

Making Circles of Steel and Castles of Vanity Possible: The Cold War in the *Longue Durée* of “Modernity”

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ALFRED MCCOY’S paper offers a masterful analysis of the way in which the Philippines, and more generally Southeast Asia, were used as base and laboratory for extending US dominance—its hegemony—in the twentieth century, and in particular the Cold War era and its aftermath. He offers a succinct summary of the way in which US organs of global domination—the National Security Council, the CIA, the Defense Department—worked throughout the developing world and in Europe to ensure compliant, anti-communist regimes during the Cold War period, which also meant that more than once the United States was thwarting democracy in a number of locales and thus casting its own ideology of democratic progress and prosperity into doubt.

Yet McCoy’s analysis, insightful and revealing as it is of the larger power struggles involved in securing global dominion, embodied in a plethora of bases, does not tell us much about what the Cold War meant for the diverse populations of Southeast Asia. Its main focus lies elsewhere: the diplomatic horse-trading, fantasies, threats, and diffidence of global hegemonies and their local collaborating elite. Nor does it show how the ideological battles of the Cold War were fought in Southeast Asia. Finally, McCoy’s paper centers on describing military-political hegemony, but does not broach a more Gramscian notion of hegemony, that is, rule by gaining the consent of the governed.

In what follows, I will attempt to supplement McCoy’s argument by looking at situations somewhat closer to the ground in Southeast Asia—and, more broadly, Asia—in order to try to understand what else was occurring, over the *longue durée*, and especially from around 1850 to 2010. My argument is that these other developments enabled and sustained the military-political hegemony embodied in US international bases. The major other process that I am positing here is the quest for “modernity.” However, as is well known, this quest was undertaken with a variety of motives and understandings of the idea, and was often in conflict or at other times intertwined with ideas about preserving something equally ill-defined that the very construction of the idea of modernity itself may have brought into being: “tradition.” It involved new concepts of identity and social organization, new kinds of practices and technologies, and the fostering of new types of desires.

It is true that projections of US power, including, certainly, its bases, had a heavy impact on Asia, and in particular on the parts of Southeast Asia with which I am most

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familiar: Indonesia and the Philippines. As George and Audrey Kahin (1995) have pointed out, and McCoy reaffirms, US covert operations in Indonesia in the late 1950s were intended to move Indonesia away from neutralism or, failing that, to create an anti-communist stronghold in Sumatra and Sulawesi. In this effort, the United States mobilized ships from Subic Bay and made use of British base facilities in Singapore, as well as employing the Philippines as a refueling stop for air support given to North Sulawesi Permesta rebels (Kahin and Kahin 1995, 120–84). Similarly, as McCoy notes, the US government gave extensive material assistance to the Philippine military in its war against Huk peasant guerrillas in the late 1940s and early 1950s (Kerkvliet 1977, 191–94). Yet neither of these assertions of US military or covert power was very successful initially. In both cases, US policy makers and military intelligence officials at first failed to understand new political and social dynamics within Indonesia and the Philippines. Yet remarkably, in the longer term, the United States was able to retain substantial, though hardly unanimous, support from peoples and governments in many parts of Asia.

If the United States was expanding its military power and reach in the second half of the twentieth century, as concretely embodied in its vast array of global bases, what was it that the United States offered that suggests it was able to create a Gramscian kind of global hegemony to support and undergird that military-political reach, despite its often clumsy and counterproductive foreign policy? I will argue that it was an extension and a refreshing of liberal capitalist modernity pioneered by Great Britain and France, with all its promise of progress, wealth, egalitarianism, democratic political systems, individual autonomy, and the ability to finance consumption that allows us to pursue desire without end, in a Žižekian sense.

