

NOTES

PROLOGUE

1. In a similar vein, Philippa Lovatt explores how cinematic sound and associated “regimes of listening” in contemporary Southeast Asia describe and inscribe an archipelagic imagination, pointing to “how under-the-radar frequencies disrupt regimes of listening associated with empire and the nation-state” (2021:177).

2. As Armes puts it, “the national film industries of most of the countries of East and Southeast Asia are virtually unknown in the West, so only the barest sketch can be offered here” (1987:135). Armes’s summary of Southeast Asian cinema histories is indeed a bare sketch and in the end offers nothing to support his prominent positioning and application of Vatsyayan’s ideas about Southeast Asian and Indian arts to the study of cinema. Instead, in seeming opposition to Vatsyayan, Armes mainly reports on what he sees as instances of American cinematic influence in various places and times in Southeast Asia. Adding to the confusion, local films that for Armes do *not* seem to imitate the West are generally dismissed as functioning “on a very primitive level” (149). I look further at Shohat’s and Stam’s work in chapter 1.

3. See, e.g., Driskell (2022); Khoo, Barker, and Ainslie (2020); Lim and Yamamoto (2012); Ingawanij and McKay (2012); and Baumgärtel (2012). The only comparative, single-author monograph among these recent studies is Sim (2020). While there are certain connections to this work, the selection of films is highly idiosyncratic, and comparisons are rarely made between films of different Southeast Asian nations that were produced in the same era. This makes for a difficult time establishing the kinds of regional patterns that my own book explores. Gonzaga (2024) is probably the work that is closest in scope and methodology to what I engage in here. Although it engages with only two Southeast Asian cities, Manila and Singapore, its focus on the convergence of different media and how markets affect, among other things, cinematic exhibition and audience expectations over the course of several decades makes it a companion and late inspiration for this work.

4. See Lovatt and Trice (2021b); the special section comprising authors Lovatt and Trice (2021a); Campos (2021); Lovatt (2021); Chulphongsathorn (2021); Trice (2021); and Yngveson (2021).

5. See, e.g., Andaya (2007); Galt (2021); Karim (1995); King and Wilder (2003); Ong and Peletz (1995); Poedjosoedarmo (1983); Roces (2022); and Wieringa (1997).

6. See, e.g., Soedjatmoko, Resink, and Kahin (1965). Of particular interest are Soedjatmoko (1965) and C. C. Berg (1965).

7. The film premiered at the Documentary Film Festival in Yogyakarta and the Malaysian International Film Festival and played in regional and global festivals, as well as at academic events and conferences. It opened online with a thirty-day run on Mubi.

1. "CULTURE BOUND" AESTHETICS AND ARCHIPELAGIC FORM

1. Usmar Ismail is considered one of the founders of native filmmaking in Indonesia and is often referred to as the "father" of Indonesian cinema. He was also an accomplished essayist, reporter, translator, and maker of theater. He worked prolifically from the late 1940s until his early death in 1970 at the age of forty nine, writing, directing, and producing numerous popular films in various genres, mostly through his own production company, Perfini. He also occasionally worked in Malaysia under a pseudonym, highlighting the fluid, supranational exchanges that I argue define regional cinemas.

2. As Umi Lestari (2020) suggests, the *mise-en-scène* in *Lewat Djam Malam*, especially the clippings pasted on Laila's walls, was likely inspired by similar arrangements in previous films such as *Terimalah Laguku* (*Please Accept My Song*, dir. Djadoeg Djajakusuma, 1952), *Enam Djam di Jogja* (*Six Hours in Djogja*, dir. Usmar Ismail, 1951), and *Embung* (*Dewdrop*, dir. Djadoeg Djajakusuma, 1952). All of these were produced by Usmar Ismail's company, Perfini, and featured Basoeki Resobowo as art director. In Lestari's reading, the use of newspapers glued onto walls in those films signified the lack of other, more costly decorations, conjuring the typically poor living conditions of the "little people" or lower classes at the time (2020:334). Chalid Arifin, the art director of *Lewat Djam Malam*, had previously worked as Resobowo's assistant. For Lestari, in *Lewat Djam Malam* as in Arifin's previous work with Resobowo, newspapers pasted on walls not only signify lower-class spaces but also indicate the kind of decorations often used in real and cinematic spaces where prostitutes conducted their business (336). While this is certainly the case, what I argue distinguishes *Lewat Djam Malam* from those earlier works is the sense of choice conveyed by numerous scenes in which Laila is shown selecting particularly meaningful images with which to adorn her walls. By contrast, in *Terimalah Laguku*, for example, the walls of certain rooms are simply covered with entire sheets of newspaper from floor to ceiling, without giving the sense that any curation of content or choice of particular symbols has occurred.

