appear to have an important message and mission regarding the potential return of a "supreme patriarch."

THE THAI NEW WAVE, THE POSTMODERN, AND THE RECLAMATION OF AFFECT

While the particular political restructurings assembled around the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997–1998 differ throughout the region, the "networked" rise of democratic reform and powerful transnational corporations (and increasingly neoliberal understandings of political economic power) was a key issue taken up across many of the emergent, Southeast Asian cinematic "new waves." In Thailand, for example, a 1997 Crisis-related reworking of the national constitution was heralded as the most democratic version yet. IMF and World Bank strategies appeared poised to allow international investors and guarantors to take control of national finance via restructuring plans aimed at combating what was labeled, in familiar terms, a problem of "crony capitalism" that had led to the crash. The gist of the reforms and liberalization strategies was that "Thai capitalism was to be made more like Western capitalism" (Hewison 2005:311). The changes were largely approved by neoliberal, Western-aligned Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai, who came to power the same year as the crisis in 1997. A "short political honeymoon" (Hewison 2005:315) resulted, with initial support from the local business community.

But domestic financial leaders increasingly felt excluded from the deal, and as the economy continued its downward slide despite reforms, anger spread in Thailand against the new government, which was seen as complicit with Western financiers. The latter were perceived (mainly correctly) as seeking to create opportunities for themselves while ineffectively "saving" Thailand. As Rachel Harrison argues, the "distinct shift in Thai opinion vis-à-vis the West" quickly became inspiration for an emergent "new wave" of Thai filmmakers who addressed the shifts "with a certain humour, irony and rich social comment . . . open to the cultural complexities of the moment" (2006:328). Most of these emergent directors who began turning out feature films in 1997 had come from advertising, where they had honed their skills to an extent that separated them from new wave filmmakers elsewhere in the region.

Both technical-aesthetic prowess and humorous social commentary are demonstrated in a commercial directed in 1998 by Wisit Sasanatieng, one of the emergent commercial directors-cum-new wave filmmakers (Thevoideck 2010). Sasanatieng was also the screenwriter for *Antapan Krong Muang* (*Daeng Birley and the Young Gangsters*, dir. Nonzee Nimbutr, 1997).[8] Along with *Fun Bar Karaoke* (dir. Pen Ek Ratanaruang, 1997), *Antapan Krong Muang* is considered one of the first offerings of the Thai new wave. In Sasanatieng's advertisement, a Thai

boxer (Chartchai Ngamsan) gets into the ring with an American opponent at a crowded match in what appears to be Bangkok. When the bell rings, before the American can even throw a punch, the Thai contestant delivers a kick to the side of his head that sends the American's mouth guard flying and knocks him out. The local crowd appears both jubilant and aghast, staring after the young boxer, who trots casually out of the ring. The "kicker" comes just afterward, however, as the piece is revealed to be an ad for Wrangler jeans, finishing on a close-up of the Thai boxer's gleaming, satirically winking smile with the classically American cowboy–associated logo (spelled in cursive with a "rope" font that recalls a lasso) superimposed to his left.

The commercial was reportedly also a trial run for the look and lead actor Wisit planned for his upcoming feature *Fa Thalai Jone* (*Tears of the Black Tiger*, 2000) (Thevoideck 2010), another new wave classic that parodies the western/cowboy genre. *Fa Thalai Jone*, like the advertisement and Nonzee's *Antapan Krong Muang*, is set in the 1950s. Not coincidentally, all three look back to the era during which Thailand first came under the influence of the U.S., taking spectators "on a dizzying visual journey down Cold War memory lane" (Harrison 2024:337). Among other things, this "hard nostalgic" tour was positioned as a historically informed engagement with the present state of affairs leading up to and during the Asian Financial Crisis. Despite its status as an advertisement for an American company, the Wrangler piece showcases the new wave's emergent "pitch black humor" (Knee 2003:102), boldly juxtaposing the more dynamic and effective appearance of Thai kickboxing with American boxing (which forbids the use of kicks). In a contest with the West, it implies, Thailand would prevail by doing things its own way. According to Harrison, the early features of the Thai new wave similarly delivered a kick to the international film world, especially in the West. Both *Antapan Krong Muang* and *Fun Bar Karaoke* were also celebrated outside of Thailand in major film festivals, with the latter showing in Berlin. The former played in London to a "packed and rapturous audience at the epicentre" of England's film world (Harrison 2006:323). This touched off a trend in global travels and appreciation for Thai films that for Harrison functioned to showcase "amazing Thailand"—with avant-garde, yet slick, commercial aesthetics comparable to national campaigns to promote tourism—to the rest of the world. Both works also signaled what would be a pattern of young Thai filmmakers exploring the country's political and cinematic pasts (about which more below).

