

From trading post to town: some notes on the history of urbanisation in Far Eastern Indonesia c. 1800-1940

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Introduction

Since the 1960s, many studies have been carried out on urbanisation and its diverse phenomena with sociological, ethnological and historical approaches. For a long time, a contrast between the development of cities and megacities in Southeast Asia with villages and other rural settlements has been proposed, with the former being a visual sign of the success of modernity, while the latter shows the backwardness of peasant societies and rural regions (Korff, 1999: 140). Southeast Asian cities were interpreted as places of institutions and people deemed necessary for any modernisation process, of essential infrastructure such as ports, harbours, airports, railways or roads and of the concentration for required capital, in colonial Indonesia that was mainly in Dutch, Chinese and Arab hands. Furthermore, Southeast Asian megacities also provided the framework for new nationalist elites after independence where the territorial control of the new states was, more or less successfully secured, institutions of the new national administration were established, and symbols of national unity and pride such as national museums or independence memorials were erected (Anderson, 1988: 18; Kurfürst, 2018: 166-7).

Modern urbanisation processes and its results were often viewed by social scientists and others with a certain ambivalence. Immediately after decolonisation, cities of the new developing nation states of Asia and Africa were interpreted as a path to modernisation and a bright future. However, just a generation later, a number of negative aspects could not be overlooked. Slums, high crime rates and an extremely high social polarisation caused cities to be viewed as parasites. This perception rather hampered the economic and social development of the former colonies. Large portions of inhabitants of colonial and postcolonial Southeast Asian cities were not integrated in their modern economies, nor could they participate in the new ways of communication (newspapers, radio, television etc.) available in urban areas (Korff, 1999: 141).

Since the Second World War, Southeast Asian megacities became a focus in sociological or geographical studies. In addition, villages and rural development have also

been quite well researched. However, small and middle-sized towns have, so far, been relatively understudied, in particular by historians.¹ This humble essay in honour of Rüdiger Korff tries to show how the first small towns in Far Eastern Indonesia developed out of trading places, missionary stations and administrative posts in the Moluccas and West New Guinea. While indigenous states have been connected with the development and growth of cities and towns in Southeast Asia (Evers and Korff, 2000: 29), the historical situation in the Indonesian Far East differs somewhat from the rest of Indonesia and other parts of Southeast Asia as indigenous states did not develop except for a few areas of this region.

Examples of town development in Eastern Indonesia: Larantuka (East Flores) and Dobo (Aru)

As highlighted by, among others, Evers and Korff (2000: 29ff), urbanisation is not a foreign element to Southeast Asia and was crucial factor in the formation of pre-colonial states in the region. However, although connected through trade relations for centuries, or perhaps even millennia, with western Indonesia, the Philippines or China, indigenous states in Far Eastern Indonesia are rather the exception than the rule. Sultanates in eastern Indonesia were strongly dependent on maritime trade relations with the outside world. Spices such as nutmeg, mace and cloves from the northern and central Moluccas were only the most valuable items circulating inside the various Southeast Asian trade networks and beyond to the West (India, Arabia, Europe) or the North (China, Korea, Japan). Other products on offer included: sandalwood, massey bark, sea cucumbers (trepang), wild nutmeg, plumes and feathers of birds of paradise, crowned pigeons and parrots, living cassowaries, sago, tortoise shells, wax, camphor, dammar and other resins, mother-of-pearl, and last but not least, slaves.² In return, Papuan and eastern Moluccan societies received rice, salt, betel, tobacco, silk textiles, Chinese and Vietnamese trade porcelain, earthenware, Chinese copper and silver coins, Indian cloth, glass and other pearls, metal tools and weapons such as axes, knives and machetes, and since the mid-19th century, more and more fire arms and gunpowder. Rifles and old muzzle loaders, often locally named in Indonesia as *donderbus* ('Blunderbuss'), were not so much in demand for warfare or slave raids, but rather for hunting birds of paradise and other beautifully coloured rainforest birds. These birds were in demand as their plumes and feathers were used as female accessories for hats and other clothes in 19th century Europe and America. Following World War I, female fashion completely changed, thus destroying the market for bird plumes and feathers in New Guinea and the Aru Islands, but saving the birds from complete extinction (Swadling, 1996). Although little is known about this period in terms of trading relations, its century-long

1 A notable exception is "In Search of Middle Indonesia" edited by van Klinken and Berenschot (2014).

2 Although slavery was officially forbidden in Indonesia since the 1860s, slave raids in coastal New Guinea stopped only at the end of the 19th century, while the trade in slaves was locally carried out until well into the first decades of the 20th century.

existence is proved by at least three large bronze drums in the Bird's Head Peninsula of the Vietnamese Dong Son Culture (5th century BC) as well as the excavations of several Dong Son bronze axes as far east as the vicinities of present day Jayapura and beyond (Moore, 2003: 48). This is a good example that the term 'isolation' should be used with care and in a rather relative way.

