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Ariel Heryanto (ed.) (2012), *Budaya populer di Indonesia; Mencairnya identitas pasca-Orde Baru*

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kelas dan etnik Ombilin-Sawahlunto-Sumatera Barat 1892-1996 (Desantara, 2005).

Finally, the book opens new perspectives and offers an approach that will make it more easy for the next generation to study specific regions in Indonesia which are very important, not only for academic circles, but also for policy makers in the regional government.

Ariel Heryanto (ed.), *Budaya populer di Indonesia; Mencairnya identitas pasca-Orde Baru*. Translated by Eka S. Saputra. Yogyakarta: Jalasutra, 2012, viii + 317 pp. ISBN: 9-786028-252812. Price: IDR 65,000 (soft cover).



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In contradiction to the essentialist view, that perceives identity as stable and unchanged, cultural studies has always understood identity as a never ending process or a “project” (Longhurst et al. 2008: 142). In his book, *Budaya populer di Indonesia; Mencairnya identitas pasca-Orde Baru* (its English title, *Popular culture in Indonesia; Fluid identities in post-authoritarian politics*), Ariel Heryanto captures just that through a selection of chapters that discusses the formation of national identity in the post-1998 era. In the two chapters that Heryanto wrote and seven others that he edited, the book captures a crucial time in the country’s history as the Indonesian people received the utmost freedom to determine who they are. The book highlights not just how identity is indeed fluid (determined through various unfixed references, bent, and mould according to people’s wish), but most importantly, it confirms the play of identity politics in which various identities are contested and ideologies continuously compete with one another.

The chapters compiled in this book are multi dimensional, covering cinema (chapters by Marshal Clark, David Hanan, Ariel Heryanto), television (Rachmah Ida, Penelope Coutas, Vissia Ita Yulianto, Edwin Jurriëns), and music (Ariel Heryanto, Max M. Richter), looking at Indonesia on a macro level and dwelling on case studies as specific as Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and the urban-*kampung* of Gubeng in Surabaya. The method ranges from ethnographic studies of watching *Meteor Garden* together with *kampung* women, interviews with TV producers of reality shows, and close reading of plots and patterns in popular cultures in Indonesia. Reading chapter after chapter, it is clear that the fall of Suharto has opened a floodgate, and while hope and creativity in the

formation of Indonesian-ness emerges, new challenges also come into sight.

One challenge is the horizontal tension among ideologies, which is elaborated bluntly in Ariel Heryanto's chapter, "Pop culture and competing identity". Through the case of Inul Daratista, Heryanto identified the competing ideologies as regional/capital, Javanist/Islamist, patriarchy/women, low/upper class (pp. 21–44). Here, Inul became a 'battle field' among values that existed and reappeared in the post-authoritarian Indonesia. Rhoma Irama's condemnation of Inul is a clear indication of Indonesia's Islamization amidst the rise of popular cultures which show Inul's success as a performer. Although Heryanto's observation was on the 2003 rise of Inul mania, his thesis stays relevant today as there is a tension spurred by fundamentalist thugs through attacks on film festivals bearing LGBT¹ issues in 2010, vandalism of the statues of Javanese mythological characters in Purwakarta in 2011, and the banning of a book discussion on moderate Islam in 2012.

Popular cultures, therefore, represent the state of the nation. Through pop cultures, stereotypes are strengthened, lost identities are reclaimed, and gender identities are problematized. Through his discussion of the movies *Ca Bau Kan* and *Gie*, Ariel Heryanto discussed the representation of Chineseness in Indonesia after 1998, while Marshal Clark focused on the representation of violence and masculinity in cinema through the films *9 Naga* (9 Dragons) and *Mengejar matahari* (Chasing the sun) – under the premise that the state had been feminized since the colonization era (p. 59). Both Heryanto and Clark illustrated cinema as a mode of expression of identities and values that were silenced during the New Order. However, popular cultures embodied a paradox. In *Ca Bau Kan* and *Gie*, Chinese identity was expressed and celebrated, but at the same time, the films presented it as different and unnatural. The Chinese characters in *Ca Bau Kan* all fell under the existing stereotype of being merchants and corrupt, while *Gie* was problematic and difficult to relate with because he was ethnically "not Indonesian enough" and "too Indonesian" at the same time (p. 127). The chapter thus implies a need to be critical against strategies of cultural activism in the Post New Order era. In the issue of Chineseness, for example, Heryanto stated the importance of not just seeking justice and expressing the silenced voices, but for the society to question concepts of Chineseness, *pribumi*, ethnicity, and nation hood as a whole (p. 135), and as a strategy of *transgression* through which laws of representation are challenged (see Kristeva 1986). Here Kristeva expressed the need to not just claim an identity that was previously marginalized by the system of power, but to question how a variety of identities came to exist in the first place and resists the boundaries within which the identities were set. In the case of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia during the New Order era, a system of misrepresentation over ethnicity as a whole was created, causing the ethnic Chinese to be rendered as different, and the *pribumi* (the 'indigenous' Malay identity) as superior and preferable. The Chinese identity thus cannot be claimed through texts which duplicate this misrepresentation, through

¹ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.