Let me start with an anecdote. In one of the classes I taught recently, I screened a Philippine film, *Batad* (Benji Garcia, 2007), about a teenage boy in the Ifugao community of Batad who is sorely tempted to abandon the traditional rice-terrace-farming life of his family by the lure of an external modernity as symbolized by shoes—an aspect of modernity that is not as useful as it might first seem in a mountainous, wet-rice-farming community. The film itself poses the problem of how this Ifugao community, most members of which live hand to mouth and are in need of supplemental income between rice harvests, can continue its traditions given intense pressures from a cash economy; new, expensive needs such as school and modern medicine; and desires for modernity—in this film in the form of commodity fetishism. The film seems to suggest that sticking with family, community, and to a large extent traditional ways is the solution. However, many of my students, the great majority of them Asian or of Asian heritage, felt that while family was most important, the hero's individual desires for progress and modernity were being unjustly suppressed by the demands of family and “backward” tradition. Most intriguing, one student condemned the “inhumane child labor” depicted in the family's use of the extra income generated by the film's teenage protagonist, especially at the expense of his having to drop out of school. In all likelihood, the protagonist's service to his family would have been seen as the natural course of things in a premodern era, a rational strategy to improve the family's chances for survival as a unit. Now, it is seen by some young Asians as holding back progress, crushing individual rights, or inhumane exploitation of child labor. What does this change tell us about Asia over the last century, and how does it relate to the Cold War?

Modernity is a signifier that may carry a multitude of meanings. One way of expressing this is captured in the collection of essays appropriately titled *Japan's Competing Modernities* (Minichiello 1998). Generally, modernity can be envisioned as consisting of a combination of several of the following key ideal traits, though the list is hardly exhaustive: rationality and rational organization of society, notions of progress, economic efficiency, democracy, egalitarianism, industrialization, individual autonomy, and artistic and cultural innovation and change. Surely, influential members of what were to become two of Asia's most powerful nations felt the need to embrace some form of modernity. The architects of the Meiji Restoration and popular writers such as Fukuzawa Yukichi, whose works were read by most Japanese elites, saw modernity as something the West had and that Japan had better get in order to be recognized as an equal on the world stage and thereby gain the removal of the unequal treaties (Starrs 2011, 13–36). Similarly, several abortive attempts at reform and modernization in the late Qing dynasty, leading eventually to the declaration of the Republic in 1911 and the dissatisfaction expressed in the May Fourth movement as well as in the writings of Lu Xun and others, demonstrate that many Chinese also saw modernity as something that needed to be acquired in order to overcome what they viewed as the military weakness and social backwardness that traditional regimes such as the Qing seemed incapable of remedying, and which had subjected China to semi-colonial occupation (Fenby 2009, 56–157).

“Modernity” was a way to build strength, to become the equals of the Western powers, to avoid or throw off colonial domination. But it was more than that. It was also a weapon in internecine struggles within emerging nations—a way for newly created intelligentsia and middle classes to critique old regimes and elites who had been unable to resist colonization or who, in the eyes of this new intelligentsia, kept independent countries such as Thailand from achieving a modern form of strength and respect as had other civilized nations of the world (Barmé 1993, 2002). The irony is that in many parts of Southeast Asia, these new intelligentsia, many of whom would later become leaders of anti-colonial nationalist movements, had been summoned into existence by the very needs of colonialism itself: the need for greater numbers of teachers, government and business clerks, doctors, and so on as colonial economies became more thoroughly integrated into the world economy and more rationalized administration was required. Colonial education systems and market economies were the main means for creating these new social formations that would transform colonial societies and eventually overthrow colonial regimes in countries as diverse as Indonesia and Vietnam (Barmé 2002; Marr 1981).

But modernity could cut other ways as well. In the Philippines, as Kerkvliet (1977) has shown, and as is illustrated with painful clarity by Manuel Arguilla's (1940) story “Rice,” local landed elites were replacing traditional patron-client ties of mutual dependency with modern business concepts and practices, such as efficiency and legal contracts, in order to lessen their obligations to impoverished tenant farmers. Eventually some even mechanized their farming operations after the Second World War, enabling them to dispense with tenant farmers altogether. Often, elite-led modernization led to unexpected consequences. Feeling keenly the loss of security entailed in traditional patron-client relationships with landlords, many Central Luzon peasants eventually organized to resist and attempt to reinstate what they felt were more equitable conditions of tenancy (Kerkvliet 1977). In Thailand, royalty and palace-oriented elites sought to lead