States based on societies that spoke Papuan languages such as Ternate, Tidore or Jailolo in the northern Moluccas are rather untypical for Indonesia. Contact with the wider world since the *age of commerce* from the 15th century onwards (Reid, 1988) introduced Islam and Christianity into Indonesia's Far East, as well as new concepts of political organisation. Eastern Indonesian sultanates such as Buton in Southeast Sulawesi, Ternate, Tidore, Jailolo or Bacan in the Northern Moluccas, or the Portuguese-influenced state Larantuka in Eastern Flores, or the several *domains* and *petty states* on the islands of Roti, Sumba or Timor (Fox, 1977) had developed small towns as residences of their rulers. Besides these sultanates and the spice trading ports of Ambon and Banda, no pre-colonial cities or towns seemed to have existed in the Far East of Indonesia.³

Trade networks in the eastern Moluccas and New Guinea functioned rather differently from those in western Indonesia or Southeast Asia. First, different trade languages had been locally in use, which reached a considerable scale of geographical extension. Languages such as Biak were spoken until the early 20th century throughout Cenderawasih Bay, the coasts of the Birds' Head Peninsula, the Raja Ampat Islands and south to the Onin Peninsula. Malay as a lingua franca in coastal New Guinea was comparatively a latecomer, perhaps a side effect of the expansion of economic activities of Chinese traders into Cenderawasih Bay in the 18th century.⁴ However, due to the impact of often Ambonese mission school teachers, and the spread of Dutch colonial control in New Guinea, Biak was completely replaced as a lingua franca throughout the coastal New Guinea region after World War I (Warnk, 2010: 117-8).⁵ Besides dialects such as Ambonese Malay, Larantuka Malay or Northern Moluccan Malay, other, smaller trade languages such as Wolio (Butonese) or the Tukang Besi language, were in use locally in eastern Indonesia.

The absence of monetary trade in the eastern Moluccas and coastal New Guinea led historians and social anthropologists to look for different models of economic transactions. Although integrated in the world system in Wallerstein's sense, the region's economy is better understood if trade procedures are analysed with models presented in classical anthropological studies of Melanesia by Bronislaw Malinowski, or Thomas Harding among others, and general surveys such as Marshall Sahlins well-known Stone Age Economics (1972). Using these models, Roy Ellen has delivered an excellent study on the dynamics of a Moluccan trading network that extended well into coastal New

3 To be fair, this assumption might also result from the lack of archaeological research in the region so far.

4 When the English country trader Thomas Forrest visited Dore in January 1775 he met several Chinese traders with Dutch passports issued in Tidore (Forrest, 1780: 106) and a local Biak-Malay translator (Forrest, 1780: 100).

5 Biak now has the status of an endangered language with c. 20,000 mother tongue speakers only (van den Heuvel, 2006).

Guinea, but was also connected to European, Indian and East Asian markets (Ellen, 2003).