Tan Pen Liang who was a typical merchant, or Soe Hok Gie who remained different from his college friends and whose best friend was a member of the communist party. Heryanto, therefore, poignantly noted on the difficulty of moviemakers and cultural activists to escape the system of representation set by the New Order.

Meanwhile, Clark highlighted self-censorship that occurred after 1998, much of which was initiated by senior moviemakers, hinting on the tension within the civil society. Decades of repression have caused a deeply rooted polarity between the ideal Indonesian man and the bad one. This is, among others, articulated by the movie *Catatan si Boy* (Boy's diary, released in 1987), which offers an ideal male character that is young, rich, and religious. It is, therefore, not a surprise when the film *9 Naga* (2006) received rumours of censorship for its poster that showed the bare-chested actor Fauzi Baadilla with a tagline, *Manusia terbaik di Indonesia adalah seorang penjahat* (The best Indonesian is a criminal). The language of popular culture needs to go beyond this polarity of good and bad, and offers an in-betweenness or hybridity. This, unfortunately, was rarely discussed throughout the book and only briefly offered by Ariel Heryanto as he quoted Remy Sylado's writing in *Ca Bau Kan*, "[...] he [Max Awuy] was increasingly aware that the world where he stood was not just black-and-white. There were a lot more colours there. Worse still, these colours change names [...]" (Sylado 1999, quoted in p. 122). Although the chapters talk at length about the dynamics of ideologies after the New Order, solutions such as hybridity, unfortunately, is not pursued.

Nonetheless, the chapters reveal exciting features of Indonesian popular cultures that make them distinct from cultures coming from the "western" world. The chapters (excluding those by Ariel Heryanto, Penelope Coutas, Edwin Jurriëns) show how communality and solidarity remain a character of Indonesians. David Hanan drew attention to a scene in the teen movie, *Ada apa dengan Cinta?* (What's up with Love), in which a group of young girls showed support to one another through their body language - while in American movies, such bodily movements might well indicate sexuality rather than solidarity. Such a practice among teenagers is typically Southeast Asian, as Hanan found similar ideas displayed in Thai teen movies. Meanwhile, in her observation of infotainment programs, Vissia Ita Yulianto referred to John Fiske's "Television culture" (2001) and noted on how viewers build "communal meanings" (p. 204). Max M. Richter's analysis of *jantilan* as a "communal ritual" reveals how music has brought people together in the suburban Yogyakarta, regardless of class and gender (p. 256). Furthermore, Richter's observation of Kridosono Stadium in the centre of the city showed how it is used for performances of metal, underground, and electronic music bands and how the youth audience still hang around the place long after the performance had ended. Watching *Meteor Garden* together with *kampung* women, Rachmah Ida noted on how watching television in Indonesia means a *shared* experience as they watch TV with neighbours, create dialogues, and build meanings (pp. 153-154). Her discussion also shows the change in

the global landscape of pop culture that is no longer America-centred, and how Indonesian-ness could be built through a reference to a Taiwanese TV drama. The strength of the Indonesian people remains in their camaraderie and dynamics, which allow popular cultures to become a model for them to regain or articulate their voice.

The power of the people (in other words, democracy) in popular cultures is expressed through the power of popular vote in *Indonesian Idol* and the concept of “anyone can be famous” promoted by this talent show (Coutas p. 113). As the creation of popular cultures lies in the hands of the people, television programs such as *News dot com* could appear after the New Order. Through parody, *News dot com* shows politicians discussing national issues with actors that resemble existing political figures, copying their ways of talking and behaving, and thus offering a hyper-reality that breaks down the previous simulacrum built by the New Order (Jurriëns p. 221). Through their program, the producers of *News dot com* managed to mobilize public opinion and gave pressure to those who opposed the criticism inserted in the program.

In general, the discussions of popular cultures in this book remain insightful as they offer some entry points useful for the nation that is in a continuous process of building its identity; therefore, it was only right for Jalasutra to have the book translated into Indonesian, making the issue known by the generation of post-*reformasi* Indonesia. Popular cultures have become people’s chance for establishing a common space for themselves, much like the Kridosomo Stadium, where musical genres transcended social boundaries and people gathered together despite gender, class, and age differences. For academicians, cultural activists, producers, and artists, a note on how this “common space” should be used was nevertheless also clear; that is, the struggle today does not just represent what was unimaginable during the New Order, but it also questions the existing methods of cultural activism.

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