Siam into modernity, as had been done by the leaders of the Meiji reforms in Japan, in order to avoid colonization, including introducing new sartorial choices modeled on Western military dress. However, as the new middle classes grew, elites lost control of the process, leading some, like Vajiravudh (King Rama VI), to ridicule writers and journalists critical of the monarchy as a “Cult of Imitators” who wore shabby Western clothes (Peleggi 2007, 65–71). Sartorial custom in the Philippines also weighed more heavily on elite women, who during the American colonial period were expected to represent tradition while their politician husbands wore modernity in the form of Western suits and clothing. This led suffragists to wear traditional clothing in order to demonstrate their loyalty to the nation while campaigning for the right to vote in the 1930s (Roces 2007, 24–29).

Often, there were reactions against the rapid modernization of life, though such changes tended to affect some locations to a greater extent than others, particularly though not exclusively in cities, much less so in some rural areas and in remote and mountainous regions (as the film *Batad* suggests). Conservative elites frequently led these reactions if modernization seemed to be eluding their control, as in Japan or the Thai example cited above. Frequently, they called for returns to “tradition,” usually newly reinvented and repressively standardized to conform to changing circumstances, to stem the tide of change (Cohen 2016). But in other instances, progressive new intelligentsias—such as Ki Hajar Dewantoro and his Taman Siswa school movement in Java—also endeavored to merge elements of tradition with aspects of Western modernity in order to retain aspects of local cultural practices and philosophies deemed more appropriate for local students (Tsuchiya 1987). Chinese intellectuals and leaders such as Sun Yat-sen, despite the Republic’s early draconian efforts to regulate clothing and bodily habits, often felt the need to wear a modified form of the scholar’s *changpo* robes in order to signify learning and the virtuous leadership assumed to accompany it (Edwards 2007, 58–59). Thus, notions of tradition also carried positive connotations.

A further irony can also be found here. The flow of modernity was not simply one-way. The process of living in modernity saw Asians shaping their own paths through new ideas, technologies, and cultural styles and practices. However, it also brought European artistic modernists, from the French Impressionists to theatre luminaries such as Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud, and even cinematic pioneers like Sergei Eisenstein, to look to Asian traditions as a way of revitalizing or sometimes simply explaining their “new” aesthetic visions and artistic practices (Artaud 1958; Brecht 1964, 91–99; Eisenstein 1949, 28–44; Starrs 2011, 120–27; Willett 1959, 116–24). Furthermore, as Andrew Jones (2001, 53–72) has argued in relation to the recording industry, the construction of popular culture in the West was often dependent on marketing new technology across the globe, including in Asia, at virtually the same time as it was disseminated in Europe and North America.

This dissemination of popular culture also marked a new realm of capitalist commoditization. The modernization of girls’ student clothing in China and its eventual appropriation and commercialization by the fashion industry in the late 1920s is only one example of the role of consumerism, too, in shaping capitalist modernity in Asia (Edwards 2007). The construction of market economies was spurred on by mass media such as newspapers with their advertisements, often employing images of attractive women dressed *à la mode* (Barmé 2002; Edwards 2007), as well as by other forms of mass entertainment dating

from the 1890s on into the 1930s. Such forms include the turn-of-the-century Parsi theatre-derived forms such as the *Komedie Stamboel* in the Dutch East Indies, political and gag cartoons and comics by Rakuten Kitzawa and others from at least the 1900s through the 1920s that mark the beginning of Japan's modern manga fluorescence, or cinema throughout Asia (Barmé 2002; Cohen 2006; Jones 2001, 11–13; Stewart 2013). In Republican China, Shanghai was the epicenter of modern popular culture, as attested to by the proliferation of Western-style-drama clubs, cartoon magazines, and newspapers in the 1920s and 1930s (Hung 1994, 19). All of these provided new images of modern men and women for audiences to aspire to and emulate, provided they could purchase the proper accoutrements. And such aspirations led to the appearance of new styles and corresponding identities, such as was seen in the modern girls or *moga* of 1920s Japan (Molony 2007, 93–95), or the jazz-era popular music of Shanghai and elsewhere in Republican China that Western-oriented Chinese elites found so distasteful (Jones 2001, 41–52).

