

The killing of *Posthouder* Scheerder and *Jifar Folfolun* (The War of the Breasts): Malukan and Dutch narratives of an incident in the VOC's waning days

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The Aru Islands in southeastern Maluku have a long history of economic exchange and colonial relations with the Dutch East India Company (VOC), and later the Dutch colonial state. Aru was fragmented in smaller autonomous settlements, of which those in the east produced valuable items for export, such as pearls and tripang (edible sea cucumber). The article focuses on a spate of anti-colonial revolts in the waning days of the VOC in the 1790s. It centred on the Batuley villages situated on a few small islands on the eastern side. The central incident leading to the resistance was the killing of a Dutch low-ranking officer, Scheerder, an event which has been preserved in local tradition till the present day. A search in the VOC archives confirms several details, but suggests a rationale for the resistance which is partly different from the traditional version, and linked in with larger movements of resistance in Aru and Maluku. The article discusses the significance of the oral traditions, and how a comparison with archival materials can enrich our understanding of Arunese–Dutch relations.

In the fall of 1794 a series of violent alterations shook the Dutch position on the Aru Islands, a cluster of forested islands in southeastern Maluku which normally purveyed the Europeans with slaves, pearls, edible sea cucumber, Birds of Paradise, and other products on the 'luxury' side of early modern markets. Maluku was a hotbed of resentment against the patronising and monopolistic policies of the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC, Dutch East India Company). Incidentally, the Dutch Republic, as a part of the First Coalition during the Napoleonic Wars, faced the onslaught of the French revolutionary forces at the very same time and

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disintegrated rapidly, which would soon have consequences for the VOC and Aru. The startling and well-documented events in Europe contrast with the concurrent and relatively small-scale anti-Dutch resistance by populations in the East Indies.

The present study departs from a violent incident in Batuley in the Aru Islands, at the very margins of the Dutch colonial sphere, where the representative of European authority met with a hasty end, an event that made its mark in local tradition as well as in the archival documents. The primary aim of the article is first, to investigate how a dramatic colonial conflict has been preserved in the collective memory of a non-literate population, and how the oral data contrast with written sources. Secondly, by combining anthropological fieldwork with a critical scrutiny of archival records we also search for clues to the rationale of the anti-VOC activism of the Batuley people in the years around 1794. A part of this is the analysis of the way Dutch Orientalist images of the local populations were constructed. We thus provide an example of how particularly dramatic events in a non-literate society could be transferred over generations for more than two centuries, and discuss how the 'gap' between the oral narratives and contemporary written accounts can be used to problematise early colonial relations, and the relation between political, economic and cultural factors.

This article will first discuss the possibilities and problems of using oral sources versus written documents for the study of history. It subsequently presents the Batuley accounts of the incident. The Dutch archival sources are then scrutinised, and the article concludes with a discussion of how one may grasp and contextualise the similarities and dissimilarities between the two source categories, and what it may tell us of early anti-colonial resistance on the fringes of the Indian Ocean world.

Oral tradition and Indonesian history

The formidable problems of writing indigenous Indonesian history have long been recognised, starting with Van Leur's famous critique of its colonial slant from the 1930s.¹ A mass of texts produced by European powers since the sixteenth century has enabled a detailed narrative of political, economic and even cultural aspects of history in at least parts of Indonesia, but the narrative has been subordinated to a Western vision of what is relevant to tell. There is no denying that this dilemma has been addressed by a growing number of historians and anthropologists, Western as well as Indonesian, especially since the 1970s. In particular, Anthony Reid has shown how a concurrent reading of European and Southeast Asian textual sources can enhance our knowledge of social structure, economic processes, and cultural values.² Anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler has famously pleaded for a reading of the colonial records 'along the archival grain', a study of archives as constantly shifting between epistemic uncertainty and clarity, reflecting colonial failures as much as triumphs and therefore not just expressions of a stable colonial discourse.³ Historians such as Merle Ricklefs and Henk Schulte Nordholt have successfully tracked

1 J.C. van Leur, *Indonesian trade and society* (The Hague and Bandung: Van Hoeve, 1955), pp. 261–89.

2 Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the age of commerce, 1450–1680, vols. I–II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988–1993).

3 Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the archival grain: Epistemic anxieties and colonial common sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

Javanese and Balinese perspectives of historical processes by the use of indigenous texts.⁴

The issue is more complicated when it comes to areas in Indonesia where indigenous written texts are quite simply lacking, including much of inner Sumatra and Kalimantan, large parts of Sulawesi, and the regions to the east of Sumbawa. Some of these areas were intensively or extensively surveyed by colonial authorities, and in these cases detailed accounts can be compiled from contemporary reports, letters, diaries, inventories, and economic figures. Examples of this are the spice sultanates Ternate and Tidore in Maluku, where Leonard Andaya, Muridan Widjojo and Christiaan van Fraassen have produced finely crafted studies of realms where exceedingly few pre-1900 writings have survived.⁵

These studies have demonstrated that it is fully possible to write indigenous and local history through a critical reading of colonial texts; however, they did not make significant use of oral traditions. The use of such traditions has since long been explored by scholars of African history such as Jan Vansina, Elizabeth Tonkin and Ruth Finnegan who have pointed at both the possibilities and the traps involved.⁶ In a sense European scholars back to the days of François Valentijn (early eighteenth century) have made use of oral data to flesh out their accounts of Indonesian regions, as amply shown by Dutch *Memories van overgave* and articles in colonial-era journals. The scholarly analysis of oral tradition has nevertheless tended to be the domain of anthropologists such as James J. Fox, Douglas Lewis and Robert Barnes, often combined with skilful archival research.⁷

At its simplest a historical study using oral traditions may compare them with any written sources which are at hand, in effect using the latter as a yardstick for the relative reliability of the former. In this way one may add something to our general knowledge of the subject, for example, the position of elite groups which might have been poorly understood by European reports. At the same time it is important to note the gap between Western academic modes of history and the historical practice of indigenous groups. The time perspective among non-literate cultures is often quite different from that of academic history; instead of a chronological perspective we may find an emphasis on origins, or history being encoded

4 Merle C. Ricklefs, *Modern Javanese historical tradition: A study of an original Kartasura chronicle and related materials* (London: SOAS, 1978); Henk Schulte Nordholt, *The spell of power: A history of Balinese politics, 1650–1940* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1996).

5 Leonard Y. Andaya, *The world of Maluku* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993); Muridan Widjojo, *The revolt of Prince Nuku: Cross-cultural alliance-making in Maluku, c.1780–1810* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Christiaan Frans van Fraassen, 'Ternate, de Molukken en de Indonesische Archipel. Van soa-organisatie en vierdeling: een studie van traditionele samenleving en cultuur in Indonesië, vol. I–II (PhD diss., Leiden University, 1987).

6 Jan Vansina, *Oral tradition: A study in historical methodology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965); Jan Vansina, *Oral tradition as history* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1985); Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating our pasts: The social construction of oral history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Ruth Finnegan, 'A note on oral tradition and historical evidence', in *Oral history: An interdisciplinary anthology*, ed. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 1996).

7 James J. Fox, *Harvest of the palm: Ecological change in Eastern Indonesia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977); E. Douglas Lewis, *The stranger-kings of Sikka* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2010); Robert H. Barnes, 'Alliance and warfare in an Eastern Indonesian principality: Kédang in the last half of the nineteenth century', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 157, 2 (2001): 271–311.

in myths.⁸ A scholar studying oral tradition should therefore not just peel off the mythological/legendary elements in order to reach a kernel of ‘truth’, but seriously consider the possibility that these elements allude to significant events or changes in the past.