The introduction of the new religions Islam and Christianity resulted in the development of sultanates in the Northern Moluccas. These sultanates were rather limited in their range of power before their contacts with Portuguese, Spanish, English and particularly Dutch colonial traders and administrators, and of small states in the wider Timor region, which were heavily influenced by Portuguese Catholicism and Dutch Calvinist colonial symbolism. When the Norwegian traveller Johan Adrian Jacobsen visited Larantuka in Eastern Flores in January 1888, he witnessed the appointment of the new raja, Don Lorenzo, by the "Governor of Timor". This account seems to be an error by Jacobsen, as there never was a Dutch governor of Timor, perhaps the Resident of Kupang in West Timor is what was meant here. Raja Don Lorenzo had to swear an oath of loyalty on a Dutch charter of appointment, a bar with a golden knob and a Royal Dutch emblem (Jacobsen, 1896: 72). Jacobsen described Larantuka as a "village" with a Jesuit mission station (established by the Portuguese in the 17th century), with a "greater church than in Maumeri" (a town on Flores, about 100 km west of Larantuka), a convent with a school for 160 girls, a safe port where he met a Chinese sailing ship from Singapore, a considerable market place and a Dutch administrative station (Jacobsen, 1896: 72-74; Beccari, 1924: 28). As a consequence, Larantuka could already be called a small town in comparison to the other settlements in Eastern Flores, Adonara, Solor, or Lembata, and in contrast to Jacobsen's statement, Larantuka was the most important urban space in that region. However, the town developed around the Portuguese (colonial) presence in the eastern Lesser Sunda Islands even though the Larantuka raja could develop a considerable grade of independence as, before 1900, direct Dutch control in the region was somewhat weak.⁶ In the eyes of the colonial administration, Don Lorenzo became too arbitrary in his leadership, disobedient towards Dutch rule and misused his autonomous power in local petty wars. Finally, in 1904 he was discharged and exiled and Larantuka became the town with the largest Dutch garrison in Eastern Flores. Don Lorenzo's activities very much reflect a pattern of political behaviour analysed by social anthropologist James C. Scott as the "art of not being governed" (Scott, 2009). Scott described the manoeuvring of mountainous ethnic groups on the fringes of the spheres of power of mainland Southeast Asia as strategies of avoiding direct political control from powerful states based on wet rice cultivation. The principalities and domains of eastern Indonesia acted similarly to avoid direct interference from the Dutch colonial state and after independence from the Indonesian central administration, as was shown by Kohl in his description of traditional rituals and soccer games in the East Flores Regency on occasion of the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of Indonesian independence (Kohl, 2000: 105-9).

The opening of Macassar in 1847 and Ambon in 1854 as free ports secured continuing economic development in Eastern Indonesia, which led finally to the development of the first small towns in the eastern Moluccas and coastal New Guinea. Perhaps most numerous documents and sources we have on the Aru Archipelago in the south eastern Moluccas are where Dobo seems to have been a small entrepôt for centuries before

6 For a description of the political structure in the Larantuka principality see Dietrich (1989: 34-36).

the first Europeans set foot on these islands (O'Connor et al., 2005: 308). According to accounts by European naturalists and travellers, such as Alfred Russell Wallace and Hermann von Rosenberg, Dobo was populated quite densely during the trading season from January to June, depending on the monsoon winds. Before the 16th century, commercial items from Aru seemed to have been forest products such as resins or massoy bark⁷, but most important had been the trade in precious live birds and their plumes and feathers. The markets for the birds were the Middle East, India and, in particular, China. Birds of paradise, parrots, cockatoos or crowned pigeons had been mentioned in Chinese texts quite often, although the different species are difficult to identify. However, all of the species that can be determined, are species from eastern Indonesia, with habitats east of the biological Wallace Line (Ptak, 2006: 21). In fact, when the first plumes of birds of paradise reached Europe in the 16th century, their origin was assumed to be the Aru Islands, e.g., by the famous Dutch botanist Charles de l'Écluse (i.e., Carolus Clusius) (Clusius, 1605: Book 1, 360). Johann Otto Hellwig, a German pharmacist and alchemist in service of the Dutch East India Company after 1676, delivered in his observations on the natural history on "several Indian things" (*De rebus variis Indicis*) a short essay on birds of paradise, which according to his account, he received himself from Aru. He also mentioned a Malay nomenclature *Burung Aru* ("Birds from Aru"), which clearly shows the importance the Aru bird trade already had for a long period (Helbigii, 1680: 458).⁸

The development of Dobo from a rather temporary trading post to a permanent village and then to a small town started in the second half of the 19th century. The Dutch scientific draughtsman Adrianus Johannes Bik, who visited the Aru Islands in April 1824, referred to an active trade in sea cucumbers and pearl fishery. However, he did not make any mention of any greater settlement with more than 1,000 inhabitants on the islands (Bik, 1928). About three decades later, the British naturalist Alfred Russell Wallace stayed in Dobo for two months to collect all kinds of specimens, and delivered the first more detailed description of the place. When Wallace visited Aru in 1857, he found there a living maritime trade: Dobo was not only frequented yearly by ten to twelve big sailing boats (*perahu*) owned by Macassar or Bugis traders, but also by hundreds of smaller boats from Goram, Eastern Ceram, Banda, Ambon, Kei, Tanimbar and Babar. This showed a vivid local trade in the Eastern Moluccan region including the coasts of New Guinea with products intended for an overseas market.⁹ He also mentioned the first shops being established by Chinese from Macassar (Wallace, 1862a: 131).

