Historical Trauma and the Discourse of Indonesian-ness in Contemporary Indonesian Horror Films

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This dissertation titled
Historical Trauma and the Discourse of Indonesian-ness in Contemporary Indonesian Horror Films

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ABSTRACT

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Historical Trauma and the Discourse of Indonesian-ness in Contemporary Indonesian Horror Films

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This dissertation investigates six contemporary Indonesian terror-evoking films that address the historical trauma of the New Order regime under Soeharto. The films chosen were: Rizal Mantovani’s *Jelangkung/The Uninvited* (2001) and *Air Terjun Pengantin/The Bride’s Waterfall* (2009), Allan Luanrdi’s *Karma* (2008), Monty Tiwa’s *Keramat/Sacred* (2009), Helfi Kardit’s *Arwah Goyang Karawang/Karawang Dance Ghost* (2011), and Joshua Oppenheimer’s *The Act of Killing* (2012). The textual analysis of this dissertation focuses on the allegorical functions of these films in contextualizing different senses of historical trauma and negotiating the discourse of Indonesian-ness. The distinct cataclysmic tenor of each film suggests an unresolved trauma of the nation that points to the latent ideological influence of the fallen New Order regime. This influence manifests itself in the retrospective understanding of Indonesian history and the contemporary discourse of Indonesian-ness.

The investigation focuses on three different components of historical trauma that pertains to *pemuda*/youth activists, gender performativity, and ethnicity, in particular the Chinese-Indonesians. Since this dissertation explicitly engages with political trauma, gender, and ethnic conflict, various studies on the respective fields constitute the analytical framework for this project.
DEDICATION

For my wonderful wife, thank you for your love, patience, and sacrifice;

For my son, thank you for your understanding and for being sunshine in my darkest days;

Thank you both for always being there for me.
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I would like to express the deepest appreciation to my committee chair Dr. Michael Gillespie, whose brilliance and patience has helped me achieve this prestigious degree in my academic life. He continually and convincingly conveyed a spirit of adventure in regard to research and scholarship. Without his guidance and assistance this dissertation would not have been possible.

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INTRODUCTION: NEW ORDER REGIME, TRAUMA, AND HORROR CINEMA

Following the fall of the New Order regime in May 1998, the Indonesian cinema industry experienced a new sense of creative freedom. The emergence of young filmmakers who had spent decades of their lives under the repressive regime resulted in numerous and diverse critiques of the regime’s strict film censorship and repressive policies. In *Wounds of the Nations*, Linnie Blake argues that such critiques are closely concerned with ways “in which traumatic memories have been inscribed as wounds on the cultural, social, psychic and political life of those who have experienced them, and those cultural products that seek to represent such experiences to those who have not” (1). I view the cluster of films that my dissertation focuses on as a means to represent and address Indonesia’s traumatic memories.

The fall of the regime did not mean the beginning of a new era. The long-reigning regime’s ideology was deeply embedded in various facets of Indonesian cultural life and it was not easy to simply erase. This ideological residue of the New Order may answer why there are not many post-1998 film productions that explicitly address the trauma of the New Order regime. Such films will be harshly censored, if not banned.¹ Films that manage to avoid censorship are usually distributed in closed communities and are not circulated through the official channel. This strict censorship indicates that the nation is not ready to address the trauma or it is just a choice to disavow the traumatic past.

¹ There are five post-1998 film productions which are banned: *Merdeka 17805* (2001), a Japanese film on Japan’s involvement in Indonesian Independence in 1945; *Buruan Cium Gue* (2005) and *Suster Keramas* (2009), two Indonesian films banned for ethical and moral reasons; *Pocong* (2006) and *Balibo Five* (2009), an Indonesian and an Australian film respectively which are banned for political reasons.
One strategy to pass the censorship while still addressing the trauma is through the cinematic genre of horror, a genre that sometimes deals with trauma, fear and anxiety as issues from the past that appear in the present. As Blake argues, “horror cinema is ideally positioned to expose the psychological, social and cultural ramifications of the ideologically expedient will to ‘bind up the nation’s ‘wounds’” (2). Thus, the discussion of the allegorical functions of horror genre is to address those “wounds.” In the process, the discussion will also show the “residue” of the New Order in the production of contemporary horror films.