3. Indonesia, or the Dutch East Indies as it was often called under colonial rule, was only made an official colony of the Netherlands in the early nineteenth century. But a high level of Dutch influence was established earlier, after the Dutch East India Corporation (VOC) began making trade incursions in the early seventeenth century (following Portuguese and British trade-based incursions into the "spice islands"), gradually using a combination of economic, political, and military means to increase its control over the production of

the spices its business was premised on extracting and exporting to Europe. Only when competition from other European corporations and unstable prices bankrupted the VOC in 1799 did the Netherlands' government step in to officialize the relationship as a colonial one. This met with staunch resistance and several years of war, especially on Java, which was then as now politically and economically important to the archipelago around it. By 1830, Dutch colonial power was fully established. For further information on modern Indonesian history and independence, see Ricklefs (2008b); Reid (2011); and Purwanto et al. (2023).

4. Akup (1932–91) grew up in Malang, East Java. He was hired by Usmar Ismail's Perfini company as an assistant director in 1952. Following the success of his first feature, *Heboh* (*Sensational*), in 1954, and further stints as unit manager and production coordinator on films directed by Ismail, he was given the opportunity to write and direct *Djuara 1960* (1960 *Champion*, 1956) and *Tiga Buronan*. Both films were profitable (*Tempo* 1974:45), but it was with *Tiga Buronan*, an acclaimed hit, that Akup truly demonstrated a knack for negotiating the prickly borders between a critical cinematic politics of "Indonesianness" and success at the box office, in this case through a penchant for humor. He continued making popular films, mostly comedy-dramas, until his death at age fifty-nine. For more information, see <http://filmindonesia.or.id/>.

5. The psychiatric term "culture bound syndrome" refers to "disorders" that are believed to occur exclusively in certain geographic areas. Latah has been most closely studied in Indonesia and Malaysia but is also noted as frequently occurring in Thailand, Myanmar, and the Philippines, where the same behavior pattern is given locally specific names. While latah and a number of other culture-bound syndromes are categorized within a class of neuropsychiatric illnesses loosely related to Tourette's syndrome and obsessive-compulsive disorder, cultural psychiatrist Ronald Simons (2001:2) also reminds us that "in actuality . . . many are not syndromes at all. Instead, they are local ways of explaining any of a wide assortment of misfortunes."

6. Likewise, the film and popular culture magazine *Varia Baru* (*New Varia*) refers to the advent of "masa latah film Indonesia" (the latah era of Indonesian film); see *Varia Baru*, Dec. 20, 1970, 10.

7. Until 1963, much of what is now Malaysia was referred to as Malaya, including during British colonization prior to 1957. Singapore was part of both Malaya and the earliest iteration of Malaysia until Malaysia and Singapore split into separate republics in 1965.

8. The targeting of song and dance in this case is not random. *Tiga Buronan* was Akup's third film for Perfini. Akup was initially hired in 1952 as an assistant director, a position he continued to play on films directed by Ismail until *Tiga Buronan*. He was therefore closely involved in the production of Ismail's *Tiga Dara* (*Three Sisters*, 1956), a hit musical that saved Perfini from impending bankruptcy. Despite the film's success, however, Ismail privately expressed his embarrassment at *Tiga Dara*'s populist style (see chapter 3), which was intended to compete with the Malayan, Philippine, Indian, and Hollywood imports then flooding Indonesia's screens and was filled throughout with song-and-dance numbers. According to one of his colleagues, Ismail found it difficult "to accept the reality that he had been *forced* to make such a film" (Said 1991:57, emphasis added). Akup, known as a keen observer who mined real-life situations for comedic episodes in his films, appears to have turned Ismail's sense of compulsion into a more lighthearted approach to market-based formal prescription and mimicry in *Tiga Buronan*.

