

# INVENTING THE PERFORMING ARTS

*Modernity and Tradition in Colonial Indonesia*



MATTHEW ISAAC COHEN

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## **INVENTING THE PERFORMING ARTS**

## A NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY AND LANGUAGE USE

This book references huge quantities of primary and secondary historical source materials in Indonesian, Malay (as Indonesian was known before 1928), Javanese, and Dutch. As with any book dealing with Indonesia before 1972, orthography is complicated and needs explaining. After 1972, Indonesian (*bahasa Indonesia*) and other languages spoken in Indonesia used a standard orthography, the Enhanced Indonesian Spelling System, which is largely phonetic like Italian. Before then, aspects of spelling were derived from Dutch conventions. So *c* (pronounced like the “ch” in church) before 1972 was written *tj*, *j* was written *dj*, *ny* was written *nj*, and *sy* (pronounced like the “sh” in ship) was written *sj*. In addition, before 1947, the vowel *i* (pronounced like the “ee” in feet) was written *ie*, and *u* (pronounced like the “oo” in boot) was written *oe*. Spelling was not standardized in the pre-1947 period, and the same word could have multiple spellings even in a single source—thus *stamboel*, *stamboul*, and *stamboul* for *stambul*. My tendency in this book is to use the Enhanced Indonesian Spelling System except when quoting from period sources, referring to titles or names of organizations, or referencing personal names better known by other spellings. Where relevant, I tend to use Javanese over Indonesian spellings, so *pendhapa* rather than *pendopo*.

All translations, unless indicated, are my own. Emphases are in the original with ellipses in brackets to indicate omissions. In Indonesian, Javanese, and other source languages, there is no marked difference between singular and plural word forms, and in this book I follow the academic convention of not adding *s*’s to the end of words in these languages to indicate plurality, assuming the reader can make sense of this from context of use.

Artistic forms (*wayang wong*, *keroncong*) are in lower case and italicized, following the house style of *Asian Theatre Journal*, but on subsequent uses regularly appearing foreign genre names and terms appear in plain face.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book was researched and (mostly) drafted during a yearlong sabbatical from teaching and administrative duties in the Department of Drama and Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London, in 2011–2012. I spent that year as a Research Fellow cloistered at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Science (NIAS) in leafy Wassenaar, a leisurely bike ride away from the world-class libraries, museums, and seminars of Leiden and the world-class dance theater and Indonesian cultural events of The Hague. I had worked earlier in Holland as a postdoctoral researcher attached to the Performing Arts of Asia: Tradition and Innovation project of the International Institute for Asian Studies, and so arrived aware of the sorts of sources on Indonesia—books, popular magazines, newspapers, academic journals, manuscripts, visual artifacts, and so on—I wished to explore in this gift of time. I felt extraordinarily privileged to be able to access materials with such ease during a period when many of the key Dutch organizations concerned with Indonesian arts and culture—the Museum Nusantara, Museum Maluku, the Netherlands Theatre Institute, Leiden University's Department of Language and Cultures of Southeast Asia and Oceania, the Royal Tropical Institute, and others—were undergoing funding cuts, restructuring, merger, and closure. In the current moment of post-colonial amnesia, it seems urgent to highlight the deep resources in the Netherlands for the study of Indonesia's past so that they might be properly managed in the future.

Huge thanks go to my Dutch and Netherlands-based colleagues and friends who supported my fellowship in various ways, including Els Bogaerts, Robert Wessing, Suryadi, Ben Arps, Clara Brakel, Yef Darwis, Karina Rinaldi-Doligez, Henk Schulte Nordholt, David Henley, Dafna Ruppin, Doris Jedamski, Marieke Bloembergen, Zweta Manggarai, Francine Brinkgreve, Hedi Hinzler, Joke Leijfeldt, Bart Barendregt, Juara Ginting, Beatriz van der Goes, Henk Mak van Dijk, Joss Wibisono, Susan Legêne, Sadiha Boonstra, Pim Westerkamp, and the staff of NIAS and the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (KITLV). The intellectual and social camaraderie of my NIAS year group, particularly