To do so requires a set of methodological practices. Vansina, among others, has pointed out the importance of analysing the circumstances of the performer and performance. In other words, we must scrutinise the social position and authority of the teller of stories, and his or her sources of knowledge. Furthermore it is essential to know under what circumstances the story is told — informally, secretly, at ritually laden occasions, poetically, and so on.⁹ Vansina, at any rate in his early work, also suggests a number of devices drawn from classical historical criticism such as careful comparison between variants, tracing possible misunderstandings in the transmission, and collation with any archaeological, linguistic or external written data at hand.¹⁰

In a general sense we might expect a stronger tradition in stable, hierarchical societies with a political centre of some consequence.¹¹ There is no guarantee that this is the case, though. James Fox has investigated historical traditions on Rote (in Nusa Tenggara Timor, NTT) and found a close correspondence with Dutch archival data as far back as the seventeenth century. Certain particles of information — names of rulers, stock events — have been preserved over the centuries, constituting the building blocks on which a variety of new stories are created over time.¹² Something similar, although to a lesser degree, applies to the Sonba’i kingdom of West Timor where some narrative elements evidently go back to the mid-seventeenth century. Heritage objects have had a role as tools that fix certain data over the generations. By contrast, the elite of the central Wewiku-Wehali kingdom which enjoyed precedence in a Timor-wide context, has vague and ever-shifting ideas about its own past.¹³ For stateless peoples, similar to the Arunese, current research indicates that interesting results can be obtained even in small-scale communities, albeit in unconventional ways — one may mention Minoru Hokari’s analysis of the ‘dream’ stories preserved by the Gurindji people of Australia, which are characterised by ‘truthfulness’ rather than ‘historical truth’.¹⁴

Then, how do rebellions against external ordering powers make their mark in the collective memory? Studies of memory, as encoded by myth and legend, point out how the narratives serve as a transmission system for information that is considered important. Techniques of sieving and selecting information are therefore vital. Human capacity to remember is limited hence the addition of details in one episode often implies that other details are deleted.¹⁵ How seminal events are remembered is also conditioned by their ties to politics or ideologies. Rebellions and anti-colonial

8 Tonkin, *Narrating our pasts*, p. 8.

9 Vansina, *Oral tradition as history*.

10 Ibid.

11 Finnegan, ‘A note on oral tradition and historical evidence’.

12 James J. Fox, ‘A Rotinese dynastic genealogy: Structure and events’, in *The translation of culture: Essays to E.E. Evans-Pritchard*, ed. Thomas O. Beidelman (London: Tavistock, 1971), pp. 37–77.

13 Hans Hägerdal, *Lords of the land, lords of the sea: Conflict and adaptation in early colonial Timor, 1600–1800* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2012), p. 383.

14 Minoru Hokari, *Gurindji journey: A Japanese historian in the outback* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2011).

15 Elizabeth Wayland Barber and Paul T. Barber, *When they severed earth from sky: How the human mind shapes myths* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 2–3.

resistance can be tied to dynasty and kingship, such as Prince Nuku's rebellion in late eighteenth-century Maluku and the extended Banjar War in nineteenth-century Kalimantan.¹⁶ Often, as in Maluku and Banjar, religious symbolism plays a key role in justifying the action. Such conflicts may inspire long epic accounts, either in written form or as oral tradition. Rebellions may also depart from lower aggregate levels, such as villages, tribal groups or districts, and depart from local grievances such as taxation, imposition of corvée labour, or circumscription of previous perceived rights. One may mention the peasant rebellion of Banten in 1888, studied in detail by Sartono Kartodirdjo, and Malielehi's rebellion in Alor in 1918.¹⁷ Such movements, too, may use religious or magical-ritual imagery in order to gather the forces. Although they are often lost in the local collective memory, there are cases where they do make their mark. As Emilie Wellfelt has shown, there is a wide array of oral traditions about the Alor rebellion of 1918, focusing on the charismatic female leader Malielehi.¹⁸

A background to the Batuley-speaking area

Perched along limestone cliffs, the seven villages of Batuley, the main protagonist in the dramatic events of 1794, occupy small islands in the shallow Arafura Sea on Aru's east coast (see [fig. 1](#)). These seashore locations provide proximity to the rich marine resources that provide subsistence and high value trade goods, while the shallow waters offer strategic protection from invasion. Desirable cliff-edge homes have stepped log ladders that reach the sea. A single daily high tide allows just a few hours each day when experienced pilots of boats larger than dugouts may access the villages, but even then craft are often grounded amid the maze of shifting channels of Batuley's waters. Batuley villagers are 'sea people' who spend much of their lives in or upon vast coastal seas. Batuley's relative geographical and logistical isolation has long provided residents a greater degree of independence from outside intervention than other Arunese villages on the western 'deep water' coast of Aru.¹⁹

Batuley people were literally considered 'barbarians' by early colonial observers because they lived outside 'civilisation', inhabiting inaccessible places. Etymologically, a barbarian in ancient Greece lived outside the state and spoke a different language. Similar uses, often with a pejorative slant, occurred in Latin, ancient Sanskrit and Arabic. Using this 'outsider' definition, some Batuley people might be quite pleased to be considered independent barbarians, although categorically barbarians can only be other people.

16 Widjojo, *The revolt of Prince Nuku*; Helius Sjamsuddin, 'Fighting Dutch rule in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: The social, political, ethnic and dynastic roots of resistance in South and Central Kalimantan, 1859–1906 (PhD diss., Monash University, 1989).

17 Sartono Kartodirdjo, *The peasants' revolt of Banten in 1888: Its conditions, course and sequel: A case study of social movements in Indonesia* ('s-Gravenhage: Smits, 1966); Emilie Wellfelt, 'Malielehi', in *Tradition, identity, and history-making in Eastern Indonesia*, ed. Hans Hägerdal (Växjö and Kalmar: Linnaeus University Press, 2011).

18 Emilie Wellfelt, *Historyscapes in Alor: Approaching indigenous histories in eastern Indonesia* (Växjö and Kalmar: Linnaeus University, 2016), pp. 205–8.

19 Batuley is one of 15 languages on Aru, all of them being Austronesian in spite of the Papuan features of the population. See Benjamin T. Daigle, 'A grammar sketch of Batuley: An Austronesian language of Aru, eastern Indonesia', MA thesis, University of Leiden, 2015.



Figure 1. Aru in a regional setting (map courtesy of Research Results Media).

The residents of Kumul, the village featured in this narrative, proudly speak of being the only villagers in Aru courageous enough to confront and repel the Dutch. A phonebooth-sized chunk of limestone cliff fallen into the sea is enthusiastically shown to visitors as evidence of a cannonball that failed to reach the village during a failed assault by Dutch forces, which may have occurred subsequent to the killing of the Dutchman Scheerder/Eskelder as retaliation. We will come back to this figure who has a central place in our study.

Oral histories in Batuley describe a long history of settlement in villages before Islamic traders visited in the fifteenth century, well before European contact.²⁰ Waves of settlements into Batuley from the west implied by oral genealogies are to some degree socially demarcated today by modern clan divisions. Earlier residents, who are described as different peoples, apparently died out, moved elsewhere, or were absorbed by the current residents' ancestors who came to exploit Batuley's rich marine resources for trade, including pearl oysters, sea cucumber, turtle shell, and shark fin.²¹ A European adventurer visiting Kumul in 1872 was met by a 'Chinaman' with a well-stocked store of 'European and Chinese articles'; 'two rooms full of mother-of-pearl of first-rate quality'; 'and a pearl of such wonderful size and beauty ... [at] ... such an enormous price that we could not even think of buying it'.²² Batuley has long been valuable real estate and many wars have been

20 Matthew Spriggs, Sue O'Connor and Peter Veth, 'The Aru Islands in perspective: A general introduction', in *The archaeology of the Aru Islands, eastern Indonesia*, ed. S. O'Connor, M. Spriggs and P. Veth (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2006).

21 The economy of the eastern side of Aru is treated in Patricia Spyer, *The memory of trade: Modernity's entanglements on an Eastern Indonesian island* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

22 L.M. D'Albertis, *New Guinea: What I did and what I saw* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1880), pp. 178–9.

fought to defend access to its resources from intruders. Historic inter-village wars in Batuley are also well known in village lore, some instigated by personal disagreements arising in day-to-day life.