Perhaps not surprisingly, political currents appeared to be running in parallel to cinematic ones. Only a year later, in 1998, the Thai Rak Thai ("Thais Love Thais") Party was founded by Thaksin Shinawatra, a local mogul and former high-ranking police officer, its moniker implicitly opposing itself to the idea that the then-current Thai premiere was in bed with foreigners. Seeing the potential for domestic capital to make a comeback, Thai business leaders quickly got behind the party, which attracted nonelites with the idea of a "social contract" that would

financially support regular Thais and help them fund small businesses. A landslide electoral victory soon landed Thaksin as the new prime minister of Thailand in 2001, as he publicly positioned the managed development approaches of Singapore and Malaysia as models for Thailand, emphasizing domestically and regionally focused political economic strategies over Western ones (Hewison 2005:320).

While not doing so in exactly the same ways as Indonesia, Thailand, too, came up with a modified neoliberal reform plan that allowed "domestic capital . . . to seize the state" (Hewison 2005:312) while explicitly pledging support for the less fortunate in society. This led to a second landslide victory in 2005. Yet Thaksin, who Kevin Hewison argues was ultimately the leader of a "government by and for the rich," (320), was soon taking increasingly authoritarian steps to protect himself and ensure the success of various policies, some of which were controversial even with supporters. Thaksin was also accused of massive corruption for helping himself and his businesses to billions of untaxed dollars, and, recalling similar events in previous decades (see chapter 4), he was ousted by popular protests and a military coup in 2006. Although Thaksin fled Thailand in self-imposed exile, his wife, Yingluck, served as prime minister from 2011 to 2014, and his daughter, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, is the current leader, elected in 2024.

It was in this context that the first new wave of young filmmakers like Nonzee, Ratanaruang, and Wisit Sasanatieng began to grapple with the storm of radical changes beginning in 1997. They were followed by slightly younger and still-more-independent-minded filmmakers like Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Anocha Suwichakornpong, who were inspired and emboldened by the first new wave, especially in terms of the paths they opened at global festivals. As was the case in Indonesia, Thailand had gone through a decade of severely reduced cinema production beginning in the late 1980s, and upstarts like Nonzee were bent on revitalizing both the local industry and its typical aesthetic approaches and flourishes, which they saw as outdated. Like their Indonesian counterparts Garin Nugroho (whose interventions began in the early 1990s, making him a sort of founding new wave father figure), Riri Riza, Nan Achnas, Mira Lesmana, and Rizal Mantovani,[9] they did so primarily by looking *back* in time. Earlier trends in lowbrow Thai and regional popular cinemas from the 1950s through the 1970s were mined as the main sources for aesthetic renewal, forming a similar basic set of features through which contemporary, globally circulating trends and ideas could also be interpreted and repositioned.[10]

In some ways anticipating later shifts in Indonesia around 2016, young Bangkok cineastes reframed these older conventions as a new, "higher-quality" cinema aimed to attract larger, more diverse audiences and be appreciated by local elites rather than being looked down on as anachronistic. Many films succeeded in gaining traction on the global festival circuit, which heralded them—with Weerasethakul eventually at the forefront—as part of a new movement in Asian and non-Western art and "slow" cinemas. This has since become a steady trend

and multilayered opportunity for emerging Southeast Asian filmmakers who have gained exposure, appreciation, guidance, and, perhaps most crucially, funding, from festivals and related organizations in Europe, Asia and at times the U.S. In line with the arguments of this chapter, the biggest early hit of the Thai new wave was the 1999 *Nang Nak* (dir. Nimbutr 1999), which brought back the historically ubiquitous, eponymous female screen ghost and "national icon" to much local and global fanfare. Along with the 2004 hit *Chattoe: Kot Tit Winyan* (*Shutter: Press to Capture Ghosts*, a.k.a. *Shutter*, dir. Banjong Pisanthanakun and Parkpoom Wongpoom) and other films, *Nang Nak* helped to position Thailand with Japan as an early leader in the global spread of so-called Asian horror—a trend that also heavily influenced reformasi-era horror in Indonesia.