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I have written elsewhere about how studying Indonesian arts is a lifetime avocation involving a mixture of participation, scholarship, and advocacy in an international moral community; it is a way of being that explodes the scientific container of "the project." In this vein, this book has been nourished by continuing communication with my interlocutors: Catherine Diamond, Mark Hobart, Michael Bodden, Cobina Gillitt, Helly Minarti, Dewanto Sukistono, Henri Chambert-Loir, John McGlynn, Paul Rae, Nano and Ratna Riantiarno, John Pawson, Gerard Mosterd, Chua Soo Pong, Jody Diamond, Alessandra Lopez y Royo, Indija Mahjoeddin, Agus Nur Amal, Margaret "Jiggs" Coldiron, Endo Suanda, Amanda Bear, Tim Behrend, Sumarsam, Ikranagara, Suprpto Suryodarmo, Sam Leiter, Simon Cook, Jan Mrázek, Sarah Weiss, Andrew Weintraub, Andy Channing, Tan Sooi Beng, Jonah Salz, Ledjar Subroto and Ananto Wicaksono, Barbara Hatley, Kathy Foley, Joko Susilo, Didik Nini Thowok, Miguel Escobar Varela, Kirstin Pauka, Made Sidia, Evan Winet, Wayan Sumitri, Anna Ingleby and Haviel Perdana, Lono Simatupang, Pudentia MPSS, Henry Spiller, Larry Reed, Lim How Ngean, Pete Smith, Adrian Vickers, Jon Keliehor, Laurie Ross, Jennifer Lindsay, Tinuk Yampolsky, Waryo Yo, J. Simon van der Walt, Tony Day, Jim Collins, Erik North, Purjadi, Opan Safari, Ghulam Sarwar-Yousof, Alexandra Green, the late Walter Angst, and others too numerous to mention. Students and colleagues at Royal Holloway, above all Helen Gilbert, have been critical sounding boards, and I am grateful to the Department of Drama and Theatre for allowing the sabbatical leave and other support needed to write this book. Naoko Shimazu gave a careful read of the chapters on the Japanese occupation. My good colleague Laura Noszlopy has provided important editorial support—sharpening arguments, suggesting cuts, polishing prose. The Asian Performing Arts Forum, which I convene with my colleagues Avanthi Meduri, Ashley Thorpe, and Shzr Ee Tan, has been a significant site for dialogue and debate both before my sabbatical and since. Final revisions on the manuscript were carried out as a Visiting Scholar at the University of Connecticut, and I would like to thank my UConn hosts, particularly Dan Weiner, Brid Grant, and John Bell, for their collegiality.

Sections of this book have been rehearsed as presentations at seminars, workshops, and conferences at Birkbeck College and the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, the University of Warwick, Durham

University, Leiden University, the National University of Singapore, the University of Lisbon, and Yale University. The organizers of these opportunities merit thanks too.

Three women—my wife Jungmin Song, my daughter Hannah Cohen, and my mother Phyllis M. Gladstein—bring sustenance, perspective, and purpose to all my endeavors.

This book is dedicated to the memory of six Indonesian teachers and mentors: Pak Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, Pak Oemartopo, Kang Basari, Mang Sujana “Jenggot,” Wa Saal, and Kang Abihudaya. *Gajah mati meninggalkan gading, harimau mati meninggalkan belang, manusia mati meninggalkan nama.*



## INTRODUCTION

In 1995, I had been living and studying shadow puppetry in Gegesik, a rice-farming town on West Java's north coast, for about a year when a representative from the provincial office of the Department of Education and Culture paid an official visit. With its many shadow puppet companies, masked-dance performers, gamelan musicians, and glass painters, Gegesik is known locally as "the Artists' Warehouse" or "Cirebon's Ubud." It is an attractive field site both for me as a student of puppetry and for a government official hoping to disseminate information to local arts practitioners. The official in question had been sent by the Bandung office to deliver a prepared speech to the town's puppeteers regarding the challenges of *globalisasi* (globalization), with the explicit hope that they would insert government messages into their performances. He arrived decked out in a safari suit, *de rigueur* for New Order civil servants in the field.

