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Spice War: Ternate, Makassar, the Dutch East India Company and the struggle for the Ambon Islands (c. 1600-1656)

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Propositions relating to the dissertation

SPICE WAR

Ternate, Makassar, the Dutch East India Company
and the struggle for the Ambon Islands (c. 1600-1656)

by **Tristan Mostert**

1. The way in which the violent conquest and depopulation of the Banda Islands in 1621 is often presented as an episode onto itself, is unwarranted. It was an inextricable part of a much wider and longer conflict in the region.
2. In explaining how the VOC was ultimately able to project its control over the Ambon region, the VOC's sustained environmental destruction and its success in recasting and dismantling existing social and political orders in the region should be considered a more central factor than its supposed military superiority in terms of firepower, discipline or fort-building.
3. The Ambon region was no exception to the spread and development of fort-building through the eastern archipelago in the early modern period: here, too, forts were ubiquitous, and new insights and practices were quickly incorporated.
4. The fact that Makassar was a cosmopolitan, free and open port town to the Asian and European traders visiting it, should not blind historians to the fact that it was also the political centre of an expansionist empire.
5. It is to be welcomed that the narrative approach is still flourishing within the historical discipline, as it not only a way of presenting one's findings, but also a method of and by itself, able to bring into clear focus the vagaries of human motivations and anxieties as a force of history.

6. Concepts such as strategic resettlement, social engineering and environmental and economic warfare, which are well-developed for the late 19th and the 20th centuries, are also readily applicable to colonial conflicts of the early modern period.
7. Notions of the rational use of violence by the VOC lose their meaning as one zooms in on the daily practice of such violence and the motivations of those practicing it.
8. The wide bird's eye views of cultural and economic networks over long time spans that have characterized some of the historiography on Southeast Asia, while very valuable, have also tended to gloss over the very consequential specifics of regional power dynamics in the region.
9. The 'environmental turn' within history, while perhaps born from current environmental concerns, should not be mistaken to be a present-day interest projected onto earlier periods. Rather, our increasing recognition of the critical role of the environment as a historical force has vastly enriched our understanding of the past.
10. If one accepts the often-heard cliché that the VOC was the first true multinational corporation, it also follows that the problems associated with corporate business were truly present from the start, as it cheated its shareholders, violated human rights, destroyed the environment, acquired an unhealthy amount of political clout, gave rise to rampant corruption and became 'too big to fail'.
11. Light pollution should be taken seriously as an environmental problem, not only because it has proven to be bad for human health and disruptive to our natural environment, but also because we should preserve peoples' ability to marvel at the starry night sky.