



THE LEGACY OF LEKRA: ORGANISING REVOLUTIONARY CULTURE IN INDONESIA



Dossier n° 35
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December 2020

COVER

Hendra Gunawan, *War and Peace*, c. 1950s, oil on canvas, 93.7 x 140.3 cm,
Collection of National Gallery Singapore.



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S. Pudjanadi, *Kaum Tani Menuntut* ('Peasants Make Demands'), published in *Harian Rakyat*, 21 June 1964. The demands read, from top to bottom: *UUPA* ('agrarian law 1960'), *UUD 45* ('Indonesian 1945 constitution'), and *demokrasi* ('democracy').



LITERATURE THAT DEFENDS VICTIMS, NOT POWER

we have cried out
from behind the walls of segregation
from the clutches of the spiteful bed
from the nightly business in the gutters
from the revenge of unwilling wedlock
“we are human beings!”

- ‘Women’, written by Sugiarti Siswadi, leader of Lekra
and the women’s organisation *Gerwani*¹

‘It was the worst when I was released. That’s the biggest prison I had to face’.

Martin Aleida recalls the moment he was released from prison at the end of 1966. At twenty-two, Martin emerged from nearly a year behind bars to Jakarta, unable to find his friends and comrades. His workplace, *Harian Rakyat* (‘The People’s Daily’), the official newspaper of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), was shuttered. Both his Party and its cultural organisation, Lekra (*Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat* or ‘The Institute for People’s Culture’), were banned and have been illegal ever since.

[Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research](#) spoke to the seventy-six-year-old Martin who, although he is from North Sumatra, has lived

in Jakarta since the early 1960s. He answered our questions from a local library that he frequents every Saturday.

‘There are a lot of events and feelings I had gone through during the last fifty years that I couldn’t tell,’ he says, referring to his recently published memoir, *Romantisme Tahun Kekerasan* (*Romance in the Years of Violence*). Martin, however, is not his even his name: ‘During the thirty-two years of military rule under General Suharto, in order to write I had to use a pseudonym – Martin Aleida – since as a writer I was prohibited by the authorities to write. Being accused arbitrarily and without proof that I was involved in the failed coup attempt of the September 30th Movement in 1965 [G30S] by the military, I couldn’t get back to my professional field as a writer. The same applied to thousands of teachers, civil servants, even puppet masters who were prohibited from going back to their fields unless they were prepared to be investigated again and again with the possibility of being detained, and at worst, eliminated’. The word ‘eliminated’ is not used loosely; during the process of the 1965 coup led by Major General Suharto, over a million communists and communist sympathisers were murdered by the coup government and its allies.

The September 30th Movement was a military splinter group that carried out an early-morning action in 1965, resulting in the kidnapping and killing of six senior officials. Though the details of the day continue to be murky, what is clear is that the right wing and the army blamed the communists for initiating the uprising. This event served as a convenient pretext for the genocidal crackdown on the PKI. Major General Suharto – better known at the CIA headquarters than in the homes of the Indonesian workers and peasants at that time – led the

army out of the barracks and began the systematic slaughter of the Left; embassies from Australia and the United States provided lists of communists who were then 'eliminated'. US Ambassador Marshall Green wrote that the United States 'made clear' to the Army that it was 'generally sympathetic with and admiring' of its operation. President Sukarno, who was overthrown in 1965, had been drifting leftwards since he led Indonesia out of Dutch imperialism in 1949. In 1955, Sukarno convened the Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung, a key event in the construction of the Third World Project. He was purged in the coup.

In 1968, CIA analyst Helen-Louise Hunter wrote a report called *1965: The Coup That Backfired* ², in which she wrote that 'In terms of the numbers killed, the anti-PKI massacres in Indonesia rank as one of the worst mass murders in the 20th century'. Amongst those killed were PKI General Secretary D.N. Aidit; two key Politburo members, M.H. Lukman and Lukman Njoto; and two other Party leaders, Sudisman and Ir Sakirman. These top five leaders of the PKI were 'eliminated' with no judicial process. It is important to note that Major General Suharto, who would promote himself to general and take the title of president, remained unrepentant about the violence and the coup till his death in 2008. Suharto's dictatorship, known as the 'New Order', remained in power for the next thirty-two years till 1998, when a broad-based movement for democracy brought it down. The tentacles of the anti-PKI coup still linger in Indonesia, where Marxism and communist organisations are banned.

