

'For Pramoedya the tremors of colonial rule are outside the archives. In the present volume I pursue how deeply epistemic anxieties stir affective tremors within them (Stoler, 2010)

After reading *The Pulse of the Archive* in Ann Stoler's *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, the grain led into the preface of Ann Stoler's first book *Capitalism and Confrontation in Sumatra's Plantation Belt, 1870-1979* in which she describes her experience as a young researcher researching North Sumatra's plantation belt, 'the colonial and contemporary heartland of Indonesia's rubber and palm oil industry and the colonial legacy inscribed in the New Order military regime' when she began to uncover something different, in the neural wirings of the colonial machine and the nerve edges of the archive. 'Coming politically of age during the Vietnam war, I was intellectually committed to examining what U.S. intervention might mean for this other part of Southeast Asia. I bristled with the notion that I had zeroed in on the "enemy," that this is what proletarianisation and the politics of repression would look like under "peripheral capitalism" in the belly of the beast [...] In attending to this underside of hegemony, I was struck by the vulnerabilities that shaped the nervous and violent gestures of Dutch estate managers and the state's local agents. Though I was schooled in an anthropology that sidestepped the category of "colonials" and focused more on the agency of the colonised, it was the conflicts among the former that increasingly drew my attention. The alternate terror and calm in which Europeans seem to have lived, their fears, and the discrepant perceptions of danger among them were pervasive in my interviews with ex-planters, in colonial novels, in the archives I read' (Stoler, 1995, p. xiv).

On page 49 of *Along the Archival Grain*, Stoler revisits this early work, 'decades ago, while researching the murder of a European planter's wife and children in 1876 on Sumatra's East Coast, she was drawn into 'how rumour ricocheted between planters and the workers they feared and the the insurgents they ignored, undoing facile distinctions between reliable and conjured information, between fact and fantasy, between mad paranoia and political reality. The contrast between neat copy and hurried hand, tidy statements and quick-paced query and response, enraged and tempered narrative, fine-grained knowledge and unabashed ignorance—all struck me as startling testimonies to the workings of empire and to what we still did not know about it.' An interesting element emerged of how individual biography resonates into area studies. Stoler outlines a textual methodology that draws on Foucault and Derrida of reading along the grain into the dense psychic space of the archive and its archivists. Stoler locates in particular the charge of expectancy and futurity, what was secret in such documents was not their specific subject matters but their timing and the interpretive uncertainties about an appropriate government response that gathered around them... documents marked *geheim* were often not due to the magnitude of the problem, but the *magnitude of dissensus* concerning what the problem actually was, Stoler describes such documents as 'sites of unease, anticipatory warnings of emergent movement among subject populations (what Raymond Williams might term 'structures of feelings') or resentments that may not yet have had a name.'

Here, Stoler's close textual reading of perspective within the text ('the erratic movement back and forth in verbal tense: the conditional [that] could powerfully reshape an immediate response as it recursively rewrote the present and re-figured events that had long passed. The portent-laden future of revolt and betrayal [...] always on the imminent and dangerous horizon') parallels Ronald Inden's exploration of perspective and 'commentative, descriptive and explanatory or interpretive in Indological texts of British Orientalists and deconstructs the myth of the rational colonial state by asking: 'whose thought is it that is dream-like in these commentative and explanatory texts, the Indians, to whom it is attributed, or the Indologists' themselves?' Stoler also seeks to deconstruct the myth of the archive as the all knowing, distant gaze of a panopticon. She counters Pramoedya Ananta Toer's vision of the Dutch East Indies' state archives in his 1912 novel *House of Glass* as a cold, inert mausoleum, 'keeping out both the tropical heat, and the resilient motion of the resistant social world of Java' with a view of the archives as heat-ful, tremorous, like a psychological transistor or grid of exposure plates gathering the paranoias, realities, delusions, anxieties, and psychic worries over race, identity

and subject-hood, she describes how like science, colonial governance attempted to tame chance, ‘much as classical probability theory was to measure the incertitudes of a modernizing world, colonial civil servants were charged to do the same.’ She describes how colonial statecraft was an administrative apparatus to gather, draw together, and connect—and disconnect—events, to make them, as needed, legible, insignificant, or unintelligible as information. The book also opens with a quote from Claude Levi-Strauss’s *Tristes Tropiques*, 1955, ‘the primary function of writing . . . is to facilitate the enslavement of other human beings.’ In re-agentising the colonial state, Stoler also opens out an interesting dimension as to how colonial officers squared the ‘law of Southeast Asian inertia’ with insurgency.