Indeed, the presence of traders and merchants from South Sulawesi was so considerable, it led Wallace to call Dobo a "Bugis trading settlement" (Wallace, 1862b: 154). As the centre of trade of the Aru Archipelago, Wallace estimated that Dobo, at the height of the trading season, had about 1,000 residents. Besides staple food, metal wares of all kind, and other trade items already mentioned above, Dobo was already a place for

7 On the economic importance of massoy bark in the Moluccas and New Guinea see Zieck (1973).

8 Clusius, although never been to Indonesia, also knew a Malay term for the birds of paradise: *Manucodiata*, derived from Malay *Manuk Dewata* ("Birds of the Gods") (Clusius, 1605: Book 1, 360).

9 On the various boat types used for long distance trade in Eastern Indonesia see Horridge (1978).

Figure 1: Dobbo in the Trading Season



Source: Wallace 1869

“European luxuries” such as sugar, biscuits, preserved fruits or wine¹⁰, which could be obtained in small quantities. Dobo, at the time of his visit, consisted of three crowded streets of “rude thatched houses” (Wallace, 1862a: 131), which had not changed when German naturalist Hermann von Rosenberg was in Dobo in 1865 (von Rosenberg, 1878: 327). As evening entertainment, Wallace witnessed among the Bugis residents of Dobo, plenty of cock-fighting and football-playing in the streets almost every evening.¹¹ A similar account is given by Italian naturalist Odoardo Beccari, who stayed on Aru from February to June 1873: Dobo was a bustling trading port which many people entered during the western monsoon season between January and June (Beccari, 1924: 200). In particular, Beccari mentioned the presence of Muslims from Macassar. Their presence for centuries from the late 17th century and more intensively from the 1850s onwards, lead to the spread of Islam in Dobo and the Aru Islands (Wellfelt and Djonler, 2019: 166).

In 1848, the Dutch government raised the claim on the territory in Eastern Indonesia up to 141° latitude. As a consequence, the spread of Dutch imperialism and colonial administration was also felt in the Eastern Moluccas. In 1882, a Dutch post was established in Aru together with a coal depot at the port, leading to further growth of Dobo. The colonial administrator, Gerrit Wilhelm Wolter Baron van Hoëvell, who visited Dobo

10 About fifty years later Hugo Merton also observed that “plenty of boxes of red wine” were loaded in Macassar with destination Dobo to his great astonishment, as he could not explain why and how so much quantities of alcohol could be consumed on Aru (Merton, 1911: 9).

11 This perhaps refers rather to the traditional game of *sepak takraw* / *sepak raga* rather than to modern soccer.

in March 1888 to investigate the trade of Aru, observed the arrival of steamships that broke the de facto monopoly of Bugis and Macassar traders (van Hoëvell, 1890: 94). More and more Chinese traders were coming to Dobo via Macassar, most being originally from Singapore (van Hoëvell, 1890: 100). After Dobo was reduced to ashes by a great fire on 1 June 1887, it was completely rebuilt by van Hoëvell's arrival the following year. The Chinese then inhabited a separate quarter, which started directly in front of the Dutch administrator's building. The Bugis quarter was located to the south of the Chinese houses. Both neighbourhoods had their own administration by a Dutch appointed official (Kapitan China / Kapitan Bugis). Dobo at that time already consisted of two parallel streets with more than 60 wooden houses, mostly inhabited by Chinese, Bugis and Macassar people (van Hoëvell, 1890: 63). Van Hoëvell estimated more than 80 Chinese and 360 Bugis and Macassar permanent residents were present in Dobo in addition to the local population (van Hoëvell, 1890: 72).