Faced with one of the bloodiest and most silenced massacres of communists in history, Martin deepened his commitment to literature

– one that, as he says, ‘defends the victims, not power’. Under the penname of Martin, he writes novels and short stories, fiction and non-fiction, about the suffering of the people and the disappeared and the silenced aspirations of a generation. He writes in Bahasa Indonesian, one of the Indonesian languages that was adopted as a language of national liberation in 1928 and matured out of necessity through the anti-colonial and anti-feudal struggles of the 1930s and 1940s.

In one of Martin’s short stories, the protagonist Dewangga lies on her deathbed, reliving memories of an entire marriage with her husband, Abdullah. Only in her final moments, after a lifetime spent together in silence, do they finally have the courage to reveal their militant pasts to one another – he as a jailed activist in 1965, she as an organiser of landless peasants. Martin’s recent memoir, he hopes, can revive these not uncommon stories of Dewangga and Abdullah for the younger generation about life before 1965, life after, and the conditions that led to this still open wound in Indonesian history.





Djoko Pekik, *Tuan Tanah Kawin Muda* (Old Landlord Marries a Youngster), 1964.



WE ARE THE LEGITIMATE HEIRS OF WORLD CULTURE

it was born
thirty-five years ago
from the pains
of the most progressive class
a child of an era
that will give birth to an era

braving tempests
lulled not by the breeze
it penetrated into the people's heart
deeper than the sea of Banda
adorning life
more beautiful than the chempaka blossom

it lives from life
withstanding terror and provocation
yesterday, today, tomorrow
it is Antaeus, son of Poseidon
invincible as long as it stays faithful to the earth
child of an era that will give birth to an era
now it has come of age.

- *coming of age* by D.N. Aidit³

When they say the 'the east was red', it is because the east was indeed red. In 1965, the PKI had three and a half million cadre and twenty

million people in its mass organisations of youth, women, peasants, and workers. It was the third-largest communist party in the world, after the parties in the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. The PKI's cultural front, Lekra, was one of its mass organisations, with over 200,000 members, totalling one and a half million with its supporters. Lekra was likely the largest cultural organisation not affiliated with a state to have ever existed anywhere. As a former member of Lekra, Martin recalls, 'I was attracted by the organisation's point of view that literature should take a side and uphold justice for the oppressed majority – the labourers, peasants, and fishermen. Literature, and art in general, are predestined to defend the oppressed'. Too little is known about this historic organisation; this is not by accident, but through the erasure and destruction of its works and the exile and disappearance of its members.

On 17 August 2020, Lekra would have celebrated seventy years since its founding. It shares its anniversary with Indonesia itself, which wrenched its freedom from the imperialists on this day in 1945, also known as *Tujubbelasan* ('the Seventeenth'). It took four more years for the British, the Dutch, and the Japanese to be fully defeated and for the 1949 Round Table Conference to be held in the Hague; at this conference, the Dutch reluctantly agreed to leave Indonesia, but they insisted on many concessions. One of these was a cultural accord that institutionalised a 'special' pro-Dutch relationship in the fields of thought and culture. For the revolutionary artists, the August Revolution was incomplete, and they set themselves to the task of building an anti-imperialist and independent national culture to usher in the socialist revolution. In 1950, *Gelanggang*, a group of artists associated with the *Siasat* weekly magazine aligned with the

Socialist Party of Indonesia, published its ‘Testimony of Beliefs’, a cultural manifesto for the months-young nation state:

We are the legitimate heirs of world culture, and we will perpetuate this culture in our own way. We were born from the ranks of ordinary people, and for us, the concept of ‘the people’ signifies a jumbled hodgepodge from which new, robust worlds are born. Our Indonesian-ness does not just derive from our brown skin, our black hair or our prominent foreheads, but rather from what is expressed by the form of our thoughts and feelings... Revolution for us is the establishment of new values on top of obsolete ones which must be destroyed... Our appreciation of the surrounding conditions (society) is that of people who acknowledge the reciprocity of influences between society and the artist.⁴

