



The Association for
Asian Studies

Visible and Invisible Realms: Power, Magic, and Colonial Conquest in Bali by Margaret J. Wiener

Review by: Carol Warren

The Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Nov., 1996), pp. 1100-1101

Published by: [Association for Asian Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2646619>

Accessed: 17/12/2012 22:25

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Association for Asian Studies is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Asian Studies*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

foreign education, and inherent conservatism skewed his view of Thai society. His proclivity to act as a “lone wolf,” a point that Van Praagh emphasizes ad nauseam, reflected a stubborn self-righteousness. His lackluster performance in four brief stints as prime minister revealed his limitations as a political leader. It is to be hoped that Seni’s next biographer will provide a more balanced historical context for his political career and assess his role more critically.

E. BRUCE REYNOLDS
San Jose State University

Visible and Invisible Realms: Power, Magic, and Colonial Conquest in Bali. By MARGARET J. WIENER. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. xiv, 445 pp. \$29.95.

Visible and Invisible Realms concerns power, magic, and the transformation of consciousness wrought by colonial conquest and the cosmic displacements it engendered. It focuses on the paramount kingdom of Klungkung, the ritual and political center of the precolonial Balinese polity, and the remarkable events which surrounded Dutch invasion. The *puputan* (ending), in which the king of Klungkung and some two hundred members of the royal house including women and children met their deaths, marked not only the end of political autonomy for the kingdom, but the end of a particular manifestation of the powers of the invisible world (*niskala*) in Balinese life.

Wiener weaves together Balinese texts, Dutch colonial sources, and oral histories of the kingdom of Klungkung, giving us a rich multivocal account of Bali before, during, and after the *puputan* (pp. 76 ff). Sometimes represented in European sources as ritual suicide in the face of foreign conquest, this watershed event is framed quite differently in Balinese narratives, which marginalize the role of Europeans in the destabilization of the Balinese world. In the vein of Marshall Sahlin’s anthropological history, Wiener explores the conjunctures and disjunctures of events and their interpretation to reveal discrepant meanings that fill the liminal spaces marking cultural and temporal difference. The study succeeds admirably in its efforts not so much to “explain” the course of events but rather, as Wittgenstein would have it, to “impress” upon us how they matter (pp. 329–30).

The nature of power in Bali and the place of Klungkung and its kings was largely misunderstood by the Dutch, for whom the supernatural world was radically separated from the mundane and from power politics. Here the ethnographers’ attention to discrepancies, absences, and silences reveals some of the most interesting aspects of contact history, otherwise dominated by more brute and one-sided readings of power political encounter (p. 231). In Klungkung narratives, for example, the absent presence of the magically powerful heirloom *keris* (sheathed and decorated daggers) forms “the central motif” in accounts of colonial conquest (pp. 360 ff). Wiener shows that the legendary *keris*, which bore personal names and were objects of ritual attention, were much more than items of royal regalia symbolizing office. Symbolic significance was as much as Dutch models of power and authority could cede; but Balinese accounts of the failed attempt in the 1930s to return these heirlooms to the reinstalled descendants of precolonial rulers from their displaced location in the Batavia Society museum imply something more.

In Balinese rendition, the conquest was consequence, not cause. The loss of this source of real power in the heirloom *keris* still “haunts Klungkung imaginations” (p. 356). That loss eventually leads to the reinvention of Bali’s kings as ritual figures and the beginnings of revised construction of Balinese understandings of the unseen world of *niskala*, increasingly through an officially constituted orthodoxy in recognized “religion.” As throughout Wiener’s study, discrepant accounts and redundant acts allude to how differently things mattered. The displacement of power from its incarnation in the sacred heirloom regalia of the royal *keris* marked the transformation of the concept of power itself, though not one that Balinese memory is prepared to acknowledge.

It has to be said that this is a very particularly positioned study of power, magic, and displacement. Wiener’s study provides a perspective on culture and transformation from the vantage point of the center. And although rulers ideally had a special relation to the powerful spirits of the unseen world, access to this domain was not limited to kings or priests in either pre- or postcolonial Bali. Magical power is manifest in temple spaces, in “hot” locations such as graveyards and ravines, and accessible in various forms and degrees to spirit-mediums, puppeteers, and ordinary Balinese through trance. The destruction of Balinese kingship did not bring with it the dissolution of all that mattered in Balinese culture. Royalty and regalia formed one among many pivots which linked the visible (*sekala*) to the invisible (*niskala*) realms of magic and power.

While the “event” of *puputan* was certainly a watershed, the study demonstrates that history is more than a sequence of events. Interpretations of “how they mattered” reverberate through time and are revived and reframed in new contexts. It is certainly not irrelevant that the first demonstrations in the New Order period in Bali took place at Puputan Square or that they concerned another phase in the disenchantment of the Balinese world. What could the Indonesian Minister have meant in 1993 when he called on Balinese to receive the controversial Golden Garuda monument, one of many new and unpopular tourism development projects, “in the spirit of *puputan*”?—in a spirit of sacrifice to the greater national good, as its proponents argued? or as a sign of new displacements as many Balinese interpreted its advent? And so the conjuncture of Visible and Invisible realms, of the past in the present continue to inform Balinese constructions of their place in the late-twentieth-century world. Wiener’s study gives us valuable insights into that process and an important analytical vantage for making sense of the postcolonial world.

CAROL WARREN
Murdoch University

Power in Motion: Capital Mobility and the Indonesian State. By JEFFREY A. WINTERS. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1996. xvi, 241 pp. \$35.00.

In this book about the changing power relations in contemporary capitalism, Jeffrey Winters argues that the relative mobility of capital is becoming a better predictor of the interests and leverage of investors than is its nationality. Investors have always wielded *structural* power (through their decisions about where, how much, and when to invest the resources they control). That power, however, has been dramatically augmented in the post-World War II era from the capacity to deploy capital across competing jurisdictions. To strengthen the plausibility of his theoretical