Batuley: A geographical and ethnographic introduction

Key contextual factors required to understand the Dutch and Aru versions of the violent showdown of 1794 are Aru's geography and weather. Batuley's east coast location is remote relative to the Dobo–Wokam fort area on the west coast, long the hub for Aru's import–export trade. In 1857, Alfred Russel Wallace described Dobo as a seasonal Bugis and Chinese trading settlement to which Aru natives from the 'Backshore' (east coast) brought their produce for export each year.²³ Today, Dobo is a bustling town of at least 40,000 people; the primary industries in Aru involve extracting living marine or terrestrial resources and providing local services or government. The model is the same, but the intensity of exploitation has increased.

The three routes between Dobo and Batuley require a lengthy boat trip, either through one of the two northernmost cross-Aru marine channels that demarcate islands within the Aru archipelago or by the longer trip around the northern tip of the Aru Island group. Strong dry winds blow from the east most of the year, except for a few months starting in late September when the wetter west winds dominate Aru skies. Most cross-island boat trips encounter headwinds at some point. Even today, with motor-powered boats, winds and tides may cause the length of the trip between Batuley and Dobo to vary anywhere from eight hours to multiple days. In 1794, travellers using sails and oars would be in transit to Batuley for at least three long days. The seasonal wind-shift defines the pearl diving and sea cucumber collection season on Aru's east coast. When the inshore winds drop in September or October, the waters calm, underwater visibility increases, which allows divers to harvest valuable pearl oysters. This east–west cycle of winds also determined the arrival and departure in Dobo on Aru's western shore of traders from Banda and Ceram for centuries.

During the three to four month-long west wind season, modern Batuley villages are busy. Village homes are filled with people spending days and nights fishing, diving, and celebrating. When onshore winds return to Batuley, the marine harvest season ends and today many people go to Dobo or elsewhere; villages are much quieter. VOC records reviewed in this article cast Batuley people as active participants in trade and conflicts near the Wokam fort, quite some distance from Batuley. Like today, in the eighteenth century, long seasonal lulls in harvesting likely gave Batuley people ample time to engage in politics and conflicts at Aru's commercial hub, with the option of retreating to their distant homes if affairs went badly.

The two master clans of Urlima and Ursia have long structured Aru society, as discussed below. The master clan origin story involves deity twin-brothers arguing over who was the eldest, which prompted a competition to control the most villages in Aru. One brother assumed the form of a whale to visit and take charge of villages that became Urlima; the other brother manifested as a hammerhead shark to establish the Ursia group. The shark could swim in shallower water to access more villages than

23 Alfred R. Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, vol. II. (of II) (London: MacMillan and Co., 1869).

the whale. Hence, Ursia was the winner, a claim still contested by Urlima people.²⁴ Centuries of conflicts in Aru between the two groups continue today and significantly influence modern democratic political processes. Batuley people are staunch Urlima members, although an account of a strategic allegiance switch is given below from VOC records. Today, old Batuley village is one of five key Aru Urlima alliance villages where master-clan meetings are held periodically. Genealogical clans also subdivide Aru villages. Clans compete with other clans for power and membership, which sometimes means absorbing non-kin villagers into a clan to strengthen numbers. Clan members receive hospitality and support from their fellows. Clan relationships are pertinent to the Aru oral histories of the Dutch headman Scheerder's killing in 1794.

Arunese oral traditions follow transmission protocols. Formal storytelling requires a storyteller, at the appropriate point in the story, to sing the *saab* that references critical components of the story. A *saab* is a specific type of song that represents 'historical truth'. The term *saab* may vary elsewhere in Aru, such as *saba* in Kola and Dobel, but the transmission protocol is Arunese. These song lyrics are brief and contain keyword references to the dramatic elements of the story, which listeners who are educated in local lore will know. Hence, a *saab* is a story told in a code that defines a social group through sharing an oral tradition. A *saab* may be told privately or in a public setting, such as occurred recently in an Arunese courtroom in a case involving a dispute of territory. A '*mare*' is another type of song sung during ritual events in Batuley. A *mare* may use phrases from a *saab* and elaborate content or musical elements, but the *saab* is seen as the 'truth' that should not be embroidered by the singer. The story of Scheerder's or Eskelder's death only became known to authors of this article as a result of questions posed to Batuley elders about the meaning behind a single phrase recorded in a *mare* sung at a festival in Kumul village in 2014 (see fig. 2).

The killing of Eskelder in Batuley tradition

In November 2014 an all-night *tambaroro* event was held in the Batuley village of Kumul in order to mark the opening of the pearl diving and sea cucumber collection season. This important ritual that demonstrates respect for the deities of the sea and land is attended by Christians and Moslems alike who sing and dance through the night accompanied by drums and gongs. The primary lyrics of one of the *mare* songs performed during this event in 2014 are shown below in the Batuley language (*Gwatle lir*), followed by our translations into Indonesian, and English. The lead singer repeated these stanzas many times with variations that allowed other men to

24 For an early discussion of the Ursia–Urlima division, see J.F.G. Brumund, 'Aanteekeningen gehouden op eene reis in het oostelijke gedeelte van den Indischen Archipel', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië* 7, 2 (1845): 289. Brumund heard that the division, which is also found on Ambon, Key, etc. was derived from the rivalry between the spice sultanates Ternate and Tidore, whose rulers had privy councils consisting of five and nine members, respectively. This is denied by Christaan Frans van Frassen ('Ternate, de Molukken en de Indonesische Archipel, II', p. 485), who assumes that the idea of the division was disseminated from one or two centres in the Maluku region, where Banda could have exercised a considerable influence.



Figure 2. Aru, with the main route between Dobo and the Gwatele villages (map courtesy of Research Results Media).

join in. The song is only sung in Kumul village and not in the other Batuley villages. Spelling variations, such as Gwatale, occur in song lyrics to support musicality.

Gwatalei id daben waka-waka

Batuley language (Gwatle lir)

Mutabein id daben sela-sela
 Kama gwatale
 Mutabein id daben waka-waka
 Mutabein la id daben waka abel
 Gwatale id daben sela-sela
 Mutabein la mulen waka abel
 Gwatale id daben waka-waka
 Sela Ngaur

Bahasa Indonesia translation

Kamu buang dia ke tebing-tebing
 Kami orang Batuley
 Kamu buang dia ke daerah bakau
 Kamu buang dia kalau mereka pergi ke dalam areal bakau
 Orang Batuley pergi ke tebing-tebing
 Kamu buang dia kalau kamu pulang dari dalam areal bakau
 Orang Batuley pergi ke daerah bakau
 Kampung ramai

English translation

You cast him away from the cliff
 We are the people of Batuley
 You threw him away to the mangroves area
 You threw him away when they went inside the mangroves area

People of Batuley went to the cliff
 You cast him away from inside the mangroves area when you came back
 The Batuley people went to the mangroves
 The village is lively

The above Batuley lyrics represent a typical Arunese historical *saab* song, in that the meanings of the lyrics are obscure unless one knows the story behind the song. Our enquiries as to the song's meaning led to several older men telling us the following story, with variations in perspective regarding the intent and motivations of the actors, but relative consistency in the events themselves. We recorded versions of this story from men from the Batuley villages of Kumul and Benjuring and also from a 70-year-old Manumbai man who lived on Wokam near the ruins of a long-abandoned Dutch fort on Aru's west coast where the story begins.

Eight generations ago, a small fort on Wokam Island on Aru's west coast was commanded by a Dutchman, known in Batuley histories as Eskelder, but verified in VOC records as *Posthouder Scheerder*. The fort's location on Wokam Island sits across a strait approximately a kilometre distant from the present-day town of Dobo. Both of these areas have long been seasonal bases for Arunese people to trade with foreign merchants.²⁵ The Dutchman, Scheerder, was in the habit of molesting any Arunese women who passed by. In particular, Scheerder is said to have had a penchant for grabbing women's breasts. His frequent molestation of Arunese women led to conflicts between Arunese people and the Dutch. These troubles became known in Aru as *Jifar* (war) *Folfolun* (breasts or mammary glands). After many Arunese people were killed in 'The War of the Breasts', the Arunese ceased their attacks on the Dutch, but their hearts were filled with anger and shame. Yet to be confirmed local lore suggests that one Aru man was killed by Scheerder after confronting him regarding the molestations.

