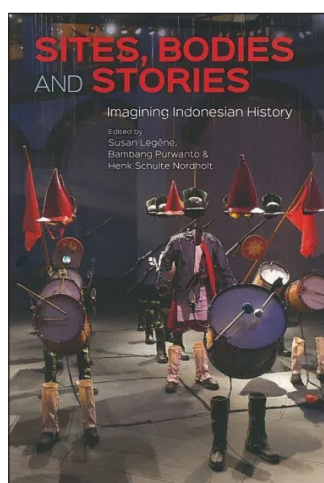


## Book reviews

Susan Legêne, Bambang Purwanto, and Henk Schulte Nordholt (eds), *Sites, bodies and stories; Imagining Indonesian history*. Singapore: NUS Press, 2015, 312 pp. ISBN 978-9971-69-857-7. Price: USD 38 (paperback).



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In 2008 a band of marauders attacked the historical site Macan Putih, situated a few miles outside Banyuwangi in East Java. They crossed the encircling wall, destroyed two statues that stood inside a ritual building, and stole a sheet that covered the shrine. This act of vandalism illustrates the highly contentious significance of some heritage sites in modern Indonesia. Macan Putih was a palace compound inhabited by the heroic ruler Tawang

Alun of Blambangan in the seventeenth century, which was rediscovered in the 1970s. While it serves as a component of the conceived heritage of this area, some Javanese and Madurese Muslims have seen the local interest in the past as a revival of Hinduism, or as heresy, and taken drastic measures against it.

The example, referred in the book chapter by Sri Margana, is one of the more drastic cases included in the present anthology. However, all the nine chapters highlight the close relation between (tangible or intangible) heritage and current ideological trends or power relationships. Not seldom, heritage has been instrumental in underpinning colonial and postcolonial knowledge regimes. In that sense the various contributions naturally form a coherent collection in spite of the widely different settings, from cases in the field to museum collections to film making. As Susan Legêne and Henk Schulte Nordholt point out in their introduction, heritage formation can be seen as “an unfixed historical cross-media process embodying the perceptions of the past in the present” (p. 8).

The essays are divided into three sections, corresponding to the title of the book. “Sites” deals with spaces of encounter, performance, and exhibition,

reminiscent of Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*. As discussed in an essay by Marieke Bloembergen and Martijn Eickhoff, Borobudur is an archetypical memory site. As they show, the famous Buddhist shrine intrigued and engaged the Japanese occupiers in the 1940s, a forgotten episode which nevertheless shows how Dutch, Japanese, and Indonesian engagements in the past, have been entangled. A less well-known location is Bampalola village on Alor, whose local significance as a heritage site is interestingly unravelled by Emilie Wellfelt. With the onset of the decentralization laws in the post-Suharto era, the quest for a local Alorese identity has increased interest in old villages and the stories tied to them. This also raises questions about authenticity and materiality, since the old structures on Alor are made of less durable material than Borobudur and need to be rebuilt from time to time.

The second section, "bodies", refers to the (supposedly) scientific measurement and assessment of people in such fields as physical anthropology and biomedical research, but also representations of people via dioramas, arts, film, and so on. Two essays, by Willem Westerkamp and Fenneke Sysling, respectively, discuss the depiction of humans in Dutch museums from the colonial to postcolonial periods, in the shape of mannequins and facial plaster casts of Indonesian people. Both of them highlight the colonial obsession of mapping ethnic types, and also postcolonial attempts of the museums to come to grips with the material in a politically-correct way – in the case of the mannequins by unceremoniously discarding them. In a third contribution in this section, Matthew Isaac Cohen surveys a cluster of mostly forgotten films from 1919-1954 with Javanese and Balinese motifs. As he shows, the Java depicted in the Hollywood movies is a rather vague site of oriental fantasy, operating as the backdrop for hybridity and self-transformation, while representations of Bali blend exoticism with erotic undertones and sometimes have all-natives casts.

"Stories", finally, alludes to intangible heritage, and how people engage with society and history through stories, addressing issues of inclusion and exclusion to particular aspects of heritage. Performing arts is important here. Three chapters written by Sadiyah Boonstra, Tular Sudarmadi, and I Ngurah Suryawan show how cultural performances are inextricably entangled in current Indonesian politics and ideology in such diverse places as Java, Flores and Papua. As demonstrated by Boonstra, the performance of *wayang* was heavily institutionalized in New Order Indonesia through a bureaucratic flow that served the conservative stance of the Suharto regime. The harsh consequence of this emphasis on sameness was suffered by the Papuan music and dance group Mambesak, described by Suryawan – a member of the group, the anthropologist Arnold Ap, was murdered in 1984 since the group was suspected of separatism. Finally, Sri Margana explores the dilemmas of a multi-ethnic region seeking for a historical identity, namely Blambangan where only a minor part of the population, the Orang Osing is original to the land and a number of stigmas are attached to their past.

It is impossible to do the contributions full justice here. They offer a

multitude of fascinating details about the cultural dimensions framing successive regimes over the last century of Indonesian history. The texts show that many defining traits of heritage have roots in colonial discourses, for example via museums, but at the same time eschew colonial determinism. Postcolonial heritage is not just defined through colonial concepts, and is not merely a representation of the colonial past. Taken together the collection offers a broad and very readable sample of the processes of heritage formation since the days of the Dutch East Indies. The anthology is important for the light it sheds on the use that local groups with central authorities and institutions have made during the past, and how the interests of these aggregate levels have frequently clashed.