The development of Dobo into a small town was already completed when German zoologist Hugo Merton stayed at Aru from January to May 1908. Steamships then were a regular sight. Besides other steamships, the Royal Dutch company Koninklijke Paketvaart-Maatschappij ran a regular service every four weeks at the harbour of Dobo and had an agent in the town since 1906. In the harbour, Merton noticed several custom sheds where mostly Chinese people were active in selling their products (Merton, 1911: 16). The town progressed further: the Dutch colonial controlleur lived in a lovely house with a veranda and the town already had a small hospital with an able Japanese doctor (Merton, 1911: 17). Australian pearl fishers kept the only two-storied houses close to the port, while behind these, the quarters of the Chinese, Arabs, Bugis, and other residents and traders were located. In the Bugis quarter, there was now a small mosque and even barracks had been erected for a small band of the Dutch colonial army consisting of one European sergeant, two corporals and 20 Javanese and Ambonese soldiers. Furthermore, two Ambonese policemen and an Ambonese post office clerk were stationed in Dobo (Merton, 1911: 19). Merton also mentioned the only building in Dobo built with brick walls: the jailhouse (Merton, 1911: 20). The population became even more multi-ethnic than already was the case in the 19th century. Merton observed that besides the tiny European group, the town was populated not only by plenty of Chinese, Bugis and Macassarese, but also by Bandanese, Timorese, Arabs, Ambonese Protestant missionary teachers and Japanese women, who were most likely pearl divers (Merton, 1911: 14).¹² The evening entertainment also changed considerably since Wallace's time: the noise of an out-of-tune gramophone robbed Merton of sleep more than once (Merton, 1911: 15).

The decline of trade in bird-of-paradise plumes after World War I was compensated, as already observed by Merton, by pearl diving. The most profitable of the pearl diving companies was the Australian-run, but Macassar-based, Celebes Trading Company, which was joined by the Bandanese Arab Syekh Said Baadilla, who subsequently became the most successful pearl trader of Eastern Indonesia and nicknamed the pearl king (*raja mutiara*) of the Moluccas (Martinez and Vickers, 2015: 59). In 1908, when Hugo Merton was in Aru, his company ran a fleet of more than 150 pearl fishing boats that

12 The Arab Syekh Said Baadilla established a pearl diving station in Dobo in 1897 (Broersma, 1934: 325).

also transported Merton during some of his several expeditions starting out from Dobo (Merton 1911: 168). The population became even more cosmopolitan: besides Chinese, Arabs, Bugis, Europeans and local Arunese, now also dozens of Japanese and Filipinos (“Manilamen”) dwelt at Dobo (v.S., 1916: 299–300).¹³ The pearl business blossomed until the late 1920s, when, during the Great Depression, the global pearl trade collapsed. Finally, in 1933 Baadilla had to declare bankruptcy, and sold most of his pearling fleet to a certain Chiu, a Chinese wharf master from Dobo (Alwi, 2008: 18). The pearl industry in Aru saw a short recovery before World War II, which led to a further growth of Dobo. However, as in other parts of Indonesia, the Pacific War interrupted development. Dobo was bombed during World War II where the Japanese maintained a seaplane base. Following the Indonesian revolution and independence, Dobo remained a small town in Eastern Indonesia, never regaining its former status as a centre for trade with Moluccan and New Guinean trade products. In the early 1990s, Dobo had about 3,500 mostly non-Papuan inhabitants: Chinese, Bugis and Macassarese, with a few Arab merchants and Javanese civil servants (Muller, 1993: 163). Dobo is now the capital of the Aru Islands district (Pulau-Pulau Aru) comprising perhaps far more than 10,000 residents.

The first towns in Dutch New Guinea 1900–1941

The first small towns on the coast of Western New Guinea show parallel developments to those in the Aru Archipelago. Indigenous acephalous societies based on big-men, and not on hierarchical state structures, did not lead to the creation of local cities or towns.¹⁴ Although Fakfak, Sorong and Manokwari-Dore were small entrepôts for the trade in birds of paradise for centuries (Warnk, 2010), it was only at the beginning of the 20th century that greater settlements grew out of villages inhabited by Chinese, Bugis and Arab traders – quite similar to Dobo on Aru. In addition to growing colonial control, Fak-Fak and Dore were also stations for Christian missions. In Dore, the Berlin-based Gossener Mission had already established a mission post in 1855, which was continued by the Utrechtsche Zendingsvereeninging in 1863 (van Hasselt, 1888). In Fakfak, a Catholic mission station was opened in 1894. In 1898, Dutch officials were stationed in Fakfak and Dore, with Merauke in South New Guinea following in 1902 and finally Hollandia (present-day Jayapura) in 1910.¹⁵ Dutch control before World War II, however, remained weak: in 1937 still only 15 Dutch administrators and 50 native clerks were based in New Guinea, all of them on posts close to the coast (Hastings, 1984: 131).