In that regard, my dissertation purports to study six contemporary Indonesian terror-evoking films with attention to the historical trauma and the negotiation of the discourse of Indonesian-ness. My decision to discuss these issues through the lens of the horror films is driven by the fact that despite its popularity, horror films are seldom rigorously analyzed with a consideration of Indonesian cultural history in mind. I argue the popularity of the horror genre and its wide-reaching audience has a greater advantage in addressing the way historical trauma plays a significant part in the discourse of Indonesian-ness because of the sense that such films are innocuous fun.

As new horror films are being produced as I write this dissertation, I limit myself to the horror films produced between 2001 and 2012. The films are Rizal Mantovani’s Jelangkung/The Uninvited (2001) and Air Terjun Pengantin/The Bride Waterfall (2009),

2 In Indonesian Movie Catalogue (1926-2005), J. B. Kristianto recorded that there are about 78 Indonesian horror films produced between 1926 and 2005. As a comparison, the number of horror films produced from 2005-2013 has reached 134 titles, a very significant rise that may be interpreted as the growing anxiety of the future and the fear of the past.

3 In the context of this dissertation, ‘contemporary’ refers to the first two decades of the 21st century, particularly the post-New Order regime after 1998. Its fall is followed by a sudden burst of democratic ecstasy after 32-year-repression under the regime.
Monty Tiwa’s *Keramat/Sacred* (2009), Helfi Kardit’s *Arwah Goyang Karawang/Karawang Dance Spirit* (2011), Allan Lunardi’s *Karma* (2008), and Joshua Oppenheimer’s *The Act of Killing* (2012). All these films are unique, and through an allegorical reading they articulate different historical traumas.

I view *Jelangkung* and *Keramat* as allegories of the conflicts between the youths activists/pemuda and the repressive New Order regime. *Jelangkung* is significant because it was the first horror film produced after the regime fell and its new narrative style became a blueprint for the horror films followed. *Keramat* features a narrative that demonstrates a clash between the modern and the traditional that is very relevant to the topic of the politics of youths’ activism. I interpret *Air Terjun Pengantin* and *Arwah Goyang Karawang* as films that allegorize the contention of gender conception between the New Order regime and the contemporary one. Significantly, *Air Terjun Pengantin* is the first Post-New Order regime slasher film that includes the appearance of the “final girl.” *Arwah Goyang Karawang* is a film that presents two controversial Indonesian artists whose performance in the film problematizes the contemporary Indonesian ideas about gender construction. I view *Karma* and *The Act of Killing* as films that allegorize the historical trauma of the Chinese-Indonesians. So far, *Karma* is the only contemporary Indonesian horror film that deals with Chinese-Indonesians. In conclusion, I argue how *The Act of Killing* fittingly urges the need to address the nation’s historical trauma by provocatively exposing it through the actual perpetrators’ memories.

The significance of this project lies in its purpose as a bridge between the small number of studies on contemporary Indonesian horror films and the issue of historical
trauma that pertains to the meaning of being post-New Order Indonesians. This dissertation also brings the horror genre into the major constellation of scholarly discourse on Indonesian cinema. Popular genres like horror have often been disregarded or marginalized and there are only a handful of serious and in-depth studies on the horror genre, and none discuss specifically the discourse of Indonesian-ness. I argue that in the Indonesian context, horror genre is part of the whole social phenomena in which the society in general still believes in the existence of the supernatural.

Indonesian-ness is defined as the cultural and political features that construct the meaning of being Indonesian. These features are fluid and molded by historical moments. In a larger picture, they contribute to the construction of Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community,” (Imagined Communities 6) which Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good, et al. dubs as “the subjective fantasies of the state,” where the nation state runs on imagination and memories, …past and present, linked to terror, insecurity, and betrayal (18). In many respects, the discourse reflects the condition of post-reformation Indonesia. This period signifies changes in the ways people re-view the idea of nation, its history, culture and their own identity, which is significant to this dissertation.

