

Jennifer Lindsay and Maya H. T. Liem, eds. *Heirs to World Culture: Being Indonesian, 1950–1965*. Leiden: KITLV Press (series *Verhandelingen* 274), 2012. 544 pp.

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In the course of Indonesian history, the years of the 1950s and 1960s have attracted the widest scholarly attention. However, most studies of the country dealing with this period focus primarily on political turmoil, particularly that relating to the September 30, 1965, coup d'état,¹ which leaves other areas of study largely unexplored. Although the essays in *Heirs to World Culture: Being Indonesian 1950–1965*, under review here, also deal with politics, the ambition of the editors extends beyond politics to explore the cultural life of the young nation during this period.

The book consists of essays developed from two workshops, one held in Leiden (April 2009, "Indonesia's Cultural Traffic Abroad, 1950–1965") and the other in Jakarta (October 2009, "Culture and Nation: Arts in Indonesia, 1950–1965"). The workshops were organized under the auspices of the collaborative research project called "Indonesia Cultural History, 1950–1965: In Search of a Lost Legacy," the bulk of which was financed by a grant through the Australia-Netherlands Research Collaboration (ANRC).

As Jennifer Lindsay, the project's principal grant applicant and one of the book's editors, states in her introductory essay, the aim of the project, which to some extent has been successfully realized in this book, is really quite ambitious: to understand how Indonesian national culture, in its infancy at the time, was translated across the country and how it was articulated and developed in daily life during the most difficult period of the revolution (1950–65). During this period, the country can be said to have been squashed by the conflicts and rivalries between the world's two largest ideological blocks, capitalism and communism, that shared a common imperial instinct. To comprehend the cultural life of the newborn nation-state during this period, the project asks some key questions (pp. 5–6), such as: How did Indonesian artists and intellectuals interrelate? How did their ideas and activities stimulate one another? How did they relate to the world outside? What was the interaction between exposure to the world and cultural developments back home? What was daily cultural life like? How did areas outside of Java or Jakarta relate to the cultural debates and divisions occurring there? What did "national culture" mean locally throughout Indonesia over this period? and How were commitments to it influenced by local events?

The essays in this collection, apart from Lindsay's introduction, are divided into two parts: Part 1, "Cultural Traffic Abroad," comprises seven essays, and Part 2,

¹ See, for example, John Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder: The September 30th Movement and Suharto's Coup d'État in Indonesia* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); *The Contours of Mass Violence in Indonesia: 1965–1968*, ed. Douglas Kammen and Katharine McGregor (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012); Taufik Abdullah, Sukri Abdurrahman, and Restu Gunawan, eds., *Malam Bencana 1965 dalam Belitan Krisis Nasional: Vol. I, Rekonstruksi dalam Perdebatan* and *Vol. II, Konflik Lokal* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2012); and dozens of other publications that appear every year in Indonesia, in diverse forms (such as memoirs, literary genres, journalistic reports, and scholarly studies), all dealing with the bloodiest political event in the course of Indonesian history.

"Culture and the Nation," contains nine essays. The manner in which the content is divided reveals the project organizers' basic assumptions regarding the development of Indonesia's national culture. Part 1 covers the promotion of Indonesian ethnic cultures abroad as well as cultural contacts between some of its intellectuals and cultural figures with their foreign counterparts, and Part 2 reports on various cultural activities at home, the bulk of them undertaken by elite cultural figures who had espoused diverse foreign ideologies (religious as well as secular).

The seven essays in Part 1 include Keith Foulcher's extensive discussion of artists', writers', and intellectuals' cultural expressions in the bi-monthly "cultural political and literary journal" *Konfrontasi* (1954–60), which was affiliated with Sutan Sjahrir's Partai Sosialis Indonesia (PSI, Indonesian Socialist Party); Liesbeth Dolk's investigation of cultural links and collaborations among Indonesian artists and with their colleagues from the Netherlands through the Dutch Cultural Foundation (Stichting voor Culturele Samenwerking, STICUSA) which existed from 1948 to 1956; Hairus Salim HS's tracking of Usmar Ismail's, Hamka's, and Bahrum Rangkuti's visit to Egypt and Pakistan and their cultural perceptions of these two Muslim countries; Tony Day's examination of "the nature and formation of prevalent notions" about Indonesia in America and about America in Indonesia between 1953 and 1957 (p. 119); Budiawan's analysis of the cultural links between "*bangsa serumpun*" (nations of the same descent) Indonesia and Malaysia in the field of literature; Maya H. T. Liem's study of literary translation in Indonesia between 1950 and 1964; and, finally, Jennifer Lindsay's survey of Indonesian cultural missions abroad between 1952 and 1965.

