves were worked by ‘native Borneo slave groupings belonging to Sulu grandees’. He notes that though descriptions seem to indicate stable conditions around the caves, Warren’s ‘superb study [*Sulu Zone*]

10 David Bulbeck *et al.*, *Southeast Asian exports since the 14th century. Cloves, pepper, coffee and sugar* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998).

11 Barbara Andaya, *To live as brothers: Southeast Sumatra in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993).

12 Leonard Y. Andaya, ‘A history of trade in the Sea of Melayu’, *Itinerario*, 24, 1 (2000): 87–110.

reveals a 'grisly tale of violence and exploitation'.¹³ In Java local chiefs, rulers and later the Dutch East India Company collected the nests through *corvée* arrangements, while in Vietnam they were gathered under bureaucratic or military supervision. The trade was so profitable that state exploitation, in one form or another, was the norm. The same applied to the impressive pearling production of Sri Lanka, where tens of thousands of men worked in an industry either directly managed by the state or farmed out to wealthy investors.¹⁴

Pearling in Indonesia was very different, since pearls were mainly harvested in the south-eastern Aru Islands, where weak state development enabled exploitation of the banks to be concentrated in village hands. In contrast, in Sulu as in Sri Lanka, pearls and shell were sufficiently important to ensure political control. According to Warren, pearling was either carried out by large expeditions led by the elite or taxed by the sultan; divers were either trained slaves or skilled boat-dwellers.¹⁵ Pearl fishing was, however, somewhat different from turtle hunting and *trepang* gathering, which were diffused over wide areas. Tortoiseshell could be obtained either through opportunistic hunting of individual animals anywhere at sea or by killing at nesting beaches in season.¹⁶ The many varieties of *trepang* were widely distributed, and after Chinese demand developed in the late seventeenth century, the holothurians were drawn from Japan and Hainan, then Southeast Asia and later, in the nineteenth century, the Pacific.¹⁷ Turtle and *trepang* gathering would seem to be less immediately amenable to state manipulation than pearling.¹⁸ However, the Taosug elite's control of production (and not just trade) in *trepang*, pearls and mother-of-pearl is absolutely central to Warren's account of Sulu Zone history.

The basic exploitation of a marine resource, like any other, was shaped by ecological and social factors and by supply and demand. The balance between potential profit-taking and exploitation costs on the one hand, and power-holders' desire and capacity to impose their will on the other, presumably decided the extent of political control. The interaction between state and market would have varied at different levels in the chains of production and marketing, most of which are inaccessible to historical research. Any attempt to make sense of such complexity has to be done within defined limits. In revisiting Warren's *Sulu Zone* I want to consider, firstly, whether or not the operation of

13 Leonard Blussé, 'In praise of commodities: An essay on the cross-cultural trade in edible bird's-nests', in *Emporia, commodities and entrepreneurs in Asian maritime trade, c.1400–1750*, ed. Roderich Ptak and Dietmar Rothermund (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991), pp. 326–7. Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450–1680, volume two: Expansion and crisis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993) discusses the China market in more detail.

14 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Noble harvest from the sea: Managing the pearl fishery of Mannar, 1500–1925', in *Institutions and economic change in South Asia*, ed. Burton Stein and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 134–72.

15 Warren, *Sulu Zone*, pp. 71–4.

16 Heather Sutherland, 'The tortoiseshell trade of East Indonesia', paper presented at the American Association of Asian Studies conference, Washington DC, 2002.

17 Campbell Macknight, *The voyage to Marege: Macassan trepangers in northern Australia* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1976); Dai Yifeng, 'Food culture and overseas trade: The *trepang* trade between China and Southeast Asia during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911)', unpublished paper, Xiamen University, p. 19; Heather Sutherland, '*Trepang* and *wangkang*. The China trade of eighteenth century Makassar', in *Authority and enterprise among the peoples of South Sulawesi*, ed. Roger Tol *et al.* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2000), pp. 73–94.

18 Sutherland, 'Tortoiseshell trade'.

the market could really be restricted to interaction between the Taosug elite and foreign traders, thus failing to penetrate local communities, and, secondly, whether slavery was the only answer to an increasing demand for labour. I will do this through a consideration of the southwest peninsula of Sulawesi (Celebes), in particular the port of Makassar. Located near southern Sulu, Makassar was also a major exporter of maritime commodities for the China market in the eighteenth century. However, very different political and economic circumstances there produced other answers to the demand for cargoes.

Trade, credit and coercion

A virtuous circle of expanding commerce based on contacts with the markets of the Islamic world to the West and the Chinese to the Northeast accelerated change in much of Southeast Asia. During the fourteenth century the search for profits, knowledge and adventure brought Muslims to present-day southern Philippines and eastern Indonesia, and the expansion of trade stimulated the development of Islamic networks linking Sulu, Mindanao, Ternate and Brunei. Sulu's contacts with China date back at least to this period, as it was mentioned as a source of high-quality pearls in 1349.¹⁹ Chinese settlements in Southeast Asia – as opposed to seasonal contacts – developed from the fifteenth century onward to serve China's growing appetite for commodities such as pepper, spices and sapanwood. As this trade grew, Sulu's neighbours Luzon and Brunei emerged as major ports. During the sixteenth century Makassar became increasingly involved, while the king's conversion to Islam in 1605 gave an extra impetus to its ties with other Muslim rulers, and led to military expeditions to impose the new religion on existing trading partners. By the mid-1600s Makassar had joined Sulu and Brunei as a major supplier of sea and forest products.

After the 1641 Dutch conquest of the key entrepot of Melaka, Makassar became an attractive alternative. The symbiosis between royal protection and wealth on the one hand, and merchant capital, knowledge and contacts on the other, underpinned the port's spectacular growth. Makassar's rulers were closely allied with foreign merchants (most notably Indian Muslims, Malays and Portuguese). Dutch factors conducted their business opportunistically with these and other major traders in Makassar, offering credit in exchange for access to their supplies, although by the 1660s they had forced the king to expel the Portuguese. After the Dutch conquest, concluded in 1669, the Indians – and many Malays – withdrew from Makassar. This left more room for the Chinese, who increasingly sought opportunities in Southeast Asia as stability and trade expanded under the Qing, particularly after the conquest of Fujian in 1671 and Taiwan (Formosa) in 1683.

After 1669, however, Makassar's long-range trade in spices, rice, textiles and slaves diminished as VOC monopolies and prohibitions on travel to once-crucial destinations such as the Melaka Straits and Manila gradually choked commerce. South Sulawesi's maritime economy came to be dominated by Dutch-controlled Makassar and by their troublesome ally, the ruler of Buginese Bone. Alternative ports for those who rejected these two authorities could best be sought along Borneo's east coast and in the southern Philippines, or in the further reaches of Sulawesi and Maluku. The attraction of such

19 Warren, *Sulu Zone*, p. 71.

rendezvous points depended on their links to China, though, and regional and local traders would only come if they could connect with that great market – either directly through Chinese or indirectly via, for example, Portuguese from Macao, Spanish from Manila or, later, country traders from India.

As I have suggested elsewhere, the eighteenth-century *trepang* trade transformed the economies in eastern Indonesia, as the insatiable Chinese culinary and medicinal demand for this sea-slug generated new markets. Makassar's commerce revived, but now was based on a north-south rather than an east-west exchange. Shallow seas, once peripheral to long-distance trade, now had a valuable export commodity that enabled local communities to develop a taste for imports.²⁰ Fishing technology was minimal, usually consisting of diving and collecting, using a single- or double-headed spear or a net. It seems that a simple hand-pulled dredge was only developed in the early nineteenth century.²¹ Previously, increased production was only possible through greater effort by individuals, by expanding the workforce or by accessing more easily exploited waters. Although China, the ultimate destination, remained stable, growing competition led to the development of new fishing grounds. Sea products flowed through a shifting hierarchy of collecting points where cargoes were assembled. These nodes ranged from beaches where local fishermen might exchange small quantities for textiles or metals to seasonal markets or settled merchant communities in established ports. The links between producing zones and markets were subject to political pressure and taxation to various degrees.²² The less permanent of these could relocate relatively easily, so that specific communities or polities might gain or lose the benefits of trade.