Alfred Russel Wallace and Hermann von Rosenberg visited Dore in 1857 shortly after the foundation of the mission there. Dore was a village where the houses were standing completely on poles in the water (Wallace, 1869: 378; de Bruijn Kops, 1850: 174),

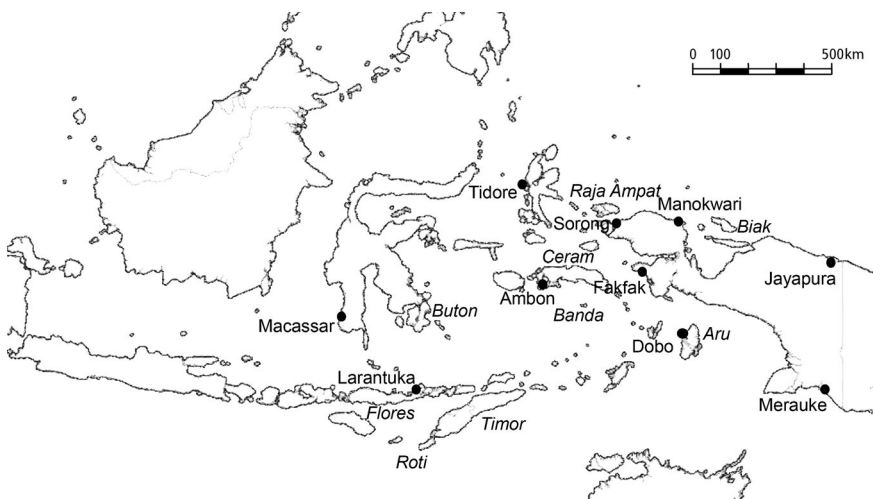
13 One cannot but wonder how the communication in Aru functioned at that time as an anonymous observer stated that Japanese pearl divers and prostitutes in Dobo were neither able to speak or to understand Pidgin Malay nor Pidgin English (v.S., 1916: 311).

14 For a description of societies based on big men see Godelier (1987).

15 A good overview on the Dutch administration in New Guinea is given in Drooglever (2009: 12–34), for a detailed study see Sinaga (2013).

similar to Sorong (Beccari, 1874: 653) and Fakfak (Beccari, 1924: 72). All three places nevertheless were vivid trade ports where Bugis, Arab and Chinese traders were present and bought live birds and plumes, massoy bark, pearls, sea cucumbers, sago or wild nutmeg (Wallace, 1862a). Besides trade goods such as glass pearls, rice, knives and axes, Bugis sarongs and Indian cotton ware, Chinese porcelain and ceramics, silver dollars and tobacco, these traders also brought a new language (Malay), and a new religion (Islam) to coastal New Guinea (Warnk, 2010). However, modern buildings and fixed streets only appeared in the aftermath of the mission station in Dore and governmental posts after 1900. Visitors to Fakfak in the first decade of the 20th century were surprised about the hustle and bustle less than 10 years after its foundation: at the roadstead was a street with several Chinese and Arab shop houses. Besides this, a garrison of 48 Indonesian soldiers and a Dutch sergeant was stationed close-by, a Javanese doctor named Suhirman (Sudirman?) was practicing, and a Dutch assistant resident, a postal clerk and an agent of the Dutch Nieuw-Guinea Handelsmaatschappij were living in Fakfak (van Weede, 1908: 212ff; Haga, 1911). When Swedish zoologist Sten Bergman visited Fakfak in 1948, he noticed the presence of Papuas, “Malays” (Indonesians, perhaps mostly Ambonese) and hundreds of Chinese (Bergman, 1950: 81).

Figure 2: Eastern Indonesia: colonial towns.



Source: Author's own draft

Manokwari-Dore, in the eastern Bird's Head Peninsula, became the District of New Guinea's administration centre in 1898, which included the northern Bird's Head and northern New Guinea up to Hollandia (Jayapura) in the remote east. Parallel developments to Fakfak and Dobo do appear: a former small entrepôt surrounded by acephalous Papuan societies was included into a greater economic world. Former local traders became largely replaced by outsiders such as Chinese and Arab merchants. This was partly due to a change in trade items. The formerly dominant trade in bird-of-paradise plumes became obsolete after World War I due to the global change in female fashion. In addition, there was strong competition and a lack of direct access to the world's markets

