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A REVIEW ESSAY

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State of the Arts, Arts of the State

Hilda Soemantri (ed.), *Visual art*. Singapore: Archipelago Press, 1998, 144 pp. [Indonesian Heritage Series 7.] ISBN 981.3018.31.3.

Edi Sedyawati (ed.), *Performing arts*. Singapore: Archipelago Press, 1998, 144 pp. [Indonesian Heritage Series 8.] ISBN 981.3018.35.6.

John H. McGlynn (ed.), *Language and literature*. Singapore: Archipelago Press, 1998, 144 pp. [Indonesian Heritage Series 10.] ISBN 981.3018.36.4.

Bernard Arps (ed.), *Performance in Java and Bali; Studies of narrative, theatre, music, and dance*. London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1993, xi + 244 pp. ISBN 0.7286.0217.2. Price: GBP 10.00.

'If anything, New Order cultural discourse exhibits not so much an inadequateness but a significant surplus of explanation in its continuous effort to make up for what may have been left out. [...] [T]his is a discourse that would rival even anthropology in the department of interpretive authority'.

John Pemberton, *On the subject of 'Java'* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 195.

I

The publication of the first volumes of the 15-volume, deluxely produced 'Indonesian Heritage' encyclopaedia project was a cause for celebration in official and diplomatic circles in early 1998. 'Indonesian Heritage', though in English, published in Singapore, and incorporating writing and editing by numerous non-Indonesian scholars, might be characterized as the swan song of New Order Indonesia's scholarly discourse on *what is Indonesia*. Each volume is composed of some 50 to 60 double-page spreads written for the most part by individual authors, as well as concise general and topical introductions written by volume and section editors. Writing is scholarly but largely

non-technical (with only minimal references), entries highly representative if not comprehensive of the facets of Indonesia surveyed, and the double-page spreads utterly dazzling with their glossy, high quality new and archival photographic reproductions and color illustrations. The 23 companies, hotels, and foundations that provided 'generous and enlightened support' for the series, along with members of the project's editorial advisory board, represent the most intimate and powerful of Soeharto cronies, industrial magnates, and ministry functionaries. Individual volumes clearly reflect upon the capacities of volume editors and the authorial teams assembled; but the encyclopedic sentiment fueling and structuring the series as a whole is authoritatively collective.

It is significant that three of the volumes – *Visual art* [VA], *Performing arts* [PA], and *Language and literature* [LAL] – are allotted to what aestheticians once termed 'the pure arts', while another two cover 'functional arts' – architecture, textiles and adornments. The remaining ten volumes manage to outline such massive topics as ancient history, the human environment, early modern history, plants, wildlife, religion and ritual, contemporary history, seas, the economy, and volcanoes. The accentuation on the arts, particularly 'the pure arts', is symptomatic of what John Pemberton, in *On the subject of 'Java'* (p. 318), called the New Order's 'reign of culture'.

The late-colonial, puissant Sanskritic coinage *kebudayaan* incorporates not only the English notion of culture (typically in the Leavisian sense), but the arts, heritage, indeed civilization itself. During the less-than-open political climate that pervaded much of the twentieth century in Indonesia, politicking and political theorizing was commonly displaced into the realm of *kebudayaan* discourse – most famously in the *Polemik kebudayaan* ('Cultural' Polemic) of 1935-37 and the controversy around the *Manifes Kebudayaan* ('Cultural' Manifesto) of 1963. The most heated *kebudayaan* discourse of the New Order period often revolved around the inter-articulated identities of the *kebudayaan* formations of region and nation: *kebudayaan daerah* and *kebudayaan nasional*. The possession, representation, and regulation of *kebudayaan*, as a refracted condensation of living oral tradition, ritual praxis, and regional custom, was rarely an academic matter, but a conduit to obtain centralized resources and power over shaping national policy.

It would be easy to dismiss the Indonesian Heritage Series as New Order jingoism. I suggest otherwise: that reviewing the three 'pure art' volumes, a veritable late New Order *kebudayaan* panoptic, might serve not only as a reminder of how the arts were conceived in the past, but perhaps also as a vehicle towards conceptualizing the New Order's bequeathment of sedimented *kebudayaan* resistances to individual and collective autonomy and the formation of a genuine civil society in a democratic Indonesia.