Batavia was the main focus for the VOC-approved China trade, but from 1746 Makassar was allowed to receive one junk each year directly from Amoy.²³ Despite fluctuations in this connection, by the mid-eighteenth century Makassar had moved from the periphery to the centre in terms of the *trepang* industry (if nothing else). Under the umbrella of the Company, local Chinese and visiting junk merchants provided credit and accumulated cargoes, and Makassar became the premier Dutch-controlled entrepot for *trepang*. It was a major fixed point in a shifting and polycentric seascape; fishermen or traders from Makassar might sometimes take their cargoes to other harbours, but sailors from elsewhere were also drawn there, despite taxes and the formalities of registration

20 Heather Sutherland, 'Power, trade and Islam in the Eastern Archipelagos, 1700–1850', in *Religion and development. Towards an integrated approach*, ed. Phillip Quarles van Ufford and Mathieu Schoffeleers (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1988), pp. 145–66; Sutherland, 'Trepang'.

21 Macknight, *Voyage to Marege*, pp. 49–51, dates the dredge to the 1840s. For references to the *ladung* (a heavy iron bar with hooks which was dragged along the bottom) in southeast Sulawesi, see J. N. Vosmaer, 'Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes, in het bijzonder van de Vosmaers-Baai of van Kendari; verrijkt met eenige berigten omtrent den stam der Orang Badjos, en meer andere aantekeningen', *Tijdschrift van het Bataviaasch Genootschap*, 63 (1839): 147–8.

22 Leonard Andaya, 'Local trade networks in Maluku in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries', *Cakalele*, 2, 2 (1991): 71–96. Sutherland, 'Power, trade and Islam' discusses the flow of sea products. Northern Australia was an important new source of *trepang*, probably from the mid-eighteenth century, but dating is uncertain (Macknight, *Voyage to Marege*, p. 81). Bonerate, the main rendezvous for the Australian fleets, emerged as a 'departure port' for the voyage back to Makassar in the middle of the century (Sutherland, 'Trepang', p. 86).

23 Leonard Blussé, *Strange company. Chinese settlers, mestizo women and the Dutch in VOC Batavia* (Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1986); Blussé, 'No boats to China: the Dutch East India Company and the changing pattern of the China sea trade', *Modern Asian Studies*, 30 (1996): 51–77.

imposed by the Company harbourmaster. Such VOC demands were often honoured in the breach, and loads might well remain unregistered if they were small, very local or simply smuggled in. Nonetheless, the registers provide unique information.²⁴

Makassar was undoubtedly comparable to Sulu in the *trepang* trade. Warren estimates that the latter was producing around 10,000 *pikul* by the mid-eighteenth century (1 *pikul* = 60.5 kg), while Makassar's registered exports were almost 5,000 in the 1760s and approximately 6,500 in the 1780s; these registered amounts were only an uncertain proportion of the whole. In the late nineteenth century Makassar's exports were thought to be well over 8,000 *pikul* out of a total of over 10,000 for the Dutch East Indies. It was further estimated that while a sizable proportion of Makassar's exports were produced from Australian fishing grounds by Makassarese, about half were brought in by Bajau 'sea-nomads' from Sulu waters.²⁵

Makassar managed to produce a steadily increasing quantity of *trepang* without resorting to the massive institutionalisation of raiding described by Warren. In Makassar traders obtained goods on credit from Chinese merchants, and then fanned out to exchange these for marine produce. Gatherers departed knowing they had a market for their catch, and may also have received advances to cover their outfitting costs. These men, setting out to fish or trade for *trepang*, were motivated less by fear or coercion than by the chance to make a profit. However, as debtors they were embedded in unequal relationships which shaped the terms of trade, and which could be seen as either exploitative or enabling. This was nothing new: in the late seventeenth century, Dutch East India Company officials complained in their first reports that the local Captain of the Chinese controlled the Makassar tortoiseshell trade. By 1703 competition in the fishing grounds had already driven prices so high that locals were asking for one *salempuris* (Indian cloth) per turtle. While the turtleshell trade between China and Southeast Asia was much older than that of *trepang* – dating back to the ninth century as opposed to the seventeenth – both commodities were collected from similar seas and often by the same sea-nomads.²⁶

The Philippine Islands, so close to the Fujian ports, were even more involved in Chinese networks than was Makassar. As noted above, Sulu's contacts with China dated from at least the 1300s, and by the end of the sixteenth century Sulu was already a major source of Chinese tortoiseshell and the only provider of mother-of-pearl.²⁷ Moreover, as Ruudje Laarhoven and Leonard Andaya have described, during the 1600s long-distance commerce flourished in the Southern Philippines, as Dutch, English, Spanish, Chinese and local shipping joined the long-established trade of Sulu and Maguindanau.²⁸ To the

24 Gerrit Knaap and Heather Sutherland, *Monsoon traders: Captains, commodities and shipping in eighteenth century Makassar* (Leiden: KITLV Press, forthcoming).

25 Warren, *Sulu Zone*, p. 65; 'Tripang', *Encyclopaedië van Nederlandsch Indië* (hereafter *ENI*) (Brill: Leiden, 1905), vol. IV, pp. 436–8; Sutherland, 'Trepang', p. 84.

26 Roderich Ptak, 'China and the trade in tortoise-shell (Sung to Ming periods)', in Ptak and Rothermund ed., *Emporia, commodities and entrepreneurs*, pp. 195–229; Dai, 'Food culture'; Sutherland, 'Trepang'. The officials' complaints are in the VOC Archives, VOC 1595 f. 240 (Chinese); VOC 1676 (1703).

27 S. T.-H. Chang, 'Commodities imported to the Chang Chou region of Fukien during the late Ming Period. A preliminary analysis of the tax lists found in *Tung-hsi-yang K'ao*', in Ptak and Rothermund ed., *Emporia, commodities, and entrepreneurs*, pp. 159–93; Ptak, 'China and the trade in tortoise-shell'.

28 Ruudje Laarhoven, *Triumph of Moro diplomacy: The Maguindanao sultanate in the 17th century* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1989); L. Andaya, 'Local trade networks'.

North, Manila had emerged as the southern hub of the Chinese eastern sailing system in the mid-sixteenth century. Under the Spanish, the galleon trade (1565–1815) made the exchange of Chinese commodities for American silver the basis of the city's mercantile economy, so Manila became one of the major Chinese cities of Southeast Asia.²⁹ Sulu had to consider both the political threat and the economic pull of Spanish Manila. The Christian colony fought a series of 'Moro Wars' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but these ended in a standoff. However, despite Spanish persecution the wealth and connections of the Chinese community in Manila made it an attractive alternative as broker to the direct traffic between Sulu and China.

