

in the Indies by Marieke Bloembergen; hair-washing by George Quinn; and tropical spa culture by Bart Barendregt. *Cleanliness and culture* is undoubtedly a pleasurable read and will inspire many readers.

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Situated testimonies: Dread and enchantment in an Indonesian Literary Archive

By LAURIE J. SEARS

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013. Pp. xxvi + 352. Map, Illustrations, Notes, Glossary, Bibliography, Index.

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In this book Laurie Sears embarks on an ambitious, wide-ranging and innovative project. Inspired by a personal interest in psychoanalysis, she takes up the concept of literary texts as 'situated testimonies', bringing into narrative form and thereby illuminating experiences of trauma. In the context of Indonesian literature and history, she focuses on a series of texts which 'have touched me in a way that allows me to partake, for a moment, in the traumas of Indonesia's past' (p. 6). These works span the whole history of modern Indonesia, from Dutch and Dutch Indies novels of the early twentieth century and low Malay fictional expressions of emergent Indonesian nationalism, to 1930s novels reflecting the contradictions of modernity, Suharto-era texts attempting to recover the suppressed 'archives' of the loss and suffering of 1965–66, and post-Suharto, post-nationalist feminist-inspired writings. To the analysis of these varied writings Sears brings in-depth discussion of psychoanalytic theories, of Freud and later interpreters such as Jean Laplanche and Nicholas Abraham, and engages with a vast body of other scholarly writing — studies of European history focusing on experiences of trauma, particularly those of holocaust survivors, discussions of the role of memory in literature, postcolonial theories and analyses, Dutch-language literary works and literary criticism, as well as studies of Indonesian history and literature. The result is a detailed, highly informed and original work, offering bold new perspectives on well-known Indonesian literary texts.

But deep scholarly enquiry does not make for an easy read. At the commencement of the Introduction we encounter immediately the domain of

psychoanalytic theories of trauma and memory and their complex terms of expression — enigmatic signifiers, intrusive intimacies, declarative and procedural memory, phantoms, phantasies, *Nächtraglichkeit*. In later chapters, the intermixing of plot summaries of literary texts with background discussion of the psychoanalytic concepts illustrated in the actions of their characters (see e.g. analysis of Louis Couperus' quartet of novels, *The book of small souls*, pp. 72–80), makes considerable demands on the reader. And the frequent, lengthy endnotes used throughout the book, while enriching the text, also interrupt and complicate its reading.

More problematically, broad-ranging citation of the works of others does not necessarily involve consideration of their arguments. The author engages with the writings of certain Indonesianist scholars, particularly James Siegel, but often other studies of a topic or text are simply listed without comment in an endnote. In relation to Armijn Pane's novel *Belenggu*, for example, the author cites in a note 'a selection of interesting studies by non-Indonesian scholars', among them William Frederick's book chapter 'Dreams of freedom, moments of despair: Armijn Pane and the imagining of modern Indonesian culture' (p. 252). But she makes no mention in the text of Frederick's analysis of *Belenggu*, in particular, his contrasting interpretation to her own of the personal qualities and significance within the novel of one of the principle characters, Jah. Sears describes Jah, singer of the popular music form *keroncong* and mistress of the male protagonist Tono, as 'only a phantasm ... a mirror for Tono ... the illusion of capitalist modernity, the desiring and insatiable subject' (p. 127). Frederick sees her, however, as a metaphor for *keroncong* music, championed by Armijn Pane in its modernity, flexibility and openness as a basis for modern Indonesian culture, a woman who 'bespeaks humanity itself — and modernity as well — through both her individual confidence and her understanding attitude towards all types of people' (p. 61). Would Sears accept this view of Armijn Pane's authorial understanding of the character of Jah, and if so, how does it relate to her own 'situated' analysis of the text?