A Batuley man, Tafer Benar, from Kumul village, was processing sago near the fort as these events unfolded. Benar then took the initiative of befriending the Dutch post commander, Scheerder, forming a special friendship known as *sobat*, which allowed each man to borrow and have sex with the other man's wife. Benar had sex with Scheerder's wife, who would not have been European. The act occurred somewhere near the west coast Wokam fort during the east-wind season when seas are rough in Batuley. This arrangement went on for some time. Benar invited Scheerder to visit Kumul village during the west-wind season in order to reciprocate the *sobat* exchange with Benar's wife. Scheerder, along with other Dutchmen and at least one local guide, made the multi-day journey from Wokam to Kumul. In preparation for Scheerder's arrival, Benar encouraged Kumul residents to participate in a plan to kill Scheerder.

Typical Batuley houses of the time were mounted on four corner poles with the house floor raised well above ground level. Access to the house was gained through a trap door in the floor that was opened from inside the house. Benar's plan was to have his confederates await Scheerder's entry up into the house through the floor at which time Scheerder would be attacked when he was vulnerable. Coincidentally, Benar's wife had given birth to a child less than 40 days before Scheerder's arrival, which meant she was required to stay in the house during her confinement according to old Batuley custom.

25 Spyer, *The memory of trade*, pp. 1–14.

Scheerder arrived in Kumul and entered Benar's house in expectation of having sex with Benar's wife. As planned, Benar and/or his confederates fell upon Scheerder as he entered the house through the trap door. Scheerder was killed and his corpse was thrown off the cliff down to the seashore. This event is referenced in the *mare* song lyric 'you cast him away from the cliff', as shown above.

When the news of Scheerder's killing in Kumul became known at the Dutch fort in Wokam, a punitive expedition was mounted by the Dutch garrison against Kumul. In Kumul, Benar attempted to persuade villagers to cooperate in fighting the Dutch, in anticipation of a retaliatory attack by the Dutch. At the time, Benar was the *orang-kaya* (village head) of Kumul. Some village men organised a competition of spear throwing and archery using a stuffed rattan dummy as a target in order to determine their prowess in combat. A man known as Tafer Bogoi Roiminag won the contest with his spear-throwing accuracy and force, and was selected to lead the defence. In Batuley, members of the Roiminag clan are the designated warriors. Bogoi Roiminag had the distinction of being unable to speak and was sometimes addressed as *dugdugun* (dummy) Bogoi.

In contrast, Benar's clan affiliation was Jamjig, also referred to as *tuurunan katil-meimai* (descendants of liars), long known in Aru for their political machinations and loose appropriations of truth for personal gain. Benar proved no exception to this tradition as he stirred up resistance in Kumul and to some degree in other Batuley villages. In Kumul, a dog was killed; village men swore an oath on the blood of the dog to stand together and forcibly resist a Dutch assault on Kumul. This blood oath is a customary ritual used in Batuley to establish unity in troubled times; oath-breakers risk mortal consequences visited upon them by local deities.

The Dutch force arrived in Kumul, said to have been guided by Raja Dorjel (king of Dorjela). This is a chief on Wamar Island where Dobo is situated, who was loyal to the Dutch and received the raja title in the late colonial era.²⁶ The Dutch fired a cannonball at the village causing mayhem in the village as everyone other than the designated Kumul warriors sought safety. The warriors lined the front cliff edge where the ladders had been removed for defensive purposes. The Dutchmen came ashore at the more accessible back of the village, however, where Bogoi Roiminag confronted them and used hand signals to challenge the Dutch leader to a duel, providing a dramatic climax to the story.

The Dutch leader fired a pistol at Bogoi; the Aru man threw his iron spear at the Dutchman; both men were mortally injured. Weapons used in the fight included a 50-centimetre *parang* or short sword with a curved bone handle and an iron spear over a metre in length with a flattened metal point on the business end. Chaos ensued and the Dutch took some prisoners including women and children. Oral accounts differ on the number of prisoners taken. A Roiminag clan elder told us that two prisoners were taken whose names were: Tafer Malay (a man) and Gorsir Gwatoko

26 Interview, Sonny Djonler and Hans Hägerdal, with Johan Kobrua, Durjela, 11 Apr. 2016. The Raja of Durjela (Dorjela) held a degree of authority over the various Urlima settlements, while the leading Ursia settlements Wokam, Samang, Ujir and Wangel were governed by *patih*s. Hugo Merton, *Ergebnisse einer zoologischen Forschungsreise in den südöstlichen Molukken (Aru- und Kei-inseln)* (Frankfurt am Main: Senckenbergische Naturforschende Gesellschaft, 1910), p. 21, however, refers to the chief of Durjela as *patti* (patih).

(a woman). Tafer soon escaped by jumping from his captor's boat to swim and run ashore to safety, all while under fire by the Dutch.

Some Kumul residents ran away in fear to hide in the mangroves, along with people from other villages, who failed to come to the aid of the Kumul men against the Dutchmen. Thus, the meaning of the *mare* song lyric: 'You throw him away when they went inside the mangroves area'. Another *mare* song mockingly composed by Kumul residents called '*Kompania bakar Kumul Batuley lari*' ([the] Company burned Kumul and Batuley ran away) is well known elsewhere in Aru. The lyrics use the Malay verbs *lari* ('run away') and *bakar* (burn) rather than Gwatile lir terms. The single vowels support musicality without adding meaning. Our informants speculate that this song is of more recent vintage than the above version sung at the Kumul *tambaroro* in 2014.

Kompania bakar Kumul o Batuley lari o, Kompania bakar Kumul
O Gwatale lari a o, lari a o lari a o
O Batuley lari a o, o lari a o lari a o

Tafer Malay survived the incident and went into hiding. The female prisoner Gorsir Gwatoko was taken back to Wokam. Kumul elders travelled to Wokam to redeem Gorsir and make peace with the Dutch by presenting an expensive cannon and the heads of two men, one of which the Kumul elders misrepresented to the Dutch as the head of Tafer Benar. In fact, the heads had belonged to a Kumul 'forest person' and a man from Kabofin, a northern Arunese community.

The further exploits of Tafer Benar are unknown; some of his descendants are proud of Benar's guile in avenging Scheerder's molestation of Arunese women. Some of these women were from the Aru region of Kola, where Benar is also thought of highly today. Conversely in Kumul, the position of *orangkaya* has never since been allotted to Benar's clan, Jamjig, since Benar's complex role in the War of the Breasts. All the men who told us versions of this story were over 50 years of age and seemed quite familiar with the story. These included men from Benjuring village where some younger men were unfamiliar with the story.

Discussion of the Batuley stories of the killing of Scheerder

The first song that memorialises this story is a cynical comment on presumptions of solidarity among Batuley people and is only sung in Kumul village. The less detailed second song in Malay delivered a similar message and reached a wider audience in Aru. In the nearby village of Benjuring, the leader of another dominant Batuley clan felt it was important that we should learn the 'real story'. In this alternative oral history version Tafer Benar was a troublemaker whose interactions with the Dutchmen at Wokam led to the pursuit of Benar to Batuley by the Dutch post commander, Scheerder. When Benar arrived in Batuley, Benar's attempts to enlist support among the people of other Batuley villages were met, not with enthusiasm, but disapproval for bringing angry Dutch soldiers to Batuley. Thus, the lack of support against the Dutch party by other Batuley villagers was a prudent reaction to Benar's reckless actions, rather than the cowardice implied by the songs.

The event is known throughout Aru as an important episode in Arunese colonial era history, as summarised in the second song, 'The Company burned Kumul and Batuley ran away'. The more detailed lyrics of the first song demonstrate the cryptic

style of Batuley storytelling and oral history keeping. People singing the refrains of the song or responding to the call of the song-leader may not know the meaning of the words they are singing. This obscurity of meaning is demonstrated in the following interpretation of the English translation of the song's lyrics with additional contextual information shown in italics.

You cast him away from the cliff (*He was thrown from the cliff*)
 We are the people of Batuley
 You throw him away to the mangroves area
 You throw him away when they went inside the mangroves area (*The people of Batuley and/or women and children hid in the mangroves*)
 People of Batuley went to the cliff
 You cast him away from inside the mangroves area when you came back
 The Batuley people went to the mangroves
 The village is lively (*There is trouble in the village*)

Batuley ritual participants first learn the coded representations for their cultural heritage knowledge and gradually learn about the underlying content.

