



Lizzy van Leeuwen. *Lost in Mall: An Ethnography of Middle-class Jakarta in the 1990s*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2011, x+299 p.

As an ethnographic study, *Lost in Mall* makes at least three important contributions to the general discussion on the rise of the middle-class in Indonesia. Firstly, based on her “intermittent and long-term participation in, and observation of, middle-class life” (p. 15), the author skillfully details a suburban Bintaro-based family’s everyday, typical middle-class behavior and aspirations for *moderen* (modern) life comforts: their exotic dream-like housing complex, overdependence on domestic helpers (*pembantu*), consumption culture, and preference for air-conditioned life-styles and environments. These practices of “everyday life” embody and express violence in terms of a “normal” regime that is established as a standard in the nation’s socio-political life. Leeuwen also includes honest transcriptions of her position (and on-site personal feelings) as a single white female researcher in her interactions with people from different layers of society. All of these actual descriptions are not merely a compilation of empirical data that record what are actually happening (itself already a valuable record); instead, they form a mosaic that offers a clear picture, full of real life-colours and human sensibilities. A real picture of the life of the middle class is precisely what has been lacking in current scholarship, with its overly theory-laden hypotheses, on the subject matter [for comparison, see Liechty 2003]. This book thus promotes a critical turn that highlights the humble strength of ethnographic study with neither “inherent pretensions to totality” [see Livingston 2007] nor pre-fabricated theoretical frameworks, providing instead detailed descriptions that enrich intercultural understanding.

Secondly, the author’s ingenious interweaving of these actual descriptions serves to challenge commonsensical assumptions of middle-class cultural and

political prominence in the narrative of *kemajuan* (progress) deployed for the developmental project of New Order’s Indonesia. In the context of what has been written about the middle class in Indonesia, *Lost in Mall* articulates a different perspective. It neither supports the concept of middle class as heroes of the nation’s development nor dismisses that concept in favor of affirming the opposite view that condemns the middle-class as “villains of globalization.” The richly detailed descriptions in *Lost in Mall* provide a much-needed perspective on the actual roles the middle-class has played and deployed to maintain its privileged status. Thus, far from presenting either an optimistic view of the middle-class or no words of praise at all for the middle-class values, it forces readers to transcend the narrow dichotomies employed in current discussion on the middle-class, showing instead the ways in which the middle-class actors are conscious of their own social ambiguity. This point is apparent in Chapter 4 (“Celebrating civil society in the shopping malls”), which discusses the “remarkable proliferation of shopping malls in Jabotabek over the last fifteen years” (p. 155). Malls are becoming an integral part of middle-class social life but are also publicly derided by that same class as an urban space with no cultural relevance. The book’s title “*Lost in Mall*” encapsulates the nation’s “culture industry” [Adorno and Horkheimer 2002] in which the mall is “occasionally used [by experienced middle-class shoppers] . . . to ‘reinvent’ themselves: to assume a different, more independent identity, a similar experience of social transformation” (p. 174). Leeuwen’s finely-tuned analysis shows that the “culture industry” here is not dictated from above, but derives from the ambiguous practices of the middle-class itself. This is not to suggest that malls, as proposed by Hedman and Sidel in the case of post-EDSA Philippines, have become “enclaves of enchanted convenience and safety, . . . something akin to ‘civil society’ for the vast majority of the Philippines’s urban population” [2000: 134], an idea that conveniently overlooks the fact that the items sold inside malls are beyond the reach of many. Instead, the middle-class, regardless of its awareness of

how illusionary malls actually are, deludes itself by treating the malls as a space for social transformation in which its members reluctantly join, while knowing at the same time that transformation has to take place in the real world outside the malls' safety zones.

Thirdly, the Voltairean satire employed creatively by the author in her descriptions is itself revealing of the diverse social encounters she had during her time of research. Her extensive experiences as a field researcher evidently have enabled her to capture the voices of discontent coming from the society itself, modulate these voices and transform them to serve as the self-consciousness of the society, no matter how ugly that self-consciousness actually is. What comes out of this discussion is "the embarrassment of the middle classes" [Wright 1985] in the classical sense, an insight that constitutes the most important contribution of *Lost in Mall* as a social critique—an academic tradition that was once full of vitality in the 1960s–70s but now is dying in many ivory towers of "Indonesian studies," where contemporary researchers often craft their own personal comfort zones in ways that avoid offending the authorities. As a member of the middle-class, this book-reviewer could not help nodding in agreement with the author's analysis and method, and applauding her work in uncovering this self-consciousness. As social critique, *Lost in Mall* provokes readers (especially young Indonesians) to juxtapose the text with their personal experiences as members of the middle-class. Whether increased self-consciousness would lead to a social change is, however, a different matter.

In contrast to the smooth-flowing descriptions that run throughout the book, Chapter 6 ("Tear gas for Christmas") stands at odds as it offers the proposition that "the relationship between emerging concepts of violence and urbanity had its roots in the second half of the nineteenth century" (p.251). Readers may understand her point about the violent nature of the colonial rule and how this might have certain historical repercussions on 1990s Indonesia, but to argue for "the origins of the middle class concept of violence" (p.265)

and how it might have been partially mediated by late-colonial Eurasian influences ("Indo culture") surely requires more extensive exploration not only of the subject of late-colonial history but also the nature of this historical transmission.

