Producing Indonesia: the state of the field of Indonesian Studies, edited by Eric Tagliocozzo, Routledge Contemporary Southeast Asia Series (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2014)

This is a multi-disciplinary compilation of work by senior Indonesianists from around the world – although mainly from the US – who met together at Cornell University’s Kahin Center for Advanced Research on Southeast Asia, in 2011, to discuss the state of Indonesian Studies, through reflection on Gauguin’s famous questions: Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? The scholars who have contributed to this book have, over three decades, been influential in producing a great deal of knowledge about and insight into Indonesia. Collectively, their work represents the diversity and complexity of both Indonesia and Indonesian studies. The book is divided into disciplinary themes, namely anthropology, art history, history, language and literature, government and political science, and ethnomusicology. Editor Eric Tagliacozzo suggests that this publication should be followed up with a series of edited books, each devoted to one of these disciplinary areas, and hopefully including the voices of more Indonesian scholars.

Anthropologists represented in the book include scholars such as Marina Welsker (Cornell University), Danilyn Rutherford (University of California, Santa Cruz), Kenneth George (Australian National University) and Patricia Spyer (Leiden University). Each shares academic reflections and insights drawn from their field and their respective study sites across the sprawling Indonesian archipelago, away from the centre of power and fast economic growth (Jakarta and the island of Java). These scholars were pioneers in researching and analyzing local communities and identities during the New Order period, when most Indonesianists were focused on the centre. Their published works have significantly helped other scholars to understand the broader Indonesia since decentralization began in 2001, bringing local issues and dynamics to the national stage.

Indonesian art history is the next area explored. The chapters in this section present a broad survey of the rich and changing art and cultural landscape of Indonesia over three decades. The authors argue that studies of Indonesian art history throw light on many areas in Indonesian studies, including archeology, history, society and politics, and while there is increasing recognition of this, more understanding of the contributions made by scholars of art history to knowledge about Indonesia is needed. Astri Wright (University of Victoria) argues that it is important for art historians to engage with a broader range of scholars in the kind of exchange and collaboration that will enrich the state of Indonesian studies in years to come.

The next theme is history, with rich, reflective essays written by distinguished scholars, including Rudolf Mrazek (University of Michigan), Laurie Sears (University of Washington) and Jean Gelman-Taylor (University of New South Wales). These scholars pay tribute to the intellectual legacy of George Kahin in their field, through his work on the Indonesian revolution. Kahin remained a lifelong mentor for many scholars who studied Indonesian history at Cornell University from the 1950s-1990s. His work and ideas shaped Indonesian studies in the US and beyond, creating a critical historical view of Indonesian history – in particular the violent events in 1965 that brought down Indonesia’s first president, Sukarno. The centrality of Cornell University in shaping the study of Indonesian modern history is evident in the fact that Kahin’s former students took up academic positions in universities across the world, including Indonesia. Beyond this, these prominent historians (especially Gelman-Taylor) also urged scholars to address the need to support Indonesian historian Bambang Purwanto’s call for a re-examination of Indonesian historiography through...
empathizing with the masses and giving more voice to the experiences of ordinary people in the writing of history.

The other section which stands out in this book is the government/political science section where three prominent political scientists, Edward Aspinall (Australian National University), William Liddle (Ohio State University) and Donald Emmerson (Stanford University), share their views on the state of Indonesian political studies. In introducing this theme, Cornell’s Thomas Pepinsky suggests that the origins of Indonesian political studies cannot be separated from the emergence of the Republic of Indonesia and the three seminal works of that era: George Kahin’s *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (1952), Herbert Feith’s *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia* (1962) and Daniel Lev’s *The Transition to Guided Democracy: Indonesian Politics, 1957-1959* (1966). Until the rise of the New Order, these works were highly influential reference points for a broad range of Western students and scholars of Indonesia seeking to understand the dynamics of the new Indonesian nation. However, in the aftermath of the violent events of 1965, when up to a million people on the left of politics were murdered, both Western and Indonesian scholars became divided by bitter academic debates over what really happened. To some extent, these positions have been maintained until today. Echoing Gelman-Taylor, Edward Aspinall calls for political scientists to pay more attention to the study of micropolitics – ‘the political activities and experiences of ordinary people’ - in the post-Suharto period.

There are substantial gaps in the survey of thinking about Indonesia that this book represents – there is no discussion of religion, gender and sexuality, or film, for example. Indonesian scholars are conspicuously absent throughout. Nonetheless, this is an excellent academic work that will be welcomed by new and older generations of Indonesianists as well as general readers.

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