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Colonial heritage as bricolage: Interpreting the colonial built environment in Surabaya, Indonesia

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One of the most visible and enduring vestiges of colonialism is its buildings. In this article I address the question of how current approving references to the colonial buildings in Indonesia should be explained, looking at one particular city, Surabaya. The cheerful, innovative adoption of colonial themes defies an analysis in terms of 'imperial debris'. I propose to borrow the term 'bricolage' from Claude Lévi-Strauss to describe this process in which people make new associations between selected colonial buildings and their own present lives. Bricolage is the selective conceptual appropriation of the colonial buildings for whatever objective the user finds convenient: objects to boost city marketing, a company advertisement, stops on a heritage tour, amusing backdrops for pictures and selfies, a counterpoint to a consumerist lifestyle in shopping malls. For colonial building enthusiasts, the love of colonial design and old urban quarters is more than a matter of the aesthetics of urban spaces, but also, indirectly, a critique of the transformation of modern cities by short-sighted real-estate developers and city administrators, who demolish irreplaceable buildings in acts of 'architectural suicide'.

One of the most visible and enduring vestiges of colonialism is its buildings. While elite housing could simply be reoccupied, quietly perpetuating colonial class relations, or be replaced by something new, public buildings had and are still imbued with colonial, symbolic elements too strong to be ignored. The public response to the colonial heritage has run the gamut from total destruction at one end to proud, ostentatious occupation of governmental buildings of the former coloniser at the other. Most of the colonial heritage falls between the extreme ends of this range: these objects have, or at least had during decolonisation, too much economic value to be simply knocked down, but had too little symbolic value to embody the reversed political order after decolonisation. Nevertheless, hospitals, schools, club houses, banks, department stores and other semi-public buildings carried an undeniable colonial flavour. What should be done with such buildings is a problem faced by many post-colonial societies and also by other states which have gone through a regime change,

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like post-communist countries. In this article I want to address the question of what people do with, and more particularly think about, the historical colonial buildings, looking at one particular city in Indonesia, Surabaya.

Compared to other post-colonial societies in Southeast Asia, until recently by and large Indonesian urbanites had little regard for the preservation of colonial buildings. At least I cannot escape the impression that French and British buildings in Hanoi, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore seem to be in a better state than Dutch buildings in Jakarta. Singapore has even left the statue of its British founder, Thomas Stamford Raffles, in its place, because, as former prime minister Lee Kuan Yew recalled: 'Letting it remain would be a symbol of public acceptance of the British heritage and could have a positive effect [on investors].'¹ East Timorese are very respectful of their Portuguese heritage, probably partly in an attempt to distinguish themselves from Indonesia.² Newlywed couples like to have their wedding photos taken against a colonial backdrop, like the City Hall in Singapore or Hotel de l'Opéra in Hanoi, but I do not recall having seen such photoshoots in Indonesia.

Ann Stoler warns that a term like 'colonial legacy' to describe such historical buildings is deceptive, because it fails to capture the enduring effects of imperial formations and she has coined the term 'imperial debris' for the material remains with which people are left in post-colonial times. She widens our gaze from the classical, memorable ruins like Angkor Wat and the Acropolis, to a much broader category including abandoned industrial plants, cultivated landscapes and nuclear waste. In her eyes the question becomes: 'How do imperial formations persist in their material debris, in ruined landscapes and through the social ruination of people's lives?'³ Stoler discusses these enduring effects in negative terms and what is more: '[s]uch effects are never done with in the definitely closed off *passé composé*.'⁴ Stoler herself cautions that people can and do change physical structures: '[r]uins are not just found, they are made'.⁵ Buildings can be rebuilt, renovated, expanded, or alternatively demolished and replaced; even where time has been allowed to take its toll, this can be interpreted as a human choice. Stoler sees no contradiction here: also, when people can change the material world, their minds remain under the sway of imperial debris. What I find problematic here—apart from the suggestion that every post-colonial effect of a former empire must *ipso facto* be negative—is the apparent lack of agency on the side of the once colonised people. In any case, if, as she writes, the effect of imperial debris is both elusive and imperceptible, such a social effect of material forms on human personalities can hardly be operationalised and tested.

In contrast to Stoler, Abidin Kusno shows concretely how Indonesian architects and their clients have consciously taken control of the colonial legacy and, in the

1 Timothy P. Barnard, 'Commemorating Raffles: The creation of an imperial icon in colonial Singapore', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 50, 4 (2019): 598; Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: The Singapore story, 1965–2000* (New York: Harper Collins, 2000), p. 50. See also Maurizio Peleggi, 'Consuming colonial nostalgia: The monumentalisation of historic hotels in urban South-East Asia', *Asia-Pacific Viewpoint* 46, 3 (2005): 255–65.

2 Annette Jansen, pers. comm.

3 Ann L. Stoler, 'Imperial debris: Reflections on ruins and ruination', *Cultural Anthropology* 23, 2 (2008): 194. Even without colonial buildings still standing, colonialism can leave traces in the present. Jennifer Cole, 'The work of memory in Madagascar', *American Ethnologist* 25, 4 (1998): 610–33.

4 Stoler, 'Imperial debris', p. 195.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 201.

process, closed the colonial period. Kusno notices the lack of regard for colonial buildings in Indonesia, which can be explained by the fact that ‘the old has already been dealt with by quiet appropriation, displacement, and refashioning for the architecture of the present’.⁶ After Independence (1945), Indonesian architects first looked to the international modernist style for inspiration, deliberately steering away from colonial building traditions developed by Dutch architects for the Netherlands Indies. Only in the 1970s did Indonesian architects return to colonial examples, especially the neo-classical Empire style, which they personally detested, but adopted nevertheless to satisfy the desires of their middle- and upper-class clients. Precisely because of its recurrent use down the centuries, the Empire style belongs to an ahistorical world and not to colonial times, even though Indonesians did make its acquaintance through Dutch architects. Paradoxically, because neo-classicism cannot be linked to any particular time or culture it ‘fit[s] historically with the idea of “Indonesia” as a nation, better than vernacular styles of architecture which are limited to particular ethnic groups (and exclude all other ethnicities), like the Minangkabau *bergonjong* or Javanese *joglo* roofs.’⁷ Kusno believes that buildings do not dominate human minds, but serve the intentions of their masters.

Unanticipated by Kusno, there has been a resurgence in popular interest in the colonial heritage in Indonesia in the past decade. The Dutch colonial name for the capital city Jakarta, Batavia, has taken on a second life as Batavia Air, a now bankrupt but briefly very successful airline company founded in 2001, and Batavia Union, a football club founded in 2010. In the old town, the trendy Café Batavia oozing a colonial ambience is popular with locals and foreign tourists alike and, in the lively square in front of it, there is the opportunity to ride on old bicycles and have a picture taken with people dressed in clothes of the colonial era. Two nearby colonial bank buildings have been nicely renovated and are open to curious members of the public. Glancing at another city, Semarang, for an example, a polder has been created to protect the old colonial city centre and Café Spiegel (‘Mirror’ in Dutch), established in a former colonial office, attracts trendy young Indonesians. The former office of a colonial railway company, now dubbed in Indonesian the Building with a Thousand Doors, is another popular hangout in Semarang, partly because of the story that jinn haunt the place.

Several scholars have discussed similar uses of post-colonial urban space in terms of ‘colonial nostalgia’.⁸ The built environment does have the potential for colonial

6 Abidin Kusno, *The appearance of memory: Mnemonic practices of architecture and urban form in Indonesia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 151.

