

manananggal, and the aforementioned Ratu Kidul, the goddess-like Javanese queen of the South Sea. My analysis interweaves ethnographic observations of ongoing rituals in Java with regional histories of feminine spiritual authority and close readings of mystical-horror films and their narrative and sociopolitical sources. Connecting the dots, I position the dynamically gendered supernatural worlds on Southeast Asian screens as emanations of a contested yet enduring pluralist symbolic order—a regional conception of authority that returns to challenge the ever-more vigorous imposition and exploitation of patriarchy in the 1980s and 1990s. The potential for agency, I argue, is divided among dual masculine and feminine basic signifiers, the powers of which are often combined in, or alternated between, distinct genders and sexes.

Chapter 6

Following the euphoric tides that swept away regional dictators from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, my concluding chapter examines the triadic entrance of cinematic new waves, representative governments, and streaming digital media in much of Southeast Asia. Assessing these shifts in historical context, I begin to account for the continuities of certain established patterns that have emerged alongside triumphal departures. Young upstarts in Bangkok, for example, led the way to unprecedented international acclaim through a series of prescient cinematic returns. Even as the success of these efforts dashed hopes for slick, Hollywood-esque “upgrades” to local form and style, I show that industry paradigms were radically shifted in another way: with cheaper digital equipment; loosened restrictions on production; and money from festivals, foundations, and private investors, many aspiring filmmakers were even better positioned than earlier generations to resist the national gravitational pulls of Jakarta, Bangkok, or Manila.

Following the overall focus on temporal and formal “backward”-ness and intermediality, I conclude the book by examining the return and expansion of archipelagic fragmentation via a steep rise in high-budget, popular, and politically charged horror films throughout the region after 2015. These works, I argue, use older, established approaches and spirit characters to engage with new problems, especially those posed by the vast regional expansion of neoliberal corporate influence. In the face of what is elsewhere understood as a postmodern crisis of affect, I propose that regional filmmakers forge new emotional connections and strategies by reclaiming the archipelagic features and plural symbolic structures of the region’s past.

BEYOND ACADEMIA

Coming from and starting a bicultural family, living in Sweden during formative moments of my childhood, living in Russia during one of the most important political transitions of the twentieth century, and working in Indonesia and Malaysia over the last two decades have indelibly impressed on me the importance

of paying attention to, and learning to see the world through, unfamiliar perspectives. My long, parallel career as a media producer has been profoundly informed by these insights and has facilitated my engagement with groups and audiences far outside the borders of academia—borders I have always perceived as porous or illusionary.

My creative work in closest conversation with this book is the hybrid ethnofiction *Banyak Ayam Banyak Rejeki* (*Many Chickens Lots of Luck*, 2021),⁷ which I codirected and produced with Indonesian scholar-practitioner Dr. Koes Yuliadi (Indonesian Institute of Arts, Yogyakarta). Set in central Java and produced in parallel with my doctoral studies, the film became an opportunity to experiment with and apply the basic archipelagic features and techniques that I was uncovering in my research. Following my research, the film engages contemporary debates about gender politics, deploying an exuberant and absurd, yet carefully gauged, satire of the increasing practice and promotion of polygamy in Java and elsewhere in the archipelago. Similar to the book, but in a different mode, the film deploys regional cinematic themes and approaches of the 1950s to the 1970s. It reflects how current shifts in media technology can be exploited to amplify enduring, pluralist structures of authority, disturbing continual attempts to institute narrow or simplistic patriarchal visions. In both festival-based and academic discussions and screenings, the film offers a platform to present my scholarly ideas in different ways and to audiences who are less familiar with film studies or other academic discourses.

On a final and more personal note, my immersion in skateboard media, as young fan and then professional filmmaker, is another, perhaps less-obvious, source of connection to my current scholarly work. My formative immersion as a teenager in the fragmented presentation and mocking imitation of mainstream media that are classic features of skateboard aesthetics has come to play an unexpected role in my career as a scholar. It was especially crucial in recognizing and decoding the deeply political aspects of similar populist tactics used by Southeast Asian filmmakers engaging waves of globalization and nationalization in the 1950s and 1960s. My earlier documentary on the American pornography industry, *Rated X: A Journey through Porn* (2000) also broadened and challenged my understandings of gender and power in ways that profoundly informed this book. Engaging in discussions with and absorbing the life experiences and perspectives of sex workers in Los Angeles helped me to perceive and understand how agency can be embedded outside of traditional patriarchal or other official spheres in a context as different as Southeast Asia.