In *Sulu Zone* (pp. 5–9) Warren discusses the Sino-Sulu trade, noting that one to four junks visited the islands annually during the later eighteenth century. Interestingly, Chinese 'visiting merchants were habitually obliged to offer trade goods on credit to the Sultan and *datus*', and *datu* also had an interest in cargoes (p. 7). Later, Warren describes the 'profound influence' of the Chinese in Sulu, as both parties sought profits (pp. 126–34). The sultanate sent five tribute missions to China between 1727–1763. Warren calculates that over 18,000 Chinese visited Jolo between 1770 and 1800, and records that the Chinese community there was estimated at 1,200 in 1803 (pp. 126–7). This was down from 4,000 in the middle of the eighteenth century, reflecting the weakening of the Chinese role in the Philippines following their support for the British occupation (1762–64), increasing Spanish competition and their growing orientation toward the Dutch East Indies.³⁰

The figures for both junks and population are far more impressive than those of Makassar, which had fewer than 500 Chinese inhabitants in the mid-1700s and an erratic junk connection which, at its more stable peak later in the century, still only carried a crew of around 220 per ship. Immigration was hardly an issue in Makassar, and VOC restrictions were largely *pro forma*.³¹ After 1840, however, fewer junks came to Sulu itself, as the Taosug lost redistributive trade to the Chinese and Manila became the main port for the China connection. Exchanges between Sulu and the Spanish capital were encouraged by the colonial administration and grew vigorously from 1785 onwards, borne mainly by Chinese – but also Spanish – shipping. *Trepang* was the prime cargo, and most of it was re-exported to Macao and Canton. This was a period of rapid commercial growth, despite the exactions of the Taosug elite in Jolo (pp. 53–66); within Sulu, rice continued to be the main commodity (p. 95).

Despite the geographic shift of focus to Manila during the second half of the nineteenth century, powerful Taosug and Chinese were still often linked in economic alliance, with the former providing the latter with shipping, crew and sometimes trade goods. Warren notes how effectively Sulu exploited its advantages of location and access to desirable products to cash in on the burgeoning tea trade: 'It was the Taosug's "spirit of commerce", their success in monopolizing this trade, and control of the exchange of important trade items in the regional network which enabled them to retain their

29 Wang Gungwu, 'Merchants without empire: The Hokkien sojourning community', reprinted in *The rise of merchant empires. Long-distance trade in the early modern period, 1350–1750*, ed. James D. Tracy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 400–22.

30 *The Chinese in the Philippines, 1770–1898*, ed. Alfonso Felix, vol. II (Manila: Historical Conservation Society, 1969). The 4,000 figure is from Dai, 'Food culture', citing Qian Jiang, 'Qingdai Zhongguo yu Sulu de maoyi' [The trade between China and Sulu in the Qing dynasty], *Nanyang Wenti Yanjiu*, 53 (1988): 80–91.

31 Knaap and Sutherland, *Monsoon traders*.

political sovereignty until 1886 [*sic*]’ (p. 143). In fact, Sulu’s political freedom ended with an enforced treaty in 1876, having endured more than two centuries longer than that of Makassar. In contrast to the latter, which had succeeded in establishing a China-focused commerce separate from its political subordination (although it was taxed), Sulu’s independent trade with China had been thoroughly undermined by Manila well before its defeat.

Sulu’s general trade patterns were not unusual. What made Warren’s Sulu different from similar polities in maritime Southeast Asia, apart from the remarkable surge in raiding, was the Taosug elite’s apparent success in blocking independent commercial contacts between their subjects and outside traders. This is an impressive and even surprising achievement given the geography of the archipelagos, the dispersed production areas, penetration by the Bugis, the existence of alternative ports and the undoubted willingness of country traders, junk captains or tramp skippers to buy up cargoes far from the main ports. What is more, the Bajau sea-nomads – Southeast Asia’s specialists in gathering *trepang*, turtles and pearls – were notoriously difficult to control. Warren notes (*Sulu Zone*, pp. 68–9) that the Samal Bajau Laut ‘provided an invaluable service to the Sultanate . . . as clients of coastal Taosug and Samal’, they procured sea products for export. These groups, clearly not enslaved *en masse* in Sulu, were related to major providers of Makassar’s *trepang*. As noted above, in the late nineteenth century Sulawesi Bajau were bringing approximately 4,000 *pikul* of Sulu *trepang* to Makassar every year, equal to a somewhat earlier estimate of Sulu’s total exports via Manila, so control of the fishing grounds must have been weak, at least by then.³² Such data weaken Warren’s image of *datu*-controlled trade and production. This will be considered further below, as will the more general issue of slavery and labour.

The situation in Dutch Makassar was totally different from Sulu. It was closed to country traders, and its own direct junk link gave its China trade a distinctive character: subservient to VOC interests in theory, but in practice very much a Chinese-run connection. Moreover, unable to compete with Asian merchants, the Company had long abandoned any inclination to seek marine produce as an exchange cargo.³³ More importantly, a colonial port-town like Makassar had no local elite with political aspirations. However, the Bugis state of Bone – the dominant power in southwest Sulawesi – certainly did, and Bone provides an instructive comparison with Sulu.

Some sources suggest that there were two main *trepang* fleets sailing from South Sulawesi: one from the VOC port of Makassar, another under the protection of the Bone king.³⁴ The extent to which Dutch and Bugis commercial spheres were separate is difficult

32 ‘Tripang’, *ENI*, vol. IV, p. 436; W. R. van Hoevell, ‘Laboean, Serawak, de Noord-oost kust van Borneo en de Sulthan van Soeloe’, *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië* (henceforth *TNI*), 11, 1 (1849): 106.

33 Although the Company initially had high hopes for selling turtleshell in Japan and India, it soon found it could not compete with Sulawesi traders in penetrating supply zones, nor with Chinese merchants offering higher prices (Sutherland, ‘Tortoiseshell trade’).

34 H. J. Lion, ‘De Tripang-visscherij’, *TNI*, 17,1 (1855): 5: ‘In former times, fifty to sixty *perahu* belonging to the king of Bone, and manned by a thousand men, sailed annually to the coasts of the Elliot and Northumberland islands. They brought their catch, after appropriate treatment at the fishing grounds, to Timor-Kupang, where they sold it to Chinese, and then returned to Celebes. The remaining *perahu*, those of Makassar and other parts of Celebes, a total of 120 to 140, usually sailed in January to the coasts of New Holland (Australia), and returned to Makassar in May, where the cargo was bought up by merchants for forwarding to China.’ However, as Campbell Macknight has pointed out, this information is unreliable (Macknight, personal communication and *Voyage to Marege*, pp. 146, note 49 and 152, note 56).

to determine, however. In Bone's relatively centralised agrarian sector the primary source of wealth was clear: the right to collect tribute, as given by the ruler to favoured nobles and office-holders.³⁵ Yet in trade the mobility of both individuals and capital fostered tensions between profit-seeking and political obligations. Indeed, people probably tried to make use of the protection and economic advantages offered by different realms, depending on circumstances.

The Bone ruler and the Dutch were neighbours and uneasy allies. In the Company-dominated port city Malay and Chinese community leaders were recognised by the VOC, but also traded in the same Asian environment as did the Bugis. The Bone king's subjects operated from his east coast kingdom, but also out of the Bugis areas fringing Dutch Makassar, where his word was law.³⁶ *Trepangers* of diverse, and perhaps flexible, allegiance could share the same homeport. Fishermen and traders from Bone and elsewhere (probably including Makassar) may have connected directly with junks in harbours closer to the southerly fishing grounds, while those sailing northward or westward to Menado or the Kalimantan coast probably also dealt with the same country traders who visited Sulu. In fact, Bugis and Sulu interests were closely intertwined. There were extensive networks linking their settlements scattered along the Straits of Makassar, and Andaya regards the commercial success of the Bugis in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries as rooted in the niche they filled in both the China and Sulu trades.³⁷ Such connections were beyond the control of the Company, and, most likely, that of the Bone and Sulu rulers as well.

The great majority of *trepang*-seekers were, to varying degrees, trading both on behalf of others and for themselves. Many Bugis skippers no doubt paid dues to their kings or patrons, who could also be their creditors. The distinction between political tribute and economically determined interest may have been blurred. Similarly, Chinese creditors were also patrons, albeit within more limited spheres. Some of the ship's crews (and even captains) would have been slaves. Further down the line, in the producing areas, formal status differentiation was irrelevant. Violence was not uncommon. Bajau, who were often tied in semi-tributary relationships, did much of the fishing, and were always vulnerable to piracy or simply to being bullied into accepting low prices. Traditionally, many Sulawesi Bajau owed allegiance to Bone, although this might have weakened after the 1820s; this did not stop them trading in Makassar.³⁸

The relationship between producers and traders at sea depended more on the situation in the fishing grounds than on the pressures of market or state. In northern Australia, as elsewhere, the commercially run voyages were governed by established rules of work and profit-sharing, which have a long history in Makassar.³⁹ In these Marege'

35 Christian Pelras, *The Bugis* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 181–6; Wolf, *Europe and the people*, p. 80.