7 Ibid.

8 William Cunningham Bissell, ‘Engaging colonial nostalgia’, *Cultural Anthropology* 20, 2 (2005): 215–48; Ana Dragojlovic, Marieke Bloembergen and Henk Schulte Nordholt, ‘Colonial re-collections’, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 170, 4 (2014): 435–41; Caitlin DeSilvey and Tim Edensor, ‘Reckoning with ruins’, *Progress in Human Geography* 37, 4 (2012): 465–85; Peleggi, ‘Consuming colonial nostalgia’; Ema Pires, ‘Re-scripting colonial heritage’, *Cultura: International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology* 11, 2 (2014): 129–39; Jonathan Roberts, ‘Remembering Korle Bu Hospital: Biomedical heritage and colonial nostalgia in the Golden Jubilee souvenir’, *History in Africa* 38, 1 (2011): 193–226; Yatun Sastramidjaja, ‘“This is not a trivialization of the past”: Youthful re-mediations of colonial memory in Jakarta’, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 170 (2014): 443–72.

nostalgia, as ‘nostalgia requires an object world to seize on’.⁹ Nostalgia is a feeling sparked by abrupt transitions and historical discontinuity when elements once considered secure by people seem to be evaporating into thin air. In societal crises, when people lose a sense of everyday ‘taken-for-granted-ness’, even colonial nostalgia is possible.¹⁰ In Indonesia, during the tumult of the Japanese Occupation (1942–45) and Indonesian Revolution (1945–49), in retrospect some Indonesians referred to Dutch times as normal times (*zaman normal*); they were probably thinking of the relative economic security and political stability so glaringly absent in their own time and were not dreaming of a return to the unequal political representation and ethnic discrimination of the Dutch era. Even decades after Independence, a yearning for the fictitious security of Dutch times could be encountered among former agricultural estate workers, but Nicole Lamb argues that these nostalgic narratives derived from the present unprecedented hardship in old age of the workers rather than to Dutch times.¹¹ Nostalgic, idealised representations of the past are always commentaries on the present.¹²

The question is how current approving references to the colonial past in Indonesia should be explained. The cheerful, innovative adoption of colonial themes cannot be cast in terms of imperial debris. Unlike the appropriation of the international, timeless Empire style, the specificity of the name Batavia, the choice of sites and the mimicry of colonial behaviour all plainly refer to a localised Netherlands Indies. But, bearing William Bissell’s warning in mind, ‘any attempt to cast colonial nostalgia as purely retrograde or reactionary seems dubious at best’,¹³ nostalgia cannot be naively accepted as an explanation either.

In this article, I shall argue that this re-appropriation of colonial buildings still standing today is a selective process. Indonesians who interact with colonial relics operate rather like waste-pickers on a garbage dump: searching around in the built environment and digging in archives and oral narratives to select what is useful to them, while ignoring what seems to serve no purpose. I propose to borrow the term ‘*bricolage*’ from Claude Lévi-Strauss to describe this process in which people make new associations between selected, colonial buildings and their own present lives.¹⁴ Through the medium of bricolage, the present becomes ‘a sort of recycled, up-dated past’.¹⁵

Lévi-Strauss’ term bricolage (tinkering, putting something together) is apt in this context because of the playfulness without direct purpose of the process; such

9 Bissell, ‘Engaging colonial nostalgia’, p. 221; see also Stephen Legg, ‘Memory and nostalgia: Review essay’, *Cultural Geographies*, 11, 1 (2004): 99–107.

10 Bissell, ‘Engaging colonial nostalgia’, p. 222; Peter Fritzsche, ‘Specters of History: On nostalgia, exile and modernity’, *American Historical Review* 106, 5 (2001): 1591; Richard Werbner, ‘Beyond oblivion: Confronting memory crisis’, in *Memory and the postcolony: African anthropology and the critique of power*, ed. Richard Werbner (London: Zed, 1998), p. 1.

11 Nicole Lamb, ‘A time of normalcy: Javanese “coolies” remember the colonial estate’, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 170, 4 (2014): 530–56.

12 Neringa Klumbytė, ‘The Soviet sausage renaissance’, *American Anthropologist* 112, 1 (2010): 22–37.

13 Bissell, ‘Engaging colonial nostalgia’, p. 217; see also Lauren Yapp, ‘The future in the past: Colonial modernity as urban heritage in contemporary Indonesia’, *South East Asia Research* 28, 2 (2020): 188.

14 David C. Berliner, ‘The abuses of memory: Reflections on the memory boom in anthropology’, *Anthropological Quarterly* 78, 1 (2005): 204.

15 Pierre Nora, ‘Between memory and history: *Les lieux de mémoire*’, *Representations* 26 (1989): 16.

knowledge merely satisfies intellectual curiosity: *'une telle science [...] répond à des exigences intellectuelles, avant, ou au lieu, de satisfaire à des besoins'*.¹⁶ The term bricolage therefore has a certain looseness which makes it more open and flexible than 'imperial debris' or 'nostalgia'. Bricolage can be done with whatever objects one happens to come across, but it does require a keen eye to recognise the possibilities of a new interpretation of the buildings encountered. However, in contrast to the processes alluded to by Lévi-Strauss, I do not think that bricolage leads to coherent structural patterns or classifications.¹⁷ On the contrary, Indonesian people seem to associate freely, and with plenty of individual variation, with colonial buildings. Colonial nostalgia, love of the timeless Empire style, and perhaps even the imperceptible ruination of post-colonial subjects by imperial debris can all be seen as different modalities of bricolage. My own bricolage with the term is permitted, I believe, because also in the work of Lévi-Strauss himself bricolage 'functions as an analogy rather than a concept'.¹⁸

The bricolage element also plays a role on a discursive level and explains why the English term 'heritage' has become popular in the Indonesian language. According to Lauren Yapp, 'heritage' is often preferred to available Indonesian alternatives like *'cagar budaya'*, *'warisan budaya'* or *'pusaka'*, precisely because of its 'newness and relative emptiness' so that Indonesians feel free to use it 'flexibly, capaciously and often even playfully'.¹⁹

In the remainder of this article, I want to analyse the colonial bricolage in the Indonesian city of Surabaya. The key question is what meanings do ordinary people assign to the post-colonial buildings today. This group is somewhat broader than the 'urban heritage advocates' who, in the words of Yapp, 'scream' when an old building is torn down.²⁰ With 'ordinary' I am speaking of people who are not formally involved in heritage conservation, but 'ordinary' should not be read as just anybody, because the kind of activity currently organised around colonial heritage 'excludes the majority of young Indonesians who lack the economic, cultural, and social capital to participate'.²¹ It will also be important to look precisely at which actors are concerned about the past, because reconstructions of the past are far from uniform; different actors have different views or pursue different goals.²² In another former Dutch colony, Suriname, for instance, Creoles and Marrons identify more with the colonial heritage in Paramaribo than do Hindustanis and Javanese, partly because the first two groups produced the carpenters who built colonial Paramaribo.²³

Surabaya, the second largest city of Indonesia with 2.9 million residents, existed before the Dutch arrived in Indonesia, but Europeans greatly expanded it as a port

16 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962), p. 16.

17 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Le totémisme aujourd'hui* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962).

18 Andrew Milner, 'Bricolage', in *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, ed. George Ritzer (Wiley Online Library, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosb050>.

19 Yapp, 'The future in the past', p. 179.

20 Lauren Yapp, 'Colonial pasts, future cities: Urban heritage advocacy in post-authoritarian Indonesia' (PhD diss., Stanford University), p. 2.

21 Sastramidjaja, 'This is not a trivialization of the past', p. 468.

22 Bissell, 'Engaging colonial nostalgia'.

23 Eugenio van Maanen, quoted by Hans Buddingh', 'Erfgoed voor de oud-kolonisten', *NRC Next*, 5 July 2011.

town from which primary produce from its hinterland, East Java, could be exported. It experienced its apogee in the mid-nineteenth century when it was the most important town of Java, only later to be gradually overtaken by its rival Batavia/Jakarta. Surabaya was plunged into a prolonged slump when the Depression of the 1930s ruined the sugar industry in its hinterland; after Independence the city was completely outshone by Jakarta, because state and private investments were heavily concentrated in the national capital. Partly because of another slump, that after 1945, Surabaya has maintained many of its colonial buildings. However, Surabaya has now recovered from its mid-twentieth century doldrums and is developing rapidly. The most visible signs of the new boom are its very large numbers of shopping malls, which abound even by Indonesian standards, and elite residential areas developed at the urban fringe. Under its mayor, Tri Rismahartini, the city has won national and international acclaim for its people-centric, green development strategy.²⁴

If tourism is a major incentive for heritage conservation,²⁵ it is relevant that, for a long time, Surabaya has been bedevilled by a reputation for being boring among Western tourists: an unavoidable, but unpleasant, noisy, polluted, congested transit hub from which to move on to more enjoyable destinations as quickly as possible.²⁶ In contrast to the foreigners' aversion, Indonesians definitely have a historical imagination of Surabaya, not because of its buildings, but as the *Kota Pahlawan* (City of Heroes), the city which in November 1945 fought heroically against superior-armed British forces in an attempt to hold it for the independent Republic of Indonesia proclaimed a few months earlier. For those who wish to see it, the different historical periods of the city and the mixed ethnic composition are easily recognisable in the urban fabric.