Sears' comments on Jah's character are invoked to support her argument against a feminist reading of *Belenggu*, which would identify a model of female modernity in either Jah or Tono's wife Tini. But she does not consider the possibility of other feminist-inspired readings of the novel, investigating complexities and contradictions in the text, something I attempted in an article (see 'Post-coloniality and the feminine in modern Indonesian literature', in *Clearing a space: Post-colonial readings of modern Indonesian literature*, ed. Keith Foulcher and Tony Day), which, like *Situated testimonies*, compares *Belenggu* with Soewarsih Djojopoespito's *Buiten het Gareel*, but explores gender relations and the

conflicted concept of the 'modern woman' rather than Sears' focus on themes of nationalist activism and modernity. Sears' discussion of Soewarsih Djojopoespito and Armijn Pane as writers of fiction and political thinkers, particularly her extended review of their critical essays, adds in a very interesting and novel way to our understanding of these figures. Bringing such perspectives into dialogue with the views and concerns of other scholars would allow a clearer appreciation of their contribution to the field.

The question of other potential meanings of the texts becomes more acute in relation to the works considered in the final section of the book, Pramudya Ananta Tur's *Bumi manusia* quartet and Ayu Utami's *Saman* and *Larung*. Focusing on literary recuperations of historical experiences of trauma, Sears directs attention to *House of glass*, the third of Pramudya's four novels, and Pangemanann, the colonial government policeman and spy, as a tortured, haunted double of the hero, Minke. Readings of the earlier novels, including Nyai Ontosoroh's role as a model of resistance and endurance, not just for Pramudya's fellow prisoners on Buru as Sears mentions in passing, but Indonesian readers across the nation, are not discussed. Sears describes Pramudya's achievements in recapturing Indonesia's repressed historical archives, but sees his dreams for the nation as failing, killed off by the failures of the post-New Order *reformasi* period in Indonesia. She traces this process through Ayu Utami's novels documenting the failure of Indonesia's masculine national activism through the paired figures of the Catholic priest Saman and psychotic murderer Larung. While conceding Saman's portrayal as a 'good activist', Sears focuses on his weaknesses and failure to survive the horrors of the New Order. Of Ayu's moving depiction of his humanity and courage, arguably memorialising the sacrifice of real figures like him, nothing is said. Sears acknowledges the importance, cited by many commentators, of Ayu's depiction of strong, active women figures and female friendship, but describes the women friends at the end of the novel *Larung* as 'damaged and depressed' (p. 191). Instead she locates in Ayu's later works, *Bilangan Fu*, *Manjali*, and *Cakrabirawa*, the author's answer to the problems of the postcolonial nation. Through convoluted plots combining Javanese and Sundanese mythology with Freudian ideas, in texts explicitly invoking terms such as 'libido', 'phantasy', and 'schizophrenia', Sears traces Ayu's development of concepts of a 'critical path', 'critical spirituality', and 'postponement of truth'. Lacking familiarity with these works, I am unable to fully assess Sears' arguments here, and have to confess to feeling no great desire to read the texts and address the problem. This is a complex reading of the novels, which may not satisfy all readers. However, it

exemplifies the challenging nature of this book, as an imaginative and thought-provoking addition to scholarship on the modern Indonesian arts.

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Malaysia

A matter of risk: Insurance in Malaysia, 1826–1990

By LEE KAM HING

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This illuminating and well-researched book, written with the support of the General Insurance Association of Malaysia, is an in-depth history of the insurance industry in Malaysia. It is also timely, given the significance and indispensable nature of the global service sector.

At least two-thirds of *A matter of risk* traces the evolution of the insurance industry since the colonial era (chapters 1–10). This is natural given the fact that the defining moments in Malaysian history required the services of the insurance sector — the First and Second World Wars, the postwar rehabilitation periods, and most importantly, the Emergency (1948–60). The final two chapters trace the trajectory of the industry from the 1960s through the 1990s.

Lee Kam Hing rightly points out the large gaps in published work on the insurance industry (p. 10) and the difficulty of acquiring empirical and statistical data. Yet he has managed to uncover a vast literature on the subject by tapping into the resources available in Malaysia, Singapore, and the United Kingdom. Data is severely limited for the war years and the early postwar rehabilitation period, but the author manages to provide a detailed and comprehensive account of the insurance industry and the overall economic development of the country.

This study focuses on the historical development of the insurance industry in Malaya/Malaysia as well as its interaction with the colonial and postcolonial state. Lee points out that the Western insurance companies which had moved into the Straits Settlements markets since 1793 eventually became Malaysian entities. This perhaps was a reflection of the trend of British companies divesting assets in developing countries and moving into other areas of investment and the consequence of state ‘localisation’.