despite keeping up appearances for the authorities surrounding him, would seemingly enjoy. The familiar word *Sekian* appears on the screen.

THE DIVISIBLE FEMININE SIGNIFIER

As I read the film's ending, the kiai and police in this case did not need to set things back in order because Alisa, with her powers as a sundel bolong, has already done so. Rather than using Islam or the law as a force to control or expel her, the men simply follow her lead, praying for Alisa's safe return to the realm of the dead. The film's gender politics are thus not in line with the trope of a female supernatural disturbance controlled and brought to order by masculine authority, religious or otherwise. More important still, in contradistinction to masculinity, which appears mainly homogeneous in the film (although it can be "good" or "bad"), feminine power is divided into two parts, the active, vengeful, justice-doing sundel bolong and the amorous deceased wife who looks like her old self and rekindles her relationship with her husband (consummated in a love scene), cementing his partnership in her revenge plans. Even before she becomes a ghost, Alisa displays active and passive sides: when first cornered by her attackers, she shows strength and skill in martial arts, fighting off many of them successfully before being outnumbered. Like *Bangunnya Nyi Roro Kidul, Sundelbolong* implies that women need to be strong, since the police and court systems are ineffective in stopping or solving rampant crimes, especially by men against women. Indeed, after Alisa's rape, she takes the perpetrators to court, but things go awry when it comes to light that she is a former prostitute, a narrative twist that further implies a conservative, masculine bias in the expression of the law.

Alisa's background in sex work constitutes a further split in her otherwise upstanding character. The film does not present this in a negative light, however, displaying an attitude that I position as a further bridge between the outsider politics of ghosts and sex workers on screen, which together constitute "the most frequent construction[s] of the adult female protagonist outside the scope of monogamy and motherhood" (Sen 1994:144).[11] *Sundelbolong*'s formulation of the "double" identity and authority of its female principal also builds on the earlier work of prostitution films—further clarifying, I propose, what those films were "really" getting at. Like them, *Sundelbolong* makes initial gestures in the direction of masculine sovereignty and dominance—a move that is soon outed as a narrative/stylistic feint that purposely misleads. In the end, solving the problems raised in the film will require not only direct "masculine" struggle but feminine interventions from the netherworld of spirits and the undead—acts that take things further in the direction of asserting a dualistic, plurally gendered symbolic order than was possible when prostitutes, with their more limited, mortal powers, were the central figures. Like the spaces of criminals and prostitutes, the sphere of spirits lies officially outside the boundaries of polite, modern society yet in reality is shown to interpenetrate and

profoundly influence it. In this context, Alisa's death, while tragic, can also be seen as a cinematic convention that unlocks a potential for justice that cannot be found within the masculinized spheres of police, courts, and law.

Even here, however, the film allows no pure association of any space with masculinity or femininity—the judge who presides over Alisa's case, for example, is a woman, as is Alisa's former pimp, who is the mastermind of the plot against her. Men and women are given roles that alternately adhere to and challenge certain gender stereotypes. This includes the otherwise masculine, male gangster who participates in the attacks on Alisa and Hendarto but inexplicably always has his shoulder-length hair tied in pigtails with white ribbons—potentially marking him as a transgender waria who may also have transcendent powers. But in this case, I suggest that it is ultimately women, and the various shades of active or passive femininity, or at times masculinity, with which they are imbued, that cumulatively express a more viable agency in the elaborate world built by the film—one in which human, spiritual, diegetic, and actual realms are also blurred and closely linked. Viewers are arguably prompted to identify with all types of active characters (mortal and immortal, male and female, but especially women), positioning them, like the figures onscreen, somewhere on a shifting spectrum of possibilities.

In my analysis, despite their connection with spirit beliefs, ritual sites, and the underlying heterogeneity of state authority, films like *Sundelbolong* and *Bangunnya Nyi Roro Kidul* are not suggesting that ghosts will actually appear to reset the distribution of power whenever some overambitious man knocks it out of balance. They do suggest, however, that a certain, collective understanding of gender and agency exists in the public sphere—an understanding that some may relate to "backward," rural areas outside of modern cities but that cannot easily be banished by doubting urbanites. *Sundelbolong* hints at this as well, presenting city-dwelling characters who initially dismiss what they term "village superstition." But like the police and kiai, the characters don't seem to be able to bring themselves to completely discount the power of spirits (or women). Despite making a show of denying ghosts' veracity, when the acts of the sundel bolong can no longer be brushed off as a hoax, the city dwellers quickly enlist the help of a male *dukun* (shaman) to fight her, revealing their basic familiarity with, and belief in, the supernatural. By that point in the film, however, it comes as little surprise that the dukun's power pales in comparison to that of the sundel bolong, and he is quickly killed by the undead Alisa's vengeful manifestation.

What emerge as most powerful, then, are the supernatural forces that, while not foreign to all men, are more closely associated with a multifarious feminine agency—one that ghosts symbolize and underscore but are not, in fact, needed to enact in real life. In this sense, *Sundelbolong* and other films of its genre construct symbolic maps that function similarly to, and draw on the sociomaterial power of, those of ritual sites such as Parangkusumo (and other regional sites, about which more below). Both films and rituals place a heavier weighting on the importance

of basic female signifiers over male ones, although the latter are not discounted; indeed, perhaps this is a response to constant pressure by state and societal actors to assert modern patriarchal values. But the ways in which such signifiers manifest or are presented continually works to complicate any equation that would point to a single, basic or "pure" signifier. In my analysis, this is an important reason that the queen or other feminine spirits and legends often display an ability to divide themselves into loosely phallic or *yonic* roles or aspects.