As can be seen from the above examples drawn from politics, literature, and popular culture, the early periods of national awakening and/or independence struggles for many Asian countries involved multiple processes and internal struggles for control that pitted differing visions of national modernity against one another. Many of these struggles continued or arose in the aftermath of World War II and throughout the 1950s. To view this through a Cold War lens would have it be a capitalist modernity versus a socialist modernity, and although this was a crucial part of the turmoil, the situations on the ground were often a good deal more complicated, as I hope my examples have suggested. Accordingly, I would assert that those global struggles of capitalist versions of modernity versus their socialist rivals were both shaping and being shaped by their intertwining with an array of local and national dynamics.

To get another sense of this, and the importance of slippery notions of modernity and tradition in the long term of recent global history, I will turn now to the modern national theatre of the late Sukarno era in Indonesia. From the 1955 parliamentary election campaigns, at the very latest, up until the tragic events of late 1965 and early 1966 that paved the road for the regime of General Suharto, modern Indonesian cultural workers became embroiled in increasingly politicized cultural struggles that can tell us much about the shared interests of the new intelligentsia of a modern nation-in-formation, as well as about some of their differences, and how the Cold War helped to amplify the latter.

It is useful to look at what writers of different stripes were producing for the national Indonesian stage at the same time as the regional rebellions in Sumatra and Sulawesi, aided and encouraged by the United States, were brewing and boiling over into bloody conflict. Modernity was still a major concern. To be sure, many of the plays penned by writers who were members of, or closely aligned with, the leftist organization Lekra, which was in turn aligned with the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party), were eventually written to conform to a form of realism—"revolutionary realism"—that was akin to socialist realisms in the Soviet Union, China, and Vietnam. This is especially true from 1959 on. Yet a number of earlier plays, and even some as late as the early 1960s, were focused primarily on a withering criticism of what Lekra members felt were the remnants of a feudal system. Yubar Ayub's *Siti Djamilah* (1956), for instance, launches a bitter critique of the way in which local elites, with the blessing of the colonial powers, conducted an often arbitrary rule over those subjects under their jurisdiction. Rather than write in the

realist prose form favored by the era, Ayub, destined to become Secretary General of Lekra in 1959, chose to mine the ethnic Minangkabau folk culture of West Sumatra to base the play on a local Minangkabau legend, as well as to structure his play as a verse drama making copious use of local proverbs. This choice is indicative of the allure of a modernized “tradition” in shoring up ideas of national identity against real and perceived threats from foreign cultures and geopolitical powers. The essential plot pits Laras Simawang, a local colonial-era government official, against his mother and the entire village community. Desiring to marry a younger woman, Laras Simawang’s capricious divorce of his pregnant wife, Siti Djamilah, has resulted in Siti Djamilah’s and her children’s suicides. According to Yubar Ayub, he had written this play

so that my final desire for this drama—to help develop the potential of regional literature, drama, and literature with the hope of enriching the wealth of our national art and culture—will become meaningful in so far as, hopefully, it is useful in the lives of the people and of the new Indonesian humanity, people and humanity that also study from their own history so as to meet the challenges confronting them today and in the future. (Ajoeb 1956, 432)¹

Note that Ayub uses two terms that correspond to the themes I am attempting to highlight. First, he talks about the *rakjat*, the people, in a populist fashion that foreshadows his commitment to class. Second, he imagines a “new Indonesian humanity,” which, in critically evaluating the past with an eye towards future action, appears to be a modernist one.

