

## The Indonesian archipelago as nursery for Leiden anthropology

### Supplementary notes to Nicoletta Diasio

Anke Niehof

In her article, Nicoletta Diasio devotes considerable attention to the contribution of Van Ossenbruggen and the *Indologen* to the development of Dutch medical anthropology. Although she provides a good analysis of the way the colonial setting inspired both (medical) ethnography and public health initiatives, the resulting picture is somewhat incomplete. It ignores the Leiden tradition in structural anthropology (cf. De Ridder & Karremans 1987, Claessen & Moyer 1988) that was nurtured in the ‘Malay archipelago as a field of ethnological study’ (De Josselin de Jong 1935). This Leiden tradition, later designated ‘structural anthropology’, yielded fruitful insights about the many-stranded relationship between social organisation, cultural classifications, indigenous perceptions of health and illness, and health behaviour. When commenting on the central position of social organisation in the work of Van Ossenbruggen, Diasio touches on a key feature of the Leiden tradition but does not elaborate on it. In this contribution we will try to complete the picture in this respect.

In Leiden, ethnology (later anthropology) started its career in 1877 as a university discipline with the purpose of imparting practically useful knowledge of Indonesian peoples to prospective colonial administrators. It replaced the study serving the same purpose at the college for colonial administrators in Surakarta, Java, that had been founded in 1834. From 1877 onwards the professors holding the chair of what was first called the “Geography and Ethnology of the East Indian Archipelago” combined geographic, linguistics and historic expertise in varying degrees but were not ethnologists. A.W. Nieuwenhuis was even a surgeon. This changed with the appointment of J.P.B. De Josselin de Jong in 1922, who held the first chair in general ethnology (De Josselin de Jong 1977a). With his knowledge of and appreciation for the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss and French anthropology in general, J.P.B. De Josselin de Jong became the founding father of the Leiden tradition in structural anthropology. Unlike his French colleague, however, he firmly rooted theoretical notions in ethnographic evidence, particularly the ethnography of Indonesia. The Indonesian context fed and shaped theoretical development. During a visit to Leiden, in 1973, Lévi Strauss is quoted to have said: “I am now beginning to understand why, besides Paris, Leiden also developed into a centre of structural anthropology. This must have been due to Leiden anthropolo-

gists' work in Indonesia. It is not the Leiden anthropologists but the Indonesians who are the great structuralists" (Vermeulen 1987: 31). In 1956, P.E. De Josselin de Jong succeeded his uncle J.P.B. De Josselin de Jong. The name of the chair was then changed from ethnology to anthropology.

The second part of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century saw a lot of ethnographic and ethnological (or anthropological, as we would say now) activity in Indonesia, undertaken by Leiden-trained administrators, missionaries, and other professionals. They mostly did this in their spare time (De Josselin de Jong 1977a). The Leiden ethnological perspective, moulded later by J.P.B. De Josselin de Jong into Dutch structural anthropology, became a pivot around which other disciplinary perspectives revolved, including medical ones. It had a strong formative influence. This is clearly visible in the writings of physicians and obstetricians about their experiences with childbirth and indigenous midwifery in Indonesia. In their work they paid ample attention to the cultural and social logic behind the observed practices (e.g. Van de Wetering 1926, Winkler 1937). Their observations gave rise to a heated debate about the practices of indigenous midwives and the harm these could do to mother and child. The proponents of professional natal care were in favour of measures to prevent the "indigenous angel of death" from practicing her vocation (Verdoorn 1941). Others proposed to instruct the traditional birth attendants (TBAs) in basic principles of hygiene and other relevant subjects (Hydrick 1942). The debate raged until the end of the colonial period. It continued in the Indonesian Republic, when the persistently high levels of maternal mortality became a source of serious concern (Niehof 1992).

The far-reaching influence of the Leiden ethnological approach, also on professionals working in Indonesia and not trained as colonial administrators in Leiden, is visible in the work of Van Ossenbruggen. Van Ossenbruggen, who was a lawyer by training, became known for his anthropological interpretation of indigenous practices during small-pox epidemics in Indonesia. Diasio rightly quotes his two well-known articles on the subject. Van Ossenbruggen was much impressed by the book of the missionary Van Hien on the Javanese spirit world, published in 1896. Upon his arrival in Java Van Ossenbruggen became interested in the principles behind Javanese divination and classification (De Josselin de Jong 1977a). This interest, also inspired by the work of Durkheim and Mauss (the French connection!), coloured his views on the indigenous practices relating to small-pox and resulted also in the by now classic article on the Javanese classification system *monca-pat* (Van Ossenbruggen 1918).

In the writings of P.E. De Josselin de Jong and his students, structural anthropology in Leiden flourished. It can be characterised as a non-materialistic and non-evolutionist type of anthropology with great emphasis on people as actors in ordering their own social and cultural universe. P.E. De Josselin de Jong saw "systems of thought and representations" as the object of structuralism (Vermeulen 1987: 33). According to a structuralist perspective, that – obviously – is holistic as well, indigenous notions and classifications relating to health and illness are seen as being part of these "systems of thought", as aspects of social organisation, and not as constituting a separate sector or domain. This view is clearly reflected in an article by P.E. De Josselin de Jong together with one of his students on the significance of sickness in Indonesian political myths

(Jordaan & De Josselin de Jong 1985). The same student applied the Leiden approach to the indigenous health system of the Madurese, who see health and well-being as a balanced state in the individual's relation to the natural and supernatural order. Illness is then regarded as a special class of misfortune resulting from imbalance (Jordaan 1985). P.E. De Josselin de Jong's paper on the participants' view of their own culture (1977b) can be seen as an example of emic anthropology *avant la lettre*.

