

I assert that by stopping at the morality of empathy and care aimed at equalizing civil society as a playing field, Kusaka's normative claims in this book fail to address the structural dimensions of moral antagonism that he himself recognizes. If we are convinced that the differences in language, living spaces, and media consumption are coupled with the material conditions of labor insecurity in a neo-liberal world, then empathy is only half of the solution. The other half of the solution lies in efforts to transform neo-liberal structures that help bring about moral antagonism to begin with. To strengthen his normative claims, Kusaka should have pushed his arguments by demonstrating how the deployment of a specific type of morality helps not only hasten democracy but also counter the hegemonic rule of neo-liberalism which, he claims, is the backdrop of moral antagonism.

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## Beyond Bali: Subaltern Citizens and Post-Colonial Intimacy

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This is a good book by which to gain insight and orientation on the contemporary experience of Balinese migrants and exiles in the Netherlands. The book takes a basic ethnographic approach to its material and develops a narrative based on the author's interactions with several interlocutors. Though it is not a difficult read, the repetitiousness and constant citation of seemingly superfluous authorities leaves all the imprints of an academic treatise.

The study properly begins with the story of the generation of left-wing Balinese exiles in the Netherlands that had fled from the spectacularly brutal Balinese version of the Indonesian massacres of 1965–1968. One of Dragojlovic's main interlocutors for this chapter is Pak Merta, an economist and member of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) who had been in exile since the late 1960s. During the New Order period, he was active in the Komitee Indonesia, an important exilic network in the Netherlands that actively worked for the defense of human rights in Indonesia and was involved in the resurgence of the youth activism which led to the fall of Soeharto's regime. Another one of Dragojlovic's prominent interlocutors is Pak Wayan, who was also stranded after the events of 1965–1966, first in China and then in the Netherlands. Pak Wayan's patronage was crucial to the foundation in 1995 of the popular pan-Balinese organization Banjar Suka Duka (Mutual Help in Joy and Sorrow).

After a chapter on the modalities of interaction of Balinese subaltern citizens with their "non-Balinese others" in the Netherlands, the study moves on to a discussion of the experiences of some Balinese interlocutors with a major exhibition of Balinese royal regalia, which was held in Amsterdam from December 2005 to April 2006, entitled "Indonesia: The Discovery of the Past." In this section, Dragojlovic dwells on the interpretation of the *kris*, or ceremonial swords, which were prominently displayed in the exhibition. According to her, the so-called "Balinese interpretation" of the *kris* is that it possesses an "absolute agency" and that these *kris*, which according to conventional wisdom had been "captured" or "looted" by the Dutch, had in fact, chosen to be taken by them to the Netherlands. This interpretation, while shared by many of Dragojlovic's other Balinese interlocutors, was given its most serious and eloquent articulation by Pak Wayan himself. Dragojlovic writes,

In his narrations, Pak Wayan explained how *kris* – and royal *kris* in particular – possess high levels of power from the *niskala* [invisible] world. Throughout, he passionately argued that *kris* are powerful, independent agents with their own will and ability to act and exercise power in the *sekala* [visible] world. As such, *kris* cannot be manipulated or tricked. Indeed, in his renderings, the fact that the *kris* from Balinese royal houses found themselves in the Batavian Society Museum and other Dutch collections was not a sign of Balinese defeat or loss of power but on the contrary a manifestation of that very power. Put simply, the *kris* had themselves chosen to be taken by the Dutch. In this way, royal *kris* are imbued with absolute agency and do not in any way resemble narratives from Klungkung in which the Dutch are credited with an understanding of how power operates” (p. 116).

This understanding of the absolute predestinative power of the *kris*, according to Dragojlovic, might explain why the Balinese are seemingly “devoid of anti-colonial sentiments” (pp. 111; 117).

