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## Katinka van Heeren (2012), Contemporary Indonesian film; Spirits of reform and ghosts from the past.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Katinka van Heeren, *Contemporary Indonesian film; Spirits of Reform and ghosts from the past*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2012, xiv + 239 pp. [Verhandelingen 277.] ISBN: 978-90- 6718-381-9. Price: EUR 31.69 (paperback).



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Katinka van Heeren's book entitled *Contemporary Indonesian film* is among the few extensive studies of films in Indonesia in the era of the *Reformasi*. Exploring the phenomenon of Indonesian films in the context of post-New Order Indonesian audiovisual media, the book delineates new patterns of production and distribution, and the reception of films in Indonesia in the present Reform era.

Indonesians have been exposed to films since the early 1900's. From the time of silent films (*film bisu*) until the present, Indonesian cinemas have been dominated by Hollywood films which are consumed primarily by the middle and higher social classes, and by Indian and Chinese films which are viewed by people from the lower social classes. As history has shown time and again, as with other media forms like radio and television, the production, distribution, and consumption of films in Indonesia has always been strongly influenced by fluctuations in the political sphere of the country. For example, during the Japanese occupation (1942-1945), the distribution of American films was restricted by the occupational authorities. The cinemas (*bioskop*), most of which were also given new Japanese names, were instructed to promote Japanese films that primarily showed Japanese valiant military and heroism on the battlefield. The distribution of American films also faced obstacles near the end of Soekarno's Old Order. The artist members of communist-oriented Lekra (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, 'Institute of People's Culture') were also highly critical of all Western cultural products, but especially of those coming from America. In such fluctuating political environments and despite all limitations in terms of expertise and capital, Indonesian filmmakers started

to emerge. The book under review looks at the most recent generation of Indonesian filmmakers who started to produce films for the national cinema after Indonesia entered its political reformation in 1998, and contextualizes the socio-cultural, economical, religious, and political surroundings that have inspired these filmmakers.

The book, in addition to its introductory and concluding chapters, is divided into three sections (each consisting of two chapters). In the "Introduction" (pp. 1-22), the author introduces the principal theoretical notions that serve as the main points of departure for the entire work. She uses the concept of "media discourse", referring to Norman Fairclough's work *Media Discourse* (1995), in order to analyse phenomena around the world of film in Indonesia during the *Reformasi* era. Additional concepts she discusses are "discourse practice" and "sociocultural practice". Van Heeren cites Fairclough who describes "discourse practice" as "the ways in which texts are produced by media workers in media institutions, and the ways in which texts are received by audiences [...], as well as how media texts are socially distributed", while "sociocultural practice" refers to "the social and cultural goings-on which a communicative event is part of" (p. 5). In other words, discourse practice is "media text production and consumption, and sociocultural practice is mass communication as a particular type of situation, the economics of media, the politics of media, and the wider cultural context of communication in the mass media" (p. 5).

The first section (Chapters 1 and 2) analyses film mediation practices. The author contrasts New Order mainstream film mediation practices to Reformation alternative underground ones. Chapter 1 (pp. 25-49) discusses policies in connection to what type of audience watches which kind of movies. It appears that the 16 mm film format represents national low-class audiences while the 35 mm format stands for transnational middle-class audiences. In this chapter, the author also analyses New Order film festivals and provides details of particular representations for audiences and the nation, including conversations and motives for showing the films, as well as discourses about participation in these festivals. In Chapter 2 (pp. 51-78), the author focuses her analysis by examining the changes and continuities in post-Suharto film mediation practices. She discusses these practices and the rise of new film genres and festivals. She demonstrates in this chapter that mainstream 35 mm films in the post-Suharto-era are connected to New Order domination and transnational identity. While alternative independent films mostly represent the local identity, and use a digital video format, and perceived as an oppositional kind of cinema.

