

The floracrats: State-sponsored science and the failure of the Enlightenment in Indonesia

By ANDREW GOSS

Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010. Pp. ix + 256. Notes, Plates, Bibliography, Index.

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This monograph is a detailed examination of the development of scientific research and institutions in Indonesia since the nineteenth century. The author, Andrew Goss, explores the development of botany and its proponents in the Dutch and independent Indonesian governments, and asks why scientists there never achieved global status for their research and discoveries. He argues that the lack of recognition lies in their research being subsumed to the larger bureaucratic needs and policies of the government, which ultimately dampened any spirit of independent inquiry or curiosity. Science was to serve the state, and its limited goals. To support his argument, Goss explores a number of diverse sources from the Netherlands and Indonesia, and uses the Buitenzorg (Bogor) Botanical Gardens as a backdrop to explore the histories of scientists and administrators, from colonial-era naturalist Franz Junghuhn to scientists at the modern Institute of Scientific Research (better known by its Indonesian acronym, LIPI). The result is a detailed, fascinating account of science and scientists in Indonesia and their milieu.

The floracrats is divided into seven mostly chronological chapters, in addition to an introduction and conclusion. In each chapter Goss takes the reader through a distinctive era of scientific research, such as attempts to improve the yield of quinine-producing trees in the 1850s and 1860s, which is the focus of chapter 2, or how the Department of Agriculture during the early twentieth century ignored traditional Javanese agricultural techniques and quickly became a tool through which the government gained control over economic development. Throughout, the overarching theme of missed opportunities or limits placed on research is brought into particular focus, as the ‘apostles of Enlightenment’ (a phrase he frequently uses to refer to scientists) are subsumed to larger governmental needs or initiatives. Science becomes bureaucratized at the Botanical Gardens, the Department of Agriculture, and later LIPI, until any form of applicable research is lost or subsumed into rational and modernist state agendas. Goss’s account idealises the possibility of the scientific community’s ability to pursue unencumbered research, as well as to spread Enlightenment principles throughout Indonesia, while also tracing the many instances when government meddling — from both the colonial metropole as well as Batavia/Jakarta — hindered the ability for free-ranging research and initiative to take place. Ultimately, Goss bemoans how science in Indonesia has been a tool of the state instead of civil society since the colonial era.

By idealising the possibilities of scientific research and civil society, Goss successfully highlights material that requires scholars and students to focus on a number of issues and ideas, in particular, the use of and approaches to scientific theory and knowledge by both modern governments and colonial regimes to achieve their agendas of control. Its boldness makes this an important book, one that should be

read by anyone interested in colonial history, science and modern governmental systems in not only Indonesia, but all of Southeast Asia.

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Performing otherness: Java and Bali on international stages, 1905–1952

By MATTHEW ISAAC COHEN

Houndsmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan in association with the International Federation of Theatre Research, Studies in International Performance series. 2010. Pp. xii + 285. Glossary, Notes, Bibliography, Index.
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This is a great book — fun to read, thoroughly researched, informative, and a wonderfully rich topic of interest to a wide range of readers. Matthew Cohen has been researching the performance of Java and Bali on international stages for a long time, and it shows in the depth of information in the book and the fluidity of his writing.

The various chapters of the book are self-contained and fascinating in themselves, but together they give a broad picture approached in various ways. Read any chapter, and it stands alone but links to others. The main figure of one chapter reappears as a background figure in another. By the end of the book, the reader feels as though she has witnessed the kaleidoscope of performance which, in some way or another, represented Java and Bali abroad over the first half of the twentieth century.

The ‘Java and Bali on International Stages’ of the title refers to performances by dancers and musicians of various origins which projected Java or Bali on stages in Europe, the United States and India in the late colonial period. The 1905–52 time-frame covers the last 40 years of the Netherlands East Indies, and the first seven years after Indonesia’s proclamation of independence in 1945, although a final chapter briefly leads the story into the present.

Cohen presents the stories of performers as varied as Dutch-born dancer Mata Hari (aka Lady MacLeod), English theatre director Edward Gordon Craig, Prague-based puppeteer Richard Teschner, Canadian singer Eva Gauthier, New York-based dancer Stella Bloch, Yogyakarta-born dancer Raden Mas Jodjana who lived in Holland, and Javanese performer of popular Malay language variety theatre, Dewi Dja, who spent much of her life in the United States. Each character comes alive as a person with a unique, complex life in a complex international world, but Cohen also uses their life stories to approach the issue of presenting ‘otherness’ from different angles, tracing the different ways the performers embraced alterity in art, and the changes in sensibility to this alterity over the first half of the twentieth century. As Cohen summarises, his book ‘historicizes two related shifts: from what Stuart Hall (1997) calls the “spectacle of the other” to ethnographically sensitive responsibility, and from the detached appropriations of exotica to