To complete the August Revolution would be a great task. During this period of the early 1950s, the communist movement was still weak organisationally, suffering the defeats of the anti-communist crackdown on the Madiun Rebellion (1948) and Sukiman raids (1951), which resulted in tens of thousands of PKI cadre and supporters jailed and killed. When D.N. Aidit was elected secretary-general in 1951, PKI’s membership was at a low point of merely 8,000 members. It was under his leadership that the Party would grow exponentially to over one million people over the next four years, and to three and a half million by the time of its destruction in the 1965 coup. The communist movement was able to grow at astounding rates by developing its mass fronts and broad political alliances. Adopting a National United Front strategy allowed the Party to build a common program with progressive sectors of society that were unified

by an anti-imperialist politics. Central to this process was the relationship with left segments of the ruling Indonesian National Party (PNI) under Sukarno's leadership. Though a product of the bourgeois revolution, over this period, Sukarno increasingly adopted a more pro-rakyat (or pro-'people') and a sharper anti-imperialist stance. As the PKI and its mass fronts grew, the communist movement would become important pillars of the ruling PNI.

It was during these years that many revolutionary cultural organisations flourished, of which Lekra was not only the largest but was also the most left-aligned. Many of its senior members were PKI cadre, including two of Lekra's founding members: Njoto, editor of *Harian Rakyat* and PKI politburo member and D.N. Aidit himself. Lekra, however, was not an official organisation of the PKI, nor did the political direction come directly from the Party. In one example, senior journalist Amarzan Ismail Hamid was editing a poetry selection of *Harian Rakyat* when D. N. Aidit's poem came before him. 'It's not good enough,' Hamid told Njoto, to which he replied, 'fine.'

The aim of Lekra was to contribute to building a robust communist movement beyond the Party. Lekra was the vanguard of communist cultural work. Meanwhile, workers were organised in the *Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia* ('The All-Indonesian Federation of Workers' Organisations' or SOBSI), women in *Gerwani* ('Indonesian Women's Movement'), peasants in *Barisan Tani Indonesia* ('Peasants' Front of Indonesia' or BTI), and youth in *Pemuda Rakyat* ('People's Youth'). These mass fronts – all of which were legal and had open ties with the PKI – formed the communist movement that spearheaded the anti-imperialist national struggle. Under the leadership of D.N. Aidit and Njoto, the work of

rebuilding the Party and the communist movement necessitated a systematic approach to culture, one which combined class consciousness, anti-imperialism, and cultural nationalism. At the centre of this project are the people, for whom and by whom culture is made. As summarised in Lekra's 1955 statement of beliefs, Mukadimah ('Introduction'), 'the people are the sole creators of culture'.

At Lekra's first national congress in 1959, Secretary-General Joebaar Ajobe recounted that 'Lekra was founded in 1950 due to an awareness of the essence of the August 1945 Revolution and of the connection between the Revolution and culture, an awareness that the Revolution has great significance for culture, and, at the same time, culture has great significance for the August Revolution'.⁵ One of the first tasks was to 'revive' people's art from the dual oppressions of domestic feudalism and foreign imperialism. Revival was 'not in a negative sense of simply preventing people's art from dying out', Ajobe elaborated, 'but rather to revive it in a positive sense, especially by giving it new content that matches the character and aims of the August Revolution'.⁵

The cultural tasks were tall and many; they ranged from systematising popular and traditional music to identifying the decadent, feudal, or non-revolutionary aspects that persisted, from developing a cultural political education program to encouraging new creative production, from rediscovering 'people's music' and instruments to organising international cultural exchanges. Through its fifteen-year existence, Lekra not only mobilised millions, but developed cultural practices rooted in the people's concrete and material conditions. From their organising, new expressive forms and new artistic theories emerged – they were, in essence, writing art history in the Marxist tradition.



S. Nar, *People's Iron Broom*, from the Afro-Asian People's Anti-Imperialist Caricature Exhibition, 1966.



BUILDING A BOISTEROUS CULTURE

Lekra worked across many regions and scales, through its own structures, affiliate organisations, and regional cultural fronts. Stephen Miller's comprehensive study of Lekra and the pages of *Kebudayaan*, the cultural supplement to *Harian Rakyat* newspaper, reveal hints about how Lekra organised itself.⁷⁷ The national secretariat was a centralised body, with divisions based on artistic sectors. During the first national congress, Lekra was formally divided into seven institutes for literature, fine arts, film, theatre, music, dance, and science.