I was particularly interested in Stoler’s examination of race and the *Inlandsche kinderen* as minor history which re-touched on elements of J.C. Van Leur’s argument last week on autonomous sequences. Stoler describes minor history as not mere microcosms of events played out elsewhere on a larger central stage but as structures of feeling and force that in “major” history might be otherwise displaced. Stoler describes how her youth as a Jewish girl in class-conscious mid-20th Century Long Island, adjacent to New York City and its worlds of taste and racial difference, may have drawn her to a sensitivity of the ‘quotidian weight of distinctions’: ‘categories of people and things, race was inscribed in that everyday - in who was not in our schools, where my father worked but did not play, where winter vacations took us, in places my family would not go. I’m ever more convinced that race was a subtext in my growing up - those who would be excluded and those places my parents feared I might be excluded from.’ It is also interesting that Stoler footnotes *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, where Deleuze and Guattari trace the minority machine in Kafka: ‘to be a sort of stranger *within* his own language; this is the situation of Kafka’s Great Swimmer.’ Stoler imagines the ethnographic method of immersement as a re-reading along the psychological grain of the archive and the strandings of language.¹

It made me curious as to how Stoler traces the pulse of racial classification and subconscious anxieties in the archives. She describes ‘how people charged with large-scale management and local situations imagined they might identify what they knew they could not see, what common sense they used to assess racial belonging or political desires that were not available to ocular senses, how they distinguished politically motivated passions from private ones, and of how Dutch colonial authorities were troubled by the *distribution* of sentiment, by both its excessive expression and the absence of it; of European fathers too attached to their mixed blood offspring; of Indies-born European children devoid of attachment to their (Dutch) cultural origins; of European-educated children, who, upon return to the Indies, held sympathies and sensibilities out of order and out of place. Stoler draws on Ian Hacking’s description of ontologies as ‘what comes into existence with the historical dynamics of naming’, where “essences” were protean, not fixed, subject to reformulation again and again.

In a footnote on page 61 Stoler writes of how ‘anthropologists have long argued against a generic Western psychosocial theory where “thought” and “emotion,” “reason” and “passion,” “cognition” and “feeling” are treated as distinct epistemic sites and where “civilised” reason “evacuates” affects from it. Critiquing Marxist readings of political economy, Stoler further argues such readings often treated the psychological, and sentiment in particular, as a poor and misleading substitute for a “real” political analysis rather than as a potentially powerful means to understand the cultural frame in which relations of power work. Whether modeled on Marx’s commitment to a rational science of capitalist logic and predictions for its demise, such key concepts as “alienation” often remain the outcome of capitalist relations of production and sociality, not the complicated subject of them. Even where strategies of labor control are mediated through “habits of the heart,” the *state’s* part in structuring sentiment is rarely the subject of analysis.

¹ In a similar dimension, Stoler draws on Foucault’s description in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* of a statement as ‘always an event that neither the language nor the meaning can quite exhaust. It is certainly a strange event . . . it is linked to the gesture of writing . . . [I]t opens up to itself a residual existence . . . in the materiality of manuscripts, books, or any other form of recording; like every event, it is unique, yet subject to repetition, transformation, and reactivation.’

What was particularly interesting in Stoler is her exploration of the ‘tacit dimension’ or unsaid ‘racialized common sense’ often hidden on the edges of the officialese of the archive, a ‘common sense about Javanese coolies and Acehnese insurgents, about the sensibilities of the *Indische* population, Indies-born and -bred Dutch versus imported, transient, and *echte* Europeans...the “Indo question” and “racial hatred” (*rassenhaat*). I was also interested in the psychological rhythms of how or whether Islam and religion were latently or explicitly referenced in the archives. The anxieties of ocularity and non-ocularity also opened out a sense of geography, I was curious if reading along the psychological grain of the archive might also encounter concepts of distance. Stoler describes how the ‘urban centres of Semarang, Batavia, and Surabaya were where most of the European population lived and where most of their destitute descendants and abandoned mixed blood offspring ended up.’ I was drawn again to J.C. Van Leur’s observation of scale and the concentration of the Dutch as a tiny minority in the East Indies which returned to the idea of a minority language, estranged from a majority language.

