
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 Amrij 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 aunties 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