Lastly, on some keywords employed by the author. The author refers to the looting during the May 1998 as "*rampok*." This is in line with her aim to make the case for "the origin of violence" by linking it to the "*rampok*" during the late colonial period to the Japanese occupation. The word "*rampok*" (and some many others such as "*bersiap*," "*kassar*") is part of the vocabulary of the Petjoh (vernaculars used by the Eurasian) that carries specific meanings (and also, conceptual understandings) shared only by the colonial officials and the Eurasians, but not by native Indonesians. One example is the well-received comic series by Peter Van Dongen, a Eurasian comic artist based in Amsterdam, who takes this specific meaning of "*rampok*" as its title to describe the conflicting situation of the 1945–47 Indonesia through the eyes of a young Dutch army deserter [Van Dongen 2005; 2008]. Indonesians, meanwhile, refer to the plundering of May 1998 as "*penjarahan*." This crucial socio-political difference between "*rampok*" and "*penjarahan*" appears to have escaped the author's consideration. Her direct reference to the Petjoh in drawing a historical parallel between the late-colonial situation and the 1990s Indonesia is itself symptomatic of a colonial-mediated social ignorance that she reproduces in the text. To treat the plundering of May 1998 simply as a "*rampok*" is to turn a blind eye to the state's negligence (and failure) as a modern political creation to provide welfare and safety for its people—a political liability the colonial government never developed, due to its overweening concern for political surveillance.

Enjoyable to read and full of inspiring propositions, *Lost in Mall* is a definite must-read for understanding modern Indonesia.

(Jafar Suryomenggolo · CSEAS)

References

Adorno, Theodor; and Horkheimer, Max. 2002. The

- Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, edited by M. Horkheimer, T. W. Adorno, and G. S. Noerr. Stanford: Stanford UP (reprinted).
- Hedman, Eva-Lotta E.; and Sidel, John T. 2000. *Malling Manila: Images of a City, Fragments of a Century*. In *Philippine Politics and Society in the Twentieth Century: Colonial Legacies, Post-colonial Trajectories*, edited by Eva-Lotta E. Hedman and J. Sidel. London: Routledge.
- Liechty, Mark. 2003. *Suitably Modern: Making Middle-class Culture in Kathmandu*. Princeton: Princeton UP.
- Livingston, Paul. 2007. Wittgenstein, Kant and the Critique of Totality. *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 33(6): 691–715.
- Van Dongen, Peter. 2005. *Rampokan: Java*. Amsterdam: Oog & Blik.
- . 2008. *Rampokan: Celebes*. Amsterdam: Oog & Blik.
- Wright, Erik Olin. 1985. *Classes*. London: Verso.

|| José S. Buenconsejo. *The River of Exchange: Music of Agusan Manobo and Visayan Relations in Caraga, Mindanao, Philippines*. 2008. 75 minutes, color, DVD. Produced by the author. Distributed through Amazon.com, <http://www.amazon.com>. In English, some Cebuano and Manobo with English subtitles. ||

This ethnographic video investigates the contemporary life of the Agusan Manobo, a minority group living in Southern Philippines, through their musical expressions in rituals and songs. It was filmed in a small town named Loreto, which is in the middle of the Agusan Valley, in the interior of Mindanao Island that flows into Umayam River, a tributary of Agusan River. These rivers have been used as an exchange route between inland and coastal people for centuries. The life of the Manobo in this area has largely changed due to the influx of Visayan settlers, particularly during the logging boom

of the 1950s, who brought their cultural practices such as sedentarization, intensive wet rice cultivation and so on. The author understands changes in Manobo musical expressions as a result of this sociocultural transformation in the area and carefully investigates Manobo relationships with their others, especially Visayan settlers who brought and introduced modernization inland.

The work consists of 19 chapters. Chapter 1 points out the importance of personalism in the Philippines, which is shared by the Manobo, and raises a question: How does musical expression create the conditions to avoid social violence, i.e., how does it endorse an ethics of group recognition? This question is investigated as a theme within the whole work and is elaborated in the following chapters.

Chapters 2 to 9 describe the socio-geographic environment of Loreto (2, 3 and 5) and the contemporary sociocultural situation of the Manobo living there (4 to 9). The latter includes two important points that are related to the following chapters. One is Manobo relationships with outside groups which are represented in Manobo cultural expressions. Manobo connections with native groups from the mountains and upriver areas appear as their drum and gong music which is played in those groups' styles and employed in traditional ritual, while their acceptance of Visayan culture appears as a Visayan spirit in their contemporary ritual and is symbolized by objects in the ritual that are parts of Visayan culture.

The other is the dominance of Visayan culture and the marginalization of traditional Manobo culture. For example, rice fields for intensive cultivation are located in the town, while traditional Manobo swiddens are located in the barrios far from Visayan presence. A corollary to this is that traditional ritual is performed only in the barrios, while contemporary Visayanized ritual is held in the town. Like contemporary Manobo ritual and the coexistence of animism and Christianity in the Manobo body, Manobo culture has changed by absorbing the dominant Visayan culture.

Chapters 10 to 13 investigate the Manobo tradi-