Siti Djamilah uses Laras Simawang’s abusive treatment of his wife and children to launch an outraged condemnation of government officials who act in arrogant and arbitrary ways. When Siti Djamilah appeals to Laras Simawang’s compassion, asking him merely to wait till she has given birth before divorcing her, the irate official, feeling Siti Djamilah is thwarting his desire for immediate gratification, tells her he will divorce her and have her hung unless she kills herself (445). The obvious injustice of his behavior and treatment of his wife and children sparks a series of condemnations of such official callousness by both Siti Djamilah and Laras Simawang’s own mother, Siti Rawijah. Two other cases are related to hint that Laras Simawang is not confining his unjust actions to his wife and family, but rather that he is also acting in an arbitrary fashion towards ordinary people: having them hung without clear reasons and stealing their livestock and goods.

If we take Ayub’s statement above seriously, it would suggest that the play is not simply a critique of colonial conditions, but also, and perhaps primarily, a cautionary tale about the potential behavior of government officials in the 1950s independent republic of Indonesia. The injustices most often mentioned in Siti Djamilah’s laments refer in

¹The Indonesian reads: “*Sehingga keinginan saya yang terakhir dengan drama ini, yaitu, ikut membantu mengembangkan potensi kesusastraan, drama dan kesenian daerah, kearah memperkaya perbendaharaan kesenian dan kebudayaan nasional kita, mendapat arti yang mudah-mudahan pula berguna bagi hidup rakyat dan manusia Indonesia baru, rakyat dan manusia yang juga belajar pada sejarahnya sendiri untuk menjawab tantangan-tantangan hari ini dan hari esoknya sendiri.*”

the iterative to government officials—*penghulu* and *hulubalang*—suggesting common occurrence. Yet, in several instances the word *raja* (king) is included among those listed as acting in a cruel and unjust fashion. In such a way, Ayub's play intimates that remnants of traditional ruling elites are also responsible for much of the systemic injustice present in his colonial-era drama, and by implication, in 1950s Indonesia. Furthermore, two of the crimes in which Siti Djamilah accuses the rajas of engaging are gambling and raping young women (449–50). This image of lascivious, carousing, and fiscally irresponsible aristocrats bears a striking similarity to criticism of the Thai monarchy and aristocrats voiced by Thai middle-class journalists from the 1910s to the 1932 overthrow of the monarchy's absolutist power (Barmé 2002). Twenty to thirty years later, as this example indicates, concerns about oppressive aristocratic traditions were still alive in parts of Asia.

A similar critical representation of old, aristocratic elites can be found in the play, *Buih dan kasih* (Foam and love, 1958) by Bachtiar Siagian, arguably Lekra's most successful playwright. Even more directly than *Siti Djamilah*, *Buih dan kasih* posits Datukmuda (Young Lord), an aristocratic leader of a fishing village, as a lascivious authoritarian leader who lusts after the beautiful young widow of a fisherman, though she has no interest in marrying him. When a young sailor happens by and attempts to rouse the girl's spirit so as to throw off the control of her father, who is submissive to Datukmuda, as well as to leave behind her hopeless faithfulness to her dead husband, he is stabbed in the back by one of Datukmuda's henchmen. Once again, we find this pattern of aristocratic leaders who are authoritarian and unscrupulous, and who lust after women. In addition, *Buih dan kasih* asserts the importance of individualism through the figure of the young sailor, Kembara (the Wanderer). Individualism is, of course, another key modernist theme, though somewhat surprising, perhaps, in the work of a writer aligned with the Communist Party, as Siagian was. When responding to Datukmuda's derisive greeting, based upon his claim to local, traditional leadership, Kembara claims that he too is a local headman—of his own sampan (Siagian 1958, 7). Further, the play suggests that the older generation is too controlling and out of touch with the times. These same themes are repeated even as late as 1961 in Emha's popular play, *Si Nandang* (Bodden 2010). In Emha's play, justice and individual choice are pitted against arbitrary and unscrupulous parental control by a local raja.