I was curious as to whether Stoler’s scholarship described as a ‘psychology of domination’ (Trocki, 1986) might corroborate with readings along the psychological grain of non-Dutch source material. Just as Stoler problematizes the fixity of viewing the colonial power in structural terms and colonised populations in agentic terms, I was curious whether similar methods of inquiry into e.g. an Acehnese archive have generated a psychological structuralism of the “dominated” or far away and of how the terminology and image of Dutch colonial officers for instance were rationalised by the ‘*vertrouwensmannen* (trustworthy men, who one took into one’s confidence) or the Eurasians who were charged—as was Pangemannan—to interpret native signs of discontent and distress; and, not least, purveyors of culture and psychology, anthropologists and others deemed Java experts.’ At the same time, Stoler’s *Capitalism and Confrontation in Sumatra’s Plantation Belt, 1870-1979* suggests there is an inseparable dialectical dimension or deep wovenness of both psycho-social worlds. On the inverse, spinning outward, Gilles Deleuze in his 1962 work *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, writes against the dialectic, how it moves within the limits of reactive forces and thrives on oppositions because it is unaware of far more subtle and subterranean differential mechanisms: topological displacements, typological variations’ opening up an interesting question of whether distance and the archipelago escape dialectics.

I was interested in why Pramoedya Ananta Toer chose to describe the archive as a mausoleum, of his imprisonment following the 1965 coup on the penal colony of Buru, and of his earlier work, exploring how Indonesian language and literature had been distorted by the Dutch colonial authorities. Distortion as a concept is explored by Ronald Inden, whereby Orientalists and Indologists in India held the belief of a unitary, determinate and objective reality that the colonised were unable to access, stuck in an inertial loop of condensation and displacement, their ways of life were distortions of reality. Toer and Stoler’s scholarship deconstruct this by locating the manufacture of the distortion in the coloniser’s unitary prism. After reading “Orientalist Constructions of India” (1986) by Ronald Inden, an American Indologist at the University of Chicago I read about the work he was building toward in *Imagining India* (1990). ‘Inspired by Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, [Inden] began a critical investigation of how social scientific knowledge was shaped by the colonial conditions of its production. *Imagining India* was a critical survey of the field of Indology and argued that most scholarship consistently failed to treat Indians as rational subjects and knowing actors who were intelligently involved in the creation of their social worlds.

Inden locates the imprint of Freud’s psychoanalysis and the interpretation of dreams on Indological studies and philology in writings such as Louis Renou’s. In this scheme, ‘the knowing subject, the analyst or Sanskritist is rational, the persons who are the subjects of inquiry are, in relation to him, irrational. The knowledges of the latter are distorted representations of their own reality. They are knowledges that must be subjugated [...] introduced, annotated, catalogued, broken up and analysed in ‘data bases’, apportioned out in monographs, reports, gazetteers, anthologies, readers.’ Inden describes how ‘Asiatic institutions’ were on the one hand perceived as irrational and defective versions of their Western equivalents yet also imagined in organicist and naturalist ways as the outcome of racial admixtures and adaptations to

the environment peculiar to Asia. The 'Lux ex Oriente' idea of Alexander the Great conquering Asia passing the Hegelian light to the West, with Europe continuing to develop and change, cumulative and directional, while Asia was left to a circular repetition.

In Hegel's principles of unity and difference, 'Indian and Chinese civilisations [were] both irrational malformations. India is represented as a distorted civilisation because in it civil society (difference) has engulfed the state (unity). China, too is represented as a misshapen civilisation, but for almost precisely the reverse reason - there, the state (Unity) has swallowed up civil society (difference). India for Hegel is prehistorical, a land of desire that forms an essential element in General History that yet lies outside of it in not developing a Spirit. Returning to the idea of inertia, Inden notes how Indologists imagined Hinduism like a vast sponge, 'which absorbs all that enters it without ceasing to be itself', and of individuals who did not shape their world but were patients of the social material reality of caste. On the opposite end, romantic-spiritualist Indologists found in India a hidden private realm of the spiritual, mysterious or exotic that Western man had lost.