Data were collected during intermittent periods of fieldwork from 2012 to 2017 (as a side-activity to other, different research I was carrying out in the city). Most of the data were collected by participating in activities of people interacting with the colonial-built environment, but I have also held qualitative interviews with professionals (conservationists, historians, tour guides and an urban planner) and conducted a written survey among history students. More information was collected from websites, newspapers and printed maps and books. My interest in the subject was originally triggered by an invitation to speak at a conference on colonial nostalgia, which explains why I began to bring this term up in several interviews.

Heritage conservation in Indonesia

If matters are allowed to run their course, certain memories live on and others are repressed or winnowed out; this process of natural selection is disturbed by the historian who influences, perhaps even reverses, the preservation of particular facts or

24 Freek Colombijn, "I'm a singer": A conversation with Johan Silas, architect and urban planner in Surabaya, Indonesia', *Indonesia* 102 (2016): 7–30; Howard Dick, *Surabaya, city of work: A socioeconomic history, 1900–2000* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002).

25 Stephen Nana Ato Arthur and John Victor Mensah, 'Urban management and heritage tourism for sustainable development: The case of Elmina cultural heritage and management programme in Ghana', *Management of Environmental Quality: An International Journal* 17, 3 (2006): 299–312.

26 Ryan Ver Berkmoes et al., *Indonesia* (Singapore: Lonely Planet, 2013), p. 158; Bill Dalton, *Indonesia handbook*, 4th edn (Chico, CA: Moon, 1989), p. 362.

objects.²⁷ Conservationist NGOs and urban administrators have a potentially important role to play in this respect. A Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act has been on the statute books in Indonesia since 1885,²⁸ but its principal concern is ancient temples, not urban sites.²⁹ The only time I have seen a reference to it was when it was used as an excuse by the Padang city government to prohibit extensions to two old churches in the 1990s, despite the fact that the churches were literally spilling over with congregations during Sunday services. In other cases, buildings on the list of protected objects under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act have been demolished without as much as a by-your-leave.³⁰

The central government has also shown little concern about the colonial heritage. The first Indonesian president, Sukarno, preferred to wipe out all traces of colonial society and during the long rule of the second president, Soeharto, the construction of new towns and shopping malls reaped far more prestige than conservation. What state interest in conservation there was, was driven by the potential to exploit heritage sites for tourism and preserved cultural heritage was fitted into a nationalist historiography of pre-colonial times–colonialism–revolutionary resistance–Independence. Joost Coté and Yatun Sastramidjaja argue that only after the fall of Soeharto in 1998, when a new decentralisation policy was initiated, was any space created for alternative, local histories in which the role of ethnic minorities (Chinese, Arabs) and Dutch colonials was acknowledged.³¹ New local, autonomous histories allowed the buildings of the Dutch and other ethnic minorities to be seen in a new context: ‘To conserve the cultural heritage of the past requires a reconciliation with the past.’³² In similar vein Lukas Ley speaks about a period of ‘soul-searching’ after the end of Soeharto’s New Order regime, expressed not only in an interest in colonial architecture but also in a selective nostalgic engagement with, in the case of Semarang, an ethnic majority identity of Javanese.³³ The timing also coincides with a global shift towards city branding.

A telling example of the new local interest is the Sumatra Heritage Trust (Badan Warisan Sumatera, BWS), founded in Medan in exactly the same year President Soeharto stepped down.³⁴ The BWS concentrates on advocacy and raising public awareness, but also restored one object, the Tjong Young Hian Bridge in Medan in

27 Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, ‘Social memory studies: From “collective memory” to the historical sociology of mnemonic practices’, *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 110.

28 Hasti Tarekat, ‘Monumentenzorg in Indonesië’, *Vetruvius: Onafhankelijk Vakblad voor Erfgoedprofessionals* 5, 18 (2012): 9–13.

29 Current conservation acts in force are: *UU 5/1992 tentang Benda Cagar Budaya* (Law 5 of 1992 on Cultural Heritage Objects) and *UU 11/2010 tentang Cagar Budaya* (Law 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage).

30 Tarekat, ‘Monumentenzorg in Indonesië’.

31 Joost Coté, ‘Searching for Semarang: Nation, urban memory, and cultural heritage’, in *Disappearing Asian city: Protecting Asia’s urban heritage in a globalizing world*, ed. William Logan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 124–41; Sastramidjaja, ‘This is not a trivialization of the past’.

32 Coté, ‘Searching for Semarang’, p. 141.

33 Lukas Ley, *Building on borrowed time: Rising seas and failing infrastructure in Semarang* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021).

34 The remainder of this section is partly based on two interviews I conducted with anonymised staff members of the Badan Pelestarian Pusaka Indonesia (BPPI, Indonesian Heritage Trust) and the Dutch Rijksdienst voor Cultureel Erfgoed (State Cultural Heritage Agency).

2001. The choice of the bridge for restoration sidestepped the dilemma that Dutch buildings smack of colonialism and indigenous buildings are rare (or ‘too big to handle’ like the Maimun Palace in Medan). The bridge conveniently carries texts in *Jawi* (Malay in Arabic script), Chinese and Dutch and therefore superficially at least unites various cultural traditions.

A number of such heritage societies, complemented by university departments, a few government institutes and individuals, united in an informal network in 2000.³⁵ The network was formalised on 17 August, 2004, with the establishment of the Indonesian Heritage Trust (Badan Pelestarian Pusaka Indonesia, BPPI).³⁶ Another network, which brings together local governments, following the example of the Indian Heritage Cities Network,³⁷ was established in 2008. The initiator of this Network of Historical Cities in Indonesia (Jaringan Kota Pusaka Indonesia, JKPI) was the mayor of Sawahlunto (West Sumatra), who wanted to develop the abandoned colonial premises of the coal mine in his town into a major tourist attraction. Most administrators look at colonial buildings in a strictly functional way, mindful of their marketing potential in the economic development of heritage tourism. JKPI is careful to steer clear of any exclusively colonial connotation and the portrait gallery and news on its website contain a mixture of objects from various periods, ethnic groups or religions.³⁸ This stand theoretically complicates the notion of colonial heritage as primarily Western, but on a practical level makes heritage conservation more palpable. More than anybody else, these administrators who are concerned about the buildings resemble *bricoleurs*, recycling only what suits them and their sense of responsibility about conserving the built heritage does not go beyond what can be exploited. The Indonesian Railways (PT Kereta Api Indonesia) and Bank Indonesia (formerly the Javasche Bank) are two large companies which have their own reasons to preserve their colonial buildings: the buildings are hard evidence of the companies’ long-lived presence, which in turn testifies to their reliability.

Not everybody is ready to embrace heritage conservation with enthusiasm. Owners of colonial property usually consider older buildings a nuisance, or a prime target for demolition if the building happens to occupy a large plot of land which is ripe for redevelopment. The conservation of historical urban areas has been considered ‘sentimental, irrational and even “anti-progress”’ by Indonesian investors.³⁹ Elderly people often look askance at colonial buildings and regard the people who care about them with suspicion, considering them—according to Ella Ubaidi, co-founder of Jakarta Old Town Kotaku—‘unpatriotic’, as these conservationists purportedly glorify the Dutch past.⁴⁰ A staff member of BPPI also told me about

35 Jaringan Pelestarian Pusaka Indonesia, www.indonesiapusaka.org (accessed 9 Apr. 2013); BPPI, ‘Salam lestari’, <https://bppiindonesianheritagetrust.org/page.php?p=26> (last accessed 9 Oct. 2022).

36 Tarekat, ‘Monumentenzorg in Indonesië’.

37 Peter Timmer, ‘Tussen erfgoed en pusaka: Gemeenschappelijk erfgoed en integrated conservation in Indonesië, in het bijzonder in de door natuurrampen getroffen stad Padang’ (MA thesis, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam 2011), p. 40.

38 www.indonesia-heritage.net (accessed 9 Apr. 2013).