The second section (Chapters 3 and 4) deals with film discourse practices. It elaborates the conception and the use of particular discourse practices. The author uses a specific concept that she calls "modes of engagement" that relates to discourses about history, historiography, and events in society. These can consist of dominant representations or ways to address certain topics, which are part of the central discourses in society, by adopting certain

modes of engagement captured in film through the use of particular genre features, narrative styles, and conversations (pp. 13-14). In Chapter 3 (pp. 81-105), the author looks at the ways in which the Indonesian state under the New Order regime seized upon particular film genres in order to promote its own mode of national history and identity and to perpetuate its power and hegemony. The author provides an account of discourses on the production of history, development, and propaganda films and on the particular modes of engagement which these films tap into in relation to historiography. She further discusses the practice of screening these films as part of a special framework: a New Order Memorial Day namely Hari Peringatan Kesaktian Pancasila (Hapsak, 'Day of the commemoration of the Sacred Pancasila'). Chapter 4 (pp. 107-132) discusses the production of counter-histories and the emergence of alternative film genres and new practices of framing during the era of Reform in order to understand in what ways the dominant modes of engagement and the generic conventions in film changed or continued to exist after the collapse of Suharto's New Order. The author sheds light on the emergence of a new genre of Islamic film, as an effect of the rise of Islam in the post-Suharto mediascape and new media freedoms that have resulted in an excessive commercialization and commodification of Islam in Indonesian electronic media.

The third section (Chapters 5 and 6) looks at film narrative practices. It examines the circulation of popular genres and the composition of stories within film genres, such as the use of popular generic formulas particularly in connection with power relations. The author "sifts through debates on particular narrative practices, seeing how far they can go morally before they are obstructed by the boundaries set by state and religious pressure groups" (p. 14). In Chapter 5 (pp. 135-156), Van Heeren looks at the connection between film and television formats regarding horror films, their generic formulas, and imagined audiences and communities. She also explores how a discourse about the formulas of horror films can be related to debates on what constitutes the modern Indonesian nation. In Chapter 6 (pp. 157-184), she delves deeper into discourses on representations of modern Indonesian realities. In this chapter, the author discusses recent debates about the moral bounds of narrative practices in the post-Suharto Indonesian mediascape in order to comprehend in what ways both commerce and censorship, including from the state and the street, define the film texts produced. She also examines debates about which narrative practices, that are related to various worldviews derived from religious and secular realities, are perceived to be fitting modes of representation for Indonesian society.

In the concluding chapter (pp. 185-201), the author wraps up the core issues that have run through the previous chapters by using an illustration of virulent debates between the government and Masyarakat Film Indonesia (MFI, 'Indonesian Film Society') which took place at the Constitutional Court in Jakarta in 2008 in a judicial review of the 1992 Film Law. The debates, which primarily deal with film censorship, represent the opposition between the

ideas that support the preservation and protection of Indonesian value and culture on the one hand and the thoughts that support universal ideas about secular humanism and democracy on the other.

Van Heeren's *Contemporary Indonesian film* has successfully captured the enduring search for national identity in post-New Order Indonesia through the movie lens and complex political, social, and cultural discourses associated with it. But cultural discourses about modern media in Indonesia, including film, shift quickly. A very recent phenomenon, which seems to have received little attention in this book, is the rise of local sentiments in regards to the derogatory representation of particular ethnic groups in some Indonesian films, as reflected in the protests of the Minangkabau people against the producer of *Cinta tapi beda*, Hanung Bramantyo, because he is seen as insulting the Minangkabau Islam-based ethnic group by presenting a female figure who embraces a Christian in the film. Similar protests by the Minangkabau people were directed toward Soraya Film, the producer of *Tenggelamnya kapal Van der Wijck*, which was an adaptation of the famous novel under same title written by Hamka, an Indonesia leading author and ulama from Minangkabau. The posters of the film show the female protagonist Hayati, a Minangkabau girl, wearing a sexy outfit. The protesters claim that Soraya Film degraded the quality of Hamka's novel and misrepresented the Minangkabau Muslims.

In sum, it can be said that the Indonesian film world is a cultural site through which one can perceive the Indonesian everlasting struggle to find its own national identity. Needless to say that such opposite thoughts pejoratively epitomize the divided identity that has been the legacy of the Indonesian post-colonialism nation since its independence. But its historical trait can be traced back to the past, when in the late decades of nineteenth century, Western modernity, as a consequence of the spread of modern European technologies to Asia, touched the societies in the Dutch East Indies. However, far beyond the post-colonial nation's cultural identity, it essentially represents the principal difference between West and East. It seems that what the British poet Joseph Rudyard Kipling said is true. Alas, "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet."

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J. Stephen Lansing, *Perfect order; Recognizing complexity in Bali*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012, xii + 225 pages. Fourth printing. ISBN 978-0-691-15626-2. Price: USD 24.95 (soft cover).

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