

## Recent Dutch-language Publications

Harry A. Poeze

KITLV/Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies

Poeze@kitlv.nl

Lutgard Mutsaers, *Roep der verten. Krontjong van roots naar revival*. Haarlem: In de Knipscheer, 2014, 559 pp. ISBN 9789062658299. Price: EUR 34.50 (hard-back).

‘I considered krontjong as a musical world in which production, distribution, and reception were indissolubly connected, the dividing-line between professionals and amateurs was sometimes difficult to draw, and all of it was in constant movement within the larger whole that was also on the move.’ Thus Lutgard Mutsaers (1953) describes her approach to the subject, about which sources were scant, let alone monographs that in more than a cursory and partial way discuss the subject—fascinating but also complicated, as ethnic issues and socio-political developments played an important role in the evolution and appreciation of krontjong music. As to the sources, Mutsaers profited immensely from the online accessibility of Dutch and Dutch-language Indies newspapers, as offered by the website of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in The Hague. Hidden information now becomes visible at the push of a button. Mutsaers’ *Roep der verten* could not have been written without this access. Hundreds of references to the most obscure publications, often only a few lines, announcing a performance, and advertisements on appearances and available records, are documented and often included in facsimile. Also included in full are a few of the seminal publications on the subject.

Mutsaers has a long past in popular music studies, and has published on rock and roll, as embraced and adapted by Indo European musicians, and the Hawaiian music that was popular in the Indies as well as the Netherlands from the thirties to the sixties. Both competed with krontjong, and even threatened to push krontjong into oblivion. Now, she has fulfilled the promise to write the history of krontjong, and has done so with six hundred pages of dense print, an ambitious project for which she was extremely well suited. The roots of krontjong are Portuguese and the earliest mention dates back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. The village of Toegoe was the

centre from which *krontjong* spread, and has maintained a reputation until today. It was the until now completely unknown journalist Arnold F. Snackey (1845–1896) who put *krontjong* on the map, its music as well as the text based on pantuns (pantoums, a verse form with an *abab* rhyme scheme that has been adapted to both French and English). It gained more popularity than respectability, when it became part of the Komédie Stamboel, as founded by Auguste Mahieu (1865–1903). Komédie Stamboel lasted only for about twenty years, but *krontjong* survived, but not without controversy. Sheet music was printed, and records were released from 1904 on. A more ‘refined’ *krontjong* was promoted by the Indo European elite. As a whole, however, *krontjong* was tainted by its indecent past. And it ranked far below the refined gamelan music. Mutsaers has scrupulously searched for references to *krontjong* in fiction and non-fiction. The first by, for instance Victor Ido and Jan Fabricius, reflect the ambiguous position of *krontjong* as a specific Indo product, with a lot of bias against them. The Indo community as organized in the Indo-Europeesch Verbond (IEV) kept its distance, but slowly acknowledged its legacy, although in a revised and respectable format, as composed by Fred Belloni. Still, Dutch experts looked down on this hybrid mestizo music, and admired gamelan. In these years *kroncong* in the public sphere was predominantly an Indonesian affair, with Miss Riboet making a world tour, with a troupe of a hundred men and women. Hawaiian music became very popular at the cost of *kroncong*, which also incorporated elements from jazz, swing, film scores, and *ketoprak*. In the Netherlands, Indonesian students were the ones who staged *kroncong*. They earned a lot of appreciation, along with some pocket money. After 1940 they depended for their livelihood on these performances. The German occupiers left them largely undisturbed; only late in 1944 did they brand *kroncong* an intolerable hybrid and degenerate form of music. At that point, the Sinar Laoet group had to cease performing. Among its members was Toemjati, as Mutsaers mentions, but it is a pity she does not give more details about him, as he was a clear supporter of the Nazi’s (he even performed in Germany); after the war, when he wanted to stage a come-back, he was taken to task for this.

On the political use of *kroncong* more details could have been supplied, to begin with the composer of the Indonesian national anthem, W.R. Soepratman, and in his wake Ismail Marzuki, who wrote and inspired the *kroncong revolusi*. As presented, the political background of war and revolution contains some flaws. After 1950 *krontjong* in Indonesia took its own course, at first still with Indo input, but after they were forced out of Indonesia to the Netherlands, it was an all-Indonesian affair, and considered part of Indonesian cultural life. In the Netherlands there were at first still some Indonesian groups, but after 1950,

Indo musicians made *kroncong* a mixture of all kinds of popular genres. Tjalie Robinson started the call for *kroncong asli* and only slowly gained supporters, let alone public performers. The Pasar Malam Besar was an instrument to promote this original *kroncong*, and since the eighties the efforts bore fruit, and the revival of *kroncong* was successfully achieved. This book with about 900 notes, with a very useful register of terms and names in *kroncong*, with short amplifications, with an index, with a time line, offers another attraction. As a bonus there is a CD with 25 tracks, 19 historical recordings, first released between 1904 and 1957, and 6 'modern' ones, attesting to the excellent quality of these *kroncong asli* recordings, which will ensure the powerful *raison d'être* of this Indo music.

Philip Dröge, *De schaduw van Tambora. De grootste natuurramp sinds menscheugenis*. Houten/Antwerpen: Spectrum, 2015, 287 pp. ISBN 9789000343607. Price: EUR 19.99 (hardback).

The strongest eruption of a volcano in modern times, far surpassing that of the Krakatau in 1883, was caused by the Tambora, on Sumbawa, the then remote island of colonial Indies, in April 1815. The volcano lost its top 1,400 metres, and was reduced from 4,200 to 2,800 metres. The eruption's strength was equivalent to one and a half times the collected strength of all atomic weapons stored during the Cold War. Its sound was heard 2,500 kilometers away. A suffocating hot gas cloud immediately killed all life, a tsunami went round the earth, and for three years the sky was darkened by particles of sulphur dioxide, influencing global climate patterns and cooling summers for several years. Waves of cold caused crop failures, which lead to illness and famine. The consequences were enormous. Tens of thousands people perished. This natural disaster lead to food riots, emigration, and mass hysteria, but it also triggered social reform. The author of *De schaduw van Tambora*, Philip Dröge, a journalist specialized in science news, tells the story of the eruption, followed by chapters situated in countries in Asia, the Americas, and Europe about the worldwide repercussions. In a last chapter he returns to Sumbawa, and its forgotten eruption, and he climbs the Tambora to see for himself the gigantic crater, now dormant. He bases his story on a plethora of eyewitness accounts, scattered in archives and periodicals all over the world—the bibliography covers twenty pages—which results in a vivid and accessible monograph.