39 Widjaja Martokusumo, ‘Urban heritage conservation: Experiences in Bandung and Jakarta’, in *The Indonesian town revisited*, ed. Peter J.M. Nas (Münster: Lit Verlag; Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), p. 376.

40 Ubaidi quoted in Timmer, ‘Tussen erfgoed en pusaka’, p. 47.

being the target of considerable enmity from the older generation, but that young people, after they have had time to reassess the negative stories about Dutch colonialism learned at school, are much more open to the attraction of the old buildings.

The upshot is that the attitude towards heritage conservation has been mixed in Indonesia: enthusiasm from hobbyists, exploitation by some state-owned companies and local governments, mistrust from some older people, and initial disinterest and then curiosity among youngsters. The same attitudes can be discerned in Surabaya.

The municipal government of Surabaya has taken some initiatives to preserve the city's colonial buildings. A comprehensive local regulation issued in 2005 (Perda Cagar Budaya 5/2005) listed 161 buildings (not necessarily Dutch) which ought to be preserved; 6 other buildings were added later. With the passing of Law 11/2010 on Cultural Heritage Sites, the legal framework to protect heritage buildings was, according to local historian La Ode Rabani, ideal, but the stumbling-block lies in its implementation.⁴¹ For instance, the Embon Saw tennis court, built in 1857 (older than Wimbledon), was demolished by a private investor and the Simpang Club, a Dutch club building constructed in 1907, but now a city landmark better known as Balai Pemuda, burnt down in 2011, the victim of inadequate fire-fighting equipment.⁴²

There are two main obstacles to the conservation of old buildings. The first is a lack of political will and of the expertise to implement regulations at the local government level. When a building on the list has been demolished, the government is at a loss about how to apply the requisite sanctions. Secondly, market forces work against preservation. Maintaining the buildings is expensive and demolishing them to make room for a new, cheaper building offers tempting profits, especially as they are often situated in top locations.⁴³ Crucially, most residents of Surabaya are unaware of the potential to develop these buildings and 'simply view them as a bunch of old buildings with no social or economic value'.⁴⁴ The conscientious, professional restoration of the Javasche Bank building by Bank Indonesia is a rare positive exception in Surabaya.⁴⁵

Beth Shalom, the only remaining synagogue in Java until its demolition, serves as an example of how difficult it is to preserve old buildings. It was demolished in 2009 after it had been sealed off by Muslims protesting against attacks on the Gaza Strip by Israel. Freddy Istanto, director of the Surabaya Heritage Society, protested to the municipal council, which in turn held the Surabaya Tourist Agency responsible. The latter was told to report the case to the police, shoving off the responsibility of who should enforce the by-law on heritage conservation. There were even people in the government who argued that the building was illegal, because it was allegedly being used as a residence, or because it had been erected without a building permit, overlooking the fact it had been built in the nineteenth century, long before such permits were required. Nobody was even sure who had demolished Beth Shalom: Muslim

41 Rabani cited by Wahyoe Boediwardhana, 'Surabaya's heritage buildings in peril', *Jakarta Post*, 1 June 2012, <http://www.thejakartapost.com> (accessed 26 Aug. 2016).

42 Boediwardhana, 'Surabaya's heritage buildings in peril'; Agoes Indrianto, 'Interpreting the past: Creating the Surabaya heritage trail, Indonesia', in *Asian tourism: Growth and change*, ed. Janet Cochrane (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2008), pp. 361–8.

43 Boediwardhana, 'Surabaya's heritage buildings in peril'; Indrianto, 'Interpreting the past', p. 364.

44 Indrianto, 'Interpreting the past', p. 364.

45 Timoticin Kwanda, 'Authenticity principle in conservation of De Javasche Bank of Surabaya: Materials, substance and form', *Procedia Engineering* 125 (2015): 675–84.

demonstrators, the owner just before selling the property to a real-estate developer or the developer after he had purchased the land.⁴⁶ In this, at best indifferent, climate for cultural heritage preservation, a group of students from the Tourism and Leisure Management Department of Petra Christian University in Surabaya came up with the idea of a heritage trail.

Touring the historical sites of Surabaya

The students of Petra Christian University had little knowledge about historical buildings, but fortunately the group was given strong support by Timoticin Kwanda, a specialist in architectural history who also works at Petra Christian University, and they could also fall back on a digital repository, Surabaya Memory, run by the same university.⁴⁷ The tour was successfully run on a number of Sunday mornings in 2005 and 2006. It should be noted that the idea sprang from the desire to develop a new initiative to stimulate tourism to boost the economy of the city, and it was unrelated to any specific interest in cultural heritage as such. The organisers only expected to arouse some nostalgic feelings for the buildings in Dutch people who could hopefully be lured to visit Surabaya.⁴⁸

After its initial trials, the Surabaya Heritage Tour was adopted by the House of Sampoerna. The House of Sampoerna is the museum of the Sampoerna kretek factory, consisting of the former dwelling of the founder, Liem Seeng Tee, and the factory building in which cigarettes are still produced by hand. The house embellished with beautiful Art Deco details also offered enough space for a café and art gallery. The House of Sampoerna has professionalised the heritage tour. It is now operated three times a day, seven days a week, free of charge. The tours, taking one of four different routes, consist of a one-and-a-half hour bus trip with two or three stops on the way. Most tours are fully booked. I joined six of these tours between 2012 and 2017. The drivers drive slowly to allow the participants to take in the sights.

A typical tour, one of the first I took in 2012, ran as follows (with explanations from the guides in parentheses). From the House of Sampoerna, the bus first drove to the Red Bridge ('where British General Mallaby was shot in the Battle of Surabaya of November 1945') and then past the office of the provincial government, built in colonial times, and the Tugu Pahlawan (Heroes' Memorial). On the way, several offices of former Dutch trading firms were pointed out ('the Lindeteves Building was used as a machine shop during the Japanese period', 'the Concordia *sociëteit* [club house] is nowadays used by the Pertamina Company'). The tour proceeded through a former domain of the sultan of Surabaya ('but no visible remains are left') and Gemblongan Street ('named after the many *gemblong* cookies which used to be baked here'). Next on the agenda was the Tunjungan Mall, built in colonial times and also used by the Japanese, and from there the bus drove past the Hotel

46 Camelia Pasandaran, 'Java's last synagogue torn down', *Jakarta Globe*, 15 June 2013; <http://www.worldministries.org> (accessed 26 Aug. 2016).

47 For details on Surabaya Memory, see Liauw Toong Tjiek (Aditya Nugraha), 'Surabaya Memory: Opportunities and challenges of open access e-heritage repositories', in *Open access to STM information: Trends, models and strategies for libraries*, ed. Anthi Katsirikou (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), pp. 113–20.

48 Indrianto, 'Interpreting the past'.

Majapahit ('formerly Oranje Hotel or Hotel Yamamoto in Japanese times, the site of the famous flag incident') and the residence of the governor of East Java. Via the Balai Pemuda ('the Simpang Club, the symbol of the discrimination against the Indonesian people'), the bus reached the Surabaya Town Hall ('designed by Dutch architect Citroen'), which was the first stop (fig. 1). At this point, we sightseers got off the bus to stretch our legs and take some pictures.

The trip resumed through Walikota Mustajab Street ('note the trees that bent over; and, by the way, you can get good food in this street') and soon reached the Cak Durasim Art Centre, where the second stop had been planned and where some stalls offered snacks. The tour continued past a former hospital ('which was about to be demolished, but was saved and is now in use as an expensive restaurant') and a railway level-crossing ('defended by *pemuda*—young revolutionaries—against the Allied forces in 1945'), before returning to the House of Sampoerna.