9. In this children's film, a ten-year-old's dream transports him into a cardboard cutout version of an Old West ranch. Sporting spurs and a ten-gallon hat, he emits a warbling, idiotic yodel and crosses his eyes. The scene also includes wooden horses that move on mechanical tracks and a shoot-out and peace-pipe reunion with another child, who is dressed in stereotypical Native American costume.

10. Akup's 1974 hit *Koboi Cengeng* (*Crybaby Cowboy*) develops his earlier ideas further, using the dissonance produced by applying stereotypical tropes of westerns to an entire film set in 1970s Indonesia as the main source of humor. In the decade following *Koboi Cengeng*, at least eight similarly themed western spoofs were released (including Akup's *Koboi Cilik* [*Little Cowboy*, 1977] and *Koboi Sutra Ungu* [*Purple Silk Cowboy*, 1981]), leading Hanan to speculate that with *Tiga Buronan*, Akup had innovated an entire Indonesian subgenre (2017:135–36). As I elaborate below, these regional variants also bear a certain resemblance to contemporary American western spoofs like Frank Tashlin's 1952 genre-bending comedy *Son of Paleface*, although with a critical difference in how the Southeast Asian films pointedly refuse to wrap things up at the end.

11. See chapter 2 for a more sustained engagement with Hansen's work and her concept of cinema as "vernacular modernism."

12. I build on David Hanan's (2009, 2017) analyses of classical Indonesian cinema as continuing to adapt and expand local traditions of representation, satire, and political engagement that extend back into local, precolonial modes of art and performance such as Javanese *wayang kulit* (shadow play).

13. See, e.g., Ismail (1983:96–98); Said (1991:59–75); and Sen (1994:41).

14. Gunning's (1986) formulation of an "exhibitionist" "cinema of attractions" in pre-1908 Europe and the U.S., before mainstream Western films became fixated on immersive, feature-length narratives. The clear difference is that Thai versioning took place during a completely different, and much longer historical period, and was not an obvious precursor to a more formally unified cinematic style. While typical film running times during the cinema of attractions were from three to fifteen minutes, Thai versioned films were generally feature length. The breakdown or nonvalidity of classical cinematic space and time in Thai versioning also did not preclude the ability for films to convey complex narratives. Here there appears to be an ability among viewers to concentrate on numerous stimuli at once without losing the thread of the story or feeling that the images onscreen have been denuded of their authenticity or naturality. Clearly, visuals are constructed and faked in numerous ways, but this only adds to their allure.

15. Although not consistent, there are notable instances in which the localized approach to film *was* referred to as classical or "classic," as in critic Sitor Situmorang's review of *Tarmina* (1954, dir. Sudjio) in the newspaper *Dunia Film* (*Film World*); see Situmorang (1955b).

16. Describing the relationship of the "makeshift" Thai popular apparatus to more mainstream global forms of cinema, Ingawanij draws on Francesco Casetti's (2015) application of Giorgio Agamben's "profanation" to film.

2. THE EMERGENCE OF ARCHIPELAGIC AESTHETICS

1. Krishna Sen, for example, has argued across several different analyses of Indonesian cinema history that Ismail and others in his camp were "deeply influenced by Hollywood cinema and consciously modeled their work on it" (1994:151). Because Ismail was

“enthralled by Hollywood” (Sen 2015:2), she suggests elsewhere, he and his films were also beacons of “liberal-democratic politics” (2003:151).

2. See, e.g., Armijn Pané (1953); Bienvenido Lumbera (1984, 2011); Tan Sooi Beng (1995); Misbach Yusa Biran (2008); Matthew Cohen (2006); Hassan Muthalib (2013); and May Ingawanij (2012, 2018).

3. As Tan Sooi Beng (1989:231–32) points out, the use of terms like *komedie* and *opera* was influenced by the regional popularity of vaudeville and also Chinese operas at the time.

4. See, e.g., Cohen (2006:232–33); Hatley (1979:4); and Pané (1953:30).

5. Nugroho and Herlina (2015:27–31) and Biran (2008), for example, list localized Javanese vernacular theaters like *ketoprak* and *ludruk*, along with regional forms like *sandi-wara*, as influences on Indonesian filmmakers, although they do not explain the specific formal or stylistic elements that emerged as a result of the influence.