(e.g. the marketing of oyster pearls). Less than 20 years after the arrival of the Dutch, the then well-known journalist Alma Karlin visited Manokwari in 1926. She described it as a small town with nice streets, a fish market, quite a number of Chinese shops and a hospital (Karlin, 1930: 193; Anonymous, 28 May 1926). Already two years earlier, an anonymous observer witnessed the first plantations around Manokwari, run by a Japanese together with a son of Dutch missionary (Anonymous, 21 February 1924). Unfortunately, this observer did not mention the workforce for these plantations, which perhaps were either Chinese or Javanese, and must have arrived via the port of Manokwari, thus creating economic possibilities for Chinese and Arab traders in the town. Manokwari had progressed further when American ornithologist Dillon Ripley reached New Guinea in 1938. At that time, in the town, plenty of Chinese shop houses existed on the main street, followed by several smaller houses for Indonesian native colonial clerks. Furthermore, army barracks, a jail, a radio station and a small generator existed, but Ripley explicitly mentioned the absence of any cars in Manokwari (Ripley, 1942: 80). Further down on a hill, were a number of comfortable bungalows for the Dutch officials, the largest one reserved for the Assistant Resident.

Even remote Hollandia (Jayapura) developed into a small town after World War I. Alma Karlin saw in 1926 a main street, a second mountainous street as well as two lanes with Chinese shops and “Malay houses” (Karlin, 1930: 173). There was also by now a mosque, barracks for 30–40 colonial soldiers, a post office, an official building for jurisdiction and a private house for the Dutch judge (Karlin, 1930: 173). The local trade in the town was completely in the hands of Chinese and “Ternatese” (Arabs and/or Bugis?) (Anonymous, 21 February 1924). In addition, at the end of World War I, the first Dutch and German planters arrived in Hollandia, accompanied by the plantation workers, although these again are not mentioned in any of the travel accounts and other sources (Haffer, 2008: 63).¹⁶ In 1937 Hollandia had a radio station, a jail for 20–30 inmates, a hospital with 20 beds, a soccer field and a tennis court (Galis and van Doornik, 1960: 14).

Perhaps the most spectacular development in economic and demographic change in Dutch New Guinea before, and directly after World War II, happened in Sorong on the western cape of the Birds’ Head Peninsula. Contacts to the Northern Moluccan sultanates, to Ambon and Ceram had been established at least since the 17th century and brought the spread of Islam to the coastal areas of New Guinea. The Italian naturalist Luigi Maria d’Albertis, who visited Sorong in April 1872, described its 200 inhabitants as “nearly all” (“quasi tutti”) being Muslims (Santini, 1937: 16; d’Albertis, 1874: 312). A colonial post was established in Sorong in 1906 which developed into a city in the late 20th century. Sorong was still a village in 1924, with a few Chinese, Bugis and Arab traders (Anonymous, 21 February 1924), but this changed as soon as oil fields were discovered close-by. The exploitation of the oil fields started in 1935 and brought dramatic changes. Already in 1938, several white bungalows for European expats had been

16 Although the existence of copra and other plantations in New Guinea after 1920 most have involved a considerable workforce, not much is known on plantation workers in Dutch New Guinea and where they came from. An anonymous newspaper article mentioned the lack of workers as the major difficulty for plantations in the Far East (Anonymous, 20 February 1924).

built as well as barracks for 10 policemen (Ripley, 1942: 162). A local Chinese doctor was practicing in town, a Dutch magistrate and the well-known Dutch-Frisian missionary Freerk Kamma were based in Sorong (Ripley, 1924: 84).¹⁷ Many of the servants for the European communities were Malay-speaking Ambonese, while the few shops were in Chinese hands. It is no surprise that Sorong was among the first targets of the Japanese in New Guinea in World War II and was taken in early April 1942. After the return of the Dutch following the war, the *Nederlandsche Nieuw Guinea Petroleum Maatschappij* enlarged the port and built large administrative buildings, impressive residences for the administrators, a large hospital and plenty of new roads (Bergman, 1950: 34-5). In 1948, Sorong already had a population of more than 5,000 people and was crowded with traffic including hundreds of trucks of all kinds, busses, shovel diggers, jeeps and the latest American luxury cars (Bergman, 1950: 35-6). Chinese and native Indonesians lived mostly in a *kampong bahru* ("new quarter"), separated from European-American expats. Besides the already mentioned infrastructure and buildings of Sorong, there was also a telegraph station, a school, a church, an army barrack and a small radio station, which broadcasted music and news from the outside world every evening for the European community (Bergman, 1950). As further evening entertainment, Bergman mentioned the bi-weekly open-air cinema with free entry, depending, of course, on the weather conditions (Bergman, 1950: 36). The economic development was carried on by the Indonesian government after its occupation of West Papua in 1963. Today Sorong is the largest city of the Indonesian province Papua Barat (West Papua) with more than 220,000 residents, while Manokwari as provincial capital (since 2003), with a university, now has about 216,000 inhabitants.