The general theme of globalization and culture had been bandied about government departments for some time before this "upgrading" session in 1995. Two years earlier at a national arts congress, I had heard talks by the head of the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and a former minister of forestry about the threats of new technologies and foreign cultural influences in the era of *globalisasi* and about the need to maintain traditional puppet theater as a moral compass.<sup>1</sup> In the midday heat of a village hall, the assembled puppeteers listened with waning patience and credulity to the Bandung official's presentation on the latest moral panic propping up the dictatorship. During the last year, satellite dishes had sprouted up around the town—"like mushrooms," it was said—and some of the puppeteers were probably thinking about the boxing match or soft porn flick they were missing. Partway through the canned speech, the official looked to me for assurance that *globalisasi* would indeed lead to the destruction of traditional values. I felt trapped in a position of extreme ethnographic irony. My presence among Gegesik's puppeteers, generously supported by a number of dissertation fieldwork grants, was proof of globalization's reach, while in a stroke, I was being hailed as a foreign researcher invested in traditional culture's survival in a preserved form. I was at a loss at how to respond.

Chicago sociologist Edward Shils once described tradition as a “consensus between living generations and generation of the dead” (Shils 1981, 168). But there appears to be little ground for consensus in the “constant battlefield” (cf. Hall 1981, 233) of artistic tradition in today’s Asia. Pitched on one side are tradition’s official guardians and experts who monumentalize heritage through the appointment of living national treasures and the standardization and codification of artistic genres. Here, authenticity is king, modernization is critiqued, and regional variety and individual variance are suppressed. This camp comprises an alliance between patrimonial arts bureaucrats and conservative traditionalists who serve what Shils calls “substantive traditionality,” involving “the appreciation of the accomplishments and wisdom of the past and of the institutions especially impregnated with tradition, as well as the desirability of regarding patterns inherited from the past as valid guides” (1981, 21). Tradition’s “moral character offers a measure of ontological security” in a runaway world (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994, 65).

Those on the other side of the battlefield eye tradition strategically as a set of resources and a reservoir of ideas available for local practitioners to resist the homogenizing effects of global capitalism. Traditional forms and practices are reconstructed as a means to raise consciousness and regenerate “personal and collective identity” by a pitched alliance of artists, curators, and activists (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994, 95). In this camp, practitioners disregard and charismatically break tradition’s ritual taboos and strictures to tap into the contemporary international art world’s “postproduction” praxes. This effort involves a “*détournement*” or “hijacking” of “pre-existing aesthetic elements,” continual recollection, reframing, appropriation, questioning, subverting, parodying, quoting, and reactivating “protocols of use for all existing modes of representation and all formal structures” (Bourriaud 2002, 18; 2009, 150).

Somewhere in between these camps are the traditional artists, like Gegesik’s puppeteers, who continue to perform in the same genres and styles of their forebears, but are quick to appropriate the latest fashions and trends—sometimes with stealth, at other times with open glee—to keep their practices relevant to contemporary audiences.

These conflicting takes on how tradition is to be conceived, represented, transmitted, replicated, appropriated, and disseminated in globalized Asia have roots in the encounters of local institutions and practices with European modernity that began in the nineteenth century and continued through the post-World War II period. This phase of late modernity, which sociologists Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, and Scott Lash refer to as “reflexive modernity,” is “marked [. . .] by the twin processes of globalization and the excavation of most traditional con-

texts of action” (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994, 95). One can see both substantive tradition and reflexive modernity emerging in Asia in negotiations with European modernity. As Israeli sociologist S. N. Eisenstadt (2000, 15) argues, the introduction of modernity to Asian societies involved the incorporation of selected aspects of “Western universalistic elements of modernity in the construction of [...] new collective identities, without necessarily giving up specific components of [...] traditional identities.” Modernity brought about new modes for the social organization, invention, appreciation, and representation of old forms of performance. It pressed new functions on existing artistic practices, often under the guise of the “restoration of behavior” (cf. Schechner 1985, 35–116).