6. See Pané (1953); Cohen (2006); Muthalib (2013); and Ingawanij (2012, 2018).

7. See, e.g., Pané (1953:30); and Ruppin (2016:7).

8. Echoing Thai scholars, Muthalib claims as classical the basic approach to cinema taken by the majority of early Malayan films, despite their clear discrepancies with the global conception of classical cinema set by Hollywood.

9. The political history of Singapore as a key locale for the production of cinema only adds to the sense of fragmentation around ideals of national unity in the region: Singapore gained independence separately from Malaya in 1959, after which it became part of the new federation of Malaysia in 1963. Only two years later, however, it separated again, becoming the independent city-state it has been known as since, a move that had lasting effects on the Malaysian film industry.

10. Ironically, it was the new, literate, script-memorizing players who were known as “amateurs,” while established actors trained in improvisation were called “professionals” (Tan 1993:52).

11. Even more so than in Indonesia, which also had a number of transnational players involved in filmmaking at the time, Singapore studios in the 1950s employed experienced directors, screenwriters, and cinematographers from India and the Philippines. Like India, the Philippines had established film studios in the 1930s, earlier than much of the rest of the region, and Filipino filmmakers were seen as having more experience at the time. See Galt (2021).

12. See Salim Said (1991:42–43, 57); Tanete Pong Masak (2016:286–89); and Adrian Jonathan Pasaribu (2020). Both Said and Masak claim that *Lewat Djam Malam* was a commercial success, while Pasaribu calls it a “minor box-office hit” that was “ultimately deemed too intellectual,” the result of which was that “Ismail’s potential audience dwindled to a few thousand” (n.p.). Misbach Yusa Biran claims that in 1954, Perfini was “entering a time of crisis because their quality films [which implicitly includes *Lewat Djam Malam*] weren’t getting big enough audiences” (2008:85). A table in Masak shows the film in a weak fourth position among Indonesian movies released around the same time in a key city. More tellingly still, it lagged far behind the Indonesian box-office numbers of Singapore-produced Malay films, which sold between three and ten times the number of tickets as *Lewat Djam Malam* (Masak 2016:432). All three scholars agree that after *Lewat Djam Malam*, Ismail’s Perfini was in deep financial trouble.

13. Siagian’s youngest daughter, Bunga, told me (August 18, 2016, in Jakarta) that her father had often described his films as explicitly drawing on Hollywood conventions.

14. See Sen (1994); Said (1991); and Masak (2016).
15. See Barnard (2005, 2009); Galt (2021); and Tan (1989, 1993).

3. ARCHIPELAGIC MODERNISM AND TRADITIONS OF GENDER

1. As I noted in chapter 2, Jason McGrath has argued that interwar leftist filmmakers in Shanghai were intentionally “jumpy” and critical of classical Hollywood naturalism in their formal approaches, while also deploying certain established American and European tropes or narrative arcs to attract more viewers (2023:105). As Ben Singer shows, throughout much of its history, Japanese cinema is well established as deploying narratively extraneous, stylistic “flourishes,” although to what extent these make Japanese films qualitatively “nonrealist” or distinct from Western classical approaches is up for debate (2014:55–56). As I take up in more detail below, during the American occupation (1945–52) after Japan’s loss to Allied forces in World War II (shortly after the interwar period that Hansen mainly refers to), its gender representation also shifted radically as locally made films were aligned with the U.S. drive to promote democracy and Western-style ideals of “freedom” (Saito 2014:329).

2. Based on studies in Indonesia of Achenese, Javanese, and Minang societies, for example, Nancy Tanner argues that “the structural features [of matrifocality] include women’s important economic roles, women’s extensive participation in decision making, and a residential pattern that enhances ties among kinswomen” (Tanner 1974:143). The idea of matrifocality is normally applied to groups that are not matrilineal or matriarchal, where women’s dominant positions are generally uncontested. As in Tanner’s study, however, it has been applied to the Minangkabau of Western Sumatra, Indonesia. The Minangkabau, a group with outsized representation among Indonesia’s early national modernist artists and filmmakers, are matrilineal but have gone through processes of patriarchalization beginning in the mid-twentieth century.