36 'The Bone king spent a couple of months each year in his residence at Bontualac, close to Makassar, and sought both political and economic advantage from his influence on local Muslim trading communities, particularly the Bugis from Wajo'; Jacobus Noorduy, 'The Wajorese merchants' community in Makassar', in Tol *et al.* ed., *Authority and enterprise*, pp. 95–120; see also Heather Sutherland, 'The Makassar Malays: Adaptation and identity, c.1660–1790', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* [henceforth *JSEAS*], 32, 3 (2001): 397–421.

37 Warren, *Sulu Zone*, and Andaya, 'Local trade networks'.

38 Vosmaer, 'Korte beschrijving', pp.115–17, 78–9, 127, 73; Sutherland, 'Tortoiseshell trade'.

39 Macknight, *Voyage to Marege*'; Sutherland, 'Trepang'. These rules are very similar to those governing the division of profits from raiding described in *Iranun and Balangingi*, p. 185.

waters there was no production by local populations, so the sailors from Sulawesi provided their own labour. This offered no opportunities for extortion, and so a straightforward business developed. Bajau working the rich Spermonde Archipelago close to Makassar, the centre of Dutch naval power, also enjoyed a relatively favourable environment. Their outfitting costs were low, they were exempt from customs and they often had close ties to Malay or Chinese traders. However, the fishing grounds of Sulu, southern Maluku or central and southeast Sulawesi would, I believe, have been characterised by contingent combinations of free and forced trade, expropriation and collecting.

Such shifting and complex relationships were common, and not just in fishing. They can, I suggest, best be seen as a tactical blending of threats and incentives with a view to maximising profit. Such opportunism also informed the search for capital, labour and political protection, confusing later efforts to create fixed models. It is in this context that Bone and Sulu are worth comparing. The Bugis, after all, were also renowned fighters, and both slavery and raiding were endemic in the region. Bone enslaved thousands after the fall of Makassar, using them to recolonise devastated rice land, and in the early eighteenth century also raided for slaves into Toraja. Although both small-scale ‘people stealing’ and the sale of captives remained popular and highly profitable activities, there seems to have been no surge in slave raiding correlated to Bone’s involvement in the *trepang* traffic. This despite the fact that Bone was also open to the same market pressures as Sulu and was politically independent and not averse to violence. It is possible, however, that the greater power of the Bone king as opposed to Sulu’s largely symbolic Sultan could have limited marauding and protected traders, but this again raises doubts as to the coercive capability of the Sulu state.

This apparent contrast may be less stark than it appears, as it could be reinforced by conventional paradigms. The notoriety of the Iranun, together with Sulu’s anti-Spanish stance, encouraged negative stereotyping that highlighted slaving and raiding (as Warren describes), while in the case of Bone – in theory a Dutch ally – attention was focused on their political unreliability. Although I believe slavery and raiding were important for Bone, they seem to have been less structurally central than in Sulu. On the other hand, as indicated above, the role of ‘free’ trade in Sulu was probably more important than the ‘slavery and raiding’ emphasis would imply. Such issues deserve systematic consideration in a broader comparative context.

The ecological and economic bases of the Sulu, Bone and Makassar *trepang* industries were not so very different, exploiting similar catchment areas with similar techniques and selling to the same market. There are obvious reasons why Makassar as a commercial centre seemed to be able to generate increasing commodity supplies through economic incentives, while in Warren’s Sulu Sultanate the elite monopoly of the market depended on their domination of servile producers. The primary factors are political in a regional rather than global sense. The VOC town was a relatively neutral arena in which Chinese business could flourish without undue competition from outside traders, and probably with a lower level of personal taxation or extortion than more internally competitive polities. Makassar also had a well-developed rice-producing hinterland (as indeed did Bone, and Sulu in Cotabato), which could provide both foodstuffs and manpower for commercial expansion. As the demand for *trepang* soared, the desire for profit and imports drew surplus labour from the agricultural and fishing sectors and into

trepang collection through gathering or trading. According to this view, a political system offering reasonable stability and security of property, (semi-)direct interaction between supply and demand and access to credit and markets was the prerequisite for Makassar's success, both before and after the Dutch conquest.

As we have seen, the political environment in Sulu was very different, characterised by competition between leaders with a hands-on personal interest in trade and manpower. Such competition, and the related need to maximise followings, are usually regarded as providing some protection and element of choice for subordinate groups.⁴⁰ However, although elite control of both the production and marketing of commodities is central to Warren's view of the Sultanate, he does not explore how intra-elite tensions could have weakened this monopoly, as individual *datu* sought to undermine their rivals' access to both suppliers and buyers. It would be remarkable if class solidarity within the elite was such that they remained as one in dominating their servile producers. They might have been united in defending the hierarchy as such, but in specific cases many must have been tempted to offer good terms to the disaffected clients, or even slaves, of other *datu*. Such a fluid political landscape offered opportunities as well as disadvantages to producers needing patrons and merchants seeking partners. While protection costs in Sulu may have been higher and less predictable than in Makassar, the strength of the Chinese presence there suggests that business was profitable and that they were ready to provide both credit and access to markets. So it is surprising that the relatively free market relationships of Makassar seem, in Warren's view, to have been virtually absent in Sulu, except in the elite's collective contact with foreign traders.

Thus far I have concentrated upon how commodity supplies were generated, noting that as an entrepot Makassar's impure market relationships prevailed. These included the offering of advances, forward trading and price fixing, all of which created obligations. In offering access to capital, credit and markets, the Chinese expanded the basis for commerce; it is highly likely that this was also the situation in Manila and Jolo. Warren's suggestion is that such deals were restricted to those between Taosug *datu* and Chinese merchants, but similar transactions could also have taken place in the various points of rendezvous where fishermen and local traders, out of sight of their owners or lords, encountered bulk buyers (almost always Chinese) or their agents. The presence or absence of *datu*, or their trusted retainers, in the fishing grounds would have determined the extent of their control. If they sailed with the fleet, they would have been able to claim their dues. However, if they relied on expropriating the catch, or their share of it, through visits to production areas or by awaiting its delivery in Sulu itself, then they were much more likely to be disappointed. A clearer understanding of this significant point would require more insight into the number and place of *datu* in Sulu society.

Warren maintains that *trepang* procurement was 'the main subsistence pursuit' of the majority of Sulu Samal, while diving for pearls, as noted above, was carried out by the Taosug's 'retainers, slaves, and the . . . Samal Bajau Laut'.⁴¹ What part of the harvest was handed to owners or surrendered as tribute is unclear; keeping quantities back for

40 The classic description of the 'contest state' is Michael Adas, 'From avoidance to confrontation: Peasant protest in pre-colonial and colonial Southeast Asia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 23 (1981): 217–47.

41 Warren, *Sulu Zone*, p. 67.

private trade would seem to weaken Warren's model. Division probably depended on the communities' location and the social and political organisation of supervision as much as on formal status. However, if fishers or foragers had undetected access to visiting traders, opportunistic deals may well have prevailed. We know little about such contacts, which could have been occasional or carried on from season to season. However, it is at this level that Taosug attempts to monopolise trade were most likely to break down. Even at main markets like Jolo or Manila, it would have been possible for fishermen, slave or free, to smuggle in and sell part of their catch.