The *raison d'être* of the arts in premodern Asia was to buttress status, venerate ancestors, ward off evil, refine moral values, attract and procure sexual partners, forge alliances, and reinforce communal solidarity—as well as to entertain. Performance was predominantly what philosopher R. G. Collingwood (1938, 73) refers to as “magical art,” cultural practices “meant to arouse emotions not discharged there and then, in the experience that evokes them, but canalised into the activities of everyday life and modifying those activities in the interest of the social or political unit concerned.” Performances of magical art righted cosmological imbalances, bore fruit in social unions, and were “a kind of dynamo supplying the mechanism of practical life with the emotional current that drives it” (69).<sup>2</sup> Art in action had social purpose and public use (cf. Wolterstorff 1997). With colonialism and the spread of European cultural models, music, dance, and theater became abstracted from particular contexts of use. They were performing arts, separate from life, operating at a distance from pressing needs, available for contemplation and the expression of abstracted emotions and sometimes utopian desires.

“Performing arts” has not attracted theoretical scrutiny comparable to its affines and components: “performance,” “art,” “theater,” “drama,” “music,” and “dance.” I use “performing arts” here to demarcate a field of activity that is essentially aesthetic or entertaining rather than ritualistic or “magical” in orientation. In directing attention to more distant goals and aspirations, performing arts act in what Scottish-born anthropologist Victor Turner (1982, 83) refers to as the “subjunctive mode,” articulating “‘if it *were* so,’ not ‘it *is* so.’” With the advent of colonial modernity, the arts became a means to formulate identities in a world of cultural difference and to stage culture to the nations of the world. The reconfiguration of customary practices and rituals as performing arts opened a rift between what philosopher Gilbert Ryle calls “knowing how” and “knowing that.” This gap contributed to the “propositional acknowledgement of rules, reasons or principles” (Ryle 1945–1946, 9) that marks a reflexive turn in culture.<sup>3</sup>

Starting in the late nineteenth century, Asian performance traditions were reformed, systematized, and modernized. Academies such as the school of music under Baroda's maharaja (opened 1886), Beijing's Fuliancheng School (1904), and Phnom Penh's École des Arts Cambodgiens (1918) were established. Textbooks were written. Arts such as Indian temple dancing (renamed *bharatanatyam*) once restricted to hereditary schools or castes became genteel pastimes available for general consumption. This pan-Asian intertwined restoration and modernization of tradition happened side by side and in conjunction with the introduction of new artistic forms from Europe under colonial and "crypto-colonial" (Herzfeld 2002) conditions. Spoken drama, cabaret, opera, European classical music, ballet, and modern and interpretive dance all found adherents among Asian educated elites. Some of the more adventurous practitioners mixed imported forms with local cultural expressions, creating Ibsenian social dramas exploring topical issues of note, operas using ethnic instruments and vocal styles, interpretive dances with indigenous costume items and props, art songs based on folk melodies, and variety performances drawing on established comic routines. And then there were traveling outfits, such as Prof. Doorlay's Tropical Express Revue Company, which in the 1930s toured a 101-part program around Asia promising a round-the-world tour in song and dance featuring forty-five solo artists from Europe, South America, the United States, Iran, and China, as well as the twenty-strong chorus of the Doorlay Girls. With its impressionistic portrayals of Russia in 1917 on the eve of revolution, the "devil dancers" of Bali, and a South American cabaret, this program was touted by the *Times of India* as "snappy, peppy and vigorous and stimulating as the fizz in good champagne."<sup>4</sup>