Radiating around the appearance of actual ghosts, the dense, jungle settings of many of Weerasethakul's early films also recall the landscapes most commonly featured in classic and contemporary Thai, Indonesian and Malaysian horror—especially pontianak films, which Rosalind Galt (2021) sees as the basis of what she calls "animism as form," an approach to cinema with its roots in regional aesthetic and spiritual epistemes. Drawn from the imagery of Thai 16 mm films of the 1950s and 1960s (at the time considered the pinnacle of abject backwardness by elite Thai critics), the ubiquitous foliage, red-eyed monkey ghosts, and simple, in-camera effects in Weerasethakul's 2010 *Loong Boonmee Raluek Chat* (*Uncle Boonmee Who Can Remember His Past Lives*), which was shot on 16 mm, were now placed on the highest global pedestal: *Uncle Boonmee* became the first ever Thai film to win the top prize at the Cannes film festival that year. In his acceptance speech, Weerasethakul explicitly positioned his film's victory in the context of Thai history by thanking "all the ghosts and spirits in Thailand that made this possible" (*Bangkok Post*, May 22, 2020).

Weerasethakul himself was born too late to have experienced regular, live-dubbed screenings, but he had watched older, 16 mm films on television growing up (*Bangkok Post*). For his contemporaries, as well, it appeared that the cinematic themes and figures of the past were not only seen as resonating with the contemporary but were inextricably linked to the hybrid local mechanisms and formats on which they had been presented in the past—the conventions and contexts that had embedded them in local cinematic history and lore. To the extent that technology allowed, these formats and forms were imported into contemporary cinema along with the ideas, ghosts, and plural symbolic orders that accompanied them. Toward the beginning of the fragmented and theatrical new wave movie *Hawan Yang Wan Yu* (*Bangkok Loco*, dir. Pornchai Hongrattanaporn, 2004), for example, the contents of a character's mind are magically projected on the wall. His first "memory" is an actual film, taken from an older, likely 16 mm, film version of the story of *nang* Nak. Tellingly, the mind-projection shows the scene where monks are extracting a disc from the skull of the female protagonist's corpse—a disc that, as we saw in chapter 5, will become a "vernacular" talisman and symbol of feminine agency that is embedded and passed down into the future of mainstream

patriarchal Theravada Thai Buddhism (and through films like *Nang Nak*, into the future of cinema).

In the context of *Bangkok Loco*, I suggest that the reference to *Nang Nak* also builds on the newer, 1999 version that helped spark the Thai new wave. Like *Nang Nak, Bangkok Loco* implies that it, too, will travel backward in time, taking up the conventions and temporality of older Thai and regional cinemas. Like many others at the time, the film is quite direct in its returns and references. It is set in the 1970s, and at one point in the narrative, one of the main characters, Bay (Krissada Terrence), finds himself employed as a live film dubber. This occurs in a spirited scene recalling the classical era of Thai 16 mm itinerant cinema, where a film truck sets up at a temple fair and the dubbers are in full view, constituting as much of an attraction as the film itself. Bay's obvious abilities, furthermore, are shown to be connected to the film's central premise, a fictionalized, Thai Buddhist style of percussion known as the Drums of the Gods. It is this mixture of "ancient" conventions and philosophies that the film positions satirically, but also in earnest and with great detail and flare, as a local source for Thai modernity and contemporary engagements with neoliberal globalization. As such, the God Drum techniques not only empower characters to master film dubbing but also 1970s Thai rock and roll, while inspiring visionary acumen for emergent business practices that will come to dominate the post-Crisis future of the early 2000s.

To master the ultimate, "10th level" of the God Drums, as instructed by an ancient parchment that emerges toward the film's end, requires something similar to the way "power couples" and regional cinematic ghosts express agency: an ability to embody, combine, or switch between masculine and feminine qualities and traits. With its vernacular Buddhist drum philosophy, *Bangkok Loco* humanizes and also further queers these ideas. The film concludes its narrative by investing such transcendent powers not in a ghost but in a mortal female character, Ton (Nountaka Warawanitchanoun), anticipating a pattern in regional supernatural films that followed *Warkop DKI Reborn* (see below). In this case, the combination of male and female traits is literal, and Ton is the recipient of genitals removed from Bay, the male character, which are surgically attached to her body.[11]