If, for the sake of argument, we reject Warren's view and suggest instead that a combination of market motives and tributary claims drove Sulu's trade, then we still have to explain the surge in piracy and slaving. In the first chapter of *Iranun and Balangingi*, as in the introduction to *Sulu Zone*, Warren discards earlier explanations emphasising the 'decay' of the Malayo-Muslim state, and the 'Moro wars' model focusing on opposition to Christianity. He then gives a fascinating account of the rise of the Iranun, their migration as refugees from a volcanic eruption (c.1765), and the tenuous control of the Sultan of Sulu over the resulting communities. Some of these groups had little means of support except raiding, and the Taosug elite became partners in their predatory activities (pp. 45–52). He also emphasises the role of firearms (e.g., pp.186–7, 250–5).

All this is pertinent and probable, particularly when read in conjunction with *Sulu Zone*. Too much is presented in the form of statements, however. The conclusions that 'global trade . . . certainly provides the most convincing explanation of the origins of Iranun expansion and slaving' (p. 33) and that 'the gradual opening of China to Western trade made Sulu's pivotal position in global commerce ever more powerful' (p. 36) need solid analysis. Slavery and raiding were unusually prominent in Sulu, but they were not unique. Armed slave retinues were common elsewhere, as were generalised extortion by a predatory elite and augmentation of local populations by the absorption of captives.⁴² Raiding had played an important role in the rise of Sulu's predecessor state, the Sultanate of Maguindanau, which enjoyed its 'golden age' in the seventeenth century. After 1775 Sulu took over as the main regional emporium, attracting traders and raiders away from its Mindanao-based rival. An escalating symbiosis between the Sultanate's desire for textiles and arms, and that of China-bound traders for *trepan* led to such a surge in transactions that new forms of production were required. Sulu, he writes, then created 'a state-making raiding and trading system' that sustained the Iranun way of life and increased the wealth of the Tausug elite by intensifying and institutionalising practices that had already been present in Maguindanau.⁴³

Warren sees a correlation in timing as indicating a causal relationship. Slave raiding in Sulu did intensify in the late 1700s, as growing commercial traffic increased opportunities for *datu* to obtain commodities to support their internal jockeying for power and external raiding. Country traders supplemented earlier Indian, Portuguese and Malay links to the West, and probably brought more weapons. However, raiding and slaving

42 *Slavery, bondage and dependency in Southeast Asia*, ed. Anthony Reid (St Lucia, QLD: Queensland University Press, 1983); Joep à Campo, 'Discourse without discussion: Representations of piracy in colonial Indonesia, 1816–1825', *JSEAS*, 34, 2 (2003): 188–214.

43 Warren, *Iranun and Balangingi*, pp. 30–7. Such a symbiosis had, after all, existed with pepper more than a century earlier. However, pepper involved more labour, spread over much of the year, than did seasonal marine produce collecting; Andaya, *To live as brothers*, p. 79.

were already well established in Sulu in the 1600s, and both the Sultanate's connection to China and the tea trade pre-dated the later eighteenth-century boom in raiding.⁴⁴ Moreover, Sulu had been directly selling sea products to China for hundreds of years, and was mentioned in Chinese sources as a *trepang* exporter earlier and more frequently than was eastern Indonesia.⁴⁵ Sulu in the late eighteenth century probably represented a less dramatic shift from past practice than Warren implies, nor was it that atypical. Moreover, while the Taosug elites' efforts to control production and trade may well have been politically advantageous, economically they encouraged a shift of trade to Manila and alternate ports, such as Singapore and Makassar. This shift was further reinforced by uncertain steps towards more free trade in the Philippines as a whole, so that by 1818 Jolo merchants were participating in the once-closed Mexican traffic.⁴⁶

David Henley, in an important review of Warren's 1998 publication, reverses the causative nexus between raiding and trade. 'It seems more likely', he notes, 'that commerce (or rather the wealth acquired via commerce) simply enabled the Taosug elite and its allies to realize, with unique and unprecedented efficacy, their abiding (and widely shared) ambition to subjugate and humble other human beings.'⁴⁷ I would add that perhaps this predilection could be indulged because the post-1765 migration of the Iranun had created a volatile force best channelled into profitable violence away from the Taosug heartland. A wider market for slaves could also have been part of a general expansion of trade in Southeast Asia; they had, after all, always been a favoured commodity.⁴⁸ Problems in obtaining food supplies might have been another reason for the Taosug sponsoring of armed forays, although in fact trade seems to have filled any subsistence gap; this is briefly considered below.

Yet another possibility is ideological. Sulu's elevation of raiding into the central element in its polity, exceeding the levels apparently characteristic of Maguindanau (and Bone) might have been due to political preference and religious conviction. Laarhoven notes a difference in orientation between the two southern Philippine sultanates, with Sulu focused on Brunei and pre-Dutch Makassar while Maguindanau's trade was more directed towards the Dutch and Ternate.⁴⁹ This could indicate fundamental differences

44 On the seventeenth century see Anthony Reid, 'Introduction', in Reid ed., *Slavery, bondage and dependency*, p. 3. The post-1750 expansion of the country trade was shaped by events in India (not just China), particularly the end of the Carnatic wars; Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Maritime commerce and English power, southeast India 1750–1800* (Delhi: Sterling, 1996), particularly ch. 8. On the country (i.e., intra-Asian) trade, see Warren, *Sulu Zone*, pp. 38–50 and Peter Marshall, 'Private British trade in the Indian Ocean before 1800', in *India and the Indian Ocean 1500–1800*, ed. Ashin Das Gupta and Michael N. Pearson (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 276–300.

45 On tea, see Jacobs, *Koopman in Azië*, pp. 137–51; Dai, 'Food culture', notes the earliest mention of Southeast Asia (as opposed to Japanese) *trepang* in Chinese sources is to 'Kelapa' (Jakarta) in 1727; frequent references to 'Luzon' follow.

46 Benito J. Legarda, *After the galleons. Foreign trade, economic change and entrepreneurship in the nineteenth century Philippines* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Southeast Asia Program, 1999), p. 18.

47 Henley, review of 'The Sulu Zone (1998)', p. 837.

48 The migration is discussed in Warren, *Iranun and Balangingi*, pp. 45–52. Recent recognition of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century growth has been linked to China's prosperity and increasing penetration of the region, leading to the identification of a so-called 'Chinese century'; see, for example, Carl Trocki, 'Chinese pioneering in eighteenth century Southeast Asia', in *The last stand of Asian autonomies. Responses to modernity in the diverse states of Southeast Asia and Korea, 1750–1900*, ed. Anthony Reid (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 83–102.

49 Laarhoven, *Triumph of Moro diplomacy*, p. 37.

between the two, not only in economic networks but also in chosen identity, with Islam being a prominent factor in Sulu. A well-founded Muslim wariness might have influenced the Sulu elite to try and insulate their followings from Spanish and Chinese contacts. If this were the case, then the combination of active *datu* involvement in trade and their attempts to monopolise production would have been reinforced. Islam, however, is largely ignored in both Warren's books, an unfortunate omission.⁵⁰

Perhaps the old colonial image of raiding as a rear-guard action against the benefits of modern commerce was not completely misguided. Maybe the Taosug were not vanguard victims and manipulators of global capital. They might just as well be seen as traditional chiefs taking advantage of a temporarily swollen reservoir of fighting men, easy access to arms and a weakening of colonial naval power in order to stage a last, glorious act in the violent history of traditional Southeast Asian raiding.⁵¹ Such an image would fit both imperial and indigenous political myths. Yet there was also the other 'Sulu Zone', implicit in Warren's 'dual economy' referred to above; it is doubtful that this was under comprehensive Taosug control. I suspect there was also a mundane but surprisingly bustling world of small-scale commerce and quiet trading to other ports that was essential to the survival of the masculine heroics and cruel profit-seeking inherent in raiding. The very geography of Sulu, with its many islands and busy sea-lanes frequented by Bugis, Chinese and country traders, must have ensured that a significant proportion of fishers, foragers and perhaps swidden farmers would have had unfiltered access to the market. However, Warren seems to regard this sphere as essentially passive and contingent. This is a pity, as the dynamics of the symbiosis between the two 'Sulu Zones' are of more fundamental interest than are the details of the raids, fascinating though the latter may be.