3. See Andaya (2007); Hanan (2017:248–58); Karim (1995); King and Wilder (2003); Ong and Peletz (1995); and Roces (2022).

4. At the very end of *Ibu Mertuaku*, seeing that Kassim has blinded himself again (and more important, perhaps, realizing he knows she lied to him), Mansoor suddenly repents, crying hysterically and begging his forgiveness. This shift, however, appears as a forced, unnatural “resolution” that is completely out of character with Mansoor as we have seen her throughout the film—as a woman whose confidence in her power and outlook is unshakable. It also does nothing to change the tragic ending of the narrative, since Kassim has already blinded himself and is not hindered in his decision to disappear from the lives of his son and ex-wife.

5. As I take up in more detail below, a similar example can be found in Filipino cineaste Lamberto Avellana’s *Anak Dalita* (*Child of Sorrow*, 1956), produced the same year as *Tiga Dara*.

6. Similar political and often ethnonationalist divisions were raising their heads in Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and elsewhere, often causing major schisms and even bloodshed but generally without actual geopolitical division of territories. As in Malaysia, the role of communist parties and other leftist factions (and increasingly staunch opposition to them) was also on the rise, showcasing local engagements with, and interpretations of, the encroachment of global cold war politics. Separatist provinces and groups also challenged the sanctity of the new, vulnerable national borders that had been inherited from defeated postwar colonial parceling.

7. Further examples of radically gendered Western or non-Western films can almost certainly be found; my point is that they are likely to be formally or narratively unusual in the context of the mainstream or alternative cinemas in which they are embedded or possibly also juxtaposed against.

8. Even then, as Hansen shows, many of the earliest stage- and screen-women were of mixed-race backgrounds. The general perception of such women as “foreign” was used to justify their flaunting local mores governing women’s public appearance. But at the same time, like the cross-dressing male actors who preceded them, they were often prized for their ability to performatively embody a pure “Indianness” and ideal femininity (1999:141–43).

9. Beginning in the nineteenth century, the strong matrifocal and matrilineal customs and legal systems of the Minangkabau were increasingly subject to debate, at times becoming the source of violent conflict (Wieringa 1997:246–47). At stake were precisely women’s inheritance rights and the economic power based on them, both of which provided a platform for the Minangkabau’s combination of strict adherence to Islam with “an egalitarian ideology and a strong belief in democracy” based in female leadership with significant male participation (1997:243). In this context, both P. Ramlee (the director of *Ibu Mertuaku*) and Usmar Ismail (the director of *Tiga Dara*) are descended from Minang families (Ramlee was raised in Malaysia in a Minang community. Ismail was born in Bukittinggi, West Sumatra, a center of Minang society, after which he moved to Java for his higher education).

10. Sanchai Chotirosseranee, deputy director of the Thai Film Archive, personal communication via email.

4. SIGNATURES OF THE INVISIBLE

1. As I discuss in chapter 5, the semi-illicit spectator interactions in these old movie theaters also mirror the performance of politicized, spiritual sex acts at certain ritual locales dedicated to the memory of various legendary “power couples.” These sites and their basis in the human-spirit relations that define such power couples also resonate with the mortal-spectral romances and the supernatural political powers they generate in popular horror films of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

2. In Indonesia, for example, as Sen and Hill show, censorship guidelines instated in the 1970s had “only one direct reference to sex in its list of twenty-four criteria for banning or cutting films” (2000:141). Only in 1981 did regulations emerge where characters committing crimes or immoral acts would have to be shown to be punished in the end, meaning that throughout the 1970s, there were significant loopholes for indirect critique through figures whose identities, while only indirectly political, nonetheless made them read as subversive.

3. Because the situation in Malaysia and Singapore was so different during this period, I have mainly excluded them from comparative analysis in this chapter. As detailed in the previous chapters, after Malaysia’s split with Singapore in 1965, film industries in both places experienced extreme lulls in production lasting until the late 1970s and beyond in the case of Singapore—precisely the opposite of what happened in the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia. In Malaysia, 95 percent of the films shown on local screens throughout the 1970s, for example, were foreign. Ethnic Malays often watched Indonesian films, and ethnic Chinese and Indians enjoyed imported fare in their own respective languages (mainly in Mandarin, Cantonese, Tamil, and Hindi, often with subtitles in English, Malay, or other Chinese dialects) (Frymus 2022:59–67).