Below the national level were the regional organisations, and below them were the local branches. Twenty-one branches were formed in its first year of existence, largely located in Java and also organised in Sumatra, Sulawesi, Bali, and Kalimantan. The prominent branches were based in the national capital of Jakarta and the PKI stronghold of Yogyakarta, alongside Medan in Sumatra, which grew out of the extensive plantation economy and land struggles in the area. Each branch had its own character, carrying the cultures and traditions of each region. During its first decade, Lekra grew to 200 local branches, reaching a membership of 100,000 by 1963, just two years before the organisation would be destroyed in the brutal coup. It has been illegal ever since. Lekra would not live to see its second national congress, planned to take place in December of that bloody year.

Beyond growing its own membership, one of Lekra's successes in the 1950s – and why it became dangerous to imperialist and capitalist

ambitions – was in engaging in the broader ‘cultural ecology’ in and around the communist movement, as described by Miller. City-wide cultural fronts were created in various regions as part of the National United Front with the Greater Jakarta Artists’ Society (Masyarakat Seniman Jakarta Raya or MSDR) being the most significant. Working with the government of Jakarta, the nation’s capital, one of the key projects was to organise popular entertainment that would encourage the ‘healthy’ development of Indonesian society, for the young and elderly alike. The cultural front intimately studied living folk art forms and the remnants of Dutch colonial culture and the still pervasive US imperialist content that they contained. They also studied revolutionary potential of existing popular culture such as *tanjidor* (or ‘boisterous’) street performances in the struggle for national liberation. Leading a cultural process with the Jakarta government helped elevate *Lekra* from its marginal ranks to a robust national force by the mid-1950s.



Amrus Natalsya, *Mereka Yang Terusir Dari Tanahnya* ('Those Chased Away from Their Land'), 1960, oil on canvas, 80 x 187 cm, Collection of National Gallery Singapore.



SOCIALIST REALISM IS THAT WHICH GIVES HOPE AND DIRECTION

do not say that the night is as hard as granite
since here in china not a stone is left unworked by the people
here nature is like marble
everything is carved and polished by the hands of working
people building culture

– Rivai Apin, *Peking*, 1961⁸

As the communist movement was finding its feet – and quickly beginning to run at impressive speeds – it was also searching for the appropriate forms to express the aspirations of a young nation. It would be inaccurate to try to squeeze the Indonesian experience into the moulds of the Soviet Union or China. ‘Socialist realism’ was the official aesthetic style of 1930s Soviet Union and much of the international communist movement. But the Soviet-style socialist realism of the 1930s did not translate well into all left aesthetic traditions, and members of Lekra dug deep into the well of Indonesian culture to create their own palate.

Lekra’s interpretations of its aesthetic ideology were diverse, as literary scholar Michael Bodden highlights in his study of the organisation’s theatre productions.⁹ While Lekra’s five combinations’ guidelines for cultural workers emphasised the unity of ‘socialist realism and revolutionary romanticism’, there are still debates about whether socialist realism was ever officially adopted by the organisation. At

the 1964 National Conference on Revolutionary Literature and Art, D.N. Aidit argued that socialist realism was inappropriate for the Indonesian historical moment since it had not yet undergone a socialist revolutionary process, opting instead for the term ‘revolutionary realism’. Meanwhile, one of Indonesia’s great novelists, Pramoedya Ananta Toer – persecuted for being a communist and jailed for thirteen years on Buru Island – at times referred to a ‘patriotic romanticism’, combining everyday reality with the most heroic aspects of struggle to construct socialism.

Both the theory and artistic expression of socialist realism were in the process of formation. The communist movement remained open to a wide range of styles and forms; it was pro-rakyat and carried forth the spirit of the 1945 August Revolution. Abstract art was never prohibited, and Lekra advocated for a diversity of styles, as stated in Lekra’s 1959 Mukaddimah (‘Introduction’): ‘Lekra encourages creative initiatives, encourages creative bravery, and Lekra approves of every kind of shape and style, as long as it is faithful to truth and as long as it strives to create the highest artistic beauty’.¹⁰

This dynamic negotiation between theory and practise extended into various artistic fields. In the area of literature, for example, Joebaar Ajoeb defined socialist realism through analysing the work of Soviet writer Maxim Gorky as not just ‘simply realistic’, but that which ‘gives hope and direction’. ‘Literature will be more important and useful if it does not only critique realities’, Ajoeb noted, ‘but shows a way out’.¹¹ This giving of hope and direction – rather than a prescriptive style – is how socialist artists become agents in revolutionary struggle.