Labour: Slavery and the question of productivity

Slavery is a contentious category, particularly in a Southeast Asian context. Indigenous legal codes and European sources reveal graded status sets, but the boundaries between slave, prisoner, serf, debtor, tribute-payer, client and freeman remain unclear in theory and seem to have been shifting in practice. In addition to endemic wars and raiding, natural disasters, economic uncertainties and local judicial practice guaranteed that fields, households and retinues (armed and ceremonial) were kept well stocked. W. H. Scott, in his study of slavery in the sixteenth-century Philippines, discusses whether the Visayan *oripun* and the Tagalog *alipin* – commonly glossed as 'slaves' – could really be considered as such. He concludes that they were neither slaves nor serfs, as they only served their masters part time and were not bound to the land. They were simply 'the

50 Intriguingly, Warren does remark that pre-1768 Mindanao raiders viewed their marauding 'as an extension of *jihad*' and contrasts that with Sulu's subsequent, economically motivated raiding. Differences in levels of Islamisation within the Sulu political constellation could have been usefully examined; William Clarence-Smith (personal communication) notes a probable consensus that the raiders were often barely, if at all, Islamised, while *Sulu Zone* explains that Islam was central to the Sultan's position as *primus inter pares* (pp. xxv–xxvi). In his justified rejection of a Moro mentality explanation for raiding, Warren might have thrown the baby out with the bathwater.

51 The weakening of Dutch naval power resulted from the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780–84) and the conflict between Britain and the Napoleon-sponsored Batavian Republic (1795–1811). On the colonial assessment of raiding see, for example, Nicholas Tarling, *Piracy and politics in the Malay World. A study of British imperialism in nineteenth century South-east Asia* (Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1963).

masses', the common people, who produced foodstuffs and handicrafts for subsistence and commodities for export.⁵²

Similar problems of definition complicated Dutch policy with regard to Sulawesi, always a major slaving centre. In nineteenth-century Sulawesi – and no doubt before – most slaves worked the land, but there was a bewildering range of status. In 1812, during the British interregnum, the English representative in Makassar observed that the slave trade was 'the favourite source of revenue among the chieftains'. In 1878 the Dutch Governor of Celebes felt that the majority of 'slaves' were little more than 'working beasts', who received less than a third of the harvest. Other literature refers to them as 'sharecroppers', subject to traditional *tesang* levies whereby the sharecropper surrendered one-third of his harvest. The Dutch were uncertain as to who were slaves or the extent to which the rural economy depended on tied labour. Consequently they were afraid that abolition would not only create violent opposition from the elite, but also disrupt production, and so slavery in Sulawesi was only gradually phased out after 1878, eighteen years after its formal abolition. No major upheavals occurred, probably because social sanctions and ties of dependence continued unabated; sporadic slaving and debt-bondage also persisted.⁵³

Warren's description of the manifold character of slavery in *Sulu Zone* (pp. 215–37) is very similar, but the distinction between slave and free remains crucial to his claim (p. 221) of an 'increased development of a slave mode of production'. *Banyaga* ('slaves') had some rights, and played a wide range of social roles. They were predominantly from neighbouring regions; some had been reduced to slavery by debt or judicial conviction but most were captives. All, he writes, were descended from those seized in raids (p. 215). In *Iranun and Balangingi* he devotes little space to slaves as such, but comments that 'significantly, the economic position of slaves was not worse than that of freemen' (p. 39). He concludes that the slave workforce was essential to the functioning of the Sulu sultanate (p. 40). The rest of the book focuses on raiding and captives. Surprisingly little attention is given to marketing (pp. 38, 160).

In *Sulu Zone*, however, Warren notes both the frequent buying and selling of slaves and the role of Jolo as a major centre, where the Balangingi sold their captives to 'Taosug *datus*, European traders, Chinese merchants, Visayan *renegados*, and Tidong chiefs' (pp. 198–199). Such a variety of purchasers suggests an open market; it is hard to know to what extent it was channelling labour into elite commodity production. Warren estimates Sulu's annual imports as averaging 2,000 to 4,000 individuals per year (p. 208). He states that before 1780 demand in Sulu itself was rather small, and most slaves were resold elsewhere, particularly in Makassar and Batavia. 'Slaves stopped being re-exported . . . when external trade to Sulu escalated and the large-scale use of slave labour in the fisheries, and in raiding *prahus* became essential for the growth of the Taosug state' (p. 198). However, the evidence in support of this crucial statement is sparse. Although it

52 W. H. Scott, "'Oripun" and "Alipin" in the sixteenth century Philippines', in Reid ed., *Slavery, bondage and dependency*, pp. 138–55. See also the other chapters in this volume and Peter Boomgaard, 'Human capital: The role of slavery in low rates of economic and population growth in early modern and early colonial Indonesia (1600–1910)', unpublished paper.

53 Heather Sutherland, 'Slavery and the slave trade in South Sulawesi, 1660s–1800s', in Reid ed., *Slavery, bondage and dependency*, pp. 263–85. The practice of *tesang* is discussed in Sutherland, 'Power and politics in South Sulawesi, 1860–1880', *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, 17 (1983): 171–2.

is made clear that the Spanish closure of Jolo to the Balangingi in 1871 created a labour shortage (p. 200), this in itself says nothing about the previous proportions of slaves exported or used locally. As will be noted below, Warren does indicate a remarkable growth in Sulu's population in the four decades before 1814, but there seems little reason to assume that this increase was used primarily in fishing and raiding.

The very diverse socio-economic roles of Warren's *banyaga*, their mainly local origin, and the fact that many became slaves through debt or adjudication all complicate the identification of slaves with captives and of labour with slavery. In *Sulu Zone* Warren estimates that the slave population was several times that of the host society. Assimilation 'was a dynamic process and manumitted slaves and their descendents were continually being redefined according to the ethnicity of their host community . . . By the end of the nineteenth century the Sulu Sultanate had become a nation of birthright Taosug' (p. 210). Given this process of absorption and replenishment, a status continuum would seem to be inevitable. Several other points in Warren's data give pause for thought when considering his conclusions. If most slaves were from the region, how crucial was long-distance raiding? If slave production of commodities was central, why did none of the freed slaves who described their former employment mention this? Nearly all of them referred to agriculture and domestic work, and a few to fishing and salt-making.⁵⁴ We need clearer distinctions between freemen, clients, tribute-payers and slaves, and an understanding of the trajectory of status change that made captives into bonded farmers. Perhaps some could better be regarded as serfs or even as tax-paying 'common people' rather than slaves.

Here I wish to address in more detail just one aspect of Warren's 'labour demand' hypothesis, focusing on his calculations of the work required to produce commodities. Firstly, and concretely, I will examine how much effort was actually needed to produce *trepang*. Secondly, I will briefly consider how *trepang* collection fit into the wider picture of production. Fundamental to both issues is a simple and unobtrusive calculation, which is nonetheless central to Warren's interpretation.

On page 220 of *Iranun and Balangingi*, Warren writes: 'At the end of the eighteenth century the expansion of western commercial activity to China stimulated the production of *trepang* and other strand commodities on an unprecedented scale.' In the relevant note (27, p. 489; see also *Sulu Zone*, p. 74) he calculates that 'in the first half of the nineteenth century an estimated 68,000 men laboured in Sulu's fisheries', producing around 10,000 *pikul* of *trepang* and 12,000 of mother-of-pearl annually. Leaving aside the accuracy of these figures, based on the 'few examples' (essentially early nineteenth century) that he was able to find, I would like now to focus on productivity. Warren concludes that 'the collecting and curing of a picul of *tripang* or a picul of mother-of-pearl shell required the average annual labour of two men for *tripang* and four men for mother-of-pearl'. It was to provide this labour that the Iranun and Balangingi undertook their raids. These figures, based on the ratios of fishermen to *pikul* produced, deserve careful examination; once again, a comparison with Makassar raises questions.