4. For more on the killings, their aftermath, and the events leading up to them, including the imbrication of art and artists in the politics of the time, see, for example, Larasati (2013), Wieringa (2002), Roosa (2006, 2020), Robinson (1995), and Wardaya (2007).

5. See, e.g., Barker (2011) and Sen (1994, 2003, 2015).

6. Ever the poet, for “knee,” Sani choses the word *lutut*, which also means to kneel or bow to authority, instead of the more common *dengkul*. I translated from the line “menggaruk kepala, sedangkan kita tahu betul yang gatal itu lutut.” It is taken from the August 2, 1967, essay “Semua Hipokrisi Harus Puna” (All hypocrisy must pass) in the daily *Harian Kami*.

7. It is interesting that only in the late 1960s does Sani’s view of Indonesia begin to come into closer alignment with that of Benedict Anderson (1983), who argues that from the beginning of nationalism in the nineteenth century, Southeast Asian nations have been imagined as communities that move in unison according to the dictates of mass media, developing “calendrically” in “homogeneous empty time.” Sani’s view of the later onset of “empty time” is also far more openly negative than Anderson’s.

8. In light of regional traditions of positioning women in ways that most spectators could identify with in a “nonpathological” manner, I distinguish this from the uncomfortable or “forced” condition Laura Mulvey calls “transvestite” identification. Mulvey’s term denotes what she argues is the only relation available to female spectators in the masculine-centered classical cinematic system, which mimics dominant patterns of identification in society: “for women (from childhood onwards) trans-sex identification is a habit that very easily becomes second nature. However, this Nature does not sit easily and shifts restlessly in its borrowed transvestite clothes” (1989:33). While refusing to draw broader conclusions about gender and representation, from his analysis of three films produced under the New Order (two of which deal with forms of prostitution), David Hanan likewise suggests that the films are “significantly different in the way that they represent women, from what is found in mainstream patriarchal cinema elsewhere” (2017:253).

9. For Deleuze, one of the most important examples of this crisis was the emergence of Italian neorealism after the Second World War. Films such as *Ladri di Bicilette* (*The Bicycle Thieves*, dir. Vittorio De Sica, 1948) and *Umberto D* (dir. Vittorio De Sica, 1952) employed lengthy tracking shots of the postwar poor wandering through the ruined outskirts of Rome.

10. In Indonesia, where inherited family names are not the norm, changing one’s name is fairly common and legally uncomplicated. The Name-of-the-Father, which for Lacan functions as a symbolic foundation of male authority across generations, is hence more or less inoperative.

11. *Rear Window* is one of Laura Mulvey’s (1975) main examples of how classical Hollywood films construct a dominant “male gaze” that implicates spectators in objectifying passive women.

12. See, e.g., Joel (2008); Tolentino (2012); Espiritu (2017); and Diaz (2021).

5. MONSTROUS FEMININE SUPERHEROES

1. The spread of Hinduism or Hinduized concepts in the Philippines is generally believed to have been indirect, occurring mainly through contact with the Sriwijaya and Majapahit empires in Sumatra and Java, respectively, between the seventh and fourteenth centuries. Systems of writing based in India were also in use in certain parts of the Philippines prior to Spanish colonization, which began in the fifteenth century. See, e.g., Evangelista (1965).

2. For a more detailed analysis and ethnographic description of this ritual, see Yngveson (2016:89–126).

3. On the rituals at Parangkusumo and their official and socially based rules, see, e.g., Gottowik (2018, 2020); and Smith and Woodward (2016).

4. See, e.g., Florida (1992); Jordaan (1984, 1997); and Resink (1997).

5. The dynasty's third king took the more overtly Islamic title of sultan. In the eighteenth century, Mataram split into two factions: the Sunanate of Surakarta and the Sultanate of Yogyakarta. Both are still active in the present, and the sultan of Yogyakarta still serves as the unelected governor of the city and the large and sociopolitically influential region surrounding it.