The nine essays in Part 2 investigate the cultural expressions of the new nation across the country. Els Bogaerts's essay recounts the early discussions among intellectuals and cultural figures about culture and decolonization represented in the journal *Mimbar Indonesia* (1947–66), which its editors claimed was as "an independent journal for building the nation, for the discussion of political, economic, and social questions, and for developing Indonesian culture" (pp. 225–26). Choirotun Chisaan's contribution examines the expressions of Indonesian Islamic cultural identity, focusing on the activities of two cultural organizations affiliated with Islam: Himpunan Seni Budaya Islam (HSBI, Association for Islamic Arts and Culture) and Lembaga Seniman Budayawan Muslim Indonesia (LESBUMI, Institute of Indonesian Muslims Artists and Cultural Figures). Rhoma Dwi Aria Yuliantri's essay looks at the type of Indonesian music promoted by Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (LEKRA, Institute of People's Culture) in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, in addition to examining music and dance ensembles that flourished during that era. Michael Bodden's essay explores the dynamics and tensions of the modern national theater sponsored by LEKRA between 1959 and 1965.

The five remaining essays—written by Melani Budianta, I Nyoman Darma Putra, Barbara Hatley, Marije Plomp, and Irawati Durban Ardjo—explore national culture expressions in a regional context. Reflecting her own personal experiences, Budianta's essay records the cultural activities of the Chinese communities in Malang, East Java. Darma Putra's contribution traces the activities of the Bali regional branch of the Lembaga Kebudayaan Nasional (LKN, Institute of National Culture), paying particular attention to the field of literature. Hatley turns to the cultural life in South Sulawesi and describes the expressions of urban entertainment and the dynamics and hostilities

among diverse groups of art workers in Makassar, the principal city of the region. Moving to the western part of Indonesia, Marije Plomp describes cultural life in Medan, the principal city of North Sumatra and the Indonesian capital of “pulp fiction.” She concentrates on urban entertainment in the city in the 1950s and the production, distribution, and reception of “*roman Medan*.” In her essay, Ardjo describes her own experience as a Sundanese dancer on the national stage as well as her travels abroad.

The future is bound up with the present, and the present is inextricably linked to the past, and the Indonesia of the 1950s and 1960s was not a nation born suddenly complete from the head of Zeus. A reading of *Heirs to World Culture* reminds us that being Indonesian during those decades was inseparable from the periods that proceeded and followed them. The extensive discussions of Indonesian culture in *Mimbar Indonesia* highlighted by Els Bogaerts commenced in the early 1940s, to which the polemical debates between Ali Boediardjo, Armijn Pané, and G. J. Resink about the concept of “national art” for the new nation, still to be born, bear irrevocable witness.² The lustrous days of the dime novel published in Medan in the 1950s, as Marije Plomp explores in her essay, were actually the continuation of the existence of the “*Indonesiase ‘dubbeltjesroman’*” (dime novels, pocket paperbacks), to borrow a term from Roelof Roolvink.³ Like the late colonial *Indonesiase “dubbeltjesroman”* that represented the dichotomous concept of Balai Pustaka’s high literature versus non-Balai Pustaka’s low literature published mainly in Sumatra, the 1950s dime novel of “*roman Medan*” represented the literary aesthetic and political contest between cosmopolitan regionalism and Jakarta, the state’s center of authority.