Inden raises the scholarship of A.M Hocart who refused to subscribe to the metaphysics that constructed the East and West as polar opposites by examining caste in Britain: 'Our constitution divides the people into lords and commons....' Why then should an Indian classification of people into four be unreal? Why should not such a classification be just as important in the state as ours? Toward the end of his paper, Inden notes the continuity of naturalist oppositions of East and West, traditional and modern, civilised and primitive in the 20th century postwar cosmology of the three worlds: how nations of the First World are the most developed or advanced because they are shaped in accord with scientific knowledge of nature; those of the Second World are, although developed, held back by their distorting Socialist ideology; the Third World, where religion and superstition still run rife, are 'underdeveloped' or 'developing'. I was particularly interested in how this schema is imbricated into post-independence scholarship, whether there is an inertial overlay in modernisation narratives that continue to perceive 'it is only since India's incorporation into the world system, first under the British and now as an independent nation, that the scientific knowledge of the West has begun to 'modernise and develop the nations of the subcontinent. I was also curious in how Mao's Three Worlds Theory re-examined this schema; how nuclearity and race were examined; and how in the U.S. Walt Rostow's modernization theory reduced race to an economic sub-indicator or as Inden writes, the 'euphemistic language of United Nations reports and Asian civilisation course syllabi.'

I was also curious as to how Ann Stoler described the 1950s when many Indo-Europeans were ousted from Indonesia or fled for refuge to southern California, Australia, and South Africa, and, perhaps most uncomfortably, to Holland. Stoler did not also mention China, and reading excerpts of Taomo Zhou's *Migration in the Time of Revolution: China, Indonesia and the Cold War* opens up a broader sense of archipelagic connections in the geographical designation of Nanyang. I was also interested in reading more diaspora literature and found E.K Tan's 2013 *Rethinking Chineseness: Translational Sinophone Identities in the Nanyang Literary World*. In *Migration in the Time of Revolution*, Taomo Zhou describes a scene in June 1955, a Dutch ocean liner travelling from Jakarta to Hong Kong, Liang Yingming, an Indonesian-born Chinese youth, arriving at night, taking a northbound train to Shenzhen, a dormant fishing village where the British authorities are wary of leftist youth, a train car guarded by Gurkha soldiers, he walks across the Lo Wu Bridge, catching sight of the Five-Star Red Flag, finding a sense of return to his ancestral homeland.

I also read an interesting paper by Joshua Barker at Ronald Inden's alma mater of the University of Chicago on *Indonesia in the Satellite Age* which described the anxiety of Suharto's New Order regime to unify the archipelago, he describes 'the first call Suharto made was to the governor of Aceh, the province at the western tip of the archipelago, and the second call he made was to the governor of Irian Jaya (Papua), Indonesia's easternmost province. Finally, a call was arranged between government officials in Sabang and Merauke, the two most distant points in the archipelago nation.

These calls were intended to position Jakarta and Suharto symbolically as the great mediators that would bring the limits of the territory into contact.’ Meanwhile, Toer was placed in a penal colony. I was curious as to the presence of new studies like Stoler’s reading along the psychological grain of the archive in post-Independence Indonesia, the durability of colonial optics in archival practices and textual methods, the construction of a majority language of nationalism out of the embers of a minority language masquerading as a majority, the psychological rift-continuity of Indonesia’s breadth and scale as a generator of anxiety, paranoia as a metropole and new elite phenomenon, reality as polyform, teleology as myth, rationality and irrationality as a false binary, history not as a single line but as plates that may or may not touch at any single moment, the import of archipelagic historiography and the imbrication of technology - radio, television, satellites, fibre-optics, atom bombs - into the the psychological grain of the archive.

I was also interested in how Stoler’s method of reading along the grain might be imagined in the context of moving image archives, in the form by which film analysis examines the psychological dynamism of the director, I found a 1925 documentary entitled Dutch East Indies, a train leaves a tunnel, a station and villagers emerge ahead, returning J.C. Van Leur’s critique of Indonesian history through European eyes ‘from the deck of the ship, the ramparts of the fortress, the high gallery of the trading house.’ I found a [dissertation](#) by Adhie Gesit Pambudi, a student at the University of Leiden, studying ‘the use of Dutch documentary films about the issues of Indonesia (1945-1949) and was curious how Stoler would deconstruct the moving image as sites of unease, anticipatory warnings of emergent movement among subject populations (what Raymond Williams might term ‘structures of feelings’) or resentments that may not yet have had a name. On the inverse, I was interested in how Indonesian filmmakers and diaspora filmmakers undertook archival practices and how the juxtaposition of films might re-mobilise Inden’s idea of a non-unitary reality that is polyform and optically and psychologically woven by intersecting languages of the ultimate form.

Ronald B. Inden, “Orientalist Constructions of India”

Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain : Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*



Dutch East Indies (1925)