The heritage tour deserves praise for its efforts to present Surabaya in a multi-dimensional way. Apart from the comment on the discrimination at the Simpang Club, no outspoken value judgement on the Dutch period was passed. The Japanese period in Indonesia's history was not ignored. Indonesians were represented as freedom fighters, remembered for baking *gemblong* cookies and for the good food on sale in Walikota Mustajab Street. The sultanate is also remembered, although no physical remains of that time have been preserved. Although the Chinese were conspicuously absent on this particular tour, another route stops at a Chinese temple (and a Dutch colonial bank and an old mosque), so I cannot agree with James Sidaway that, when historical sites are appropriated for a heritage trail, histories of certain groups are always left out.⁴⁹

The heritage tour is rich in its choice of objects representing various groups, but prosaic in the way these objects are presented. The tour connects '*lieux de mémoire*' like beads strung in a necklace. Pierre Nora has argued that, in a rapidly changing, modern world, there is hardly any room left for living memories and people's experience of the past has become so superficial, they can only find the past in specific *lieux de mémoire* 'where memory crystallizes'.⁵⁰ In these 'sites of memory', 'a sense of historical continuity persists. There are *lieux de mémoire* [...], because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory', Nora asserts.⁵¹

The objects along the route have been reduced to pre-digested morsels of information. Exactly as Nora argues in his concept of *lieux de mémoire*, the memories of the past have been flattened and the stories told by different guides were practically interchangeable, and were indeed ingested like instant food. Most people took the tour in groups: families, friends and couples. Many people treat the tour as an outing (*main-main*) and an alternative to window-shopping in a shopping mall. People in groups show more interest in each other than in the historical buildings and certainly take more pictures of each other than of the buildings. The buildings are merely scenic backdrops. The tour appears to be a godsend for shy, young lovers, because it costs no money and the cramped seats on the bus 'force' them to make some physical contact as they are driven around.

49 James D. Sidaway, 'Postcolonial geographies: An exploratory essay', *Progress in Human Geography* 24, 4 (2000): 592.

50 Nora, 'Between memory and history', p. 7.

51 Ibid.



Figure 1. Stop at the Town Hall on the Surabaya Heritage Tour (photo by the author).

Before, during and after the tours, I had the opportunity to have short conversations with 32 participants, individually as well as in groups.⁵² What did they think of the buildings we passed? Several of my interlocutors thought the buildings beautiful, and also profitable, because were they not there Surabaya would no longer attract (domestic) tourists. Two of the three most appreciated objects, the Red Bridge and the Hotel Majapahit, were popular choices because of the historical events which had taken place there during the Indonesian Revolution; they were not so much symbols of Dutch colonialism, as of heroic Indonesian resistance to the colonial oppressor. A rare feeling of nostalgia was expressed by two parents who fondly remembered their history lessons at school and regretted that the national anthem is sung only once a week instead of daily in schools today. Another couple had also brought their children on the tour as a history lesson, because the kids were 'glued to their handphones' (*kena HP*) and the parents hoped that the children would 'get a feeling of ownership of Surabaya' (*punya rasa memiliki kota Surabaya*). Meanwhile their corpulent son just traipsed along behind his parents; when I asked him what he thought of the trip he only mumbled he felt drowsy.

52 There were about equal numbers of women and men; their ages fell in a range from 4 to over 70 with an overrepresentation of the group between 20 and 30; both locally born people and migrants took the tours, and on some there were one or two foreigners (apart from myself). Quite a few persons had taken the tour more than once.

Only a couple of participants cherished the historical buildings for their architectural and aesthetic qualities. This was the reason for the popularity of the third most liked building, the sombre office of the former plantation company HVA (fig. 2). As one man said, these old buildings should no longer be demolished to make way for shopping malls, because the town already had a surfeit of the latter. Not only were the old buildings favourably compared to shopping malls, the outing offered by the heritage tour was also preferable to the boring activity of strolling through a mall. One of the guides believed that, if all historical buildings were to be removed, urbanites could lose their pride in Surabaya.

The multi-dimensional content of the tour differs somewhat from a map published by the House of Sampoerna on which most buildings are Dutch. The map is published in Indonesian and English versions, which show some remarkable differences in the way sites are captioned. The English version describes the Simpang Club as follows:

[The] Balai Pemuda building used to be known as SIMPANGSCHE SOCIETEIT, and functioned as a place where the Dutch gathered and partied. [...] in November 1945 the building was turned into the Headquarters of Central PRI (the Youth of Indonesian Republic organisation).⁵³

The Indonesian version runs like this:

The Balai Pemuda Building used to be known as the Simpangscche Societeit. Founded in 1907, it functioned as a place of entertainment and a meeting place for Europeans in Surabaya. The building is proof of the racism (*bukti rasialisme*) of colonial times, because only white people were allowed in. A signboard stated: 'Verboden voor Inlander[s]', indigenous people forbidden to enter.⁵⁴

However, there is no systematic difference, the one offering a polished version to foreigners and the other a nationalist text to Indonesians. For instance, referring to the office of the Dutch plantation company, HVA, the Indonesian version gives the names of the Dutch architects and mentions the fact it was used as military headquarters by the Japanese army. The English version leaves out these factual details, but concludes that 'the building symbolized the presence of a sugar conglomerate as well as being the first sign of the entry of capitalism into Java'.

In sum, both the guides and the participants in the tour have an unproblematic and rather superficial relationship to the buildings. There are no strong feelings of either anger or nostalgia. The participants join the tour as a nice alternative to visiting a shopping mall and they pick the best spots as a background for pictures and selfies. For the guides the buildings are *lieux de mémoire*, handy objects on which to hang a story. I next turned to university students of history in the hope of getting a deeper engagement with the past.

53 *Surabaya Heritage Track Map* (Surabaya: House of Sampoerna and Radio Suara Surabaya, 2012, English version).

54 *Surabaya Heritage Track Map* (Surabaya: House of Sampoerna and Radio Suara Surabaya, 2012; Indonesian version).



Figure 2. Former office of HVA (Handelsvereniging Amsterdam) in Surabaya (photo by the author).

History students

History students are interesting because, on the whole, I expect them to have more than an average interest in the past and a knowledge which goes beyond school lessons. Arguably the image of colonial times in the eyes of younger Indonesians has been shaped most strongly by the film *Janur Kuning*, which is shown in schools every year on Proclamation Day. It shows cruel Dutch colonials yelling ‘*Godverdomme*’

(Goddamn) at Indonesians all the time.⁵⁵ Such ‘spectacularization [of the past] in films, museums, docudramas, Internet sites, [and] photography books’ has a powerful impact on the imagination of historical events by new generations.⁵⁶ The cruelty of colonialism taught in schools is reinforced by countless reliefs on Independence memorials, portraying big-nosed, sadistic Dutch soldiers. However, a new generation of professional urban historians is writing local histories which are moving away from the nationalist, anti-colonial messages conveyed by such films as *Janur Kuning*. Colonial heritage can have a place in these new local histories.⁵⁷

A seminar at the Universitas Airlangga in Surabaya in March 2012 offered me the chance to conduct a survey among a group of 30 undergraduate history students. The survey was repeated with another 54 respondents in 2015. The same year, the same questionnaire was filled in by 68 undergraduate history students of the Universitas Negeri Semarang and 20 staff members and PhD students at Universitas Airlangga and Universitas Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta, again after I had given a seminar. The questionnaire consisted of three open questions (and two questions about age and sex).⁵⁸ In the following, I shall limit myself to the answers given by the history students from Surabaya, referring to the other two surveys only for comparison.

The first question was the most general, asking about what if any association they felt with Dutch colonial times, perhaps memories, thoughts, ideas and mental images of, for example, concrete events, buildings, places, persons, habits, stories told by grandparents and food. About a third of the students reported negative associations and sketched colonial times purely in terms of exploitation, cruelty and the plundering of Indonesian riches. The Great Post Road (Jalan Raya Pos) and the Cultivation System were said to exemplify the misery of the Indonesians.⁵⁹ About a third of the students, clearly influenced by lectures which echoed local scholarly interests, balanced such negative characterisations with positive aspects of colonial rule and mentioned that the latter had ushered in modernisation. The students in Semarang remarked that the Cultivation System had opened global markets to Indonesian products and also referred to their city’s renowned colonial town planning.

Interestingly, about half the students mentioned colonial buildings, either generally or specifically. Some of these buildings had some connection to colonial control and surveillance: the town hall, provincial headquarters, police station, and jail. Other

55 Timmer, ‘Tussen erfgoed en pusaska’.

56 Andreas Huyssen, ‘Present pasts: Media, politics, amnesia’, *Public Culture* 12, 1 (2000): 29; see also Marianne Hirsch, ‘The generation of postmemory’, *Poetics Today* 29, 1 (2008): 103–28.