In all of these works, then, we see a set of themes that are focused on advocating on behalf of modernity and some of its imagined attributes—egalitarianism; individual choice; and the rule of law defined over and against hierarchy, arbitrary authority, and old-fashioned norms. As such they seem to fit with a generally liberal idea of modernity. Still, the element of class critique—the association of injustice, arbitrary authority, and even parental control with local rajas and aristocrats—is what binds this theme to that of a particularly youthful socialist vision of what modernity might mean. That vision was only given a fuller, more solidly Cold War form in the later campaign plays of the 1959–65 period, in which communist cadres lead the masses to victories over separatist rebels, recalcitrant and greedy landlords, and subversive capitalist bureaucrats.

Opposed to the leftist writers of Lekra were Muslim cultural groups such as Himpunan Seniman dan Budayawan Islam (HSBI, Association of Islamic Artists and Cultural Workers). HSBI theatre activists were broadly concerned with putting forward a vision of a Muslim and nationalist modernity that saw communism as necessarily atheistic and thus, always a potential enemy, but how to define Islamic modernity? There were a

few plays like Emil Sanossa's *Fajar sidiq* (Daybreak, n.d.) that attempted to link Islamic morality to the independence struggle, but the great majority of these plays took the early days of the Muslim community or other Biblical or Koranic stories as their material. This, like Yubar Ayub's *Siti Djalilah*, could be viewed as suggesting that the examples of the past—especially the truths of Islamic belief and practice, as embodied in the Koran and Hadith—could teach us about how to respond to the present, or that the past could be deployed as an allegory of current affairs.

I will here look very briefly at a play by M. Nur Alian, the first Secretary General of HSBI from its inception in 1956 to 1961, in order to examine some aspects of this Islamic vision of modernity. Alian's plays were all written prior to 1962, at which point they were published by the Ministry of Religion's Bureau of Religious Information. The first play in Alian's collection, *Djalilah* (the name of a character) is instructive. In many ways, it is very like the earlier Lekra plays written during the same period. The protagonists are ordinary people who suffer abuse and worse at the hands of arbitrary officials. Djalilah, the play's heroine, describes the situation they face as living "in the midst of a country that is increasingly controlled by lust and passion" ("*di tengah-tengah negeri yang serba dikuasai hawa nafsu*"; Alian 1962, 10). The main antagonist, Abdulkahar, is a harsh palace overseer. The play represents Abdulkahar's henchmen as rude and arrogant, and Abdulkahar himself as economically corrupt, stealing from the state's treasury, and as an enslaver of others. Contrasted with Abdulkahar is the new caliph, Umar, one of Muhammad's companions. Unlike his overseer, Umar does not desire ostentatious, glorifying titles. He declares that God alone makes the law for his subjects, while Umar, himself, is but a servant of Allah who ensures that Allah's laws are carried out. His is a message of hope to the oppressed ("the cruel shall be humiliated before me, and the oppressed will receive succor at my hands" / "*yang zalim dihadapanku terhina, yang teraniaya, dihadapanku tertolong*"; 15).

When Umar acts to remedy the situation, he curses the corrupt officials (23) in language not too different from that which would be used several years later in Lekra plays lambasting the capitalist bureaucrats. Similarly, there is at work in this piece an egalitarian impulse close to the heart of some visions of Islam, in which Umar sees himself as not a lord, but a brother in the faith, one who is every bit as subject to Allah's laws as any other Muslim (13–15). Interestingly enough, the play's heroine, Djalilah, is so inspired by Umar's brand of justice that she volunteers to help wipe out fraudulently gained wealth (*ghulul*). Another moment redolent of modernity, one of gender egalitarianism, thus appears briefly at the end of Alian's piece.

In Alian's play, we see a sense of Islam coalescing with the nationalist imperatives of the late 1950s and a partial symmetry with the early Lekra plays described above: desires for justice and egalitarianism, a struggle against corrupt and arbitrary officials, and even a resonance with gender issues also broached in the Lekra dramas. To be sure there is a difference. There is no discernable emphasis on individualism as there was in some of the early Lekra plays, and the stress on corrupt and arbitrary officials is not correlated with class as surely as it is in Ayub's or Siagian's works. Yet the mutual emphasis on creating just, egalitarian, and honest social and political systems is striking.