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4 Seminal works on Indonesian popular cinema by Khrisna Sen (1994), Salim Said (1991), Ariel Heryanto (2008), Marshall Clark (2010), and Misbach Y.Biran (1982) focus on Indonesian cinema in general or specific aspects of it. Some of them mention the horror genre briefly without a thorough exploration. Two film scholars who particularly discuss Indonesian horror genre in their studies are Katinka Van Heeren (2012), and Thomas Barker (2013).

5 A good example is Banyuwangi tragedy in 1998 that occurred about seven months after Soeharto resigned. The tragedy is known as “ninja slaying tragedy,” as the killers dressed in black just like the Japanese ninja and killed suspected “black magic sorcerers” in small cities in Java. There were about 182 victims that included not only the suspected black magic sorcerers but also Muslim clerics and ordinary farmers. There was a conspiracy theory that the killing was political in nature as it happened before the general election. This incident directly shows a direct interplay between the horror genre, Indonesian society, and its political life.

6 The Post-Reformation era is the period after May 1998.
To understand the past influence on the present, I use Walter Benjamin’s notion of historical materialism that, “blast[s] open the continuum of history” (262). His notion opens a possibility of momentary collision between past and present. In the context of Indonesia, despite the changes that occurred in the post-reformation period, the ideological and political legacies of the New Order regime remain and infiltrate the present. For example, the nurtured fear of Communism and exclusion of the accused Communists’ descendant or minority groups from certain aspects of the nation’s life are still apparent today. To borrow Edward Said’s term, this condition reflects a form of “neo-colonialism.” This neo-colonialism indicates that “it is not what happened in the past and what the past really was” that is at stake; rather, it is “uncertainty about whether the past is really over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms” (3). I argue that the contemporary discourse of Indonesian-ness is informed by issues of trauma that are associated with the New Order regime. I will show how these collective fears and anxieties are allegorized in the horror films discussed.

I position this project within a body of scholarship that examines the allegorical function of the horror genre. Broadly speaking, allegory is “a form of extended metaphor in which objects, persons, and actions in a narrative are equated with the meanings that lie outside the narrative itself. The underlying meaning has moral, social, religious, or political significance, and characters are often personifications of abstract ideas”. In Fredric Jameson’s words, the concept of allegory is a means to an “opening up of the text to multiple meanings, to successive rewritings and overwritings, which are generated at

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7 Walter Benjamin’s 1940 essay “Theses on the Philosophy of History.”
8 tnellen.com
so many levels and as so many supplementary interpretations” (29-30). Jameson’s
definition is germane to my project’s focus on critical analysis through the allegorical
reading of popular horror films. Ismail Xavier specifically extends the definition to
cinema by claiming that “allegories are not only disguised discourse but also have an
expressive dimension: They condense the filmmakers’ response…to the vicissitudes of a
social project” (10). Furthermore, Franco Moretti notes, “Through the figures of ghosts
and monsters, collective fears and anxieties can be allegorized into a literary form” (qtd.
in Thomas Barker 2). These senses of allegory inform my focus on how ghosts and
monsters are allegories of the “haunting past.” In Shocking Representation: Historical
Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film, Adam Lowenstein considers
historical trauma, national cinema, and the modern horror film. Lowenstein considers
cinematic allegories as “a shocking collision of film, spectator, and history where
registers of bodily space and historical time are disrupted, confronted, and intertwined”
(2). This project demonstrates the “shocking collision” when the films discussed disrupt
and confront the repressed New Order historical trauma through their allegorical
function. Xavier states that few characters, some events, or specific editing techniques in
films can represent “a national fate, the destiny of an ethnic group or of a class” (15). In
a similar way, I discuss Indonesian horror films as allegories of national trauma by
focusing on how film stages history.