In summary, this story is an important cultural referent in Arunese history and for the Batuley community. Regardless of the perception of Benar's role as hero or troublemaker, his actions represent a long-remembered Arunese effort to restore self-respect during the European colonial period. The story is known on Aru's west coast near the Wokam fort where the interaction between Benar and Scheerder began.²⁷ The subsequent abandonment of the Wokam fort may have been attributed to these events by Aru people, although the Dutch departure was also a consequence of the decline of the VOC as described below, and the ascent of British control over Dutch colonies during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. Anecdotally, the conflict may have strengthened relationships between Arunese people and traders from Ceram and Makassar also seeking Aru resources in direct trading competition with the Dutch.

Within the broader Batuley community the story is divisive. Today, some Kumul villagers claim legitimacy and leadership in maintaining Batuley's independence from European exploitation. This perspective supports the reputation/designation of Bogoi's Roiminag clan as the warrior clan. In contrast, a leader of a different and senior Batuley area clan in Benjuring interprets the events as a series of unfortunate incidents which brought trouble to Batuley and needlessly divided the communities. Benar's exploits are not celebrated in song at Benjuring village's *tambaroro* event.

The Batuley versions of the killing of Scheerder offer a valuable and rare contribution to the historical record of the colonial period in Eastern Indonesia. Several of the oral accounts we recorded demonstrate impressive detail. As will be seen,

27 The 'rumoured' killing of an unnamed VOC *posthouder* in 1794 is also mentioned in the singular comprehensive record of colonial Arunese history, which was compiled by the Catholic missionary Andreas Sol MGR, *Sejarah Gereja Katolik di Kepulauan Aru* (Jakarta: Frits H. Pangemanan, 2009), p. 45. Sol spent decades living and working in Aru. In 1976, Sol established Catholic churches in Batuley villages, including Kumul, Benjuring, and Kabalsiang. Sol's writings and anecdotes of his actions in Batuley demonstrate respect for Batuley customs. That oral tradition about the war has been influenced by contacts with missionaries is rather implausible although it cannot be entirely excluded.

Europeans described east coast Arunese people as uncivilised, treacherous and unreasonable.²⁸ In contrast the Arunese accounts of the incidents involving Scheerder illustrate Arunese people seeking self-respect, balanced against the fear of punitive reprisals by Europeans with superior armaments. *Posthouder* Scheerder's activities may have seemed quite barbaric to the Arunese people whose commercial trade Scheerder was meant to be overseeing.

Aru in VOC records: Resistance and accommodation

[The economic] expectations have been rather fulfilled, since the populous [Aru] islands can contribute a lot to the welfare of this province [Banda] in peaceful times, in particular if one finds the means to impede the arrival of the Makassarese, especially at Barakai, Mariri, Lollakrey, Trangan, Oe Oljex, Batuley and Kobroor, which, being separated from the other islands by creeks and only reachable by small perahus, deliver pearls, all sorts of *tripang*, *karet* [turtleshell] and, at the western and north-western side, a lot of sago, hogs, rice, poultry, *kacang* [grams], beans, etc. One also encounters a lot of dugongs at the coasts, who are reportedly good food with a pleasant taste. [...]

The people [of the west coast] tend to accept the Christian religion by God's hand. For the progress of this a schoolmaster is placed here since 1660, and a few schools have been established.

Those of the eastern side are, on the other hand, the most barbarian people of the world, without any respect or fear, fiercely trusting their impenetrable rocks and mountains, which are inaccessible to Europeans²⁹

Thus did a VOC employee describe the Aru Islands in 1756. At the time of writing the islands, situated at the very eastern end of the Indian Ocean world, had been drawn into the Dutch seaborne empire for more than 130 years.³⁰ The perspective that the writer takes is utilitarian: the welfare to which Aru might contribute is understood to be that of Dutch settlers on the Banda Islands where the governor for this part of the Dutch East Indies resided. This is done also by keeping the enterprising Bugis–Makassar seafaring traders out since they tend to operate outside of VOC control and are breaking the trade monopoly reserved for the Banda burghers. The characterisation of ethnic groups is as summary as it is black-and-white, and is intimately tied to their relations with the VOC. The dwellers of the west coast are susceptible to the Reformed Christian religion and therefore commendable while the independent-minded peoples of the east are at the very bottom of human civilisation.

28 Reinier de Klerk, *Belangrijk verslag over den staat Banda en omliggende eilanden aan Zijne Excellentie den Gouverneur-Generaal van Ned.-Indië Jacob Mossel* ('s-Gravenhage: n.p., 1894), pp. 29–30. A similar characterisation of the Arunese is found in about 1700 in Pieter van Dam, *Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie, Tweede Boek, Deel 1* ('s-Gravenhage: M. Nijhoff, 1931); 'The inhabitants are, compared to the mentioned, and the following islands, very black and stupid, but very keen on mutual robberies, from which most of the slaves come, which are annually bartered by the burghers against gongs, elephant tusks, clothes, and small things' (p. 210).

29 de Klerk, *Belangrijk verslag over den staat Banda en omliggende eilanden*, pp. 29–30.

30 Spyer, *The memory of trade*, p. 19.

The quote hints at the formidable problems of using Western sources to describe Arunese historical processes. While the foregoing section has shown the picture of the past among a people which was largely autonomous of European culture up to the twentieth century, and only partly influenced by the trade and policies of the Dutch, we will now investigate how this picture of the past can be confronted with the archival record of Dutch–Batuley relations. The heavily biased Dutch records do not represent the ‘truth’ of the matter. They do, however, represent a contemporary and fairly scrupulous view of the relationship. The VOC was a commercial-cum-colonial organisation whose servants were expected to deliver information that could be used for allocations and strategic decisions. The information was not meant for publication and is therefore in a way ‘matter-of-fact’ in style.³¹ On the other hand, this is offset by the lack of professionalism among many Company servants, their obvious lack of understanding of foreign cultures, and corrupt practices which might have led to misreporting in some instances.

The main Dutch referent in the VOC–Arunese relations was the Banda post, firmly established after the notorious conquest of the nutmeg-producing Banda Islands in 1621.³² A first contract was drawn up as early as 1623. As far as can be seen, however, this merely involved *negeris* of the west coast, such as Ujir, Wokam, Wamar, Maykor and Trangan. The contract included stipulations of VOC suzerainty and trading regulations — the Arunese were only to trade with Ambon and Banda.³³ The villages on the so-called Backshore (Agterwal) in the east may have been involved in this arrangement indirectly at best.³⁴ Seventeenth-century sources make references to an older political division in the Ursia (Ulisiwa) and Urlima (Ulilima) bonds, a ritual grouping of settlements found in many places of Maluku. A VOC source from 1680 asserts that it was in particular the Urlima who sought renewed Dutch protection against Ursia in 1646, 1653 and 1659, leading to the construction of a Dutch fort and a permanent garrison on Wokam Island.³⁵

Judging from later lists Batuley was Urlima.³⁶ However, the area proved recalcitrant against the Company in the next few years. It is briefly mentioned in 1661 when the Dutch ventured to the Backshore and made peace with various groups. At a meeting on the small island Mariri the various eastern and southeastern *orangkayas* came together, including those from Batuley, Barakai, Krei and Balletan, the last-mentioned of which had been defeated by Company arms.³⁷ However, the peace did not last long. Not even two years had passed before the peoples of the Backshore colluded

31 Graham Irwin, ‘Dutch historical sources’, in *An introduction to Indonesian historiography*, ed. Soedjatmoko et al. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965).

32 Willard Hanna, *Indonesian Banda: Colonialism and its aftermath in the nutmeg islands* (Banda Neira: Yayasan Warisan dan Budaya Banda Neira, 1991), pp. 46–58.

33 *Corpus diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*, vol. I. (s-Gravenhage: M. Nijhoff, 1907), pp. 179–82.