As she competes in a final duel with a foreign "Devil Drummer" who happens to be named Ringo Starr, her appearance now flickers between Bay's male body and her female one. The film's satirical intervention into the democratizing neoliberal present is capped with a character who is the spitting image of then–prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra: it is also the old, queer vernacular force of the God Drums, the film suggests, that lifted Thaksin out of a string of business failures. Randomly struck by lightning generated by the polysexual "Buddhism" of Ton's playing, the diegetic Thaksin emerges from the phone booth, holding the flaming receiver, which, like the castrated Bay, has been separated from its "cable." As the typical noise of cellular interference is added to the soundtrack (signaling the heterogeneity of time, since this is the 1970s), the letters *GSM* appear onscreen along

with a lightbulb above Thaksin's head. The imagery and sounds poke fun at the actual Thaksin's history of using his own and others' money to fund multiple failed business ventures. He, too, only succeeded years later with Advanced Info Service, a computer rental business that he parlayed into a cellular network. With the help of Thaksin's copious official connections (in line with the expansion of patronage networks), the company then received monopoly rights for twenty years for Thailand's new 900 MHz GSM network.

The shining democratic, increasingly patriarchal-nationalist and business-friendly future following the Asian Financial Crisis is hence linked by *Bangkok Loco* to the prime-minister-to-be's "crazy" partnership with an invisible but densely networked creative force. Doing so also connects the possibility of modern agency to a set of older, queerer Thai vernacular Buddhist conventions and values. The idea of political economic patronage is hence also made to overflow the role of patriarchy or heteronormativity in defining or exploiting it—patronage, or in this case domestic capital, is "democratized" for the neoliberal era in Southeast Asia, but not according to emergent, Western models. Alongside these interventions, and in line with other new wave offerings, the film reclaims the once-disgraced forms and approaches of local and regional cinematic pasts, repackaging and presenting them in ways that appealed to newer and bigger audiences, including global ones. But as the film—anticipating the fall of Thaksin by highlighting his bumbling, corrupt tendencies—also acknowledges, localization alone is not sufficient as a solution. *Bangkok Loco*'s trafficking in the nostalgic cinematic and political discourses of "Thais Love Thais" has raised the specters of gendered violence and corruption and, as we will see, has brought back the "ancient" danger of misinterpretation.

Even as the films of the Thai new wave have transcended localized, lower-class niches by traveling extensively to festivals, they have encountered another, ostensibly "higher" label: the loose global category of art film and the assumptions of critics regarding the applicability of postmodernist interpretation, which has gained currency alongside theories of neoliberalism (Harvey 2007:4). Certainly, films such as *Bangkok Loco* or the works of Weerasethakul or other new wave and independent Thai filmmakers might appear to engage in typically postmodern modes of representation, such as pastiche and the "spatialization" of multiple times in a single image or sequence—something that at first glance appears very similar to the horizonal, archipelagic convergences of distinct media, places, and times I have argued to be a key facet of regional cinemas. But in both cases, intermedial convergence constitutes a conscious engagement not only with history but with particular historical modes of representation that are not understood as either typically modernist or something that follows the failures of modernism. Building on the issue of hybridized, localized neoliberalism, this raises questions about whether the label *postmodernist* is misleading or a poor fit.

As Damian Sutton (2012) and Rachel Harrison (2007) argue, new wave director Wisit Sasanatieng's *Fa Thalai Jone* (*Tears of the Black Tiger*, 2000), which toured a number of prestigious European, Asian, and American festivals, "was firmly pigeonholed as an art-house film, to be viewed, reviewed and interpreted through a framework of irony and camp" (Sutton 2012:41). Yet for Sutton, such interpretations miss the point of work that is, in fact, a "period romp through Thai popular culture, drawing upon real and fictional histories, folk theatre and society" (42). Not unlike *Bangkok Loco, Tears of the Black Tiger* might appear to consist of a "hyperreal" collage of layers of playful but meaningless representation on top of further representations, with nothing material or meaningful at its core. It refers heavily to spaghetti westerns but even more so to Thai 16 mm action films of the 1960s, which most global festival audiences would be unfamiliar with. But Sutton contends that the many swirling referents in *Tears* are material and historical, and "the film is never far from a reminder that modernisation comes with a militarised face" (42). More specifically, it uses warnings about the dangers of Westernization and democratization imposed from without on a society with its own embedded problems of politics, gender, and class as a critique of the state of affairs in post-1998 Thailand.