This dissertation examines how trauma informs the negotiation of the discourse of
Indonesian-ness in three distinct ways: the political activism of pemuda (youth) and the
portrait of ideal pemuda; gender construction and performativity; and ethnicity, in
particular pertaining to Chinese-Indonesians. The unifying element that binds them together is the legacy of the New Order regime and its haunting of the present. I propose that the first feature is allegorized by the urban youth culture in the films in which the generation of young actors/actresses fills the theater screen, representing the faces of contemporary students and youths.

The second feature addresses the socio-cultural shift during the post-reformation period that challenges the New Order regime’s conception of gender. As a result, the existing tension between the modern-secular and the traditional-patriarchal forces is sharpened. The films’ depictions of monsters, women, men, and their interactions become allegories of the “haunting” tension between the traditional and modern views on gender performativity.

The last feature discusses the Chinese-Indonesians’ cultural history and traumatic memories. There has been a legacy of discrimination existing since the colonial period, and despite the changes in the political landscape during the reformation era, the sentiment remains. The communist killings in 1966-67 and the May 1998 tragedy are related to their role in Indonesian cultural history. I view the films as an allegory of the Chinese-Indonesians’ historical trauma that arises from discrimination and prejudice.

**The Legacy of the New Order**

New Order regime began and ended with bloody violence: the first one refers to the so-called failed communist coup in 1965, which resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of Indonesians who were suspected as communists and at the same time
brought Soeharto to the presidency. The second one is the Reformation movement of 1998 that brought down Soeharto, which resulted in deaths of students, destruction of ethnic Chinese businesses and the raping of ethnic Chinese women. In-between those two major events, there was numerous and unaccounted violence by the regime against any subversion toward them, establishing the New Order regime as an authoritative and repressive regime that legitimized any means to maintain order and power.

When discussing post-Soeharto Indonesian culture and politics between 1998 and 2001, some recurrent keywords emerge in scholarly books published on that period and beyond: reformation, democracy, transition, decentralization, regionalism, crisis, instability, and anxiety. Lee Khoon Choy discusses the fall of Soeharto and explores the distinctive nature of some Indonesian provinces to emphasize the strong regionalism that became more apparent through the decentralization of power after Soeharto fell in *A Fragile Nation: The Indonesian Crisis*. In *Indonesia in Transition*, Henk-Schulte Nordholt and Gusti Asnan discuss three important keywords—civil society, region, and crisis—in the post-Soeharto regime. In *Reformasi: The Struggle for Power in Post-Soeharto Indonesia*, Kevin O’Rourke makes some clear remarks describing the condition in Indonesia at that time: “Reformasi relates to Indonesia’s political events from 1996 to 2001—a period marked by tumult, intrigue, tragedy and mystery” (vii). Abidin Kusno argues that after 1998 Jakarta as the center of the nation came to be conceived of as a “space of fear and terror…with memories of violence embedded somewhere in the inner psyche of the urban residents of Jakarta” (9). Terms related to poverty, ethnic/religious
clashes, corruption, collusion, and the government’s incompetence are often heard during the Post-Reformation period.

Returning to the New Order regime, it is a common understanding among Indonesians that Javanese norms and virtues were a significant aspect of the regime, which is embodied in the concept of Javanism. It is impossible to discuss the detailed aspects of Javanism here, so I limit the focus on three of its virtues that pertains to the New Order ideology: the importance of order, loyalty, and obedience. Thus, it is not strange that the words “order” and “fostering stability,” among others, became the New Order regime “buzzwords.”

The second and third aspects are intertwined with Javanism’s hierarchical structure. They reflect the hierarchical and familial-like governance that locates Soeharto as the “father of the nation,” whose orders should always be obeyed by rakyat (the people). Just like a father punishes his children, the regime uses the same means to deal with insurgents or opposition with a seemingly noble reason: to produce a deterrent effect and provide an example for the other “children.”