34 We follow the practice of Spyer, *The memory of trade*, in translating Agterwal as Backshore.

35 W. Ph. Coolhaas, *Generale missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, vol. 4: 1675–1685 (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1971), p. 432.

36 Van Fraassen, ‘Ternate, de Molukken en de Indonesische Archipel’, vol. 2, pp. 484–5; A. Balk, *Memorie van overgave van de Onderafdeeling Aroe-eilanden*. KIT 1243, Open collection microfiches, Nationaal Archief, The Hague, 1937, p. 4.

37 *Dagh-Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia* (s-Gravenhage: M. Nijhoff, Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1889), pp. 302–3.

to ravage the *negeris* loyal to the Company. Two hundred boats arrived at the roadstead off the Dutch fort in Wokam which was attacked. The small VOC garrison nevertheless successfully withstood the assault and the Arunese disappeared after three of their number were killed. Shortly afterwards a Company vessel, the sloop *het Tijgertje* arrived in Aru and a new peace deal was attempted. When the Arunese enemy proved intractable, the Company troops decided to invade Batuley which seems to have been the heart of the resistance. This time, however, luck ran out for the Dutch. Their intent was discovered in time and the enterprise failed. The Dutch nevertheless managed to arrest the Batuley chief Jaroelyami who was reputed to have enticed the locals, otherwise known as friends of the VOC. In the end Jaroelyami was released due to the intervention of his friends and seemed very grateful for this act of mercy.³⁸

Despite a similar outburst of violence in Barakai in the 1680s, Aru was not among the hotspots of the Dutch East Indies.³⁹ From the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth century little happened there that was of greater consequence for the VOC's position in Maluku.⁴⁰ A pattern evolved where the Dutch leaned on the partly Christianised *negeris* on the west coast, such as Wokam, Wamar and Maykor.⁴¹ Like the other islands of southern Maluku, Aru was monitored by Banda, which would supply the fort on Wokam with men and provisions and support the small Christian congregations.⁴² As mentioned, access to the Backshore was cumbersome, and only small craft could land there. The easterners were therefore largely left to their own devices provided that they followed a few rough guidelines about trade and external contacts. Sometimes, however, they did not even do that.

While Aru was far from accessible — in fact, the easternmost VOC outpost at the very edge of the Indian Ocean world — it was of considerable economic interest. Some of this is mentioned in the passage quoted at the beginning of this section. Pearl oysters are found in the shallow waters on the eastern side and naturally caught the interest of Company officials.⁴³ Pearls are easy to transport and bring large profits, provided that they can be harvested with some regularity. Early reports were discouraging since the Arunese pearls were considered too small and hard to collect, but a certain pearl-fishing industry nevertheless grew during the eighteenth century, focused on the southeastern island Barakai. *Tripang*, or sea cucumber, was another high cash value item harvested in the shallow Backshore seas. The *tripang*, of which there are several species, were caught by the locals, boiled and dried according

38 *Dagh-Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia* ('s-Gravenhage: M. Nijhoff, Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1891), pp. 476–7.

39 W. Ph. Coolhaas, *Generale missiven*, vol. 4, p. 712; François Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indien, Deel III B*. (Doordrecht and Amsterdam: Van Braam and Onder de Linden, 1726), pp. 41–3.

40 See further Pieter Bleeker, 'De Aroe-eilanden, in vroeger tijd en tegenwoordig', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië* 20, 1 (1858): 266.

41 According to Pieter van Dam there were 257 Christians in four *negeris* around 1700. At the same time there were 13 VOC employees in the fort; van Dam, *Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie*, pp. 206, 209.

42 M.J. Lampers, 'In het spoor van de Compagnie: VOC, inheemse samenleving en de gereformeerde kerk in de Zuidooster- en Zuidwestereilanden 1660–1700'. Undated manuscript found at KITLV Library (now incorporated in Universitaire Bibliotheken Leiden).

43 W. Ph. Coolhaas, *Generale missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, vol. 3: 1656–1674 (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1968), pp. 315–6.

to a laborious procedure, and sold to traders for export to China or Chinese communities.⁴⁴ It was considered a delicacy and eaten in the form of soups or stews. Another delicacy on the Chinese dinner table was edible bird's nests, which likewise fetched good prices. Birds-of-Paradise and turtle-shells added to the valuable fauna found on or close to the Aru Islands.

In the mercantilist spirit of the age the VOC restricted trade to and from Aru. For most of the period the burghers of Banda were the only merchants allowed to go there for trade. Nevertheless, Aru's remoteness impeded the full implementation of the monopoly. Seafarers from South Sulawesi had been present in South Maluku since at least the early seventeenth century, and their activities outside of the VOC trade system were not curtailed that easily. On the contrary, the activities of these so-called smugglers increased during the eighteenth century. Another important group operating without Dutch trading passes were the merchants of East Ceram and adjacent islands. They acquired products from Papua and operated a route that went down to Aru, Kei and Tanimbar and then westwards, towards Timor, Sumbawa, Lombok and even Java.⁴⁵

As the eighteenth century drew to a close, the VOC's trading power declined due to a number of factors: corruption, financial mismanagement and war with the British. Local conditions in the VOC's post on Banda had also deteriorated. Banda's wealth was based on nutmeg plantations worked by slaves, partly from Aru.⁴⁶ When rough weather ruined the plantations, commercial intercourse with Aru became rarer in the 1770s. Naturally, this made for increased opportunities for Makassarese and Ceramese who operated beyond the eyes of the Company. The islanders could get as much as double the price for their items from non-VOC traders. When the VOC once again tried to tighten its grip on the Aru trade in the 1780s, discontent inevitably simmered among the producers.⁴⁷ The situation now needed a catalyst to erupt in earnest.

Such a catalyst was provided from an unexpected corner, namely the spice sultanate Tidore in North Maluku. Dutch interference in the affairs of the strongly Islamic sultanate resulted in an uprising led by Prince Nuku, a charismatic character who would be a headache for the Dutch for a quarter of a century. Allying with a number of groups in Maluku and Papua, he attempted to gain the throne of Tidore and expel Dutch power in the region from 1781. Among his supporters were the Muslim trading communities of East Ceram.⁴⁸ All this had consequences for stability on the Aru Islands. While most Arunese kept to the old ancestral religion, and a few hundred Christians lived in the western villages, the small island Ujir to the northwest had been Muslim since the seventeenth century. The Ujirese were often at odds with the Christian villages and maintained alliances (*pela*) with settlements on Gorom

44 A.J. Bik, *Dagverhael eener reis, gedaan in het jaar 1824 tot nadere verkenning der eilanden Kefing, Goram, Groot-, Klein Kei en de Aroe eilanden* (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1928), pp. 69–72.

45 Roy Ellen, *On the edge of the Banda zone: Past and present in the social organization of a Moluccan trading network* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), pp. 86–7.

46 Hanna, *Indonesian Banda*, pp. 66–7. For the circulation of slaves, see also Ellen, *On the edge of the Banda zone*, pp. 85–6, 102–3.

47 Bleeker, 'De Aroe-eilanden, in vroeger tijd en tegenwoordig', p. 267.

48 Widjojo, *The rebellion of Prince Nuku*.

Island east of Ceram.⁴⁹ This made the Ujirese susceptible to the anti-Dutch and anti-Christian discourse spread by the Nuku rebellion.

A brother of Nuku, Jou Mangofa, prepared the ground for the attack on the Dutch which was carried out in 1787.⁵⁰ The Ujirese and their Goromese friends attacked the Dutch fort on Aru and massacred the weak garrison. A Dutch seaborne expedition the following year was heavily defeated with the help of Nuku's troops from North Maluku, and the accompanying merchant convoy was lost. Several communities on the Backshore, including Batuley, preferred to back the Ujir-Gorom-Tidore alliance which transgressed the traditional Urlima-Ursia division. In one version the Ujirese hired Papuan marauders to capture Batuley people at the coast, then promised to return the prisoners if Batuley joined the anti-European movement.⁵¹ Others, in particular the pearl-producing Barakai (Workay) stayed loyal to the Company.