To do so, Sutton argues, *Tears of the Black Tiger* genuinely, if still winkingly, engages various tropes and regional-global time-spaces instead of simply "pastiching" them (53). As I have shown throughout this book, from the beginning of processes of national development, the heterogeneous modernity of Indonesian, Thai, and other regional cinemas likewise works to avoid the postmodernist traps that Fredric Jameson (1991) and others argue that Western mass media (and non-Western after it) falls into, beginning in the mid-twentieth century. The continuation of regional, archipelagic aesthetics into the postreform present, I argue, does not simply allude to paradoxes, the inevitable failures of modernism, and global democracies that are inseparable from the negative effects of neoliberalism. Rather, as I argued in the case of *Bernafas Dalam Kubur*, regional films work to symbolize, and hence represent, the allegedly unfathomable, ghostly, fragmented, networked realities of domestic and global political economy. Through their shifting-but-recognizable images, representation remains an absurdly scattered, porous, and self-referential endeavor that is also, at its best, resonant with a particular (usually local or regional) set of experiences. Especially with the rise of global streaming services, such films thus communicate things that certain audiences are better positioned to grasp but that others now increasingly look on and wonder about (and at times misinterpret).

In contradistinction, what Jameson terms the postmodern "waning of affect" is signaled by the work of artists like Andy Warhol. Warhol's quirky embrace of commercialization, Jameson argues, highlights and simultaneously furthers the global, mass-market dehumanization of individual subjects, especially in its focus on "stars—like Marilyn Monroe—who are themselves commodified and transformed

into their own images" (Jameson 1991:11). This aligns with Harvey's idea that neoliberal markets function as "guides" for human ethics and behavior, "substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs" (2007:3). But if Southeast Asian media has gone through similar processes, the results are in many cases quite different. The supranational iconicity of Suzzanna or nang Nak, for example, anchors regional filmmakers in older processes of commodification and confrontation with depersonalized, spectral images that circulate widely but retain a sense of their own history, place, and purpose (for example, shadow play). In the present, undead, immortalized figures like Suzzanna are made reproducible through digital means but crucially also through sublation with regional deities and myths that have carried across numerous historical shifts in media technology. The means of their iconization and commodification therefore do not simply indicate a detached, postmodern present or future with no real past. Nor do they spell the waning of the possibility of affective, emotional investment in films or other media.

Such icons, I argue, point backward and forward at the same time, emanating an accrued historicity and materiality—one paradoxically not unlike the "aura" that Walter Benjamin (1968) insisted was destroyed by cinematic and other emergent modes of representation. Watching a supernatural film, like attending a ritual, challenges viewers' "immunity" to the images and worlds on the screen, along with the phantoms and human-spirit partnerships that inhabit them. As in heterodox local rituals, cinema viewers are positioned as participants and facilitated to identify or mimetically embody an iconic, venerated "power couple" that has, across time and various media, become "democratized" and accessible to ordinary men and women in a regionally specific sense (Gottowik 2018:404). Yet I contend that this occurs without the images (or pilgrim-spectators with them) losing the material bases of their meaning and power, which remain embedded in temples, palaces, and other actual locales. The layers of meaning, referentiality, and experience these intermedial exchanges produce envelop and ground the processes by which commodification occurs in specific local and regional histories. In a similar way, Daromir Rudnyckyj argues that the expansion of spirituality and religiosity in various ways after the fall of Soeharto has led to an increased production of "spirituality as an object of intervention"—one that, as we have seen, can be either progressive or conservative in its intent and effects. "The inculca[tion of] . . . Islamic ethics in combination with western management knowledge" is conceived as a broad-based solution to the problems of linking decisions and culture exclusively to "ahistorical" market forces (Rudnyckyj 2009:132).

In the context of such neoliberal "spiritual economies," instead of announcing the "waning of affect" or the "crisis of historicity," I argue that sundel bolong, nang Nak, the pontianak, and their mediatized spiritual conspirators reanimate the past without a stultifying, detached sense of nostalgia. Such ghosts and deities engage, and potentially indoctrinate, leaders, spectators, and ritual-goers with a complex and at times sorrowful, but also pleasurably deep, historical view. Emotional affect

and desire are not made to disappear; they are reinstated via extended relations between humans and various icons and specters. These invest the present with the actual times and places (and practices) associated with ghosts and deities and their past and future existences. Building on my analysis in chapter 5, I compare this to what Arnika Fuhrmann calls a radical "sexual contemporaneity" in the context of Thailand—a convention and mode of relation that is likewise activated across films and vernacular Buddhist rituals. While in some instances, the connection of dissimilar beings and times takes the form of relationships with ghosts, in others, it is produced by complex attachments and modes of illicit desire between particular groups of humans—attractions that are, in the view of mainstream patriarchal Thai Buddhism, "broadly . . . counternormative or as yet impossible" (Fuhrmann 2016:13).

