Freek Colombijn (with the assistance of Martine Barwegen), *Under Construction: The Politics of Urban Space and Housing During the Decolonization of Indonesia, 1930-1960*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2010, xvi + 480 pp. ISBN 9789067182911 (paperback). [Sold out].

Under Construction is an insightful, engagingly written and intensively researched examination of the 'long decolonization' of Indonesia (1930-1960) viewed from the fresh perspective of urban space and housing. Studies of the 'three eras' (*tiga zaman*) of Dutch, then Japanese, and finally Indonesian rule that spanned these decades normally focus on war, diplomacy, and governance. Freek Colombijn's analysis of the neglected field of urban space and residency examines new territory, contending that Indonesian cities in this period were sites of radical social change where citizens and authorities frequently interacted over the issue of housing. His study sheds new light on the decolonization process through combining views from city hall as well as the person on the street, and comparing local with national policies and experiences.

Following a chapter that summarizes the social and political setting across the 'three eras', Colombijn's book proceeds in two parts. The first interrogates the nature of spatial segregation in large cities, and the second examines the challenges of development and conflict over housing between various urban stakeholders. Colombijn masters the difficult task of combining chronological and thematic approaches in each part, providing a balance of empirical detail and a clear sense of continuity and change over time. Indeed, one of the major contributions of this book is the challenge it presents to widely-held assumptions about when and, indeed, whether breaks with the past have occurred in twentieth century Indonesian history. In doing so, Colombijn also tackles some major historiographical debates.

In Part One, for example, he dismantles the assumption of many experts that Indonesia's transition to independence was accompanied by a 'from-race-to-class' segregation pattern in cities; that is, Indonesian middle classes moved into the villas of the erstwhile 'European' quarters from the colonial era. Colombijn finds that while a *discourse* of racial difference is evident in many European sources from the colonial period, in *practice* it was class (defined by income and 'lifestyle') that overwhelmingly determined where one lived. So while poor areas were usually described by Europeans as

'kampongs' and thus glossed as 'native', these areas actually housed significant populations from other ethnic groups (including Europeans). Similarly, in well-to-do suburbs, spacious villas were considered 'European' dwellings but often housed Chinese and other non-Europeans on middle- or upper-class incomes. The major change following decolonization was that Indonesian authorities abolished the legal distinctions between 'Native', 'Foreign Oriental' and 'European' that formally (although not practically, as Colombijn also cogently shows in a dedicated chapter on the subject) underpinned land tenure systems. After independence, urban residential patterns continued to reflect class differences between Indonesians.

Colombijn's finding that race was not as important as class when it came to the spatial expression of social differences in Indonesian cities provides new evidence for an emerging school of thought that challenges the current centrality of race in historical studies of colonial Indonesia. His interpretation that class differences were certainly racialized by Europeans in this period, but that post-colonial scholars have been (erroneously) reifying these distinctions ever since, is where the controversy persists. Although compelling in the narrow sense of illuminating residential patterns, I suspect Colombijn's study won't put an end to the wider historiographical, chicken-and-egg debate of what was most important—race or class—for determining social opportunity in colonial society. Scholars who argue that European elites conflated the two categories can still claim that colonial rhetoric, albeit specious, had material outcomes for the different social experiences of brown and white city residents.

What can surely not remain in dispute is Colombijn's revelation of a deeper continuity in the views of governing elites across the transition from Dutch to Indonesian rule. Part Two of *Under Construction* details the process by which Indonesian civil and military authorities used anti-racist, anti-colonial rhetoric to legitimize their new power in the 1940s and 1950s, only to perpetuate the 'top-down' planning styles of their colonial forebears and neglect housing Indonesia's poorest city dwellers in favour of middle-class bureaucrats and military personnel. Granted, housing shortages in these decades were exacerbated by war and deprivation, but Indonesian planners' solution—official encouragement of 'self-help' in the housing sector—was symptomatic of a failing developmental state.

Across the five chapters comprising Part Two, Colombijn skilfully explains several present-day legacies dating from the long period of decolonization

that are either thrown into sharp relief when examined through the prism of housing access, or that were exacerbated by housing shortages. These are: a self-serving, corrupt civil bureaucracy in conflict (over access to staff housing, in this instance) with a self-serving, corrupt military; the retardation of decentralization and grass-roots democracy in governance at the local as well as national level; and resentment and disunity across the archipelago over the disproportionate investment in Jakarta at the expense of other major Indonesian cities.

Throughout *Under Construction*, Colombijn reveals the social conflicts that arose between various stakeholders around the issue of urban planning, and the tensions between ideas and experience, discourse and practice that frequently characterised the different perspectives of housing authorities, renters, landowners, and squatters. It is a small disappointment, then, that he concludes the long period of decolonization in Indonesia was essentially one of 'uneasy modernization' (p. 403)—the post-colonial continuation of a colonial developmentalist project and discourse. In doing so, many of the complexities he spends a whole book carefully teasing apart are collapsed into a conventional narrative (about the growing pains associated with 'becoming a nation') which becomes dangerously circular when he claims that 'becoming a developmental state speeded up the decolonization of Indonesia' (p. 404). This might be true (if it makes sense) for elites who benefited from the Indonesianization of technocratic institutions in the post-colonial era, but if continuity was the overwhelming experience of ordinary Indonesians, did 'decolonization' mean the same for them? In the detail of the chapters, if not in every aspect of the conclusion, however, *Under Construction* is a provocative and interesting book that will be important not only to Indonesia and Southeast Asia specialists, but also to urban historians and scholars of colonialism and postcolonialism.

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