

address heterogeneous regional audiences. In Thailand these patchworks allude to particular, and often highly distinct, *versions* of Thainess, the majority of which eschew centrally established ideas of national purity, even while a few work to construct it. Often, these versions involve employing local dialects and using particular references to cater to the specific experiences and perspectives aligned with them, effectively addressing Thailand in terms of its multiple subnational regions and "centers" and mirroring the fragmentation of form, genre, locale, language, and other references in the exhibition of the films themselves. This basic approach to cinema production and exhibition, which I term *archipelagic*, also functions to alter, divide, and profane the unified, homogeneous Thai nation as conceived and promoted by the central government.

BOENG, AJO BOENG!

Throughout the region, cinema has constituted one of the most important ways both to imagine and to deconstruct the nation. Yet filmmakers were not alone in inheriting this difficult and paradoxical task. As I have begun to show (and will expand on in the next chapter), the reproduction of archipelagic aesthetics in Southeast Asia was and is an eminently multi- and intermedial endeavor in which cineastes are entangled in complex media histories and with the work of other artists, writers, and performers. Thai versioning stands among the clearest examples of the deconstruction of a national imaginary using a multimedia approach based in the radical reconfiguration of cinematic technologies. Figure 6, for example, depicts one of the most apt and recognizable symbols of Indonesian artists' analogous, archipelagic impulses to playfully subvert and desacralize nationalist iconographies in the mediums of painting and text.

Requisitioned by Soekarno, the poster was created by a team of artists based in Batavia (now Jakarta) at the beginning of the nationalist struggle against the Dutch (1945–49) in 1945. At first glance, the image of a native man breaking free of his shackles against the background of the red and white Indonesian flag appears as a typical example of a globally comparable nationalist aesthetics. Yet in this case, the artists felt an image alone was not sufficient: the poster needed to call out to would-be Indonesians through multiple channels, inciting them to struggle but also addressing them in a more particularized manner—one in which they might recognize something collectively of "themselves," even if the result would at one level be a kind of self-mockery. As fate would have it, the noted poet Chairil Anwar happened to pass by. After briefly considering the image, he offered "Boeng, Ajo Boeng!" or roughly, "Brother, Let's Go Brother!"—the now-famous tagline. The words he chose, deploying the egalitarian neologism *boeng* (now spelled *bung*), by which Soekarno himself was known, were a perfect fit, and the poster was an instant classic, canonized as a symbol of national struggle against colonial oppression.



FIGURE 6. The famous nationalist poster created by painter Affandi, working together with the artist Sudjojono and SIM (Seniman Indonesia Muda [Young Indonesian Artists]). The deceptively simple and serious tagline “Boeng, Ajo Boeng!” (Brother, Let’s Go Brother!) was supplied by notorious modernist poet Chairil Anwar.

Perhaps the poster’s creators were indeed caught up in a fervent spirit of nationalism, driven in part by the oncoming armed struggle against the Dutch, in which many of them would participate. But the words also conveyed a different meaning, and as they were applied to the image in large, capital letters, the artists couldn’t help but chuckle. Anwar, a radical new innovator in the then-emergent national language, Indonesian, was also known for haunting Jakarta’s brothels in search of both pleasure and inspiration. As his colleagues discerned, Anwar had taken the tagline from the calls of local prostitutes (Sembiring 2010), who used them to incite passing men to join a far briefer, more commercialized union than what the poster was otherwise promoting.

Among the most sacred emblems encapsulating Indonesian nationalism and modernism (and patriarchy), the poster was believed by its creators to be incomplete until the utterances of a “profane” feminine source were added to the artistic strokes of the capital city’s emergent master-painters. The addition implicitly linked them, and all who viewed the poster, to the seamier, illicit sides of urban life inherent in all nations but normally excluded from nationalist imagery. The earnest struggle for an ideal unity that the poster symbolizes simultaneously offers a satirical commentary on its own meaning and address, rendering a fittingly multiplex, paradoxical icon of the nation as a whole. The “fake” or misappropriated

nationalist utterances of prostitutes were—even in the final, officially sanctioned, image of the poster—not separable from the real thing. The artists, having absorbed the complex milieu surrounding them in what would be the capital city, and drawing on their own diverse experiences with nationalist struggle, were driven to question the nation even as they gave birth to one of its classical visual cornerstones.

This image, and its glorious, nefarious call to action, resonated throughout the various spheres and genres of nationalist art. Soon after independence, Usmar Ismail, later to be dubbed the "father" of Indonesian cinema, wrote that nationalist artists should position "their souls as a radar that captures every detail . . . in the lives" (1983:10) of the vast ethnically and geographically divided peoples that had suddenly become "Indonesians." As Ismail and his colleagues-in-celuloid demonstrated in distinct but related ways, the convoluted signals emitted by the people would drive filmmakers to imagine and project the nation onscreen as a politically, socioeconomically, culturally, and temporally inconsistent, heterogeneous entity. By pointedly imagining Indonesia as a false or "bad" copy of the (Western) geopolitical ideal of nations constituting a homogeneous, modern series, filmmakers paid homage to the archipelagic realities of local and regional histories. Doing so also implied that from a local perspective, global ideals simplistically advocating unity and homogeneity would themselves ultimately appear fake or contradictory, just as they did in the rigidly (ethno)nationalist tenor of the Malayan film *Sergeant Hassan*.

Building on this analysis and its focus on multimedia approaches to cinema and nation-cum-region, chapter 2 will begin by exploring the critical role of Malay, Thai, Filipino, and Javanese vernacular theaters in anticipating and bringing together the emergent modern/regional public that would help define the lowbrow-yet-cosmopolitan aesthetics of the films produced in the 1950s and 1960s. I position theatrical forms like *bangsawan*, *stambul*, *sarsuela*, and *likay*, which emerged in parallel with motion pictures in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as a bridge between the forms and habits of traditional media and those of film. As I show, one especially important result of this process was a formative split—not only in the style but also in the audiences for films produced in the region and those made elsewhere. Drawing on, and radically expanding, Miriam Hansen's (1999, 2000, 2012) idea of classical Hollywood as a global "vernacular modernism," I examine the similar role of a set of regional vernacular theaters in setting the tone (and gathering the audiences) for the region's cinemas.