Lekra's aesthetic ideology found its praxis in cultural nights, where artists, militants, and ordinary people came to meet. Led by Lekra and often hosted by its women leaders, these cultural evenings were organised for the movement's official events, commemorations of significant moments, and internationalist celebrations. With a mixture of music, dance, and theatre, these cultural nights were sites to collectively practise, test, evaluate, and evolve abstract theories into concrete being. It was in the area of dance, as Miller notes, where the communist movement made inroads in infusing political content with existing folk traditions. Carrying names such as 'The Dance of Conscious Youth', 'Dance of the Revolution', and 'The Peasant Dance', these pieces and performances were the products of debate and innovation. Some of these rich developments were documented and systematised in the pages of *Kebudayaan*: what was the importance of 'imbuing dance with new progressive politics of Indonesia'? What was the 'accessibility of dances' in order for workers and peasants to participate? What is the relationship between 'forms and content with the lives of ordinary Indonesians'.¹²

Staged in the public arena, these cultural nights were part of the goal of 'meluas dan meninggi' – broadening the base while raising artistic standards. The complicated questions being confronted centred around the extent to which traditional arts can – and should – be carried forward, modified, or discarded. The success of these events was that they could speak to the needs of the people – a 1955 PKI election rally cultural night in Surakarta drew one million people. Ordinary people were actively participated in culture in the millions, both in expressing their collective aspirations and engaging in the processes of creation.

VIVA CUBA!



Diterbitkan oleh :
Bg. Kebudayaan
Kedutaan Besar Kuba
Djakarta — Indonesia

Cover of *Viva Cuba*, a collection of poetry in homage to the Cuban Revolution, including poems written by Lekra members, 1963.



TO CATCH THE HEARTBEAT OF THOSE BELOW

One of Lekra's key principles was *Turun ke bawah* or *turba* ('descend from above' or 'going down to the masses'), which was concretised in the first national congress as a theory to guide the artist-militant's work.¹³ 'It literally means going down to the grassroots – working, eating, living with labourers, landless peasants, and fishermen', Martin explains. Along with the 'three alike' – work alike, eat alike, sleep alike – this methodology 'was a way to intensify your imagination and inspiration, to sharpen your feelings about how hard the lives of the people are', says Martin.

Hersri Setiawan was a Lekra member and the Indonesian representative to the Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau in the 1960s. He was also jailed on Buru Island for many years for his work with Lekra. In Lasja F. Susatyo and M. Abduh Aziz's documentary, *Tjidurian 19* (2009) – named after the street address of the Jakarta secretariat which was raided during the crackdown – Hersri remembers spending days hoeing and weeding and nights discussing folk tales while weaving with the peasants. To him, the purpose of an artist was to 'catch the heartbeat of those below'.¹⁴

In Keith Foulcher's study of Lekra's literature and dramatic arts, Kusni Sulang (using his penname Helmi) recalls without romanticism his experience of *turba* as the 'immediate physical sensations of learning to live humbly in conditions uncomfortable and even

distasteful to the urbanised intellectual, as well as the length of time it took him to learn to speak not the terminology of his training, but in the living language of the people'. To this, Foulcher adds, 'Lekra's cultural politics were being tested, questioned and were strengthened in the process of revolutionary struggle'.¹⁵

'Revolutionary realist' dramas were developed according to the conjunctural needs of the time, often taking on themes such as the PKI land reform campaigns in the countryside that were led by the BTI peasants' front. The play *Api di pematang* ('Fire in the rice paddies', 1964) by Kusni Sulang was drafted after his intensive *turba* work. After receiving feedback and criticism from regional party leaders down to the local level, peasant actors were identified and two rehearsals were held, including one with 600 peasants in the audience. Through this elaborate process, the peasants' concerns were elevated into a creative production and brought back to the peasants to enact and evaluate. The process was defined by an ongoing negotiation between visions of the Party and the realities of peasant life. The contributions of Marxist thought in Lekra's artistic practices and principles are clear. 'Art is a scientific tool for understanding the objective reality of class division in society', writes Indonesian scholar Brigitta Isabella; 'art can capture the emotions of the people and produce the revolutionary spirit required to achieve a socialist future'.¹⁶

