

‘Federalism’ and the Colonial Project Under Scrutiny: Re-interpreting the Writings of F.S.A. de Clercq, Dutch Colonial Resident in Eastern Indonesia

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or areas. Such division is normally regulated by a written constitution, with a supreme court to adjudicate disputes between the overall federal states and the separate component states.

This modern arrangement seems very distant from the colonial situation, and indeed de Clercq never discusses it. Yet though he nowhere builds a theory of federalism or of the relation between colonial and traditional rulers, he peppers his descriptions of contemporary North Moluccan life with citations from treaties or regulations that seem outdated or that require clarification. „Direct“ vs. „indirect“ rule was a multi-shaded region filled with endless, steadily and continuously negotiated details, in which a central government’s local representative creatively interfaced with traditional rulers and with the classes of persons whom they ruled. As a scholar, de Clercq wants to present an impartial description of conditions in his Residency; this conflicts with his role as an activist and reformist, as well as Resident.

Benedict Anderson (1992) notes that a weakness of colonial scholarship is its lack of theory-building, deriving (he says) from provincial isolation and from lack of interest in the comparative study of colonial regimes. If these were traits of colonial scholarship, de Clercq was unaware of them; in a later book he even included a chapter comparing Dutch, English, and German colonial policies on New Guinea. Though de Clercq’s work, and Dutch colonial scholarship generally, may seem to have contributed little to modern political theories, it formed an important and still influential part of Indonesia’s evolving experience with the division of governmental functions.

Abstract

Presentation of this paper coincides with the on-line publication of the English translation of F.S.A. de Clercq’s (1890) „Bijdragen tot de kennis der residentie Ternate“ (translated by Paul M Taylor and Marie N Richards, with English title „TERNATE: THE SULTANATE AND ITS RESIDENCY“). This paper offers an interpretation of de Clercq’s statements about issues of divided governance, and also introduces some innovations within the web-publication (digital edition) of this source material for North Moluccan history.

Frederick Sigismund Alexander de Clercq (1842-1906) was the Resident attached to the court of Ternate from 1885 to 1888. He thus had a biased yet privileged view of the Sultanate, and dealt on a daily basis with issues of divided governance. „Federalism“ is a political theory of divided legislative power, in which government and legislation are best divided between a federal STATE and its constituent states, departments,