The first point that must be stressed is the seasonality of collecting. In Makassar as elsewhere, the rhythm of marine exploitation was set by the monsoons, which

54 Warren, *Sulu Zone*, Appendix R; the lack of reference to commodity production is pointed out in Henley's review, p. 836.

determined both the safety of fishing and the sailing of the Chinese junks. In the later eighteenth century Makassar's *trepang* fleets, consisting of 50 to 80 vessels, sailed out in December and January, either to gather *trepang* or to purchase it from local populations. They returned in May or June to pay off their debts to the Chinese merchants, who then forwarded the cargoes to Batavia or Amoy (Xiamen). Since fleets also departed from other Sulawesi ports and boats sailed separately, more shipping was involved than that mentioned above. This voyaging pattern is confirmed by the Makassar harbourmaster's shipping registers, which are the primary source for the following paragraphs.⁵⁵ The fishing season, including beach processing, lasted at most six months, so the several thousand men involved would have been active in other sectors for the remainder of the year. The two coasts of the south-west Sulawesi peninsula have alternating rainy seasons, and hence complementary planting and harvesting cycles; this flexibility may have facilitated the combining of voyaging with agriculture.

Sulu fishermen lacked this ecological advantage, as the sailing and planting seasons, which began in April, conflicted.⁵⁶ On the other hand, they may have collected their *trepang* much closer to home – mainly in May, June and July, but to a lesser extent throughout the year. The infamous monsoon-driven '*musim Lanun*' (Iranun, i.e. pirate, season), which could carry the marauding Iranun and Balangingi as far west as Burma, encompassed August, September and October, and would presumably have clashed with harvesting. Raiding more locally, round the Borneo coasts and the Philippines, was possible from March onwards.⁵⁷ In *Iranun and Balangingi* Warren comments that the savage image of the Iranun 'needs to be balanced against a new understanding of the Iranun-Maranao and Samal as also engaged in fishing, trade and agricultural enterprise. However, one should not place too much emphasis on the crewmembers' alternate peaceful economic pursuits. . .' (pp. 221–2). However, he regards the existence of a 'dual economy' integrating seasonal raiding with the collecting of marine products for the China market as fundamental to Iranun and Balangingi success (pp. 218–20). He fails to follow up this remark by exploring its implications. If the raiders themselves were fishermen, how crucial was the slave workforce? Moreover, *trepanging* for the Sulu elite was by no means restricted to slaves. 'It was not uncommon', writes Warren, 'for a Taosug *datu* to employ several hundred fisherfolk (Samal retainers, slaves, or Samal Bajau Laut) in flotillas of fifty to one hundred small *vintas*, to collect *tripang*.'⁵⁸ The producers of marine commodities were apparently an extremely diverse group, as indeed was also the case in Makassar. The striking feature in Sulu was the centrality of raiding.

Commodity collection could be integrated into existing agricultural or fishing cycles, if the population could be motivated to do so. The desire for goods (such as textiles, ironware, opium or arms), often combined with political pressure, could provide such motivation. If, as Henley suggests, there was sufficient slack in existing patterns of production to accommodate collecting, then supplementing local populations by raiding

55 Knaap and Sutherland, *Monsoon traders*.

56 Warren, *Sulu Zone*, p. 97; Melvin Mednick describes slaves as useful for reinforcing farmers when men were away on the raids; he does discuss their eventual other employment in 'Some problems of Moro history and political organisation', in *The Muslim Filipinos: Their history, society and contemporary problems*, ed. Peter. G. Gowing and Robert D. McAmis (Manila: Solidaridad, 1974), pp. 13–26.

57 Warren, *Iranun and Balangingi*, pp. 2, 261–6.

58 Warren, *Sulu Zone*, p. 70.

would not have been essential.⁵⁹ If the population were scarce, forcibly imported labour would have been primarily used for farming (for self-sustenance and a surplus). The population of Jolo Island did increase dramatically in the first half of the nineteenth century: Warren calculated that it grew from approximately 40,000 in 1770 to 200,000 in 1814, with an ever-increasing proportion of slaves. This latter figure would give a population density of 224 people per square kilometre, which is surprising if we consider that the same figure for the wet-rice areas of Bali and Lombok only reached 148 in 1920.⁶⁰ The Sulu Archipelago, however, was subject to droughts, and consequently imported rice from its neighbours. This seems to have been done mainly through commerce. Rice was obtained from Cotabato swidden farmers as tribute and through Chinese traders; from Basilan, where Taosug control was 'largely ritual'; and from Zamboanga, where the Spanish governors were involved.⁶¹ This vigorous rice trade does not mean that there was extensive use of free labour. However, it does suggest that there was probably a continuum of status among rice producers, comparable to that which I feel might have existed in fishing and collecting.

Apart from these issues of seasonality and gradations in compulsion, labour needs could also have been affected by developments in technology and structure. As was noted above, there seems to have been little change in fishing methods before the nineteenth century. However, there is ample evidence that the *trepang* industry in Makassar was far from static. During the 1700s both organisation and productivity (output per man) responded to the apparently unlimited Chinese demand. Makassar's early eighteenth-century registers show limited *trepang* shipments; what did come in was brought by a few traders – often Chinese or Malay – as part of a mixed cargo and then shipped out to Batavia. Nevertheless, sources for the early 1730s show both a differentiation in the fleet and also a rate of productivity somewhat above Warren's estimate. In 1730 the Lieutenant of the Malays controlled a significant proportion of *trepang perahu*, although most were sailed by their owners. Loads varied from half a *pikul* per vessel to 50 or even more. In 1734, 36 boats were registered as importing *trepang*, and the ratio of *trepang* to crew members (an index of productivity) was 0.87, somewhat more than Warren's 0.5. In 1736 VOC cruisers seized a vessel in the fishing grounds near Aru; the 29 crew had accumulated over 46 *pikul* of *trepang*, giving a ratio of 1.6.⁶² Some of this, however, may have been obtained through trade.

By the mid-1760s the register reveals a fully developed *trepang* fishing flotilla, focused upon the northern Australian coast. The main fleet sailed to Bonerate; most, if not all, then proceeded to Marege'. Eighty ships left in December and 61 carried no cargo, indicating they were going to fish themselves, rather than seeking cargoes through barter; 62 were registered as carrying nothing but *trepang* on their return, with 806 crewmen bringing in 998 *pikul*.⁶³ This gives a ratio of 1.24 *pikul* per man, substantially higher than

59 David Henley, personal communication.

60 Warren, *Sulu Zone*, pp. 208–10; Peter Boomgaard and A. J. Gooszen, *Population trends 1795–1942* (Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute, 1991), Table 22.

61 Warren, *Sulu Zone*, pp. 95–102.

62 VOC 2163, ff. 132–9 (load size); VOC 2314 (1734); *Generale missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (The Hague: Rijkscommissië voor Vaderlandse Geschiedenis, 1988), pp. 750–1 (1736).

63 VOC 3210.

Warren's calculation. This effective exploitation of Australian waters was a fast and impressive response to Chinese demand.

Productivity seems to have continued to rise, despite fluctuations due to the nature of fishing and the patchy data. Campbell MacKnight has calculated an overall productivity ratio of 1.94 *pikul* for 1771.⁶⁴ By the later eighteenth century a clearer, although not new, distinction was emerging between 'traders' and 'gatherers'. 'Traders' left Makassar carrying cargoes to exchange for *trepang*, and returned from different ports with higher loads, while 'gatherers' tended to carry only provisions, and their *trepang* cargoes tended to be smaller. This distinction is only indicative, not absolute. Already in 1730 some of the ship captains (notably Chinese with very big loads) were undoubtedly traders. Indications are that in 1777 'traders' were bringing in 5.7 *pikul* per crewmember, and 'gatherers' 2.65. The proportion of Chinese skippers, presumably all traders, grew from 26 per cent in the 1770s to 36 per cent in the 1780s. In *The voyage to Marege*, MacKnight's figures for the nineteenth century indicate a productivity ratio ranging between 13.3 and 3.75 *pikul*.⁶⁵ If we bundle disparate data together, we see a rise from 0.86 in the 1730s to 1.6 in the 1760s, 3.64 in the 1770s and, for the late 1900s, 6.74.