Indonesia—and its complex mix of local cultures, languages, and religions; strong sense of national modernity; and cosmopolitan ethos—provides an important lens to examine the creative dialectic of tradition and modernity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the penultimate stage of European colonialism in Asia. Indonesia is a heterogeneous space, a site of trajectories and intersections, with porous boundaries and multiple possibilities for belonging (Lombard [1990] 1996). Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, who plays several small roles in this book as a playwright in exile and a propaganda officer for the Japanese, called for Indonesia's "continuous revolution," a nonstop overturning of established norms that confronted the old with the new. In this Trotskyist vein I take Indonesia as a hope and aspiration to be performed into existence. Indonesia is "a problem, a proposition, a possibility, a position from which to occupy the world" (Strassler 2010, 5).

Indonesia was for most of this period a Dutch colony, and political historians typically prefer to refer to it before the United Nations recognized its independence in 1949 as *Nederlands-Indië*, the "Dutch Indies." But I favor the somewhat



Map of the East Indies, from Raymond Kennedy, *Islands and Peoples of the Indies* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1943). The names of Indonesian islands and cities changed after independence—Batavia became Jakarta, the Celebes became Sulawesi, Indonesian Borneo became Kalimantan, and so on. But Indonesia's postcolonial borders were nearly the same as in the Dutch Indies. This map, published in a time of geopolitical upheaval, also shows the islands of the Philippines, as well as contemporary Brunei, Singapore, and Malaysia, or what scholars generally refer to as peninsular and insular Southeast Asia.

anachronistic term “Indonesia,” not because I take the nation-state as the inevitable outcome of the period under examination, but because so much of the cultural activities described escaped the purview of the Dutch colonizers. As politician Sutan Sjahrir stated in 1937, “they never ever, not even one single moment, have thought about conscious cultural politics on behalf of the people of Indonesia” (quoted in Dolk 2012, 57). *Pace* the heated rhetoric of some 1990s American postcolonial scholars, “the Dutch” manifested little interest in monitoring or controlling artistic flows and formations, except when they stood to benefit economically from them or perceived cultural expressions as undermining colonial

authority. “Too much preoccupation with Eurocentrism or colonialism also disguises fundamental questions of contemporary modernity that cut across so-called cultural divides” (Dirlik 2007, 80).

The absence of “Dutch” in the title of the book also signals that it is concerned with a number of different colonial regimes—Dutch colonialism starting in the early nineteenth century, the Japanese occupation (1942–1945), and to a lesser extent the British interregnum (1811–1816). I pay particular attention to the Japanese colonial period because, in contrast to the Dutch who preceded them, the Japanese colonizers placed a high priority on the arts. The three-and-a-half-year period of occupation wrought innumerable artistic changes. Some innovations like the imported *kamishibai* scroll theater quickly faded after Japan’s defeat. Other developments, including the differentiation made between “Western” and “Asian” art, the yoking of art to propaganda, interarts collaborations, training and “upgrading” of performers, local and national bureaus for the arts, and cultural policies, were in Indonesia to stay. The acceleration of culture (cf. Urban 2001) under the Japanese happened at such a rate that the occupation cries out for focused attention, meriting its own section in this book.

The century and a half of artistic change investigated in this book occurred in conjunction and interaction with important changes in technology, economy, religion, demographics, social organization, politics, and education. We will see that interactions between the performing arts field and these social institutions and forces were complex and often unpredictable. Steamship routes shaped touring circuits for itinerant performers. Education distanced elites from indigenous culture, but also provided new modes and causes for its appreciation. Political affiliation gave new purpose to old forms of expressive culture, with the performing arts becoming a preferred medium for communicating “hidden transcripts” (cf. Scott 1990) under regimes of colonial censorship and surveillance. Changes in religious beliefs meant that ceremonial arts once restricted to particular sites or classes were stripped of their sacred auras and could entertain multiethnic audiences, be studied by foreigners, collected as domestic furnishings, and used to promote products and services. Audio recordings introduced exogenous musical repertoires and affected performance practices of existing traditions. Short dances were created or extracted from larger choreographies to entertain tourists or be performed at school pageants. Newspapers promoted artistic novelty and provided forums for debates on cultural value. Migrant artists fleeing war-torn Europe became music teachers and set up dance studios. Radio broadcasts created stars. We will see further how cash crops, migration from China and India, the multiethnic classrooms of the colonial capital Batavia, and colonial expropriation and privation interacted in diverse ways with the arts.