Martin spoke about Amrus Natalsya, a prominent Lekra sculptor whose work was admired by President Sukarno and exhibited at the Bandung Conference art exhibition. Amrus lived among the Central Javanese peasants and created one of his most famous wood sculptures after a land dispute that resulted in the death of eleven landless

peasants. The work was a record of an event, an analysis of class struggle, and an embodiment of the Lekra principle *kreativitas individual dan kearifan massa* ('individual creativity and the wisdom of the masses'). The eighty-six-year-old Amrus held his last solo exhibition in Jakarta in July 2019. In a serendipitous encounter, Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research met Amrus and thanked him for his work on the closing day of the exhibition, befittingly entitled *Terakhir, selamat tinggal dan terima kasih* ('The last, farewell and thank you').

h Pemuda” dengan Dwikora

baru

ebidjksa-
digariskan
Rabinet, dan
ingln me
trasi2 ana-
pembangu
ini ”y ada
sejal pu
ingan Rak
Tapi da
fni dja
g jang me
Rakjat, lan
Imperialis
all seperti
nggap se
elah sele-
banga me
kita akan
ffman na-

lannja be-
stru baru
akan me-
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un perfilm
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Semenjara
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bangun, ka



TANAH UNTUK PENGARAP —

Tjukiman kaju :

Pudjanadi

DIJAKARTA (HIM) —
Tujuan utama konferensi
pertama Lembaga Musik In-
donesia ialah untuk melawan
musik jang ke-gila2an, un-

KONFERANSI LEMBAGA MUSIK
INDONESIA



BUT THE SPIRIT LIVES, IF IT IS RIGHT

**The little boat sails there and back
And reaches Surabaya
In Cuba they repelled the attack
Latin America being united with Afro-Asia.**

- an unauthored *pantun*, a popular form of oral poetry that was documented by *Harian Rakyat*.¹⁷

Building the national cultural project in Indonesia has always been intimately connected with an internationalist vision. Cultural exchange with socialist countries began in the early days of Lekra, when a delegation officially representing the PKI attended the International Youth Festival in the German Democratic Republic. As the Third World Project was being born in Bandung at the 1955 Asian-African Conference with Sukarno as one of its great proponents, so too was the spirit of an internationalist culture. Without the mediation of colonial powers, leaders of twenty-nine newly independent or soon-to-become independent African and Asian states came together, representing half of the world's population.¹⁸ Marking this historic moment was the first international group exhibition of Indonesian artists, including contemporary and traditional paintings. This diversity of styles marked the pluralism of non-alignment, with an anti-imperialist culture as the common thread. In his opening speech at the historic conference, Sukarno speaks about the persistent 'life-line of imperialism', which forms the basis of Afro-Asian unity.

‘No people can feel themselves free, so long as part of their motherland is unfree. Like peace, freedom is indivisible’, Sukarno affirms. ‘There is no such thing as being half free, as there is no such thing as being half alive’.¹⁹

Internationalism was institutionalised following the Bandung Conference, with the creation of the Afro-Asian Writers’ Association and the Association’s conferences that took place in Tashkent (1958), Cairo (1962), Beirut (1967), New Delhi (1970), Alma Ata (1973), Luanda (1979), Tashkent (1983), and Tunis (1988), as Isabella Brigitta explores in her work on the Indonesian cultural diplomacy of that era.²⁰ Diplomatic friendship societies with Indonesia were established from China to Czechoslovakia. Study and exhibition exchanges were organised with socialist and non-socialist countries alike. As Foucher argues, ‘The battle was not just control of the arts, but for the nature of the Indonesian state and its relations with the outside world’.

No national culture can be developed in isolation, and the curiosity of Lekra and the communist movement for world culture was apparent. In the introduction of *Contemporary Progressive Indonesian Poetry* (1962), PKI and *Gerwani* leader Bitang Suradi writes that ‘progressive Indonesian poets are consciously-living citizens, dedicating their creative abilities and talents to build a happy life, not only for their own people, but for all peoples of the world, to build the better world which the best poets of the world have been singing of and dreaming about throughout the ages’.²¹ In the pages of the poetry collection are poems dedicated to Congolese revolutionary Patrice Lumumba and Vietnam’s ‘Uncle’ Ho Chi Minh, homages to the Cuban and Arab

peoples, and salutes to Brazil's Mário de Andrade to Afro-Asian countries at the Bandung Conference. These poems looked outwards for inspiration and embodied the legacy of the internationalist 'Bandung spirit'.