II

'Indonesian heritage' is encyclopaedic, partially in the sense that (as the text on the front flap of each book cover tells us) a double-page spread can be read on its own. Appreciated in this way, there are sometimes-unexpected jewels of illustrated mini-essays to be encountered: Adrian Vickers on changes in nineteenth-century Balinese art, Hilda Soemantri on modern Indonesian ceramics, Sal Murgiyanto on modern choreographer Seti-Arti Kailola, Muhammad Haji Salleh on Malay writer Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi, Doris Jedamski on colonial libraries. But like many encyclopaedists, the volume editors also worked hard to structure entries so that each book might present a Grand Narrative as well. *Visual art* begins with such a programmatic statement. The editor writes that Indonesian art

has been approached only within limited categories or definitions such as 'ancient', 'traditional' or 'modern'. [...] They [available references] do not permit an assessment of the position of a particular art form in relation to Indonesian art in its entirety. Indeed, there are those who still view Indonesian modern art as a phenomenon removed from any ancient or traditional roots. This volume attempts to present the hitherto fractured picture of Indonesian visual art as a unified whole. (VA, p. 6.)

Assessing, positioning, viewing, presenting, and unifying in the service of an integrated totality. These pre-eminently encyclopaedic impulses are continually confounded by the reality of archipelagic Indonesia, with its 69 to 578 languages (counting is a problem: LAL, p. 72) and corresponding ethnic identities. Telling a focused cultural story encompassing the varied histories of highland Irian Jaya, Manado, rural Aceh, and cosmopolitan Bandung, allowing all to speak authentically to aspects of Indonesian artistic experience, presents monumental difficulties, approached in different ways by the editors of the three volumes.

Hilda Soemantri, celebrated ceramicist and faculty member of the Jakarta Institute of the Arts, focuses largely on twentieth-century developments in *Visual art*. Brief discussions of 'art in traditional societies', manuscript illustrations, and Hindu statuary are to be found in sections entitled 'Sources and essences of visual tradition' and 'Indigenous crafts and painted surfaces'. But many well-documented subjects, such as Batak staves, Majapahit terra cottas, carved *keris* hafts, and Torajan ancestral ephagies, are only alluded to or not mentioned at all. The least scholarly of the volume's essays, such as Wiyoso Yudoseputro's on 'Islamic influences', are found in these sections – essays tending toward over-dependence on secondary and tertiary literature, and emphasis of legend over empirical historical study. The general lack of intimacy of the writers in these sections with the subjects they tackle is readily

apparent to a specialist. Allow me to use the example of reverse painting on glass. Contrary to Wahyono Martowikrido, the renowned painter Rastika is not from 'the tiny village of Gresik Kulon' (VA, p. 42), but from Gegesik Kulon, a ward in the medium-sized town of Gegesik; a Cirebonese glass painting reproduced on page 25 does not symbolize 'the created world' and 'the abode of the gods', but rather depicts a critical scene from the wayang tale of *Palasara Tapa*, in which the meditating Palasara is tempted to cease his devotions by the playful transformation of Bathara Guru and Bathara Narada into lovebirds. This sort of sloppiness makes the presence of the volume's 'pre-historical' essays feel pro-forma, a necessary prologue to the engrossing historical romance of modernism from Raden Saleh through contemporary installation art.

Interest in collecting contemporary art rose sharply in Indonesia starting in 1987 (VA, p. 134), coinciding roughly with an economic boom and renewed international scholarly attention on the topic by Astri Wright, Jim Supangkat, and Helena Spanjaard, among others. (The only previous scholarship of note had been conducted by Claire Holt.) *Visual art* draws heavily on the historiography of these scholars and attends, generally speaking, precisely to the type of *objects d'art* that brings in cash. The approach taken, by and large, is not ethnographic-anthropological, but rather aesthetic-art critical. Attention is paid to the different histories of Java's modern art centres in Bandung, Yogyakarta, and Jakarta; the special 18-page 'Bali: a different path' section is a particular delight and of special significance for its balanced account of the degree of influence exercised by Western artists on Bali in the 1930s (substantial but not total). It is unfortunate but perhaps overdetermined by inequalities of price and the uneven scholarly gaze that little is said of contemporary artistic centers outside of Java and Bali. One is left wondering whether non-traditional arts exist at all in Indonesia's outer islands. The question posed by the editors at the book's beginning on the degree of indebtedness of contemporary art to traditional roots also feels only partially answered: some artists working today clearly are, others perhaps are not.