6. See, e.g., Hefner (2011); Gottowik (2020); Ricklefs (2008a); and Weng (2017).

7. The room was set aside after the hotel's disastrous beachside opening ceremony in which President Soekarno and various other luminaries present were drenched by a sudden wave that also wrecked the new hotel's dining area. Locals said the wave was caused by the hotel's refusal to give offerings to Ratu Kidul to ensure the success of the ceremony and hotel, which borders her ocean territory (Strassler 2014:111). Even now, filmmakers around Yogyakarta are also sensitive to the issue of spirit portrayal without ritual permission. As contemporary writer-director Makbul Mubarak explained at a question-and-answer session for the screening of his short film *Ruah* (*The Malediction*, 2016) in 2018, his original intention to prominently feature a painting of Ratu Kidul in the film was strongly objected to by his local collaborators (Mubarak is originally from Sulawesi). To his surprise, they were not joking when they said they felt it would be too "risky" to portray the queen without proper permission. Rather than going through the potentially elaborate rituals to get permission, he changed the painting to one that roughly resembles the queen. This involved shifting the main color of her costume to purple from the typical green, which is known as the queen's favorite color.

8. In the recent documentary *Suzzanna: The Queen of Black Magic* (dir. David Gregory, 2024), Suzzanna's role in her films is discussed in detail in interviews with key industry players who worked with her during her heyday, including her second husband, the actor Cliff Sangra.

9. The New Order takeover of Gunung Kemukus also aimed at exerting pressure on residents to allow their land to be flooded by way of a dam the government would construct nearby. But whatever the intention, the result was that the site itself expanded its ritual operations with only slight modifications to the mythical narratives attached to it, which did not alter its symbolic basis in a legendary "power couple." For more on the takeover and narrative alterations, see de Guzman (2006).

10. The inclusion of scenes of policemen and kiai turning to the camera to voice the narrower concerns of masculine officialdom mirror ritual elements such as a banner I observed at the event at Parangkusumo detailed above. Despite the fact that prostitution, a major facet of the event, is illegal in Bantul, the regency where Parangkusumo is located, the banner thanked "Polres dan Kabupaten Bantul" (the offices of the local government and police) for their sponsorship and implicitly for their flexibility and understanding. Clearly the authorities make exceptions when the queen of the South Sea, with her connections to the reigning sultan and governor, is invoked. During the shadow-play performance, the banner's message was also reiterated by the puppet master in a manner similar to the film's mocking "public service announcements," using special puppets associated with satire and direct audience address. Both film and shadow play in this case deploy one of the key archipelagic conventions that I have identified in previous chapters as

embedded in regional cinemas and live performance: an interactive mode of expression that pauses narrative flow in order to engage with elements of the surrounding public sphere, linking actual and diegetic spaces.

11. As in *Bernafas Dalam Lumpur*, the “unnatural” death of the central female character at the hands of unscrupulous men under an officially masculine regime unleashes an uncanny force—one that embeds itself in the film’s diegesis while projecting from the screen into the spaces of viewers. In the case of *Sundelbolong*, however, as in many other supernatural horror films, the death of the central female character does not come at the end of the narrative but in the beginning or the middle, after which the power released by her death (in the form of a vengeful ghost) becomes the focus of the film. One can also draw similarities between *Sundelbolong* and *Bumi Makin Panas*, another earlier Suzzanna vehicle in which her prostitute character has an almost supernatural ability to survive attacks. In *Sundelbolong*, once Alisa becomes a sundel bolong, she is similarly positioned as an unstoppable force that acts at the intersection of gender and law, humanity and the superhuman, and officially authorized and unauthorized power.

12. It does not, however, unduly minimize the roles of the female part of the site’s Oedipus-like legend. That role is played by the prince’s mother, *Ibu Ontrowulan*, who misrecognizes and falls in love with him after a long separation. It is she that female pilgrims mimetically embody in the performance of ritual, and the ritual sex act makes a “blessing” of the normally taboo union.

13. The net result of this can be unclear. Base sexual desire often carries negative connotations in Javanese philosophy, while sex framed as a union and transfer of knowledge and spiritual power between two participants, as in the cases of the legendary “power couples” behind the above rituals, is generally lauded. In this case, it appears to be a combination, but the lust with which the women approach male characters (contrasting with the heroes’ stoicism toward the women) is likely aimed to showcase a certain spiritual weakness.

