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Romain Bertrand France

Global history of minorities

Wednesday October 16th 2013 | 4pm | The Kitchen

The author

Romain Bertrand has been a research director at the Fondation nationale des sciences politiques (French foundation for political science) since 2008. He graduated from the Institut d'études politiques (Institute of Political Studies) of Bordeaux, earned his doctorate at Sciences Po Paris, and joined the CERI (a social science research center dedicated to international studies) in 2001. He has been an editorial-committee member of *Critique internationale* and *Raisons politiques*, and is currently an editorial-committee member of *Annales*. He has been a visiting researcher at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and at Oxford (Nuffield College), and an invited professor in the International Relations Department at Fudan University in Shanghai and the Sociology Department at the New School for Social Science Research in New York. With Stéphane van Damme (of Sciences Po's center for history), he co-directs a research seminar at Sciences Po called "L'épreuve des Indes" (The Trials of India) on the historiography of the construction and circulation of knowledge in situations of "imperial encounters" in the modern era.

Bibliography

L'Histoire à parts égales. Récits d'une rencontre Orient-Occident (XVIe-XVIIe siècles) (Seuil, 2011) (*A Balanced History. Tales of an East-West Encounter (16th-17th centuries)*)

Mémoires d'empire. La controverse autour du « fait colonial » (Editions du Croquant, 2006) (*Memoires of Empire: The Controversy over the "Fact of Colonialism"*)

Etat colonial, noblesse et nationalisme à Java - La Tradition parfaite (Karthala, 2005) (*Nobility and Nationalism in Colonial Java*)

Indonésie, la démocratie invisible. Violence, magie et politique à Java (Karthala, 2002) (*Indonesia and Its Invisible Democracy. Violence, Magic and Politics in Java*)

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L'Histoire à parts égales. Récits d'une rencontre Orient-Occident (XVIe-XVIIe siècles) (Seuil, 2011) (*A Balanced History. Tales of an East-West Encounter (16th-17th centuries)*)



Whereas "world-history" has never been so important, the same world history is often retold: that of Europe and its "expansion" into Africa, Asia, and the Americas. For Romain Bertrand, the only way to overcome this obstinate Eurocentrism is to write a balanced history, based on sources that are not all European. This is what he proposes in this book, which contains a detailed account of the first contacts between the Dutch, Malays, and Javanese at the turn of the 17th century.

Bertrand shows that at that time, Europe had no advantage over the societies of the insulindien world, whether in terms of nautical or cartographical knowledge, long-distance companies, or military technology. When the ships of the first Dutch expedition of Cornelis de Houtman dropped anchor in Banten harbor in Java in June 1596, they were not landing in a "primitive" world. The reader discovers, on the contrary, a complex, cosmopolitan society that had been a member in long-distance commercial networks for decades and was enmeshed in intense, sophisticated political and religious debates that strangely echoed those then taking place in Europe. This book offers a radically new way to make global history.

Press

In these days of globalization, this historian is revolutionizing our view of the relationship between East and West as it was when they first met in the 16th century in Java.

Le Nouvel Observateur

In 1596, the Dutch landed in Java. In *L'histoire à parts égales*, Romain Bertrand relates what happened in a balanced way, from both points of view. Bold.

Le Monde des livres

One is never careful enough with one's own talent. The first ten pages of Romain Bertrand's book are so brilliant some people may not read further.

Patrick Boucheron, Historian

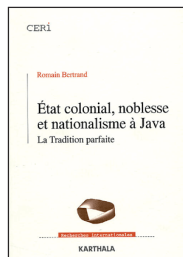
Mémoires d'empire. La controverse autour du « fait colonial » (Editions du Croquant, 2006) (*Memoires of Empire: The Controversy over the "Fact of Colonialism"*)



This essay recounts the history of the debates and demonstrations over the French law of February 23, 2005 on the "positive role" French colonialism played, which paved the way for the rise in power of the topic of "memory wars."

It raises questions as to both the strategies of the majority parties' representatives, who voted for and defended the law, and the discourse and tactics of activist organizations calling for its abrogation. Reviewing in detail the relationship of favoritism between elected officials and associations of persons repatriated from Algeria, the author tries to highlight the terribly ordinary, rather than exceptional, political processes that contributed to "creating a controversy" over the "fact of colonialism." In doing so, he shows how the label "colonial [French] Republic" brandished by members of the indigenous population and associations involved in the autonomous immigration movement were distorted to impose a specific interpretation of the "urban riots" of October-November 2005 as referring not to concrete problems of exclusion and discrimination requiring action (and self-criticism) on the part of the government, but to elusive memorial feelings. He takes a sort of inventory of the mechanisms by which, and especially the consequences of having, a new place for debate in which the "(post)-colonial issue" leads to evading the "social issue."

Etat colonial, noblesse et nationalisme à Java - La Tradition parfaite (Karthala, 2005) (*Nobility and Nationalism in Colonial Java*)



The formation of the state of Java, from the 19th to the 20th centuries, is inextricable from the transformation of the priyayi into nobles of the robe. The exercise of authority came to be talked about and lived in terms specific to the priyayi way of thinking

of themselves and their social universe. The relationship of domination was announced in a mystical language that posits the existence of an invisible inverse reality, and therefore of a specific manner of acquiring and exercising power over oneself and others through ascetic practices. The palace scribes developed the "view" that Java was an ideal social order, an inalterable moral area. They claimed there was a "Javanese way" to do things (well): a "perfect tradition" that imbued social life with a litany of rules of conduct bearing a particular relationship of self to self. The first heralds of anticolonial nationalism, most of them members of the priyayi, used this "view" of Java as the basis for the antidemocratic theory of the state that was to shape the nation to come. But for the eternal Java of the court poets to become the subject of nationalist discourse, the language of the "perfect tradition" had to cease being a collective illusion and start serving instrumental purposes. During the second half of the 19th century, the colonial Dutch state in Insulinde had become a producer and certifier of "knowledge about Java." Competing with the image of "perfect tradition," it enabled the priyayi to develop a reflexive, strategic relationship with the development of their own identity.

Indonésie, la démocratie invisible. Violence, magie et politique à Java (Karthala, 2002) (*Indonesia and Its Invisible Democracy. Violence, Magic and Politics in Java*)



After President Suharto resigned in May 1998, Indonesia simultaneously experienced spectacular political liberalization and considerably increased social violence. The model transition quickly became a nightmare. Does this mean the country is "regressing," or "returning

to the wild state," as one sometimes hears? In fact, Indonesian society may never have been as politicized as it is today. In the provinces, regions, and villages, new forms of collective action are taking shape and debates rage, often ending in conflict. The practices of the invisible powerfully reveal the hidden side of the transition, and in particular the violence of power. These practices have an eminently political meaning. The accusations of witchcraft enable the "little people" of the suburbs and hamlets to require a notable to make honorable amends for his arrogance, or even abuses. In Jakarta itself, in the halls of the presidential palace and political party offices, renowned wise men, witches, and soothsayers act as eminences grises. The invisible is everywhere in the Indonesia of Reformasi. But the mystical repertoire of politics is a secret language, marked by the seal of insinuation and innuendo. In decoding it, in describing the specific ways to live and speak power in Java, this essay provides an innovative reading of the Indonesian reform at a time when international events are turning all eyes toward the archipelago. In addition, its use of an alternative to "transitology," the disparaged science of democratic transition, makes it useful for comparative work.