Edi Sedyawati, director general of *kebudayaan* at the time of the publication of *Performing arts* and a scholar of classical reliefs and dance, drew largely on Department of Education and Culture documentation and faculty members at Indonesia's art conservatories to construct her edited volume, and a somewhat questionable typological scheme (traditional musical ensembles, non-representational dance, wayang theatre, modern Indonesian music, and so on) to order individual portraits of performing art forms found in Indonesia today. There are strong analytical descriptions of contemporary practices – the dance steps of Aceh's *seudati*, Solonese shadow puppet iconography, the performance structure of Balinese *topeng pajegan*. In contrast to the other volumes, the focus is almost exclusively upon living art forms and

artists; the great performing artists of Indonesia's past, and no longer extant performance forms; receive scant attention. The tendency of Indonesia's conservatories and the Department of Education and Culture to focus on classical and modern forms of art, in addition, results in a downplaying of Indonesia's numerous folk and popular performing arts. No definitions are offered of Javanese *kethoprak*, *tayuban*, or *dhagelan Mataram* (though such forms may be mentioned in passing), and one looks in vain for the names of Indonesia's beloved clowns and comedians of stage, television, and film. Sedyawati notes that 'as one peruses this volume, many similarities in the great variety of Indonesia's performing arts become evident' (PA, p. 9). Justly so. But the volume's ahistoricity makes it unclear whether similarities are due to the existence of mutual ancestors, co-influences; or coincidence. What one is offered instead are individual snapshots of performance today, a celebration of archipelagic artistic diversity. Reading *Performing arts* compares to attending an all-Indonesia arts festival or *pasar malam* fair, where one admires a blurred parade of virtuosity without being consistently aware of precisely what one is seeing or how it got there.

John McGlynn, editor, translator, and head of the Lontar Foundation in Jakarta, offers a remarkably comprehensive account of Indonesian literature(s) in *Language and literature*. World experts from nine countries (only 13 of the 45 writers contributing to LAL are Indonesian, in contrast to 28 out of 29 in PA) provide remarkable treatments of topics ranging from the preparation of Balinese manuscripts (Hedi Hinzler), living oral traditions of Nusa Tenggara (James Fox), *rabab pariaman* (Suryadi), the art of composing a Malay letter (Annabel Gallop), the 'Pujangga Baru' (Keith Foulcher), and Goenawan Mohamad's essays (Jennifer Lindsay). Linguists will possibly be disappointed with the accentuation of literature over language in the volume – one looks (again) in vain for discussions of Javanese speech etiquette and grammatical rules governing infixation in eastern Indonesian languages – but the book is groundbreaking in its scope of inclusion, opening avenues to important topics formerly familiar to only the most specialized of scholars. Through generous selections of translated prose and poetry, life histories, technical accounts, and historical overviews, we get a vivid sense of what Indonesian literature is, and how it means.

McGlynn, like the other editors discussed above, has a definite story to tell. It is one of National Redemption.

Indonesian writers want to make a name for themselves and put their literature on both the national and international map. [...] What Indonesians are now saying is that they want to be defined through their literary expressions, that they will no longer be content to limit themselves ideologically, culturally, politically, or geographically. They have the right, in fact, the obligation, to explore all venues, to

gather knowledge, and to impart for their fellow human beings the discoveries they have made. (LAL, p. 121.)

The bold simplicity of this narrative means that eddies and cross-currents of Indonesian literature are occasionally ignored or misrepresented. It was not, for example, simply 'pessimism' which 'forced Utuy [Tatang Sontani] back into Sundanese culture' in the 1950s, as claimed by Harry Aveling in his contribution on the playwright. Rather, the intimate involvement of Utuy in Sundanese language theatre was part of a general trend in Indonesian arts of the time. This was about the same time when S.M. Ardan discovered Betawi culture and Ajip Rosidi adapted Sundanese *pantun* tales. One might argue (indeed, one should argue) about the causes for the 'discovery' of regional traditions by Indonesia's intelligentsia – including (we might as well be honest) the emphasis on indigenous folk arts by LEKRA, the cultural arm of the Indonesian Communist Party. And this brings us to another problem. As one might expect, Chinese and Communist writers get short shrift in the volume; Chinese manuscript literature is discussed by Ann Kumar and Ian Proudfoot, but the often marvelous Sino-Malay print literature of the late colonial period is entirely overlooked, while Pramoedya is depicted as a Writer of the Revolution, obfuscating his leftist ideological commitments and entanglements. These substantial reservations aside, LAL is almost certainly the best general introduction to Indonesian literature available to the English reader, and by far the strongest of these three Indonesian Heritage Series volumes.