57 Coté, ‘Searching for Semarang’, p. 141.

58 The average age of respondents was 20 years; two-thirds of the students were female. The staff and PhD students had an average age of 40 years (stdev = 6 years) with an equal number of women and men. The technique of a survey assumes that each person responds individually, but this was clearly not the case. Sets of two or three consecutive forms in my pile, filled out by students who must have sat next to each other during the seminars, often used identical phrases copied from each other. All respondents knew, or could have known, that I was Dutch, but I did not detect that my nationality was any reason to answer about the Netherlands Indies in glowing terms.

59 The Great Post Road, connecting the western with the eastern tip of Java, was built using forced labour under the administration of Governor-General H.W. Daendels (1808–11); the Cultivation System (1830–70), as taught in Indonesian schools, was another form of compulsory labour under which Javanese peasants were forced to use a fifth of their land to produce export crops to be handed over to the colonial government; with disastrous consequences like shortage of food crops and famine.

buildings evoked a sumptuous lifestyle and the students' answers implied that luxury was restricted to Europeans (and then to *all* Europeans) only: Hotel Majapahit, Zangrandia ice-cream parlour and above all Balai Pemuda (in Dutch times, the Simpang Club), where the Dutch partied. The buildings were described using adjectives such as strong, solid, modern, impressive, luxurious and adapted to the tropical climate, with some of their characteristic features detailed, for instance, the 'large windows' of the Hotel Majapahit. In quite a few answers, colonial architecture was positively valued and praised as beautiful, artistic, pleasing and 'having character' (*arsitektur yang berkarakter*) or 'being unique and imbuing the present-day city with a distinctive feature' (*arsitektur yg unik dan memberikan ciri khas terhadap sebuah kota pada masa sekarang ini*).

One striking pattern emerging in these answers is that the history students tend to associate the colonial past heavily with particular places. I had expected these students to use a rich palette of archives, newspapers, films, photographs, novels, oral histories and websites to depict colonial times but, in their eyes, the past is very much inscribed in buildings. Activities and more abstract ideas about Dutch times are also often linked to specific places. The Dutch partied in the Simpang Club. Dutch exploitation of the Indonesians was exemplified in the construction of the Great Post Road and students added the detail that it ran (all the way) from Anyer to Banyuwangi as evidence of Dutch cruelty. Two students who associated Dutch times with their university did not mention anything like '(higher) education', but referred explicitly to the 'building' (*gedung*) of the Medical Faculty of Universitas Airlangga, formerly the Nederlandsch-Indische Artsenschool (fig. 3). The physical buildings serve as access points by which undergraduate students with still relatively limited knowledge can enter an imagined colonial era.⁶⁰

One question asked directly about any possible nostalgic ideas about the Dutch period. The majority of the students denied such feelings, and some explained this by pointing out they had not yet been born. In their logic, having lived through an era is a prerequisite for being nostalgic about it. The students' understanding of the term 'nostalgia' is not shared by most scholars writing about mnemonic practices. Stoler dryly remarks that '[n]ostalgia is often about that which one has never known or ever seen';⁶¹ in other words, having lived in an era is not a prerequisite for nostalgia.⁶² So, having been born in colonial times is not a prerequisite for nostalgic memories of it, but nevertheless the students clearly denied having such feelings.

In hindsight, I am clearer in my mind about the question of why possible (nostalgic) memories made little sense to the students. The advanced historical knowledge which the students of Universitas Airlangga have acquired during their studies must

60 The answers of staff and PhD students were more varied and included *keroncong* music, romantic love between Indonesian and Dutch people, the knowledge the Dutch had passed on and recollections of a grandfather who worked in a leper hospital. Is their wider range of answers caused by longer study of the past or is it a difference of generations?

61 Stoler, 'Imperial debris', p. 207.

62 Paul Bijl, 'Dutch colonialism across decolonisation', *Journal of Dutch Literature*, 4, 1 (2013): 128–49; Inge Melchior, *Guardians of living history: An ethnography of post-Soviet memory making in Estonia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020); Inge Melchior and Oane Visser, 'Voicing past and present uncertainties: The relocation of a Soviet World War II memorial and the politics of memory in Estonia', *Focaal: Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 59 (2011): 34–5.



Figure 3. Medical Faculty for Native Doctors (Nederlandsch-Indische Artsenschool) in Surabaya (photo by the author).

have prevented them from developing strong feelings about colonial objects. Maurice Halbwachs was quite outspoken about the fact that history and social memory belong in different domains: 'History is dead memory, a way of preserving pasts to which we no longer have an "organic" experiential relation.'⁶³ Memory is a direct experience of the past, 'a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present'; history, by contrast, is the systematic and critical study of the past, which creates a distance. The history students were perhaps precisely the wrong group from whom to expect an emotional engagement with the colonial-built environment, given their interest in history rather than memory. It was among amateur historians that I found the people with the deepest emotions about the colonial heritage.

Groups of enthusiasts

Roodebrug is a community (*komunitas*) of amateur historians founded in 2010. It is a club of enthusiasts who share an interest in the history of Surabaya and want to raise public awareness of its urban history. Although their historical interest definitely has a nostalgic tinge, the members certainly have a thorough knowledge of the history of Surabaya which few professional historians could match. One of the members, who

⁶³ Halbwachs cited by Olick and Robbins, 'Social memory studies', p. 110; in a similar vein, Nora, 'Between memory and history', p. 8.

took me on three rides through Surabaya on his motorcycle, provided me with non-stop details about the historical buildings we passed, recounting their changing uses through time or informing me about the architects. Another prominent member published a history book and joined a public historical debate in the Netherlands with a long letter to the editor.⁶⁴ Roodebrug has a small library of history books and the members were very eager to meet me, a so-called 'expert on urban history', and interrogate me about Surabaya's past. One favourite Roodebrug activity consists of re-enactments of battles of the Indonesian Revolution.⁶⁵

Roodebrug offers a prime example of the truism that memory is a social process.⁶⁶ The members meet in their clubhouse or a restaurant every week. They also have a Facebook page and a website. I attended two of these weekly meetings (in 2012 and 2015), which lasted two hours, and also had myself led around an old Chinese kampong by two of its members. The participants in these meetings were well acquainted with each other, new arrivals were cheerfully welcomed and throughout the meetings they held animated conversations. One evening, the members studied pictures from the 1950s in a book published in the 1970s which was passed around with great interest. An original walkie-talkie was also passed from hand to hand and most people pretended to use it in a strategy of 'authentication':⁶⁷ 'Hello, hello, this is X speaking, over!'

At first sight it seemed what fascinated them most was military history, recalling the martial struggle of the Indonesian revolutionaries against the Dutch, fully in line with the nationalist history taught under President Soeharto. The name 'Roodebrug' (Red Bridge) refers to the bridge at which General Mallaby was shot in November 1945. Roodebrug runs a shop at the foot of Tugu Pahlawan (Heroes' Memorial) which commemorates the revolutionaries killed in these battles. Here they sell authentic and replica helmets and replica guns and army flasks. It is even possible to order a tailor-made historical uniform of the Indonesian People's Army. The website also offers photo shoots in traditional clothing, and these commodities show that most people preferred to don army clothing for these photos (with guns and bikes as accoutrements). To add to the historical flavour, the photos could be printed in sepia.⁶⁸ On being asked, they agreed that the Hotel Majapahit was the most important historical building in town, because it was the site of the famous flag incident on 19 September 1945 (in which revolutionaries ripped off the lower blue strip of a Dutch red-white-and-blue flag, turning it into the Indonesian red-and-white republican flag).

However, it was not long before it was revealed that their interests are much broader than the Revolution. This emerged, for instance, in the questions they

64 Ady Setyawan, *Benteng-benteng Surabaya* (Yogyakarta: Mata Padi Pressindo, 2015); Ady Setyawan, 'Hoe gekleurd zijn jullie archieven?', *De Volkskrant*, 22 Dec. 2016, p. 24.

65 majalahscg.com/read/320/ronakota/Roode-Brug-Soerabaia-Gelar-Diskusi-Buku-Sang-Patriot (accessed 16 June 2014); Roodebrug Soerabaia: Tandamata Kota Pahlawan, <https://roodebrugsouerabaia.com/?v=75dfaed2dded> (accessed 9 Oct. 2022).

66 Olick and Robbins, 'Social memory studies', p. 123.

67 Duane Jethro, *Aesthetics of power: Heritage formation and the senses in post-apartheid South Africa* (Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2015; *Quaestiones Inertiae* 87), p. 31.