Looking especially at the films of Weerasethakul, Fuhrmann focuses on how alternative, syncretic or vernacular Buddhist concepts are deployed to express and insist on the viability of queer desire and sexuality—something that has also become more directly visible in the era of postcrisis regional reform but bears its own strong connections to the past. Here again, localized, historically embedded concepts are deployed to circumvent certain effects of globalized liberal discourse in terms of how it frames the rights or needs of Thai or regional subjects, especially nonheteronormative ones. For Fuhrmann, new wave Thai cinema, which is also characterized by increasing numbers of female and openly nonheteronormative filmmakers, "deploys Buddhist tropes, stories, and images to move queerness beyond binary notions of liberalism and illiberalism" (2016:10). These localized approaches to representation, she argues, are better adapted to the historical pathways of desire between queer Thai subjects. One reason is that they work to implicitly problematize and deconstruct contemporary global binaries of repression versus the potential "reduction of a Thai queer imaginary to a standard liberal frame of policy-oriented activism" (9). Building on Fuhrmann's work, I argue that despite a complex and variable set of challenges, emerging filmmakers throughout the region have turned to face the neoliberal, postmodern present in distinct but related ways: by reclaiming and adapting the feelings and values associated with "bad," "backward," or "lowbrow" historical forms of representation—locally rooted but regionally networked forms that elite, modernizing, and liberalizing nationalists once sought to do away with for good.

With the rise of more fragmented, yet expanded, spiritual economies and sexual and spectral contemporaneity, the ideas and practices that constitute the regional spheres of business, politics, and "the people" are linked, often via affect, in more concerted, and at times open, ways. In this sense, there now appears to be a potential for greater "agreement," at least on basic conceptual and methodological levels, between these disparate areas and interests. At the same time, films highlighting the interconnection of such distinct spheres using ghosts or queer power couples to realize "as of yet impossible" rights, desires and emotional connections are on the rise, asserting the continued existence of numerous problems

and inequities. Such films have also begun to circulate much more globally than in the past, as they have moved from greater festival exposure onto the world's rapidly expanding digital streaming networks. Indonesia has emerged in the last few years as the strongest presence on services like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney Hotstar (among many other locally and regionally based streamers). But the increased global presence of Southeast Asian films in both art-independent and commercial platforms, and the various archipelagic models, symbols, and invectives they deploy in the name of reclaiming (or simply activating or elongating) affect, is a demonstrably regional phenomenon.

REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURES AND THE EXPANSION OF ARCHIPELAGIC IMAGINATIONS

Outside of Thailand and Indonesia, Gaik Cheng Khoo (2006) sees middle-class independent filmmakers in 1990s and early 2000s Kuala Lumpur using cinema to negotiate problems that are basically similar. Instead of national-patriarchal interpretations of Buddhism, new wave Malaysian cineastes face rigid, top-down interpretations of Islam, often even more so than their Indonesian counterparts. In ways that roughly reflect official Theravada values in Thailand, these Muslim ideals are positioned as the basis for a rationalist-modernist and, especially in Malaysia, ethnonationalist ideology—one that arose in the 1950s and has been increasingly enforced by the government and Malay elites since the 1970s and 1980s. As in Indonesia, "spiritual economies" in Malaysia have become a much more visible force since the early 2000s, but they are more conspicuously driven by religious conservatism, with far fewer prominent movements deploying spiritual inclusivity or localized versions of Islam to balance it out.

As Khoo argues, however, young Malaysian filmmakers in the postreform period have used their work to imagine and push for a more visible presence of local and regional syncretisms. In their films, "modernity facilitates the conscious and unconscious recuperation of *adat*" (Khoo 2006:4), a set of hybrid, often animist-derived, Malay values and customs that predate the arrival of both Islam and Western colonialism in the region. In spite of the fact that conservative nationalists inaccurately tar them as Westernized liberals, Malaysian new wave filmmakers like Yasmin Ahmad, Amir Mohammad, Tan Chui Mui, James Lee, U-Wei Haji Saari, and others strove to avoid a simple recourse to typically empty, postmodern image economies or to neoliberal, globalizing discourses of repression vs. activism. Their approaches reflect thematic and stylistic patterns that are well established in Malaysian history and that I suggest are similar to forms of representation recouped by young regional filmmakers elsewhere in the region around the same time. For Khoo, emergent Malaysian cineastes' strategy of looking backward and "reclaiming *adat*" after the Asian Financial Crisis was similarly accomplished "through a focus on sexuality or a return to forms of the archaic such as magic