In the years before Sukarno was deposed, he was getting closer to the left flank of the Non-Aligned Movement, one of the international platforms whose seeds were planted at the Bandung Conference of which both Cuba and Indonesia were a part. In 1959, Sukarno called upon artists to stand in the ranks of the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist fronts. He knew that developing a robust national culture must be anti-imperialist. 'We must be more vigilant, more tenacious, and more persevering in opposing imperialist culture, especially US imperialist culture, which in reality continues to threaten us in every shape and way.' This was also the year of the Cuban Revolution. Both Indonesia and Cuba were united against imperialism and jointly organising the Tricontinental Conference that would take place in Havana in 1966 – the very conference that we pay homage to in our own name at Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research. Neither the PKI, Lekra, nor Sukarno's presidency would live to see that conference.

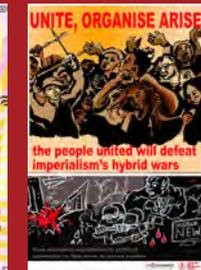
But history arms us. 'For the younger generation it is very important to relay to them the recent past and history of the country', Martin insists. During the 2015 International People's Tribunal on the 1965 events, Martin testified about the crimes against humanity that he witnessed. When questioned about his PKI affiliation – a Party that continues to be illegal – he responded, at great risk to himself, that he never regretted joining the Party when he was twenty years old.

'I am a human being; I am proud that I have ideals, even if everyone condemns what I aspire to'.²²

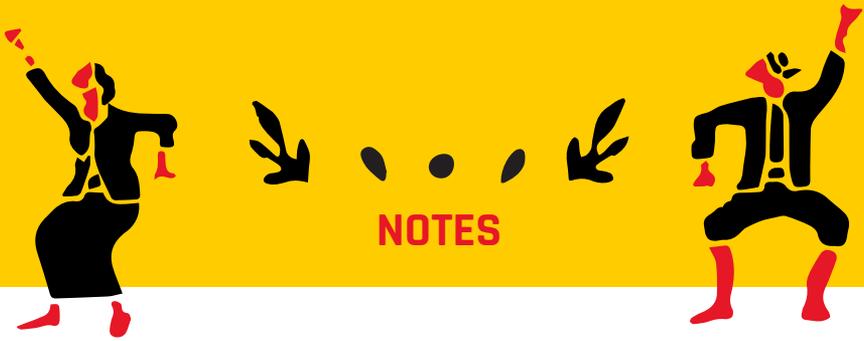
In 1966, the Afro-Asian Writers' Association organised the Anti-Imperialist Caricature Exhibition in Beijing, hosting 180 works from 24 countries on the Asian and African continents. Following this lineage, Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research and the International Week of Anti-Imperialist Struggle have organised a four-part [series](#), the *Anti-Imperialist Poster Exhibition*, as part of an international platform of hundreds of social movements and people's organisations. Not unlike the time of Sukarno, the struggles against imperialism continue to be our common thread. Over 145 artists from 35 countries have contributed work to our first three exhibitions: *Capitalism*, *Neoliberalism*, and *Imperialism*. The fourth and final exhibition, *Hybrid War*, will close off 2020.

'Formal organisations can disappear; Party organisations can be abolished', Lekra poet Putu Oka Sukanta reminds us, 'but the spirit lives, if it is right'. In the spirit of Lekram, following the seventieth anniversary of its founding on 17 August 1950, these exhibitions are part of our broader project to call on the artists and militants of today to combine individual creativity with the wisdom of the masses, from whose struggles for emancipation we seek hope and direction.





Posters from the Anti-Imperialist Poster Exhibition series by: Pedro Sartorio, Bendik Vestre, Emily Davidson, Ahmad Mofeed, Choo Chan Kai, Greta Acosta Reyes, Ghalmi Othmane, Edson João Gomes Garcia, Fabiola Sánchez Quiroz, Robert Streader, Madhuri Shukla, Rebel Politik, Ramchandran Viswanathan, Hiroto Morais, Sinead L. Uhle, Paul Meyer and Judy Ann Seidman.



¹ Suradi, Bitang, Ed. *Contemporary Progressive Indonesian Poets*, League of People's Culture, 1962.

² CIA, *Research Study: Indonesia—1965: The Coup That Backfired*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/csau-40.pdf>

³ Translated from Goenawan Mohamad, 'Forgetting; Poetry and the nation, a motif in Indonesian literary modernism after 1945', 2002.

⁴ Yuliantri, Rhoma Dwi Aria. 'LEKRA and Ensembles Tracing the Indonesian Musical Stage' in *Heirs to World Culture*. Brill, 2012: 421-452.