In the case of the queen and Parangkusumo, the site as a whole represents the "female" component of a larger, triangular symbolic structure that connects the South Sea to the "male" volcanic mountain, Merapi, to the north. The palace of the sultan/governor of Yogyakarta, one of the special human representatives the sites continue to authorize, is positioned between them at roughly equal distances from each. But in many narratives (and films), the queen also acts as a whole symbolic foundation in her own right (and Parangkusumo can be seen as a complete symbolic map in its own right, with seats for a man and a woman)—one that functions according to the broader male-female structure, while inflecting it with a more feminine aura. It does so, however, with the assumption, as in *Bangunnya* and in the Mataram dynasty's *Babad* history, that a masculine source of power will eventually enter the picture, imbuing it with a symbolic balance.

Conversely, in Gunung Kemukus, the above ritual site that was made into an official tourist destination by the New Order, pilgrims' performative mimicry of a legendary power couple is focused more closely on the identity of the male member, a rebellious fifteenth-century prince, *Pangeran* Samudro, whose tomb is located on a hilltop there.[12] In a related way, if we expand our category of supernatural films beyond those explicitly labeled horror, we will also find a loosely corresponding genre made up of *laga* (action) films in which male characters with extraordinary powers are generally the central figures. Similar to a ritual site like Kemukus, while readily identifiable as more typically masculine in their overall orientation (the heroes are usually shirtless, muscle-bound men of few words who are skilled in martial arts [fig. 32]), these films also invariably feature powerful female characters. Women are not the central focus yet are often shown to be as powerful as the male heroes and may defeat them repeatedly in fights. In *Si Buta Lawan Jaka Sembung* (*The Warrior and the Blind Swordsman*, dir. Dasri Yacob, 1983), for example, a gang of women under the leadership of a demigoddess named *Dewi* Magi (Sri Gudhi Sintara) offer continual challenges to the status of the male heroes. In fact, the men's lives are only spared in the end because *Dewi* Magi chooses to sacrifice herself. She and her gang are also shown to openly express sexual desire, often more so than the male characters.[13]

The most salient difference between the male-centric supernatural action films and the female-centric supernatural horror films appears to be that the former are normally set in the distant colonial or precolonial past. The latter almost always take place in the modern present.[14] The result is to frame magical or extramonotheistic

FIGURE 32. Poster for the 1983 supernatural action film *Si Buta Lawan Jaka Sembung* (*The Warrior and the Blind Swordsman*). Courtesy of KAFEIN.

spiritual power in men mainly as an "ancient" force associated with legends and mythologized colonial struggles in days of yore. In the bygone settings of these *film laga*, the use of magic by male and female actors alike (disappearing and reappearing, flying, shooting colored beams from limbs or eyes, etc.) does not raise eyebrows or cause shock as it does in modern settings, where such abilities are mainly associated with ghosts and horror. The heroic, magic fighting men in such films will also generally utter a few short phrases in Arabic now and then, establishing the presence of Islam as a component of their anticolonial struggles, but without worrying much over its contemporary status vis-à-vis enduring, pre-Islamic practices and beliefs.[15]

In comparing feminine supernatural horror to *film laga*, I contend that women in the former are positioned as better able to carry over magical, superhuman abilities and deploy them as disturbing, but ultimately much-needed, interventions in the present, especially during the New Order. As noted above, it appears that the somewhat heavier weighting on a dualist feminine power operative in the present is a calculated or reflexive response to the political makeup and needs of Indonesia under Soeharto. Films, like ritual sites, deftly juggle Islam, modern legal authority, prostitution, desire, legendary romance, and the potential for illicit or radical alliances between men and women, humans and ghosts, and at times partners of the same sex or gender. They assert that in most cases, it is a male partner who needs to be coaxed by a spirit to better understand and engage with the world as it "really" is. But the idea that things could be the other way around also continues to circulate in media and spiritual practice.

As in the films of the 1950s and 1960s analyzed in earlier chapters, the particular cinematic perspective that expands on the political economy of rituals is also contested along class lines. Especially in the case of 1980s supernatural horror and *film laga*, locally made films were frowned on as lowbrow embarrassments by elite critics (Imanjaya 2014; Sasono 2014). But like hybrid, and in some sense sordid, "Islamic" rituals that conjure Tantric and other "fragments" of the past through sex and prostitution, supernatural horror and action films were able to create strong economic bases that helped ensure the longevity of their messages. Two of the most iconic stars of these films, the above-mentioned Suzzanna and Barry Prima, were among the highest paid actors in Indonesian cinema at the time. The special effects used in many films, while not precisely in line with the global state of the art, were also often elaborate and visually impressive, as well as expensive. One might think of the imagery created with such effects (including hyperrealistic makeup and explosions, maggots crawling on rotting flesh, and flying heads and entrails, among others) as complex, cinematic "national icons" that connect and build on the similarly ubiquitous—and ambiguous, deconstructive—status of enduring figures like Ratu Kidul.

A REGIONAL PANTHEON OF NATIONAL-POLITICAL PHANTOMS AND SPIRIT DOUBLES

Indonesia is of course far from the only Southeast Asian country in which the transdiegetic, intermedial appearance of the supernatural is effective as a disruptor of modern conceptions such as absolute patriarchy and linear, future-oriented national time. Gazing at mythical-historical supernatural figures that transcend the space and time of the nation, audiences are also positioned to imagine connections across patchy bodies of *tanah air* (land-water) into other regional territories where similar politically, economically, and socially formative apparitions are known to appear. As Rosalind Galt argues, neighboring female spirits like the Malay *pontianak* have since at least the 1950s similarly thrown time "out of joint"