Modernity in these pages is neither an ideology nor teleology. Nor do I try to define it as a style or specify a modern period. Rather, modernity operates primarily as what cultural critic Fredric Jameson (2002, 41) calls a “narrative category,” a means for “the rewriting of moments of the past, which is to say of previously existing versions or narratives of the past.” I wish to unfurl stories of collective creativity in the modernization and hybridization of culture, the disembedding and remooring of venerable traditions, and the emergence of new art forms and modern attitudes to art. I survey the remains of the past for moments of cultural acceleration, skirting around the archipelago in search of the conjunctures of globalization (Dirlik 2007, 154) and structural reconfigurations that prompt the questioning of old aesthetic values and provide new possibilities for collective and individual expression. I observe how nineteenth- and twentieth-century practitioners sought actively to incorporate aspects of international modernity and reflected on their own cultural activities through embracing modern concepts and modes of analysis. Rather than viewing the performing arts as mirroring or expressing modern ideas already circulating in society, I take artistic practice as a primary mode for inventing and experiencing modernity. In this way, this book gives historical perspectives on issues that remain current in Indonesia today—including debates over proprietorship, cosmopolitan modernity and local tradition, exogenous versus endogenous changes in tradition (cf. Shils 1981), artistic freedom and regulation, civil decorum, enthusiasm for the new and despair for the old, and local culture and national belonging. “The problem is not simply to repeat the past, but rather to take root in it in order to ceaselessly invent” (Ricoeur 2006, 51).

Much of the creative invention of the period involved the hybridizing of old and new, foreign and local. Hybridity and the interweaving of culture (cf. Fischer-Lichte 2009) have arguably always been characteristic of Indonesian arts. A. L. Becker (1979, 232) analyzes *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet theater) as a kind of living archive of all registers and forms of language available to Javanese society, “a means for contextualizing the past in the present, and the present in the past.” Though its dominant repertoire may be derived Hindu epics imported from India in the first millennium, shadow puppetry is popularly believed to be the invention of the legendary Islamic proselytizer Sunan Kalijaga, and through the nineteenth century at least, most Javanese were convinced that the tales enacted by shadow puppeteers actually took place in Java’s distant past. Such apparent contradictions went generally unnoticed or at least unremarked on by exegetes. A puppet maker could add a canon or Dutch flag to a marching army (*rampogan*) figure or dress the gods in fashionable shoes with heels and pointed toes without reflexive deliberation of such anachronisms. Premodern *wayang* seemingly



existed in a state of what Jacqueline Lo (2000) has called “happy hybridity,” accreting layers of history and culture without tension or conflict. In contrast, during the nineteenth and twentieth century, as we shall see, hybridization became an intentional artistic strategy that modern-leaning practitioners used to gain public recognition and achieve artistic distinction. Traditionalists in turn constructed “ideological zones of cultural purity” (Renato Rosaldo in Canclini [1990] 1995, xv). They railed against hybridity to cope with the moral uncertainties of rapid societal change.

