Susie Protschky and Tom van den Berge (eds), *Modern Times in Southeast Asia, 1920s–1970s*. Leiden: BRILL, 2018, pp. xi + 214, ISBN: 9789004372610, price: EUR 25.00 (hardcover).

The scholarly quest to understand modernity has been a thriving field for at least half a century, with works focusing on Southeast Asia from a variety of angles, from education to everyday habits and sexuality; architecture, urban planning, and economic production; the arts and other forms of public entertainment (theatre, night fairs, photography, painting, and films), to mention but a few. This body of work has productively intersected with a more recent analytical endeavor that refutes the binary paradigm of modernity as “aspiration” *versus* “rejection” of European models. A landmark essay was Fredrick Cooper’s 2005 “Modernity,” in which he advocated for historically-grounded studies that “listen to what is being said in the world” (2005: 115).

Modern Times in Southeast Asia directly stems from this intersection, answering Cooper’s call to eschew the deployment of “modernity” as an “analytic category” (2005: 113). The essays in the collection offer several windows on what “modernity” looked like across Southeast Asia in the middle 50 years of the twentieth century. The outcome of a workshop held at the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde, the volume proves the continued intellectual vitality of KITLV, and the legacy of Henk Schulte Nordholt’s imprint on the Institute, as it was his work that opened this line of inquiry in the 1990s. Far from reproducing itself, we see an expansion of its scope in terms of chronology, geography, and methodologies.

The volume does not aspire to exhaustive coverage of the region, but its inquiry into “modernity at certain places and in particular times” (p. 1) does showcase a great variety of “samples of plural modernities” (p. 1) from across the region (Mainland and Maritime), religions and traditions (Islam, Buddhism, colonial Christianity, spiritual movements, etc.), decades (from the 1920s to the 1970s), and methodologies (from cultural studies to archival history and literary studies).

According to Susie Protschky’s introduction, the volume could be divided in two sections, with a first half (chapters 2 to 4) presenting contributions in which “the concerns of governing elites and their religious subjects and citizens could not be more dissonant, and yet they share this referent, ‘modernity’” (p. 2), and a second portion centered on “representations of modernity by actors, artists, novelists, and non-fiction writers” inviting reflections “on the conditions of modernity” (p. 7). In this review I shall opt for a different ordering of the chapters, however, taking as inspiration Protschky’s own concluding remark stating that these essays collectively “advance the argument that every-

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day experiences of modernity were complex indexes of continuity and change in the transition from colonialism to post-colonialism" (p. 11).

This process of "continuity and change" can take a variety of forms, as contributors to this volume show. Sometimes, it is an ongoing process towards change marked by tensions, where the global and the local do not blend, but are juxtaposed. While in deeply different ways, Tom van den Berge's analysis of modern art in the Indies (Chapter 5), Tim Barnard's depictions of women in Malay films and advertisements (Chapter 6), and Janit Feanfu and Rachel Harrison's investigation of Thailand's modernity (Chapter 8), all identify aspects of the "aspiration *versus* rejection of Western modernity" paradigm.

Other times, processes of "continuity and change" can give shape to the surfacing of new, different, negotiated, multi-sited realities, as highlighted by Michael Pante's contribution on the planning and building of Quezon City in the greater Manila area (Chapter 2); Julian Millie's on re-framings of Islamic rituals in Java and Sumatra (Chapter 3); Marieke Bloembergen's on new spiritual movements in Java (Chapter 4); Chie Ikeya's study of vernacular materials on sex culture in Burma (Chapter 7); and Christina Firpo's investigation of a colonial modernity project for mixed-race children centered on controlling the bodies of Indochina's *metis* boys (Chapter 9).

Then, on the one hand, van den Berge's chapter "Picasso in the Tropics" asks "how did the colony react to modern art" (p. 88) to uncover Dutch critics' expectations of Indonesian artists to preserve local traditions, whereas "Sudjojono, the father of Indonesian painting, admired Picasso" (p. 112). Barnard's "Women, Film, and Modern Malay Identities" offers an analysis of Malay movies to discuss feminine stereotypes through these actresses' screen roles and real lifestyle choices, unveiling how the binary between "traditional" and "modern" was only supplanted by women's contribution to nation-building. Feanfu and Harrison's "Contested Modernities and Spectres of Progress in Twentieth-Century Siam/Thailand" examines "literary texts and cultural materials" to unpack the meaning of modernity as the monarchy shifted from one to the other, when "the longing for the imagined 'purity' of the past is juxtaposed with the potential excitements of a modern future" (p. 188).

On the other hand, Bloembergen's essay "New Spiritual Movements, Scholars, and 'Greater India' in Indonesia" most clearly shows "alternative" (I would say multi-faceted) "forms and trajectories of modernity in Indonesia" through an analysis of new transnational spiritual associations which established networks that connected Java to the Netherlands, France, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, England, and America, thus creating "alternative maps and moral geographies" (p. 58). Similarly effective is Ikeya's "Talking Sex, Making Love," which analyses a "reformulation of the intimate" by Moe Nin, a critic of Burma's tradi-

tional forms of marriage and family who also eluded being framed “as an agent of either colonialism or nationalism” (p. 137).

Firpo’s rich chapter “Modernity and the Body” looks at how the French colonial government—much like Ann Stoler tells us the Dutch were doing in Java—focused on Europeanizing mixed-race children by removing all exposure to local culture, including the avoidance of Vietnamese food, for example, and mandating instead dietary prescriptions shaped by the French vegetarian movement of the late nineteenth century; but no note was made at the time over the fact that the founders of this movement had themselves been inspired by Buddhist practices in Burma!

The meeting of local and global “modern” trends is also apparent in Pante’s exploration of the planning and building of Quezon City; “Modern Living in Third-World Suburbia” “problematizes understandings of modernity” in general, but more specifically leads to the observation that “despite being a symbol of post-colonial independence, Quezon City remained beholden to colonial ideologies, plans, and personnel” (p. 33) as a colonial suburban neighborhood that turned capital city in the independent era.

These dynamics might be hidden, but are nonetheless also extant in Julian Millie’s contribution “Mediated Publicness and Islamic Modernity in Indonesia,” as he compares two ways in which mediated publicness was reoriented in the late colonial period. Exploring Deliar Noer’s concept of *ijtihad* as “an Islamic morality not constructed out of revelation, but out of ethical understanding of national publicness” (p. 41), alongside changes in religious rituals in North Sumatra and in West Java, Millie reflects on the shaping of forms of Islamic modernity and subjectivity as the result of interactions between local, national, and global trends.

The volume has its own flow and intellectual coherence, but I see one missed opportunity. The editors’ choice to focus on Southeast Asia was “by default,” as this is their region of expertise, and there is nothing wrong with that. But this could have been the place to articulate why and how individual case studies from Southeast Asia contribute to the scholarly debate over “modernity” “as the story” of modernity (Cooper in this volume, p. 2), beyond merely “confirm[ing] that the notion of single or plural ‘modernities’ remains difficult to conceptually substantiate as a condition separate from, for example, capitalism, urbanization, consumerism, or the rise of mass politics, and (ominously), ‘globalization’, another fraught term” (pp. 6–7).

Modern Times is a welcome addition to the burgeoning body of scholarly works which address the question of modernity in Asia through the lens of local experiences, grounded in extensive and deep empirical and archival research. The introduction provides a bird’s-eye view to the state of the field, and indi-

vidual chapters are all intriguing, suitable for readers at various levels of the academic ladder and with a broad range of geographical foci, from undergraduate instruction to scholars in a variety of fields.

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Reference

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