Several probable trends are apparent in the Makassar data. The first is this increasing productivity, the second is an growing differentiation between traders and gatherers, and the third is the growth of trade, both in absolute terms and in relative terms compared to fishing. The differences with Sulu in productivity and structural change are immediately apparent. Warren's calculation of 0.5 *pikul* per man per year is much lower, and the response to demand seems limited to increased raiding. These differences could be related to a low productivity of slave (as opposed to free) labour or – if we discount the existence of a slave mode of production – a lack of incentives for tribute-paying clients to deliver more produce. (Admittedly, it could just as easily be indicative of inadequate data.)

Maybe the answer lies in the exploitation of pearl shell, long a Sulu export and included in Warren's calculations. A comparison with Aru might be instructive; here the pearl banks were owned communally by nearby villages, who gathered the shell by diving. An account from the late nineteenth century stresses that since calm water was essential for the work, collecting was only possible for a few months during the west monsoon. Aru exported 3,000 to 3,500 *pikul* per year in the mid-1800s, about a quarter as much as Sulu. If Warren is correct and 'the average annual labour of four men' was necessary for a *pikul* of pearl shell, then up to 14,000 men would have been needed for Aru's production. However, the total population of the Aru Islands, including the vast majority who had nothing to do with pearl fishing, was only about 13,000 in 1888. Another important pearl fishing zone had been under the control of the Sultan of Tidore, who took pearl shell as tribute, but the fishery was poorly run and declined. In neither case is the use of slave labour reported.⁶⁶ Given the data on *trepang* collecting outlined above, and the case of Aru, it is hard to accept Warren's claim of 68,000 'labouring in the fisheries'.

There are indications in Warren's own rich data that aspects of his analysis of labour in Sulu should be qualified. The image of a 'slave mode of production' is misleading,

64 Campbell MacKnight, personal communication.

65 MacKnight, *Voyage to Marege*, pp. 22, 113; the 1777 figures are from VOC 3493 and the rise in Chinese skippers from Knaap and Sutherland, *Monsoon traders*.

66 'Paarl en paarlemoervisscherij', *ENI*, vol. III, pp. 154–7 and 'Aroe-eilanden', vol. I, p. 46.

because it obscures both the ambiguous status of workers and the varying possible roles of tax, tribute and trade. Similarly, the focus on commodity production is weakened by the seasonal nature of the work. Warren himself makes it clear that both rice and *trepang* were produced under various regimes. Given the strength of the Jolo Chinese community, it also seems unlikely that they allowed themselves to be completely confined to *datu*-dominated channels.

Conclusion

Warren refers to the ‘apparent paradox in Southeast Asian history . . . that the rise of the Sulu Sultanate, increased maritime raiding and the opening and immanent decline of China at the hands of Europe took place at much the same time (the end of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century) as the introduction of tea . . . to Europe’.⁶⁷ It is his desire, in *Iranun and Balangingi*, to resolve this paradox. He deserves credit for posing the question, but in fact there really seems to be no paradox. Throughout Southeast Asian history, from Oc Eo (in the Mekong Delta during the ‘Funan’ period) onwards, the currents of trade have been tapped by ambitious chiefs. Maritime states like Srivijaya or Johor used the threat of piracy to channel trade to their ports, while pepper-producing areas from Aceh through south Sumatra to Borneo imported slave labour, which Malay, Javanese or Bugis traders were happy to provide. Networks of slave markets funnelled people into the system. When in the late nineteenth century Bugis entrepreneurs sought a workforce to open copra plantations in west Kalimantan around Pontianak, they advanced credit against labour, and imported ‘debt slaves’ (*pandeling*), who became free copra producers after a few years. Sulu is part of a familiar pattern, a variation on a theme. Moreover, as noted above, the correlations in time are less tight than Warren suggests, and the causative nexus subject to varying interpretations.

The subtitles of Warren’s two books indicate his focus on the interlocking of trade, state and slave raiding, with shifting ethnic identities as a result. This structure is characterised by coercion and violence: global capital’s search for commodities required the Tausug elite to seize slaves in armed forays. The slaves were then forced to produce goods, which the elite exchanged in a market they controlled. All transactions seem to be determined by the exercise of power. We are told little about the mechanics of exchange or compulsion, although the Sulu polity would seem to have been typical of a weakly integrated tributary system, as described by Wolf. In such a system, factional fighting between local alliances weakens both the flow of tribute to the centre and the position of producers, who are forced to seek protection.⁶⁸ State capacity to channel economic activities is extremely limited, and it would seem likely that insofar as marketing was centralised, this occurred because of positive incentives. In Makassar, or for that matter the city-states of East Africa, goods flowed to the ports where merchants gathered, because there commodities could be bought and sold, credit obtained and profits realised. The role of Jolo town within the Sulu polity deserves greater attention; was it a combination of a free port and religious centre under a symbolic ruler, or was it somehow controlled by the *datu* class as a whole? The answer could tell us much about the role of trade in the Sulu Zone.

67 Warren, *Iranun and Balangingi*, p. 400.

68 Wolf, *Europe and the people*, p. 80.

By the late eighteenth century the density and intensity of commercial relationships in eastern Southeast Asia had increased markedly, primarily because of the great expansion in the Chinese economy, but also because of Europe's appetite for tea. This could indeed lead to state formation, as Warren claims, if weapons and taxes were used to centralise power. Yet nowhere is this process described; political and economic relationships are presented as if they are unchanging, although the dramatic impact of global trade is asserted.

Laura Lee Junker describes how fifteenth-century Sulu successfully competed for foreign trade in the Philippines but depicts a more complex social landscape than that of the 1700s, as described by Warren:

The growth of foreign prestige goods trade was only one element of complex and evolving chiefly political economies in the late-first-millennium to mid-second-millennium Philippines. Wealth for generating, maintaining and expanding political power came from a number of production and exchange contexts that are intimately intertwined, including foreign luxury good trade, local production of status goods by attached craft specialists, bridewealth and other status good exchanges between local elites, goods circulated through the ritual feasting system, tribute mobilization and seizure of valuables during raids.⁶⁹

The Sulu sultanate in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was, of course, more centralised than most Philippine polities, and more deeply involved in trans-regional commerce. Nevertheless, *datu* status was probably underpinned by similarly diverse relationships, evolving in response to market opportunities and political pressure. However, if Sulu under a largely symbolic Sultan essentially remained a shifting constellation of competing leaders, it seems probable that they sought social and economic resources wherever they could find them. In that case, both local relationships and external contacts would have been more various, and much less fixed, than Warren suggests.

The Sulu Zone is still, after two decades, a very rewarding book; *Iranun and Balangingi* adds much rich detail, but little new analysis. This is a pity, as the theoretical superstructure of *Sulu Zone* is due for revision. The original model is too deterministic, absolute and undifferentiated in its emphasis on 'capital', elite control and the dichotomy between slave and free. Some of the data on population and labour productivity could also be re-evaluated; in the preceding pages I have taken a small step in that direction. I am not a Philippine specialist, and I am sure that I have, in places, misunderstood the situation or misrepresented the argument. These points notwithstanding, however, Warren's whole Sulu Zone project and the major questions which it raises still demand the attention of all serious students of Southeast Asian history.

69 Junker, *Raiding, trading and feasting*, p. 385.