68 The photoshoots are no longer offered on the website, but the website still has a gallery with such pictures. Roodebrugsoerabaia: Tandamata Kota Pahlawan, <https://www.roodebrugsouerabaia.com> (last accessed 4 Jan. 2017).

asked me and in images of buildings and the old tramways on the postcards and printed T-shirts sold in their shop and on their website. They also brainstormed the possibility of organising city walks for primary school pupils, taking them over the Red Bridge, past the colonial post office, a colonial-era church and buildings of Dutch trading companies. Some members were very concerned about the imminent demolition of an old, inner-city Chinese kampong, Alon-Alon Contong, by an expansionist hotel company. This recognition of an old but rundown Chinese kampong as part of their local history, a 're-connecting' to the 'silenced contributions of Chinese-Indonesians'⁶⁹ underlines how the members of Roodebrug have developed their own version of history, running counter to state versions of Indonesian history from which Chinese have virtually been erased.

'Do you feel nostalgic about the past?', I asked the members during one of their weekly meetings. They did. Mostly about life in the kampongs but also about historical buildings, the independence struggle and the local heroes who had lived in the kampongs. As one member put it succinctly: 'You cannot understand Surabaya in isolation from its kampongs' (*Surabaya tidak lepas dari kampung*). Another member clarified: 'Bung Tomo and Sukarno were born in a Surabaya kampong; it is even said Lee Kuan Yew lived in a Surabaya kampong.'⁷⁰ 'If we were to ask people in a hundred years from now what extant building in Surabaya is important, what would they answer?', I asked. The first spontaneous answer was: nothing; no present building is worth being remembered in the future.

In these answers lies an element of what Svetlana Boym has called 'reflective nostalgia' or what Michael Herzfeld has called 'structural nostalgia': the 'collective representation' of a now vanished 'Edenic order—a time before time—in which the balanced perfection of social relations has not yet suffered the [moral] decay that affects everything human'.⁷¹ The moral decay that the members of Roodebrug sense in society is visible in the perceived lack of popular knowledge about old buildings, the lack of respect shown to the historical value of buildings by real-estate developers who demolish precious reminders of the past in their grab for construction sites and also in the general neglect of the urban environment (for instance, by littering the streets with rubbish). The same point has been made by people supporting heritage conservation in Jakarta and Semarang.⁷² Unlike their counterparts in Semarang, however, heritage enthusiasts in Surabaya did not couple their embracing of colonial modernist architecture with criticisms of 'traditional' urban dwellers like market vendors, who need to be given a 'proper' education and socialisation.⁷³ On the contrary. The traditional urban kampong is seen as the idealised counter-image of contemporary moral decay.⁷⁴ The appreciation of the revolutionaries is not based on their heroism

69 Sastramidjaja, 'This is not a trivialization of the past', p. 464.

70 Bung Tomo played a central role in the Battle of Surabaya with his fiery radio broadcasts; Lee Kuan Yew was the first prime minister of Singapore. Although it is correct that Bung Tomo and Sukarno were born in Surabaya, I consider it unlikely Lee Kuan Yew ever lived there.

71 Svetlana Boym, 'Nostalgia and its discontents', *Hedgehog Review* 9, 2 (2007): 7–18; Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural intimacy: Social poetics in the nation state* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 109.

72 Coté, 'Searching for Semarang', p. 128–9; Sastramidjaja, 'This is not a trivialization of the past', p. 447; Yapp, 'The future in the past', pp. 185–6.

73 Yapp, 'The future in the past', p. 193.

74 I do not know how to explain this difference between Semarang and Surabaya. Lauren Yapp

as such, but because they embody positive values like self-sacrifice to a greater cause and a sense of responsibility. In the eyes of Roodebrug's members, today, these values have been replaced by egotism and self-interest. In the same way, they view the neglect or demolition of colonial-era buildings as indicative of the selfish, neo-liberal thinking of property owners and developers.⁷⁵ Roodebrug is perhaps the socially tightest of these groups, but definitely not the only popular organisation interested in colonial heritage. For example, the Surabaya Heritage Society/ Sjarikat Poesaka Soerabaia is a Facebook group whose membership partly overlaps with Roodebrug.⁷⁶ Its Facebook site contains dozens of photographs, mostly of ramshackle buildings; sometimes historical commentary is added to make diachronic comparisons.

The most loosely organised initiative is the Manic Street Walkers. It is no more than a programme of city walks advertised on a website and on social media, initiated and organised by just one person, but hosted by a professionally run, private cultural centre, C20.⁷⁷ The organiser became interested in history after reading Howard Dick's *Surabaya: City of work* and began organising the walks in 2011. The walks, held at an irregular interval of between one and four weeks, go through old city quarters, preferably the (former) Arab, Chinese, and European areas. The composition of the group of participants changes all the time, but is usually made up of fewer than ten people. By 2017, because of time pressures, she had discontinued the walks, except for well-paying foreigners.

Superficially the activity is similar to the Sampoerna heritage tour, but the two-hour walk turns it into a totally different activity. While the Sampoerna heritage tour can be consumed passively, the walk, which lasts approximately two hours, demands the active involvement of the participants.⁷⁸ For the initiator of the Manic Street Walkers, the walks are intended not only, and perhaps not primarily, to look at buildings, but to meet people, and observe their customs, taste old-fashioned foods and discover forgotten music. In the old city quarters, she searches for handmade alternatives to mass-produced products. She regularly stops to chat with people, buys snacks during the walk, and makes notes of quick interviews on her mobile phone (fig. 4). The walks do not exactly follow a planned route, but as a real *bricoleur*, at every crossroads she seems to decide which road looks most appealing at that moment.⁷⁹ To enable these everyday encounters, the walks take place on bustling weekdays, and not on

describes how vendors in Semarang seemed actively to stand in the way of heritage advocates' efforts to restore a colonial market hall. A similar potential conflict did not play a role in Surabaya where Roodebrug has never undertaken a major conservation project. Another possible explanation of the difference is the reputation of Surabaya as a city with a relatively benevolent state attitude towards kampongs. Colombijn, 'I'm a singer'.

75 Roodebrug has undertaken one activity in heritage conservation: clearing overgrowth threatening to swamp some colonial fortification. This can be interpreted as a nostalgic re-enactment of revolutionary times, not of the fighting, but of the spirit of togetherness and self-sacrifice they feel is missing today.

76 Sjarikat Poesaka Soerabaia, www.facebook.com/groups/127232587336686 (accessed 5 Jan. 2016); another group is called Surabaya Tempo Dulu, <https://www.facebook.com/surabayatempodulu> (accessed 29 Aug. 2019).

77 C20-library.net/walkers and @manicstreetwalk (accessed 4 Jan. 2016).

78 See also Tanya Richardson, 'Walking streets, talking history: The making of Odessa', *Ethnology* 44, 3 (2005): 13–33.

79 Also, Michel de Certeau likened walking the city with bricolage; Michel de Certeau, *The practice of everyday life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).



Figure 4. Manic Street Walkers meeting children (photo by the author).

Sundays. This ‘Do-It-Yourself knowledge’ challenges official views on heritage, because it is ‘drawing on an organic sense of place, grounded in personal and local experiences’ which are different from the standard national history.⁸⁰

The organiser rejects a motorcycle as alternative means of transportation, because ‘when one walks, one encounters the details directly’. The importance of walking is hard to overestimate. Remarking on a similar tour in Jakarta, Sastramidjaja says that for middle-class Indonesians ‘conditioned to avoid the streets with their dirt, heat, and manifold dangers’, it is exceptional ‘to brave the streets and walk amidst [...] chaotic traffic and waste stench’.⁸¹ The choice of walking is, to paraphrase Wendy Parkins, ‘a condemnation of speed’ and ‘a critique of modernity’.⁸²

When I asked the initiator whether she felt nostalgic about the past, she rejected the suggestion, because ‘these people are still here, aren’t they?’ and, unlike Roodebrug and the Surabaya Heritage Society/Sjarikat Poesaka Soerabaia, she has not embraced the romanticism of the old spelling, but uses a hip English name for her undertaking. Nevertheless, this is ‘structural nostalgia’ in the highest degree. She feels inspired by

80 Sastramidjaja, ‘This is not a trivialization of the past’, pp. 444, 461. The alternative view on Surabaya’s history is disseminated in printed walking maps and the online magazine *Ayorek!*, www.ayorek.org.