Developing this argument further, the penultimate chapter of the book discusses the complex contestation over meanings generated by a centennial commemorative performance, with overt anti-colonial themes, dramatizing the historical event that occurred in 1908 known as the Puputan (finishing, ending), wherein the members of the entire royal family which ruled the last independent kingdom in Bali were massacred by the Dutch colonial army as they marched to their deaths all dressed in white. The dramatization, entitled “Puputan, Val van Bali” (Puputan, The Fall of Bali), was staged by the multi-ethnic Colorful City Choir as conducted by Johnny Rahaket. According to Dragojlovic, this performance stemmed “from a longstanding battle by people of Indies descent for recognition of historical injustices in Dutch society – a battle that can be contrasted to Balinese people’s interpretations of Balinese-Dutch relations” (p. 127). Ironically, no Balinese individuals or organizations were consulted or contacted by the organizers of the performance. Rahaket was the son of a Moluccan soldier in the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL) who had emigrated to the Netherlands in the 1950s. Many of those who participated in the performance were mainly individuals with Moluccan or more broadly Indonesian heritage, with none having Balinese credentials. Pak Nyoman, a long-term interlocutor of Dragojlovic, and adopted son of Pak Wayan, was particularly vociferous in his rejection of the performance as an instrumentalization of the “Balinese name” by non-Balinese. According to Dragojlovic, “The Balinese people did not see themselves as victims of Dutch colonialism at large ... As staged by Rahaket, the commemorative performance completely undermined Balinese understandings of historical agency” (p. 144). She therefore draws the conclusion that, “[t]he performance of ‘Puputan, Val van Bali’, which aimed to ‘reveal’ colonial injustice and point towards the need for accountability in broader Dutch society, ended up silencing the very people whose history it was claiming to reveal” (p. 146).

It could be argued that such issues generated by the performance “Puputan, Val van Bali” do not necessarily inhere in such a project in itself. From the point of view of an ethical theatrical practice, the exclusion, whether intended or not, of the Balinese migrant community in the telling of their own immediate history, had already doomed the project from the very beginning. A kind of ethical relationship with the subject matter of the story itself was therefore violated by Rahaket and others in the process of production itself. The question of whether or not the existing ethnic divides within the Indonesian exile and migrant community would have made such cooperation and interaction with the Balinese community impossible is an open one. Nevertheless, the organizers missed out on an opportunity to develop and initiate open dialogues on the understanding of this historical event between the larger Indonesian migrant community and the Balinese, and within the Balinese community itself. The point is that the performance could have “failed better” if only the organizers had been more committed to involving the Balinese in such a commemorative project. Dragojlovic did not question Rahaket on the conditions which created this failure.

Since the success of her dissertation depends on it, Dragojlovic seems overly anxious to strengthen her account of “Balinese-Hindu” ontology as supposedly standing in firm opposition to the alleged linear and secular understanding of historical events by the Dutch. Given this thinly-veiled anxiety,

she seems willing to introduce repressions of her own into the text in order to attribute the seeming lack of interest of her Balinese interlocutors in “anti-colonialism” to the fact that their subscription to the ultimate power which resides in the invisible world (*niskala*) already represents a more profound resistance to the power of colonialism. This gaping lacuna in Dragojlovic’s study is represented by the lack of any real or virtual dialogue on the subject of Dutch colonial history in Bali and in the Indies as a whole between Pak Wayan, fervent long-distance Balinese cultural activist, and Pak Merta, a Balinese well versed in the leftist literature on colonialism and Marxism. Despite having almost a whole chapter dedicated to Indonesian political exiles in the Netherlands, Dragojlovic seems uninterested in querying the views of Balinese leftists and political activists, both young and old, on the subject of the Puputan. Does Dragojlovic fear that their points of view would not be sufficiently “Balinese”?

Isn’t it plausible that Balinese migrants would find it more expedient to repress not only the self-inflicted violence of 1965–1966 but also the externally inflicted colonial violence of 1908, given their anxiety to be perceived in the Dutch mainstream polite society as agreeable and most desirable among migrants? Isn’t Dragojlovic being willfully naïve for “expecting,” that “considering their history,” anti-colonial sentiment would inhere in subaltern subjects desperate for economic and social integration into Dutch society (p. 103)? How “anti-colonial” indeed are the Vietnamese immigrants in Paris, Filipino immigrants in Los Angeles, California, or Indian immigrants in London? Imagine how inconvenient it would be for them to endlessly bring up the massacres perpetrated by their erstwhile colonial masters against their countrymen while hankering for citizenship in their adopted homes. Despite its positive contributions to this important topic, Dragojlovic just repeats what has already been done in countless dissertations influenced by mainstream academic postcolonialism by seeking to “recover instances of resistance only by redefining the concept and, indeed, by having it transform into its opposite – what they brandish as subaltern agency are in fact instances of acquiescence.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Nivedita Majumdar, “Silencing the Subaltern,” *Catalyst* 1:1 (2017), <https://catalyst-journal.com/vol1/no1/silencing-the-subaltern>.