14. There are certain exceptions to this, most notably the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s films starring the pop musician Rhoma Irama as a *kiai*-type figure also imbued with mystical powers.

15. As Eric Sasono argues, *laga* films in which the setting is anticolonial struggle also mirror shadow play (*wayang kulit*) in the convention of presenting Dutch characters “with untrimmed facial hair [who] . . . always speak in coarse language to emphasize their impolite behaviour.” Likewise, in many wayang narratives involving characters meant to represent the position of the Dutch, the puppets used are generally villainous, “ogre-like creatures . . . depicted with physical deformation and speaking with coarse language” (2014:41).

16. See, for example, the 1959 16 mm version of *Mae Nak Phra Khanong* available on YouTube (dir. Rungsri Tasapayak), in which the ending sequence conveys a similar message.

6. RECLAIMING AFFECT

1. Building on current trends in local-language films, however, three recent movies have attempted to resurrect and capitalize on the stage legacy of *Srimulat*, although with less success than *Warkop DKI: Finding Srimulat* (dir. Charles Gozali, 2013) and *Srimulat: Hil Yang Mustahal*, chapters 1 (dir. Fajar Nugros, 2022) and 2 (dir. Fajar Nugros, 2023).

2. I conducted an interview in 2015 with the adult children of the late Herry Koko, the director of Surya Group at their home in Sidoarjo, East Java, which is in a neighborhood adjacent to that of my in-laws. The background information about the group came from this meeting and conversation, as did the photograph of the Surya Group.

3. *DKI* stands for *Dono, Kasino, and Indro*, the names of the three core members, but also mimics the initials of *Daerah Khusus Ibukota* or “Special Region of the Capital City,” as the administrative area that includes Jakarta is known. On Warkop’s history and theatrical and filmic approaches, see Kristanto (2004:108–11).

4. See Imanjaya (2014) and Sasono (2014) on the status of Indonesian supernatural horror as global cult cinema.

5. In chapter 5, I also frame Soeharto’s partnership with his politically and publicly active wife as a similar kind of power couple, not unlike the “conjugal dictatorship” of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines.

6. See, e.g., Gottowik (2020); Ricklefs (2008a); and Weng (2017).

7. See *Suzzanna: The Queen of Black Magic* (dir. David Gregory, 2024).

8. Versions of the film that have since been edited together with Sasanatieng’s commercial are available online; see, e.g., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qW85GRkHhLg>.

9. See Yngvesson (2015) for a detailed analysis of how Riza, Achnas, Lesmana, and Mantovani’s breakout 1998 film *Kuldesak* performed its inability to separate itself from Indonesia’s aesthetic past, despite its codirectors’ stated goals of doing just that.

10. For more on the Thai new wave, their aesthetics, and their politics, see Harrison (2006, 2007, 2024); Ingawanij (2006); Knee (2003); and Sutton (2012).

11. The power of “wielding” two sexes or gender identities together and without subsuming one into the other also recalls Ben Murtagh’s (2013) analysis of New Order-era Indonesian films featuring dynamic *waria* characters, indicating the local formulation of male-to-female transgender identity.

12. On these assumptions, see also Mary Anne Doane (1987).

13. *KKN* stands for *Kuliah Kerja Nyata*, which means “real work study” but is often translated as “Student Study Service.” *KKN* is a special program required of undergrads in many Indonesian universities. It involves proposing a project, often aimed at teaching new skills or improving infrastructure, to be carried out by a group of students in a remote, rural, or otherwise underserved area. In the film, students are tasked with improving water management infrastructure in a village in East Java. The story for the film comes from a viral narrative posted on Twitter in 2019 by the user SimpleMan, who claimed it was based on his actual experiences during a *KKN* project in 2009.

14. The term *satanic* or *Satan* in English is an inadequate translation for the concept of *setan* in the film’s title. While *setan* can at times refer to the Satan or devil of Abrahamic religions, it more often indicates a local concept of a nefarious ghost or spirit that does not align with the figures known to Islam or Christianity. Because of the way spirits and *setans* are positioned and rendered in *Pengabdi Setan*, I believe it invokes the non-Abrahamic version, despite its English translation as “Satan’s Slaves.”