81 Sastramidjaja, ‘This is not a trivialization of the past’, p 463.

82 Wendy Parkins, ‘Out of time: Fast subjects and slow living’, *Time & Society* 13, 2–3 (2004): 372.

the old quarters and deems a new, posh residential area like Pakuwon Indah ‘uninspiring’ (*tidak inspiratif*).

The participants in the walks share these feelings of respect for old customs. As one person told me: she enjoyed the community life in the small car-free inner-city squares and alleys. A telling example of this respect is a participant who carried a cigarette butt with him until he found a dustbin and did not throw it on the street as most urbanites would have done. The Manic Street Walkers hikes are free of charge, but their announcement via social media is already enough to preselect a certain audience. Therefore, I agree with Sastramidjaja writing about similar heritage trails in Jakarta that participation is ‘confined to a class of culturally literate, young cosmopolitans, who easily move between virtual space and material places’.⁸³

There are, though, subtle differences between the class and gender background of the members of Roodebrug and the people behind C20, which hosts the Manic Street Walkers, although both have a multiethnic membership including some members of Chinese descent.⁸⁴ The people attending the meetings of Roodebrug were between 25 and 50 years old and a clear majority was male; some of the women present had come with a male partner, did not feel involved and quickly sat apart from the others to have their own conversations. Judging by their office jobs, clothing, motorcycles, computer skills and often university degrees most members could be considered middle class. Their resistance to capitalists was partly inspired by the fact that at least one core member was a man of limited means living in the Chinese kampong Alon-Alon Contong, which was under direct threat of demolition by an investor. I would call the people running the host organisation, C20, upper-middle class, and the fact that the Manic Street Walkers defy the middle-class norm of not walking is also indicative of their elitist background. One of the leaders of C20 was inspired by a certain disgust of elite gated communities for wealthy Chinese, on which she had turned her back. The leadership of C20 was partly inspired by the ideal of bringing women out on to the street, which is in many respects a masculine, urban environment.

What both groups have in common is that they demand active participation. The required investment in time, or even physical exercise, and also the fun it brings with it, will strengthen the shared opinions of the members. Roodebrug and the Manic Street Walkers organise activities at which like-minded people meet: ‘Nostalgia has to do with longing, but also, and more importantly, with belonging’.⁸⁵

Going over my field notes for the final revision of this article, I was reminded of another example of the bricolage with colonial heritage in Surabaya: the use of old tombstones of the Penele Cemetery as a scenic backdrop for professional wedding photos (so, after all, colonial heritage is also used for wedding pictures in Indonesia!). The lightness of such bricolage almost literally making use of the surface of colonialism of course shuns some fundamental debates about contested colonial histories.

83 Sastramidjaja, ‘This is not a trivialization of the past’, p. 468.

84 I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer who drew my attention to this fact, and also provided me with new information about C20’s feminist background.

85 Sastramidjaja, ‘This is not a trivialization of the past’, p. 469.

Conclusion

Surabaya, like many post-colonial cities, has been left with a great deal of ‘imperial debris’, buildings too big to simply ignore. As eyewitnesses of colonial Indonesia gradually die out, the buildings will grow in importance as signifiers of the past but, in the process, the buildings will lose their original purpose and acquire fresh meanings in the new context.⁸⁶

In this article I have argued against a single interpretation of the ways urbanites today interact with these buildings, but have decided instead to speak of bricolage. Bricolage is the selective conceptual appropriation of the colonial buildings for whatever objective the user finds convenient: objects to boost a city’s ‘brand’, a company advertisement, stops on a heritage tour, amusing backdrops for pictures and selfies, a counterpoint to a consumerist lifestyle in shopping malls, et cetera.

What makes the colonial buildings so eminently suitable for bricolage? Lévi-Strauss argues that especially ‘*débris*’, or ‘*résidus*’ of human labour without practical utility but which happen to be at hand, are ‘*bon à penser*’.⁸⁷ Colonial buildings do not, of course, have a monopoly as objects of bricolage, but the ‘interval of neglect’⁸⁸ has broken their direct link with the past and makes them freely available for unbounded intellectual roaming. Bricolage would therefore certainly not be an appropriate term for the strong emotions felt by former Dutch residents of colonial villas, or their descendants, for whom this emotional link with the past has not been broken and who return to Indonesia in nostalgic search of their former homes. Also, elderly Indonesians lacked the temporal, and consequently emotional distance to the buildings to be receptive to playful bricolage; in contrast to Dutch from the same generation who grew up in or with the Dutch East Indies, they were not nostalgic, but demonstrated deep-seated hostility towards Indonesian conservationists.

Many Indonesians I talked to simply found these buildings beautiful, not because of colonial associations, but because of their intrinsic architectural qualities. As a representative of BPPI, the Indonesian Heritage Trust, said: ‘I am not interested in the colonial past as such, the buildings are what forms the point of departure.’ Amid indistinguishable shopping malls, housing estates and shophouses (*ruko*), the colonial buildings are refreshing landmarks which enhance the aesthetic quality of the urban environment.

However, for those most openly enthusiastic about the colonial buildings—the leading figures in Roodebrug and the Manic Street Walkers—the love of colonial design and old urban quarters is more than a matter of the mere aesthetics of urban spaces. Their positive reception of colonial buildings is also, but indirectly, a critique of the transformation of modern cities by short-sighted real-estate developers and unthinking city administrators, who demolish irreplaceable buildings in acts of ‘architectural suicide’.⁸⁹ Colonial architecture can serve either as a direct critique of

86 Esther Captain, ‘Inleiding’, in *Oorlogserfgoed overzee: De erfenis van de Tweede Wereldoorlog in Aruba, Curaçao, Indonesië en Suriname*, ed. Esther Captain and Guno Jones (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2010), p. 11; Paul Basu and Ferdinand de Jong, ‘Utopian archives, decolonial affordances: Introduction to special issue’, *Social Anthropology* 24, 1 (2016): 5–19.

87 Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage*, pp. 16, 27, 29, 32.

88 J.B. Jackson, quoted by DeSilvey and Edensor, ‘Reckoning with ruins’, p. 472.

89 Eko Budihardjo, quoted by Coté, ‘Searching for Semarang’, p. 126.

twenty-first century, monotonous, capital-driven urban design, or indirectly as a physical connection to a now-vanishing kampong life, imbued with imagined positive values like togetherness, self-sacrifice, variation in taste and slower-paced living.

The new factor in the equation is their appreciation of kampong life as an alternative, 'lived space'.⁹⁰ The members of Roodebrug and the participants in the Manic Street Walkers are not nostalgic for Dutch times, but feel a 'structural nostalgia'⁹¹ for a past, idealised kampong life they contrast with a world in which real-estate developers pull the strings, or where selfish, careless citizens litter the environment with rubbish.

The members of Roodebrug see the Dutch colonial buildings as mediators of a now vanished, 'honest', traditional kampong society. There is a double irony here. Firstly, the members of Roodebrug associate the colonial heritage with a bygone kampong society, whereas in colonial times Dutch administrators considered kampongs to be the very antithesis of the modern city they were hoping to build themselves. Secondly, many of the Dutch buildings (the office buildings of large companies in particular) bear testimony to a capitalist economy run on the same neo-liberal principles the members of Roodebrug detest today. The Manic Street Walkers, in contrast, experience kampong life directly as a 'material, unmediated experience of the past in an increasingly dematerialized, digitized world'.⁹²

For anthropologists 'the historical accuracy of people's stories are not as interesting as the efficacy of memory as *practice* that generates meaning'.⁹³ As long as many people can find something useful in these *lieux de mémoire* in 'an endless recycling of their meaning',⁹⁴ the will to preserve the buildings will probably be strengthened. Convinced as I am that the colonial buildings enhance the liveability of cities, I find this multifarious *bricolage* a reassuring thought.

90 Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace* (Paris: Anthropos, 1986 [1974]).

91 Herzfeld, *Cultural intimacy*.

92 DeSilvey and Edensor, 'Reckoning with ruins', p. 474.

93 Melchior, *Guardians of living history*, p. 34; emphasis in original.

94 Nora, 'Between memory and history', p. 19.