I would like to mention two more quintessential publications that were influential for the anthropological study of indigenous medicine in Indonesia and were not included in Diasio's review. The first is Maijer's paper about Javanese indigenous healers (Maijer 1918). As Geertz would do after him (Geertz 1960), Maijer placed these healers – or *dukuns* – in the context of the Javanese “systems of thought and representations”. The second one is the book by Kloppenburg-Versteeg (1933) on the use of plants in Indonesia. Her book played an important role in unravelling the indigenous classification of plants, including plants for medicinal use. Herbal medicine and tonics (*jamu*) are an essential part of Javanese culture. The book by Kloppenburg-Versteeg paved the way for a better understanding of Javanese culture through its classification and use of plants. The work of the scholars discussed or referred to above shows how important Indonesia was in providing a nurturing environment for the development ethnology, the Leiden tradition of structural anthropology, and the field that we now call medical anthropology.

## Note

Anke Niehof studied anthropology in Leiden and demography in Groningen. She obtained her Ph.D. at Leiden University in 1985, on the basis of a thesis entitled *Women and Fertility in Madura, Indonesia*. She worked and lived in Indonesia for about ten years. Since 1993 she has been a full professor at Wageningen University, holding the chair of Sociology of Consumers and Households. Her most recent publication is: Anke Niehof and Firman Lubis (eds), 2003, *Two is Enough: Family Planning in Indonesia during the New Order (1968-1998)*, Leiden: KITLV Press.

## References

- Claessen, H.J.M. & D.S. Moyer  
1988 *Time past, time present, time future: Perspectives on Indonesian culture. Essays in honour of Professor P.E. De Josselin de Jong*. Dordrecht: Foris Publications.
- De Josselin de Jong, J.P.B.  
1935 *De Maleische Archipel als ethnologisch studieveld*. [The Malay Archipelago as a Field of Ethnological Study]. Leiden: J. Ginberg.
- 1977a Introduction. In: P.E. De Josselin de Jong (ed.), *Structural anthropology in The Netherlands*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, pp. 1-30.

- 1977b The participants' view of their own culture. In: P.E. De Josselin de Jong (ed.), *Structural anthropology in The Netherlands*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, pp. 231-53. [1956]
- De Ridder, R. & J.A.J. Karremans  
 1987 *The Leiden tradition in structural anthropology: Essays in honour of P.E. De Josselin de Jong*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- Geertz, C.  
 1960 *The religion of Java*. New York: The Free Press.
- Hydrick, J.L.  
 1942 *Intensive rural hygiene Work in The Netherlands East Indies*. New York: The Netherlands Information Bureau. [First impression 1935].
- Jordaan, R.E.  
 1985 *Folk medicine in Madura, Indonesia*. Ph.D. Thesis Leiden University.
- Jordaan, R.E. & P.E. De Josselin de Jong  
 1985 Sickness as metaphor in Indonesian political myths. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 141 (2/3): 253-75.
- Maijer, L.Th.  
 1918 *De Javaan als doekoen: Een ethnografische bijdrage* [The Javanese as *dukun*: An ethnographic contribution]. Weltevreden: G. Kolff & Co.
- Niehof, A.  
 1992 Mediating roles of the traditional birth attendant in Indonesia. In: S. Van Bemmelen, M. Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis, E. Locher-Scholten & E. Touwen-Bouwsma (eds), *Women and mediation in Indonesia*. Leiden: KITLV Press, pp. 167-87.
- Van de Wetering, F.H.  
 1926 De Savoenezen [The Savunese]. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde* 82: 485-575.
- Van Ossenbruggen, F.D.E.  
 1918 De oorsprong van het Javaansche begrip montja-pat, in verband met primitieve classificaties [The origin of the Javanese concept of monca-pat, in relation to primitive classifications]. *Verslagen en mededeelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandsche Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afdeling Letterkunde* 5-3: 6-44.
- Verdoorn, J.A.  
 1941 *Verloskundige hulp voor de inheemsche bevolking van Nederlandsch-Indië; Een sociaal-medische studie*. [Obstetric care for the indigenous population of the Netherlands East Indies; A socio-medical study]. 's Gravenhage: Boekencentrum.
- Vermeulen, H.F.  
 1977 P.E. De Josselin de Jong and the Leiden tradition: A short history. In: R. De Ridder & J.A.J. Karremans (eds), *The Leiden tradition in structural anthropology: Essays in honour of P.E. De Josselin de Jong*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, pp. 4-64.
- Winkler, J.  
 1926 De Batakse vroedvrouw in vroeger tijd [The Batak midwife in former times]. *Geneeskundig Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië* 77: 1322-41.