III

Reading the three volumes together, one experiences a lurking hucksterism. *Kebudayaan* is not just being surveyed, it is being sold. I have mentioned already the attention of *Visual art* to valuable art objects, and I might note as well in this connection the lack of interest of *Language and literature* in newspaper and magazine ephemera, and the focus of *Performing arts* on flashy spectacle over bang-on-a-can children's groups and humble singers of tales. It is not incidental that I first encountered the Indonesian Heritage Series on sale at the 1998 Pasar Malam Besar in The Hague, and that in five months of canvassing of book stores in Java during the same year, the volumes were nowhere to be found. *Kebudayaan* is constructed as something produced by Indonesians for an audience of foreign tourists and carriage-trading, foreign-traveling, English-speaking Indonesian élites. The link between *kebudayaan* and tourism was incrementally constructed and reinforced during the New Order. Its apex was in 1998. In Soeharto's New Year's Eve national television address, he declared 1998 as *tahun kebudayaan* – the year of living cultural-

ly – celebrating national pride in cultural accomplishments and projecting record (cultural) tourist income. Subsequently, the arts portfolio was partially taken out of the hands of the Department of Education and Culture and integrated into a newly christened Department of Tourism and the Arts. In late New Order Indonesia, tourism and its twin-sister globalization were often discursively troped to justify a variety of the regime's culturalist projects, including the instillation of the state ideology of Pancasila, avoidance of SARA (ethnic, religious, racial, class) conflicts, and the encouragement of provincial heritage and national pride. 'See how attentive the foreign tourists are to your X', so many government officials have told their constituents, 'so why aren't your children still producing X?' The Indonesian Heritage Series consists, in one strong sense, of a catalogue of these X's, the 'peaks' of *kebudayaan* to be 'preserved and developed' (in officialese) and subsequently marketed.

It is important to state at this juncture that the genuine topography of Indonesia's cultural history is still largely unknown: there are many so-called peaks, some of Himalayan proportions, that have yet to be mapped. These three volumes are important as much for presenting what is known about Indonesian arts, as much as for pointing out the fields in which both Indonesian and foreign experts remain largely ignorant. Comparable surveys have been quite limited in number. In fact, only three spring to mind: Fritz Wagner's *Art of Indonesia* (originally published in 1959), Claire Holt's *Art in Indonesia; Continuity and change* (1967), and the *Indonesia Indah* series published by Tien Soeharto's now-nationalized 'Our Hope' Foundation. Even regional surveys, on the expressive cultures of Sunda or Tana Toraja, for example, have been far fewer than one might suppose. The advancement of knowledge of the Indonesian arts has proceeded piecemeal, with intense international focus on some areas and near total neglect of others.

This is evident looking at Bernard Arps' edited anthology, *Performance in Java and Bali*, containing fourteen papers presented as a symposium on Indonesian performing arts held at the School of Oriental and African Studies in 1990. To state the obvious: it is noteworthy that at a seminar purportedly on *Indonesian* performance, none of the presenters discussed outer island art forms. The range of 'Javanese' and 'Balinese' arts assayed in the volume appears at first glance substantial, including Banyuwangi's *seblang* ritual dance, Sundanese *jaipongan* popular dance, and Sino-Malay *Po-te-hi* puppetry. Belying this diversity, however, are certain preponderate concentrations which are in fact symptomatic of Indonesian performing art scholarship in general. Fully six of the volume's fourteen contributions are entirely or secondarily concerned with royal court performance. Clara Brakel compares the courtly dances of Surakarta and Yogyakarta, Peter Carey writes briefly on political allusions in the court arts of nineteenth-century Yogya-