Local and international conditions—the growing strength of the PKI and its bitter rival, the Indonesian army, within Indonesia; the alliance of Muslims with the army and secular anti-communist forces; and the British government's heavy-handed

establishment of the new Malaysian state in 1963 followed by substantial economic support from the United States and its backing for Malaysia to become a member of the UN Security Council—helped speed the growing polarization of Indonesian political and cultural groups into a more solidly Cold War binary by the mid-1960s. However, the earlier plays of both groups should suggest that such a polarization was not about epochal change, but rather, a fork in the road requiring a choice between what appeared to be two divergent visions of modernity.

Certainly, the United States also worked assiduously in Japan during the occupation years to ensure that Japan made the “right” choice at this fork (Dower 1999, 432–40), while at the same time it failed to prevent China from following, at least temporarily, a socialist path.

On the other hand, not only did the Cold War amplify the divisions between groups with competing visions of modernity, but also it frequently allowed some of these groups to mask other divisions in charting what kind of modernity, from among the contending possibilities, would emerge to guide the future. For example, the rebelling Huk peasants in Central Luzon in the 1946–54 period were often demonized by Philippine landlords, politicians, and US military and political operatives as communists, though the rebellion’s ties to the Philippine Communist Party were rather loose, while most peasants, as noted above, simply wanted a return to the previous kinds of security offered by patron-client relationships with landlords (Kerkvliet 1977). Peasants in Thailand could be similarly dismissed as communists and even assassinated for demanding full citizenship or that national land reform laws be extended or observed, both in the 1950s and the 1970s (Haberkmorn 2011). In both cases, even when peasants only wanted a return to previous relations, modernity played a role as the rural poor and landless began to form modern organizations, take part in national politics, and demand equal legal rights as national citizens, while landlords followed an increasingly ruthless modernist logic of maximizing accumulation and profit.

Indeed, as the ongoing, unequal US relationship with the Philippines indicates, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and the control over global resources they facilitate have indeed been key processes throughout much of the last 150 years. As a result, perhaps, ideas of modernity, tied to dreams of more equal global relations of power and culture, still remain on the agenda.

An example of this can be found in the fact that a series of prominent Indonesian novelists of the last few decades—Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Y. B. Mangunwijaya, and Ayu Utami—have all endeavored in their works to see Indonesia and its literature and culture as situated on a cosmopolitan stage and possessing cultural riches that parallel and are equally emotionally captivating or intellectually sophisticated as Western mythologies, quantum physics, or post-structuralist social theory. In a way, these writers are asserting that Indonesia is an equal partner in modernity, but now with the addenda that reformulated elements of traditional culture and philosophy can contribute meaningfully to that global society. That being modern remains a desirable goal for Indonesian writers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries would seem to confirm the *longue durée* of an age of the hegemony of capitalist modernity, perhaps hinting at one of the key tools underpinning the “indirect hegemony” McCoy notes in his fascinating paper.

Similarly, the fact that so many Asian countries have shed their dictatorial regimes since the 1980s can also be seen as foreshadowed in the call of Lekra and HSBI plays alike for a more just government and the rule of law, emblems of modernity and surely ideological concepts and practices of a powerful nature, however abused and ignored by the Western powers that preached them and pretended to have mastered them. Furthermore, in the novels of the three Indonesian writers just mentioned, the assertion of equality is a defense of certain reformulated local-national cultural values that constitutes a mild sort of rebuke to Western notions of superiority, a way for the empire to write back, and, limited though not insignificant, a countervailing force to the hegemony of the dominant global powers. Carefully reading these cultural works, as well as the Lekra and HSBI plays from 1955–65 Indonesia, against the background of social ferment and change occurring across Asia in the last 150 years reveals something of what held American bases in place and allowed their multiplication: the aspiration to acquire some form of “modernity” (for which America has certainly been a key exemplar, rivaled for a time by the Soviet Union and Maoist China) and to be acknowledged as participants in a modern world society. The Cold War was one episode, albeit an important one, in this historical quest.

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