Rachmi Dyah Larasati, *The Dance that Makes You Vanish: Cultural Reconstruction in Post-Genocide Indonesia*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013, xii + 196 pp. ISBN 9780816679935. Price: USD 25.00 (paperback).

The appearance of this book is very timely. Recovery of the long-suppressed history of the anti-Communist massacres and imprisonments of 1965 and their aftermath in Indonesia has gained considerable momentum in recent months. Augmenting the academic studies of the 1965 events, and the personal accounts by victims which have appeared since the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998, in 2012 three developments brought these issues to wider public attention. The Indonesian Human Rights commission presented the first official independent report on the conduct of the killings; the influential news magazine *Tempo* published a special issue consisting of interviews with perpetrators, and an internationally-funded documentary film *The Act of Killing*, depicting a group of men recreating their murders they committed in 1965, has attracted huge interest within Indonesia and abroad. Additionally, two major works of fiction on the 1965 theme by younger authors without personal involvement in the events have enriched the process of recall of this time and its significance for Indonesians today.

Rachmi Diyah Larasati is uniquely positioned to contribute to this process of historical recuperation. As a child of a family of dancers persecuted for their connections with the communist-linked women's organization Gerwani, who became an acclaimed dance practitioner and academic under the Suharto regime, Larasati has had intimate personal experience of the project explored in this book. That is, the erasure of left-identified women performers, and their replacement by replica bodies and re-appropriated versions of their dance, thereby creating an idealized image of Indonesian culture to promote the power and legitimacy of Suharto's New Order state. In the early pages of her work she identifies her aim as not only analysing the way 'art forms once practiced by the vanished dancers' have been 'reclaimed and ideologically retooled by the state' (p. xxi), but also how 'marginal groups of women have survived and maintained their "forbidden" artistic practices' (p. 12). In introducing a later chapter Larasati defines her aim 'to examine how the strategic transmission of dance in villages and family compounds can effect a coded distribution of narratives concerning history, power and state order, narratives aimed at an eventual

coming to fruition in the form of resistive practice' (p. 61). Drawing on her own experience of performing, studying, and working overseas, she also suggests that 'mobility, particularly for those who enact art forms such as dance can become a powerful tool of resistance to dominant and dominating cultural narratives' (p. 16). She speaks of a 'new networking of international artists' in a number of non-Western countries, with 'a conception of our movements as a "transnational feminist practice"' which may allow more critical examination of 'local patriarchal rule and its connection to international structures of power'.

As readers we thus eagerly anticipate that the chapters to come will offer new, detailed, experientially-grounded insights into two major issues—the impact of the 1965 repression on performers and their families, and the remoulding and appropriation of local art forms undertaken by the New Order state, analysed in general terms in the studies of scholars such as Philip Yampolsky, Greg Acciaioli and Amrih Widodo. Further, Larasati's study promises to reveal unique insights into on as-yet unreported resistance to state control at the local level, and on wider international networks of critique and resistance. The inclusion of a chapter describing Larasati's visits to Cambodia and drawing comparisons with the Indonesian situation suggests possible sharing of experience and critical strategies with Cambodian performers.

Sadly, however, on all these fronts the results disappoint. Repeated general analyses of New Order cultural policies invoke a variety of cultural theories, but fail to add much specific information. Regarding Larasati's family there are references to aunts and grandmothers with disgraced histories of leftist dance practice, 'a disappeared grandfather and many other "subversive" relatives' (p. xix) including an aunt 'who claimed to be her mother' (p. 121). But we know nothing of the stories of these people and their personal experiences. How and why did the author's aunt assume the role of her mother; how did her grandmother hold a position of such importance in the village, in spite of her tainted political connections, that meetings of the PKK women's movement, dance practices following new state guidelines and documentation of local dance forms by civil servants all took place in the yard of her home? How did these relatives, the central grandmother figure in particular, interact with Larasati as a child? The name of her grandmother, Siti Samidjah, is cited in the dedication of the book, and appears in two footnotes as the source of technical information about dance. But no

other information about her is given. Similarly, we know nothing about the husband whom Larasati is accused of neglecting, leading to the court case referred to several times at some length in the narrative. With no information about how she came to marry, her husband's position or his attitude to her travels, we can only wonder at the strangeness of the case, rather than engaging empathetically with her experience. In the case of a few marginalized performers, Suyitno (p. 56), Pariyah and her mother (pp. 67-9), and the author's protector Mr. Soek (why such an odd name?) a little more information is given, but always as a brief reference rather than a comprehensive account of these people's experiences. Meanwhile, the informants interviewed by the author (1965 survivors and activists) are identified in footnotes as the sources of her information, but not otherwise described or cited. None of these figures speak in their own words. While acknowledging the ongoing need for caution in discussing 1965 connections, I feel that strategies could have been developed to engage readers with specific personal experiences, while if necessary disguising individual identities, rather than simply conveying general information. (As an example of such an approach, see Rhoma Dwi Aria Yuliantri 'Lekra and Ensembles' in Lindsay and Liem (2012), and other articles in the same volume, which would have been a very useful resource for the section on Sukarno-era culture in this book.)

Regarding the 'upgrading' of folk dances in keeping with state-imposed standards of refinement, likewise little detail is provided. Of the form *jejer*, banned after 1965 but later rehabilitated because of international interest, we learn only that its original form was lively and 'boisterous', men and women danced together without clear separation between audience and dancer, and that the all-female dancers displayed their hair and torsos. What its movements were like, what music accompanied it, and how such patterns were transformed in its reincarnation under the New Order are not discussed. Similarly in relation to the form *tayub*, we learn only that dancers were trained to perform 'in a more "refined" way' (p. 69). Dances for Independence Day celebrations had to conform to new guidelines set by the head of the village, based on information from the regional arts council (p. 74), but no mention is made of what these guidelines were.

On resistance, we are told that the author secretly practised the banned *gandrung* dance with her grandmother at the back of the house, and that banned practitioners secretly practised the music of *jejer* and *gandrung*

(p. 82). But no details are given of such activities, and no explanation of their context, aim or effects; there is no indication of the 'strategic transmission of dance' aimed at fostering 'resistive practice' suggested earlier. Of international networks of critique and resistance among women performers no examples are provided. Reflections on dance practice and social/ political conditions in Cambodia draw entirely on the author's own observations; she makes no mention of interactions with local dancers or cultural analysts. Regrettably, we do not know how local participants might respond to her suggestion of a more effective and progressive role for state cultivation of traditional dance in Cambodia than in Indonesia.

Near the end of the book Larasati refers to 'a few Indonesian women dancers' who have been able to find cracks in the walls of patriarchal control 'through networking with like-minded artists across the archipelago and through travel abroad' (p. 142). Yet the example she cites is the group Sahita from Solo in Central Java, whose performance idiom, playfully subverting standard stereotypes of femininity and gender relations, is thoroughly locally-based, owing little to networks with other groups or foreign travel. Larasati's own collaborative performance, *Tembok Mari Bicara*, concerning the 1965 theme, involving lecturers from the Yogyakarta arts institute and local performers, would seem a better illustration of such potential. A fuller account of the content of this performance and its reception would have provided a stronger ending to the book than the current shift into an argument about genocide. Hopefully in future the author will write further about her own activities and those of other locally-grounded, globally-connected performers re-telling Indonesia's history and interrogating its present, within a framework of political and cultural analysis which illuminates rather than overwhelms this material, bringing to life its colourful detail.

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Reference

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