karta, Martin Ramstedt tropes on Geertz's Balinese theatre state in his discussion of 'devotional' Balinese performing arts, Felicia Hughes-Freeland provides a political economic analysis of Yogyakarta court dance and its patrons, R. Anderson Sutton contemplates the sacred quality of the rarely performed *Bedhaya Semang* Yogyakarta court dance, while Edi Sedyawati analyses Central Javanese temple reliefs from the point of view of the *Nāṭyasastra*. This emphasis on court arts is entirely understandable when one remembers that Europeans have been important parts of the audience for such presentations since at least the first decade of the sixteenth century, when the English factor Edmund Scott was feted with *raket* dance-drama at the court of Banten. In fact, recent critical work by Sumarsam, Marc Perlman, Laurie Sears, and others has demonstrated that European aesthetics impacted heavily upon the conceptualization and production of this vein of art. I find nothing inherently wrong in studying the court arts of Java and Bali, but this focus does have the unfortunate side-effect that it implicitly lends support to a crusty (and entirely erroneous) supposition that everything artistic outside of the courts is ungainly or crude.

It was apparently one of the aims of the London conference to compare different sorts of Indonesian (and non-Indonesian) performance: thus, we find Wim van Zanten reflecting on contextual and structural similarities and differences between Sundanese sung tales and art music, Richard Widdess on Indian and Javanese musical tunings, and Kees Epskamp on W.H. Rasers' fragmentary notes comparing the structure of Panji tales and Shakespeare's *Tempest*. In nearly all these comparisons, however, what is lacking is a sense of shared history. We hear little of artistic developments that impacted nearly all of Java and Bali's art forms, such as the emergence of *pasar malam* and 'Eastern' radio stations as artistic forums, the development of *sanggar* for pedagogy, LEKRA's significance in the ideological energization of folk arts, or the remarkable popular-hybrid theatre movement of the late colonial period, which inundated the artistic economies not only of Java and Bali (much to the horror of colonial scholars such as Kunst, Pigeaud, De Zoete, and Spies), but much of the rest of South and Southeast Asia as well.

We can observe that the major scholarly problems of the Indonesian Heritage Series art volumes, then, are not exclusively 'Indonesian' ones, although the triumphantly celebratory tone of the series, replete with proclamations such as 'freedom and creativity have flourished in the world of arts under Soeharto's 1965 New Order' (VA, p. 59), would likely not be shared by most foreign observers. Ward Keeler once wrote that 'it is very difficult to establish with any certainty what performances were like a century ago, or fifty years ago, or even thirty. Had we clearer records of a range of earlier performances, we could speak more confidently of the links between the content of performance and their particular historical and political con-

texts'. In fact, more recent research has suggested that records of performances (and of literary and visual art production) do exist for many, if not all Indonesian art forms, typically buried in colonial archives or popular press publications. Certain of these accounts are clearer than others. It will be a task incumbent upon future generations of scholars to excavate these materials in order to historicize art and thus bring out a fuller range of art's societal significances, past and present. With that, research on the arts will have a genuine purport for its current practitioners, valuating their efforts through uncovering implied continuities with the past and recognizing individual and collective artistic creativity *vis-à-vis* ongoing processes of contextual adaptation and formal change.

IV

'In multiethnic Indonesia, [...] to write about one's own culture is to establish one's ethnic identity', observed Edward Bruner in 1987. Such writing on the self was actively encouraged during the New Order, fostered by the establishment of Javanologi, Sundanologi, Dayakologi, Baliologi, and like organizations, encouraging inward reflection, provincialism, and over-estimation of the High Beauty of local tradition. A central political-cultural issue for post-New Order Indonesia will be to energize Indonesia's variegated communities of creators and consumers of art to consider appreciating, writing about, and artistically appropriating the art of Indonesian ethnic others (including *pribumi* 'natives' as well as Chinese, Arabs, and Indians) with all the intensity of the interest currently focused on Euro-American arts. The seeds of such a trans-ethnic artistic nationalism were apparent in the 1950s, as Ajip Rosidi has observed. It will not be easy to revitalize this enthusiasm, particularly in light of the separatist politics of contemporary Indonesia. But it can be hoped that future surveys of Indonesian art will engage in a more meaningful way the art that runs against the grain of the teleologies that all literature and visual art leads to high modernism and that the most 'significant' performing arts are the ones already celebrated nationally and internationally.