⁵ Yuliantri, Rhoma Dwi Aria. 'LEKRA and Ensembles Tracing the Indonesian Musical Stage' in *Heirs to World Culture*. Brill, 2012: 421-452.

⁶ Yuliantri, Rhoma Dwi Aria. 'LEKRA and Ensembles Tracing the Indonesian Musical Stage' in *Heirs to World Culture*. Brill, 2012: 421-452.

⁷ Miller, Stephen. *The Communist Imagination: A Study of the Cultural Pages of Harian Rakjat in the Early 1950s*, UNSW Canberra, 2015.

⁸ Written after a visit to China following the Afro-Asian Writers Bureau meeting in Tokyo in 1961. Apin was part of the Indonesian delegation to the Tashkent (1959) and Cairo (1962) Afro-Asian Writers Conferences. Found in Suradi, Bitang, Ed. *Contemporary Progressive Indonesian Poets*, League of People's Culture, 1962.

⁹ Bodden, Michael. 'Dynamics and tensions of LEKRA's modern national theatre', 1959-1965 in *Heirs to World Culture*. Brill, 2012: 453-484.

¹⁰ Translation quoted in Brigitta, Isabella. 'The Politics of Friendship: Modern Art in Indonesia's Cultural Diplomacy, 1950-1965', in *Ambitious Alignments: New Histories of Southeast Asian Art, 1945-1990*. Power Publications, 2018: 83-106.

¹¹ Miller, Stephen. *The Communist Imagination: A Study of the Cultural Pages of Harian Rakjat in the Early 1950s*, UNSW Canberra, 2015.

¹² Miller, Stephen. *The Communist Imagination: A Study of the Cultural Pages of Harian Rakjat in the Early 1950s*, UNSW Canberra, 2015.

¹³ Different English translations of *turun ke bawah*: 'descend from above' in translation by Antariksa, Sari D., Sol Aréchiga, Edwina Brennan for School of Improper Education, KUNCI Cultural Studies Center, 2018, 'going down to the masses' by Michael Bodden

¹⁴ Susatyo, Lasja F. and M. Abduh Aziz, *Tjidurian 19* (41 min.), 2009.

¹⁵ Foulcher, Keith. 'Politics and Literature in Independent Indonesia: The View from the Left' in *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 15, No. 1: 83-103.

¹⁶ Brigitta, Isabella. 'The Politics of Friendship: Modern Art in Indonesia's Cultural Diplomacy, 1950-1965', in *Ambitious Alignments: New Histories of Southeast Asian Art, 1945-1990*. Power Publications, 2018: 83-106.

¹⁷ Suradi, Bitang, Ed. *Contemporary Progressive Indonesian Poets*, League of People's Culture, 1962.

¹⁸ Prashad, Vijay. *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*, LeftWord Books, 2008.

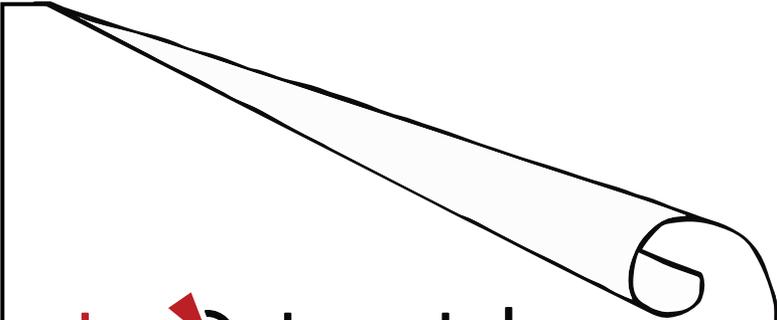
¹⁹ President Sukarno's opening speech at the Bandung Conference on 18 April 1955.

²⁰ Brigitta, Isabella. 'The Politics of Friendship: Modern Art in Indonesia's Cultural Diplomacy, 1950-1965', in *Ambitious Alignments: New Histories of Southeast Asian Art, 1945-1990*. Power Publications, 2018: 83-106.

²¹ Suradi, Bitang, Ed. *Contemporary Progressive Indonesian Poets*, League of People's Culture, 1962.

²² Martin Aleida's testimony at the International People's Tribunal in the Hague on 11 November 2015: <https://genosidapolitik65.blogspot.com/2017/11/ipt-1965-kesaksian-martin-aleida-saya.html>





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