The exhibitions of Indonesian performances abroad, recorded by Jennifer Lindsay, had their roots in performances from decades earlier. Their archetypical predecessors had graced international colonial exhibitions organized by vying colonizers in the nineteenth century,⁴ and Indonesian cultural missions abroad continue to this day. Actually, this mode of Indonesian cultural practice—peddling traditional culture to foreign countries—epitomizes the inculcated feelings of inferiority that traumatized a postcolonial nation, a painful legacy of its past. Unlike during the Sukarno and Suharto eras, in the present Reformation era, as Indonesia still recurrently suffers economic crises, the organization of cultural missions abroad by state officials has been criticized by diverse parties at home, which consider them to be a waste of millions from the state’s budget, with only minor economic rewards for ordinary citizens. Generally speaking, the Indonesian cultural configuration in the 1950s and the 1960s, which was

² For more on these polemics, see: Ali Boediardjo, “Krontjong disamping Gamelan,” *Poedjangga Baroe* VIII,10 (1941): 256–60; and “Enige opmerkingen over en naar aanleiding van het eerste volkconcert van ‘Perikatan Perkoempoelan Radio Ketimoeran,’” *Kritiek en Opbouw* 4,1 (1941): 11–13; Armijn Pané, “Gamelan tegenover Krontjong,” *Poedjangga Baroe* IX,1 (1941): 9–30, and Getrudes J. Resink, “Indonesische toekomstmuziek,” *Kritiek en Opbouw* 4,5 (1941): 74–77.

³ Roelof Roolvink, “De Indonesiase ‘dubbeltjesroman,’” in *Bingkisan budi: Een bundel opstellen aan Dr Philippus Samuel van Ronkel door vrienden en leerlingen aangeboden op zijn tachtigste verjaardag, 1 Augustus 1950*, ed. Anton A. Cense et al. (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff’s Uitgeversmaatschappij N.V., 1950), pp. 255–64. See also Sitti Faizah Rivai, “Roman Pitjisan Indonesia sebelum Perang” (undergraduate thesis [S1], Faculty of Letters, University of Indonesia, 1963).

⁴ See Marieke Bloembergen, *Colonial Spectacles: The Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies at the World Exhibitions, 1880–1931*, trans. Beverly Jackson (Singapore: NUS Press, 2006).

characterized by conflicts influenced by diverse foreign ideologies, has had an enormous influence on shaping the character of its cultural life in later periods.

As Jennifer Lindsay admits, this ambitious project has shortcomings. Types of popular culture (other than "*roman Medan*"), such as popular music and comics, and the role of electronic media (like radio, social media, and visual arts), are not among the subjects discussed in this book (p. 20). Apart from that, as a reader of this book, I question whether politics influenced by foreign ideologies (capitalist and communist) and the imported strains of Islam were the only factors that shaped Indonesian national culture in the 1950s and '60s. What was the cultural life like among common people who were not involved in the political conflicts between the supporters of two opponent cultural organizations, Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (LEKRA, Institute of People's Culture) and Manifest Kebudayaan (MANIKEBU, Cultural Manifesto)—groups that mainly represented the elite class of intellectuals and cultural figures? How were the cultural relations among the different ethnic cultures translated by the nonpolitically and ideologically affiliated art workers of the period? How were the elements of ethnic culture absorbed into the national culture under construction? (One good example of the latter phenomenon was the existence of some musical groups founded by Minangkabau migrants in Jakarta in the 1950s, including *Orkes Gumarang*, *Orkes Taruna Ria*, and *Orkes Kumbang Tjari*, whose music ventured beyond the Minangkabau ethnic cultural boundaries.⁵) Are the types of cultural activities other than those carried out by elite intellectuals and cultural figures who were familiar with the words of Montesquieu and Karl Marx not considered significant to the formation of Indonesian national culture under construction during the 1950s and the 1960s? Although the book leaves many subjects open for further research, as Jennifer Lindsay admits (p. 21), it certainly has opened a wide window in understanding the cultural dynamics of the new nation called Indonesia, and it is a very welcome addition to the literature on the cultural history of that country.

⁵ See Bart Barendregt, "The Sound of 'Longing for Home': Redefining a Sense of Community through Minang Popular Music," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 158,3 (2002): 411–50. For more on the Minangkabau *Gumarang* music group (established in Jakarta in 1953 and considered by many to be the best ever) that was famous nationally in the 1950s and 1960s, see Asbon Madjid, *Kumpulan Lagu Minang Modern, Orkes Gumarang Pimp. Asbon M.* (Jakarta: Rora Karya, 1997).