While there is no evidence that the Backshore settlements were significantly influenced by Islam at this early stage, the uprising clearly had religious-millenarian dimensions. A few eyewitness accounts from Arunese chiefs who stayed loyal to the Dutch have been preserved. They testify to the awe in which Tidore was held. A Christian chief on the west coast was asked to convert to Islam:

They offered him a cloth and a white kerchief as token of peace with him, if he abandoned the Europeans and handed them over. They also enjoined him to become a Mohammedan instead, since he could no longer lean on the Noble Company, since they had all been exterminated in their possessions, and they henceforth must be governed by the king of Tidore, whose overwhelming power must overcome all the Company.⁵²

The Tidorese prince Jou Mangofa, who was appointed king of Ujir, used the Dutch prisoners as personal servants who carried his betel box, state *kris*, and *payung* (parasol), thus symbolically turning the old European superiority in status on its head — a drastic arrangement that was probably not lost on the Arunese.⁵³

The Dutch authorities, however, did not give up in spite of repeated humiliations. The allies of Nuku were considered dangerous enough for a new and stronger expedition being dispatched in 1789. The settlement on Ujir was attacked but the bitter resistance forced the Dutch troops to embark and leave Aru in haste. It was however a Pyrrhic victory for the rebels and King Jou Mangofa was critically wounded. The manpower of the Muslim villages was no more than 380 able-bodied men at the outbreak of the rebellions, and the drawn-out conflict took its toll. The so-called Alfurs, meaning the populations of the

49 VOC 8034 (1787), report, 30 July 1787, f. 115, Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

50 VOC 3817 (1789), witness account by Peter Pauhuta, 25 June 1788, Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

51 VOC 3864 (1788–89), proclamation, 6 Dec. 1788, Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

52 VOC 8034 (1787), witness account by Nicolaas Harmansz and his kin, n.d., Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

53 VOC 3817 (1789), witness account by Coenraad Abraham Schipio, 14 May 1788, Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

interior and east, were shortly after ‘bought according to the way of their land, and swore loyalty’, namely to the VOC. The Batuley people in particular swarmed around Ujir and tried to catch anyone daring to leave the small island — recently their brothers-in-arms.⁵⁴

When a new VOC expedition approached Ujir in 1790 the Ujirese resources to stop it were therefore limited. Still the Dutch operation was severely mismanaged, and the population had time to flee in their boats. The expedition built a fort (improperly at the site of a mosque) and placed a strong garrison there. The site was ill chosen, however, and there was little that the fever-ridden troop could do. It was necessary to equip a fourth expedition in 1791 to put things in order. Jou Mangofa had been killed by this time, and the Ujirese saw no prospects of continuing the rebellion, especially since the movement of Nuku had reached a low ebb in other parts of Maluku.⁵⁵ A peace agreement was signed and things technically returned to the old state of things.⁵⁶ The garrison was moved to its original site on Wokam.

Batuley confronts the Company

However, dissatisfaction soon flared up again, this time in the Backshore rather than among the subdued Muslims. The reasons for this are not very clear, but apparently have to do with a new spate of Dutch activity, once their position on Aru had been secured again, and possibly with personal issues. There were grave problems with some of the officers who served on Aru. The commander C.A. van Eyk was known for his recalcitrant and even punishable conduct and for mistreating some Ujirese, while another commander called N.E. Constants was deemed irresponsible and caused unrest among the garrison.⁵⁷ Such shortcomings would have been damaging to Dutch–Arunese relations. A key figure in the following events was Sergeant Heymen Scheerder. He held the function of *posthouder* (post-keeper) or commander in the fort on Wokam, was entrusted with missions to other parts of Aru, and was therefore a person whom many villagers would have met. An early report spoke rather highly about him: upon arriving in Aru in 1793 he put the property of the Company in good order. It is also mentioned that the peace articles of 1791 were reconfirmed and added to, so that the native chiefs supposedly bonded with the Company on their own free will. However, Scheerder received the probably delicate task of modifying Dutch interference in the *tripang* trade, a major source of wealth for the Backshore villages. His predecessor as commander, F. Salgary, had issued a decree against the boiling of white *tripang*, which had caused resentment among the Banda burghers and impeded their commerce.⁵⁸

It was also obvious that the expeditions of 1790–91 had not managed to intimidate the traders from South Sulawesi and Gorom off East Ceram. In a report from April 1794 Heymen Scheerder stated that he had completed the yearly trip round

54 VOC 3864 (1789), report, 22 Sept. 1789, Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

55 Widjojo, *The rebellion of Prince Nuku*, p. 69; E. Katoppo, *Nuku: Perjuangan kemerdekaan di Maluku Utara* (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1984), p. 84.

56 VOC 3943 (1791), ff. 94–7, Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

57 Comité Oost-Indische Handel en Bezittingen, 82, 1793, 2.01.27.01, Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

58 Comité Oost-Indische Handel en Bezittingen, 82, 1793, §253, 2.01.27.01, Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

the Aru Islands and found that conditions were peaceful at the moment, but added that four large Makassarese *paduakangs* had been seen at the pearling island of Barakai. With a mere 30 Company soldiers at hand Scheerder did not dare try to expel the strong and determined Makassarese. But this was not all. No less than 40 Goromese trading junks swarmed at the Backshore, to the great detriment of the Company traders. Scheerder tried to order the settlements at the Backshore not to deal with them in any way. Adding to these problems, the star of Nuku of Tidore was on the rise again in other parts of Maluku, and Aru had recently been a main hiding place for his adherents. Secret commercial intercourse with the Nuku faction in fact continued as ammunition, gunpowder and other goods were received in exchange for local products. The Banda authorities were well aware of the simmering problems but ordered Scheerder to interfere in internal disputes and problems as little as possible.⁵⁹ In the fall of 1794 an incident nevertheless occurred, which was as shocking as unpleasant for the Dutch, namely:

[T]hat Posthouder Heymen Scheerder departed for the hinterland on 9 November [1794] with an *oremby* [smaller sailing craft] in the company of one European and two sepoy soldiers; and on 11 [November] he was wiped out and murdered by the people of the *negeri* Koemol [Kumul] together with one sepoy called Cheg Aboe, while another sepoy called Nandja was badly wounded and not without mortal danger.

That, out of several soldiers who were dispatched by the aforementioned Posthouder Scheerder to carry out their commerce at the *negeris* Warkay [Barakai], Koemol, Kerey [Krai] and Koba, five people, namely two Europeans and three sepoys, were absent with ten shotguns, nine cartridge boxes and nine cutlasses ...⁶⁰

The loyal chief of Wokam took it upon himself to track the missing soldiers. This he seems to have done successfully since no more murders of VOC staff were reported. However, the situation was bad as it was. The Banda post had few resources to spare and decided to send a commission rather than a costly military expedition,

mainly to calm down the fermenting temper of the natives and prevent these events, the reasons for which one could better assume and determine, from ushering into open defection and hostility, since the Arunese are way too much urged by the Goromese and other sea migrants, as seen a few years ago, and where the frequent Goromese shipping on Aru inspires quite some fear.⁶¹

From the rather brief reports of the incident it appears that the VOC authorities did not have a clear idea why the killings took place, although it is hinted that they might

59 Comité Oost-Indische Handel en Bezittingen, 83, 1794, ff. 26–7, 251, 2.01.27.01, Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

60 Comité Oost-Indische Handel en Bezittingen, 42, 1795, §308, 2.01.27.01, Nationaal Archief, The Hague. Pieter Bleeker, who had access to now unavailable sources, says that Scheerder's aim with the expedition was to monitor the monopoly trade, make new contacts with the so-called Alfurs, and check the extent of 'smuggling' (non-VOC trade) and what measures could be taken against it (Bleeker, 'De Aroe-eilanden', p. 273).

