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Performing Power: Cultural Hegemony, Identity, and Resistance in Colonial Indonesia. By Arnout van der Meer. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020. xviii+280 pp.

Performing Power is a study of how the Dutch sought to colonize Java through imposing and maintaining their hegemony via cultural domination of the colonized, who were invariably provoked to contest and resist the colonizers. The book lays out this broad argument by focusing on “everyday discursive acts” (p. 2) between the colonizer and colonized. In one introduction, six content chapters and one epilogue, the author surveys the mundane and routine aspects of everyday life in Java, which he describes as “stages” where power was consciously performed and resisted (chapter 1). These “stages” include norms of etiquette and behaviour, specifically contestation over “customary ways of paying respect” or “*hormat*”, clothing, dress and outward appearances, fairs and night markets, architecture and urban planning, as well as pawnshops. Focusing on these “stages” of everyday interaction, the book argues, allows us to appreciate how Indonesian nationalism, which tends to be understood in terms of overt political organization and action, arose from quotidian struggles sparked by larger societal transformations affecting Java from the turn of the twentieth century onwards. As Arnout van der Meer writes, the book “offers an important revision of the prevailing narrative of the Indonesian national awakening, demonstrating that it was not just a movement that a small political elite incited from the top-down but also one that grew out of a large social transformation from below” (p. 11).

The book’s focus on material culture and quotidian realities is its biggest strength as the vivid and fine-grained descriptions make for engaging reading. The first three chapters on the *hormat* debate are the strongest portions of the book, where van der Meer manages to weave a coherent account explaining the politics behind what were highly charged gestures of *hormat* during a formative moment of the Indonesian nationalist movement.

I am less persuaded that the book manages to offer a revisionist account of Indonesian nationalist awakening, even though I am partial, as I am sure we all are, to histories from below. The book could have benefited from a broader engagement with a more expansive conceptual literature beyond “Javanization” and Gramscian “cultural hegemony” (pp. 2–10). The need for greater conceptual rigour and insight comes through in the book’s strongest chapters when we realize that the leading participants of the *hormat* debate were reform-minded Dutch officials and the same Dutch-educated indigenous elite who led the nationalist movement from top-down and whose voices and historical roles are already well-studied in the existing literature. We should not, therefore, confuse quotidian realities with “bottom-up” perspectives. This slippage points to the need for greater clarity on the category of “the everyday”, which is under-theorized in the book. To begin with, we need to ask whose everyday lives and struggles were at stake?

The “stages”—perhaps “sites” is a better word—the book is concerned with are located in colonial Java’s urban areas. This book is preoccupied primarily with the everyday struggles of residents in urban Java. I would have preferred a broader coverage of historical actors and geographical spaces; for instance, placing greater attention on everyday lives outside Java would have strengthened the study. Given the book’s preoccupation with urban popular culture, van der Meer could have used an extremely rich theoretical and empirical scholarship in this field to better define and theorize his subject of study. While he does cite some of this literature, especially those pertinent to Indonesia, he could have used this literature as a springboard for articulating a broader understanding of “the everyday” as an analytical category in historical studies on colonial Indonesia.

“Javanization” and Gramscian “cultural hegemony” appear to be the book’s conceptual lynchpin. Van der Meer explains that his use of “Javanization” and “performing power” reference the standard scholarship on Javanese power and the so-called “theatre state” put forth by Clifford Geertz that he critiques. In place of “theatre state”, van der Meer proposes “cultural hegemony” as the more productive

concept because it is attuned to the dynamism and interactive character of how colonial domination was exercised and resisted.

Notwithstanding the book's laudable attempt at updating an older scholarship using a popular concept, the sustained play on the metaphor of an onstage performance—"stage" and "script" are two words that appear frequently throughout the book—is distracting and does little to sharpen the analysis. Metaphors of stage and performance are hackneyed and can be applied to any society under any set of historical circumstances, which undermines greater appreciation of the specific transformations colonial Java was experiencing, something that the book documents well. Neither does this metaphorical play modify or advance our understanding of this popular Gramscian concept. It does not help that the concept of hegemony is so overused, such that it is fast becoming a platitude seemingly applicable to every historical context. This makes the author's metaphorical evocation of actors performing on-script and/or off-script appear more predictable than it really is. The element of compounded predictability is unfortunate as it undercuts the book's colourful and palpable accounts of everyday life, which might have been better used to elaborate on the analytical category of everyday life in colonial urban cultures.

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Coup, King, Crisis: A Critical Interregnum in Thailand. By Pavin Chachavalpongpun. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale Southeast Asia Studies Monograph, 2020. ix+379 pp.

Pavin Chachavalpongpun has become the leading chronicler of Thailand's strengthening authoritarianism in the twenty-first century, first with his account of the 2006 coup and its aftermath (Pavin 2014), and now with this volume detailing the causes, outcomes