Academic histories of Indonesian arts obsessively trace what cultural historian Claire Holt (1967, 3) calls “strands of continuities” from the prehistoric period to the present, looking for signs of ancestor worship, communality, and natural symbols in even the most contemporary of expressions. The book title’s invocation of invention, in contrast, emphasizes the creation of new forms and processes, radical breakthroughs, discontinuities, ruptures, change. Thinking in terms of inventiveness gives agency, voice, and presence to practitioners and creative collectives (Strother 1999). The word “inventing” also intentionally echoes the trope of the invention of tradition (Hobsbawm 1983) and problematizes the construction “the performing arts” as a cross-cultural field. I am inspired particularly by the critical anthropology of Mark Hobart (2007), who posits that dance as an aesthetic practice did not exist in Bali before the arrival of European administrators, scholars, and tourists. Traditions of stylized movement could be discerned in precolonial ritual and dramatic spectacles, as well as in everyday grooming and farming activities, but dance was not a distinct form to be appreciated in its own terms. This book extends Hobart’s line of argument, figuring Indonesia’s entire performing arts complex as a modern invention produced through the encounter of local and extralocal forces (see also Mitchell 2000, 3f).

An initial impetus for this book was my experience of writing two monographs on itinerant Indonesian performance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Cohen 2006, 2010). Following the movements of Auguste Mahieu and his *Komedi Stamboel* musical theater troupe around the archipelago between 1891 and 1903, as well as the various practitioners who popularized Indonesian art abroad in the first half of the twentieth century, I became aware that there was no benchmark history of Indonesian dance, drama, puppetry, or music before independence. I could refer readers to studies of Javanese folk performance (Pigeaud 1991), courtly dance (Lelyveld [1933] 1993), or Balinese dance and drama (de Zoete and Spies 1938) written during the brief flowering of performance scholarship in the late colonial period. I could also mine more recent historical genre studies on courtly *wayang wong* dance drama in Yogyakarta (Soedarsono 1984), court dances of Surakarta (Brakel-Papenhuyzen 1992a, 1995),



and central Javanese gamelan (Sumarsam 1995). But there were precious few attempts to synthesize this literature and other scholarly writings to consider how the larger field of performing arts mediated the changing social, political, and economic circumstances of colonial Indonesia. This book is intended to fill that lacuna, offering a synoptic overview and guiding the reader to relevant primary and secondary literature. Many of these sources are, of course, written in Dutch, the language of the colonizer and educated elites, but because facility in Dutch is increasingly less common among students of Indonesian culture I reference Indonesian and English translations, when available, over Dutch originals.

The paucity of historiographic sources means that out of necessity I rely substantially on the popular press, particularly newspapers and popular magazines, in the construction of my narrative. You can sometimes get a vital sense of a performance scene at a particular moment of time through its remainders in newspaper and magazine articles, letters to the editor, advertisements, and photographs. These sources are always fragmentary and incomplete, however, and shot through with biases that can be difficult to gauge. Their focus is inevitably on moments of controversy, novelty, and scandal: the everyday and the commonplace tend to be left unexamined. You encounter mediations that “remove social relations from the immediacy of context” (Giddens 1991, 28). The correlate is that there are assumptions of prior knowledge and cultural understandings that present-day readers may not share. It is possible to reconstruct through the newspapers the contours of a theater craze or the journey of a celebrated company, though it is easy to get lost on the way. Troupes bifurcate or dissolve, genre names are recycled or used in novel ways, performances are promised but fail to materialize. I have found that generally other sources—a puppet, mask, costume, or musical instrument in a museum collection; an ethnographic account or traveler’s report; a play or manuscript; a painting or postcard—are needed to substantiate and flesh out the popular press materials.<sup>5</sup>

Theoretically, this book is grounded in sociological and anthropological theories of tradition and modernity. I poach the writings particularly of Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman, S. N. Eisenstadt, Edward Shils, Néstor García Canclini, Raymond Williams, and Arif Dirlik. These theorists view tradition dynamically. Tradition involves an orientation to the past, but it also serves to organize the future (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994, 62). In tradition “past time is incorporated into present practices, such that the horizon of the future curves back to intersect with what went before. [. . .] Tradition [. . .] sustains trust in the continuity of past, present, and future, and connects such trust to routinized social practices” (105). Each element of tradition “is open to acceptance, modification, or rejection” (Shils 1981, 45). But it is sometimes necessary to step outside of tradition