61 Comité Oost-Indische Handel en Bezittingen, 84, 1795, §309, 2.01.27.01, Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

have something to do with the presence of non-VOC traders with a decidedly anti-Dutch agenda. The Governor of Banda also wrote with disdain about ‘the arbitrary way of acting on Aru, from which most of the troubles have risen’, implying that Scheerder himself may not have been altogether without responsibility for his fate.⁶² Another report retrospectively wrote about the incident and gives a similar idea:

The calamities which have been related here, one after another, cannot just be attributed to the cruel nature of the Arunese. Justice commands us to tell here, that because of the limited choice of available officials at that time, persons were often appointed *posthouders* who neither had the apparent suitability nor the desirable good conduct. As a consequence of this they often acted faultily. The population, which knew the safety of their hiding places, did not regard this favourably, and from this the calamities did not seldom come forth.⁶³

The disgraced former commander Van Eyk, severely castigated by previous reports, was now hastily ordered to join the commission due to his long and intimate intercourse with the Arunese. Together with a Lieutenant Pieter Pols he was dispatched with a set of instructions. Upon arriving in Aru they were to oversee the installation of the new *posthouder* and investigate if anyone in the garrison had contributed to the Kumul incident through their own misconduct. As for the murderers from Kumul, the commission were to act cautiously and try to apprehend the perpetrators by ‘soft’ means rather than aggressive action, which could easily make the tense situation even worse for the weak outpost and for the Company. All means were to be used to restore peaceful relations with the natives and make them swear to hold on to the previously stipulated agreement.⁶⁴

This was easier said than done. The Orangkaya of Wokam reported in 1795 that:

he had disputes with the Batuleyese since the murder of *Posthouder* Scheerder in November last year, that the Ceramese and Goromesese had committed much evil, and also that on the 4th of this month [May], the Batuleyese and the Koproorese together with the [illegible], ravaged the *negeri* Maikor, burned some houses, murdered three people and brought two others with them.⁶⁵

The results of the commission appear to have been meagre; it was not possible to apprehend the culprits with the resources at hand, and it was debatable if it was worth the effort keeping the Aru post at all.⁶⁶ Moreover, a report from November 1795 speaks of continuing unrest. The report reveals that the new commander Anthony Boode had passed away in May of that year, but ‘the warfare among the natives and the continuing robberies on Wokam by the Batuleyese, supported by the Koproorese’ made it too dangerous to dispatch a vessel to Banda to bring news

62 Comité Oost-Indische Handel en Bezittingen, 84, 1795, §312, 2.01.27.01, Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

63 Bleeker, ‘De Aroe-eilanden’, p. 273.

64 Comité Oost-Indische Handel en Bezittingen, 84, Instructions, 3 Dec. 1794, 2.01.27.01, Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

65 Comité Oost-Indische Handel en Bezittingen, 84, 1795, f. 507-8, 2.01.27.01, Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

66 Pieter Bleeker, ‘De Aroe-eilanden’, p. 274.

about the situation.⁶⁷ Thus there was no communication between Banda and the Wokam fort for half a year, undoubtedly lending some strength to the commission's pessimistic conclusions!

The next *posthouder*, Johannes Loonhard, nervously took over the defence of the fort and constantly held the cannons and muskets ready in case of a sudden assault. He assisted the Orangkaya of Wokam with ammunition in order to withstand the Batuleyese. The Batuleyese attacked Wokam with some success, but failed when they tried to approach the Muslims of Ujir, their former allies. As the report has it, their mischief was paid in full when 21 of their men were captured. The Ujirese had probably not forgotten how the Batuleyese attacked them in 1789. Two captives were killed and one was presented to the Dutch on Wokam. Most of the *negeris* on Aru preferred to stay on good terms with the VOC in practice.⁶⁸

The actual end of the resistance of Batuley is obscure. At the time when Scheerder was killed, French revolutionary troops already stood on the soil of the distant Netherlands, and the Batavian Republic was proclaimed in January 1795.⁶⁹ As a result the Dutch automatically became the enemies of Britain. The news about these alterations reached Southeast Asia several months later, and quickly proved disastrous for the waning VOC. Ambon and Banda were occupied by British squadrons in early 1796. Allying with Nuku, they assisted the latter in taking the throne of Tidore one year later, although the Dutch held out on Ternate for some time.⁷⁰ Not much information about the islands under Banda's jurisdiction reached the Dutch authorities in Batavia, and the VOC itself was finally dissolved in 1799/1800. From what little is known, the fort on Wokam was abandoned after the British takeover, in March 1797.⁷¹ A letter from four Arunese *orangkayas* to Batavia relates that a Mr Steenbergen arrived in Tanah Aru as a Dutch agent in April 1799 and 'checked the government of our land from one end to the other, and all was good'. The *orangkayas* expressed their content with the clandestine Dutch visit and assured them that they had not really served the English.⁷² The letter may imply that the commotion on the Backshore had ceased by this time. Although it was briefly occupied again after 1803, Aru mostly managed its own affairs during the following decades.⁷³ In a way, therefore, Batuley's resistance paid off: the Europeans disappeared from the islands, and trade resumed its natural course without any real interference.

Conclusion

A comparison between the oral stories preserved in Batuley and the archival sources shows some striking similarities. The name and terminal fate of Scheerder-Eskelder has been remembered in a clearly recognisable way over eight generations,

67 Comité Oost-Indische Handel en Bezittingen, 85, 1795, f. 100, 2.01.27.01, Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

68 Comité Oost-Indische Handel en Bezittingen, 85, 1795, f. 101, 2.01.27.01, Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

69 E.S. de Klerck, *History of the Netherlands East Indies*, vol. I (of II) (Amsterdam: B.M. Israël NV, 1975), p. 60.

70 Widjojo, *The revolt of Prince Nuku*, pp. 76–7, 180.

71 C.A. Scheebert, relation, 1799, Coll. Nederburgh No. 413, Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

72 A. Meursinge, *Maleisch leesboek*, vol. 2. (Leyden: Luchtmans, 1845), p. xxv.

73 Bleeker, 'De Aroe-eilanden', pp. 274–5.

apparently without any support from written records. Scheerder's debauchery is not directly confirmed by the VOC records, which nevertheless hint at personal shortcomings of the Dutch *posthouders* as one reason for the resistance. In both the oral and archival versions, the Company or its allies subsequently exact revenge on the Batuley people, although the circumstances are rather different.⁷⁴ This again brings us to Vansina's conclusions, that the information contained in oral tradition must be evaluated against the context of performance and performer. In spite of colonial and postcolonial alterations, Batuley society has preserved a sense of continuity where songs (*saab*) and accompanying traditions are reiterated by means of collective events (*tambaroro*).

It is, however, just as important to note the differences between the two categories of sources. The Batuley stories are intensively personal: the entire conflict is reduced to a set of human relations which are described in detail, dealing with aspects of fear and respect. In that respect they strongly contrast with the business-like VOC reports, which provide little detail about personal interactions.

All this begs the question of whether the Batuley version of history can elucidate the circumstances of the 1790s resistance — the second part of our research question. Several aspects indicated by the VOC reports are entirely missing. The reports suggest that the Batuley resistance was tied to a complicated set of grievances and conflicts that afflicted Maluku in the VOC's waning days. Dutch ambitions to regulate trade and prices caused resentment in Aru and this was combined with personal grievances by the Muslim Ujirese. Ujir and other parts of Aru, including Batuley, allied with the Nuku movement although non-Muslim Batuley soon broke with the rebels. Meanwhile, foreign traders without VOC passes, in particular the Bugis–Makassar seafarers, offered economic advantages over the Dutch monopoly, and gained influence in the Backshore. Finally, ill-fated Dutch attempts to interfere in the handling of the economically vital *tripang* trade, combined with grave personal misconduct on the part of the Dutch representatives, prepared the ground for the Scheerder incident. In view of all this the Batuley version may seem myopic; however, this is how oral tradition works. Complicated sequences of events are distilled into a single, strongly personalised event. The value of the story may lie in the irreverent portrayal of the Dutch in collective memory, as violence-prone and breakers of normal codes of decency. From that point of view the account turns De Klerk's accusation of Arunese barbarism, quoted earlier in this article, on its head.

74 Batuley once again rose against the colonial order in 1859, and a number of anti-colonial revolts took place on the Backshore between 1880 and 1915, which may conceivably have influenced the collective memory of the Scheerder incident. H.C. van Eijbergen, 'Verslag eener reis naar de Aroe- en Key-eilanden in de maand Junij 1862', *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 15 (1866): 310; Spyer, *The memory of trade*, pp. 12–13.