Conclusion

To sum up, comparatively less studies have been carried out on middle sized towns, especially in regions with stateless societies organised in domains or petty states in the eastern Lesser Sunda Islands (Fox, 1977) or even acephalous societies such as New Guinea organised around big men (Godelier, 1987). In the Far East of Indonesia, urbanisation did develop, but only after contact with the outside, in particular with the European world in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Traditional trade patterns were replaced by the colonial monetary economy with the region becoming more dependent on the world economy. A point in case is the trade in precious birds and their plumes: a highly profitable business faced a complete breakdown with the change of female fashion and the prohibition of hunting in the Dutch East Indies and Australian administrated eastern New Guinea after World War I (Ellen, 2003: 136).

The new towns such as Sorong, Dobo, Hollandia or Manokwari were rather Indonesian-cosmopolitan than locally Papuan in character. An anonymous observer even went so far to claim that in 1915 "Dobo actually had no native population at all" (v.S., 1916: 300). The position of Chinese traders and the evident economic presence of a very tiny

17 Ornithologist Ripley to his great surprise first met Magistrate Kern while he was playing soccer outside with some boys (Ripley, 1942: 84).

group of Arab-Hadhrami merchants is particularly striking. Until around 1900, the Arab community was very active in the Moluccas until they faced strong economic rivalry by Chinese businessmen. Following the war, they also faced competition from Japanese companies (Clarence-Smith, 1998: 41). This development is also confirmed by German geologist Johannes Wanner who observed in December 1902 that the local trade in Eastern Ceram and the Geser-Goram islands was nearly completely under the control of Chinese and Arabs who replaced local Moluccan-Papuan as well as Bugis traders (Wanner, 2009: 31; Ellen, 2003: 237). Similar accounts had been already mentioned for Sorong or Dobo. In this respect, the first urban environments in Indonesia's Far East followed a pattern famously considered as *plural societies* by former colonial administrator John S. Furnivall. In Furnivall's opinion, colonialism was the impetus for the development of such plural societies, where different ethnic groups or races only interact for economic reasons at particular places such as markets. They live side by side in the colonial state without mingling and are not able to express one common social will (Furnivall, 1944: 446-7). Yet, although Furnivall was heavily criticised for creating a Southeast Asian homo oeconomicus, his general description fits rather well for the new towns in New Guinea and Eastern Indonesia.

In the vicinity of colonial expansion, new religions found their way to the south eastern Moluccas and coastal New Guinea. Although Islam was present in the region at least since the 1850s and Christian mission stations had been established around the same time (Warnk, 2010), colonial expansion facilitated their further spread. Oral traditions about Islamic migrants and holy men from Mecca still circulate in the Aru Islands (Wellfelt and Djonler, 2019: 170-171). Perhaps it is justified to say, the introduction of the new religions of Islam and Christianity can be interpreted as much as being a catalyst of town development as well as a result of it. The first colonial administrative posts in the region were established at exactly those places with either a strong presence of Muslim and Chinese traders (such as Dobo or Fakfak), or with an already existing Christian mission station (Dore-Manokwari, Larantuka).

On the other hand, in the wake of colonial expansion, new possibilities also emerged. First, the emergence of small towns led to the creation of completely new social and economic patterns in the informal sector. New competitors replaced others and local traders lost their former status in coastal trading ports. Furthermore, the first towns became not only centres of colonial rule and economy, but also of education. Education at Christian mission schools and to a lesser extent also at the often informal Islamic teachings, following the presence of rather wealthy Arab traders, was a pattern of urban development, modernity and change (Korff, 1999: 140). In particular, Christian education brought the region new languages such as Dutch and, more importantly, Malay via mostly Ambonese, and to a lesser extent, Manadonese school teachers. With the introduction of Malay, they paved the way for further integration into the Dutch East Indies (Anderson, 1988: 132-133). Finally, school education in eastern Indonesian towns gave its pupils and their families access to modern media and entertainment. Radio stations were set up in places such as Sorong, and radio sets could be bought easily if you had enough money as soon the colonial authorities had established electricity and generators. The common education also enabled locals to travel to other parts of Indonesia and created a sense of more comprehensive identity which shortly before World War

II resulted in the growth of an Indonesian nationalism also in New Guinea and other remote areas.

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