

Sandra Niessen - CV

Sandra Niessen (Canadian and Dutch) is a freelance anthropologist living in The Netherlands.

She undertook her first fieldwork expedition in 1979 with the goal of exploring the thought-world of the Batak of North Sumatra. It was a transformative experience that provided direction for the rest of her career; it was at this time that she decided to use the indigenous weavings to guide her explorations.

Sandra obtained her PhD *cum laude* at Leiden University (Netherlands) in 1985 for her dissertation entitled *Motifs of Life in Toba Batak Texts and Textiles*. Since then, in addition to dozens of articles, she has published two more books on the topic, *Batak Cloth and Clothing: A Dynamic Indonesian Tradition* (1993) and, very recently, her *magnum opus*, *Legacy in cloth: Batak textiles of Indonesia* (2009). The culmination of thirty years of research, the book documents the full repertory of textile types of the Toba, Karo and Simalungun Batak, including their history and techniques of production.

Sandra is currently working on a project to bring copies of this volume back to the villages in North Sumatra so that the weavers and their families can regain access to their textile heritage, much of which has been lost. She hopes to track the impact of this book on Batak weaving in the future.

Sandra's interest in indigenous Batak cloth has lured her into the depots of major ethnographic collections in Europe and North America and inspired her more general inquiry into material culture and museum history. She has worked at the Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, Bronbeek Museum in Arnhem and the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam and she has participated in the production of numerous exhibitions and exhibit catalogues. The Department of Human Ecology at the University of Alberta, where she taught for 15 years (1987 – 2002), had a Clothing and Textiles Study Collection and trained students for museum careers. In 2006, she guest-curated a major exhibition about Batak textiles, entitled *Woven Worlds* at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam.

Non-Western craft and non-Western clothing in the global forum are prominent themes in many of her writings.

Under the name, [Bergoord Publishing](#), Sandra provides publishing assistance and, as a native English speaker in The Netherlands, she frequently does text translations (Dutch to English) and correction (English).

In her spare time, she all too often still finds herself at the computer, but then to explore her own Dutch cultural and family history. She is involved in numerous [local history publication projects](#) as well as a group that has assembled to protect the local 19th century estates in her community.

An [Outline CV](#) may be downloaded in pdf format (121K).

For a personal biographic statement see [Exploring Magic in Batak textiles](#).

For further information, to purchase [Legacy in cloth, Batak textiles of Indonesia](#), or for a detailed professional resumé please [contact](#) Sandra.