Another important aspect of Javanism is mysticism. Choy argues that understanding Javanese mysticism is certainly important to understanding Indonesia. An aspect of Javanese mysticism that reflects the ever-return of the past is the way in which it sees history. Javanism’s perspective of history is a “cosmological oscillation between periods of concentration of power and periods of its diffusion” (Anderson, *Language and Power* 34). It strongly suggests the return of the past/old power because

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9 Niels Mulder defines Javanism as “a descriptive label for those elements of Javanese culture that [are] considered to be essentially Javanese and that define it as a unique category” (1).
there is no resting point between the cycle of power concentration and diffusion. Regionalism and decentralization that mark the post-Reformation period signify a power dispersal, pushing even more for “the central symbol of Power” (Anderson, *Language and Power* 36) to (re-) surface.

For example, the New Order regime attempted to establish its power and authority by equating itself with the glory of the ancient Javanese kingdom, creating an illusion that the regime was as powerful as, if not greater than it. Anderson argues that Soeharto claimed to be the descendent of the Mataram kings to solidify and strengthen his position. Responding to Soeharto’s claim, Suryakusuma refers to him as “a very wealthy king” (*Agama, Seksi, dan Kekuasaan* 4). This statement reinforces the idea of Soeharto as more a king than a president. In this cultural mindset, the gods themselves appoint these kings and only the gods can dethrone them.

This belief is depicted in the mystical and well-known Javanese shadow puppet performances, *wayang*, that for centuries and to this day have provided spiritual and moral guidance for people. *Wayang* has been the most perfect instrument to disseminate and preserve this ancient belief. In this regard, I incorporate some *wayang* discussions in the films’ discussion. Anderson argues that the *wayang* tradition for the Javanese is still “an almost universally accepted religious mythology which commands deep emotional and intellectual adherence” (*Mythology and the Tolerance* 16-23). He asserts that the Javanese concept of power is “concrete, homogeneous, and without inherent moral implications” (23).

The New Order regime, similar to the mystic, maintained its power through its
“untouchability,” fear-and-respect-evoking nature. In a way, the regime shares similar traits with the spirits/ghosts of the horror genre. Criticizing the regime’s political system and policies was as taboo as meddling with the spirit worlds, with punishment or death as the consequences. Anderson asserts that the Javanese mysticism regarding power preservation requires the ruler to concentrate around him any objects or persons held to have or contain unusual Power (Language and Power 27). People believe that Soeharto had more than 2000 sacred objects at his house (Ki Ageng Pamungkas 7). Arwan Tuti Artha states that during his 32-year-reign, Soeharto had more than a thousand shaman, paranormal, and spiritual gurus, which clearly showed his desire to gain spiritual power (31). It seems that he already knew the exact time to the minute to step down. Behind Soeharto’s calmness and smile (he was known as the “smiling general”) lay the mind that created systematic violence and assertiveness, ready to muffle any subversion to overthrow him.

“Civil society” becomes the catchword during the first two years after Soeharto’s resignation in 1998. It represents the people’s high hopes for democratic institutions. However, a society grows tired of waiting and becomes less optimistic because of “the continuity of corruption, political violence and the revival of the strong state” (Nordholt, Indonesia in Transition 5). The situation is akin to opening Pandora’s box, from which political and economical uncertainty, fear of disintegration, discrimination and the rise of religious fanatics emerge and pose imminent threats after being repressed for more than thirty years. The still-powerful New Order regime could easily return to power in such a fragile democratic situation.
The growing separatist movements and strong religious sentiment that materialized through hard-line religious groups have been another threat. It seems that reformation has given birth to another equally dangerous “monster,” neo-liberalism. Marcia Landy’s argument points at how neo-liberalism invokes events and images from the past “as forces for cohesion and consensus in the interests of national solidarity” (2). In other words, neo-liberalism generates nostalgia for the past because, despite being a repressive and authoritarian state, the past is presented as secure and stable. Her argument clearly confirms the presence of the past in contemporary Indonesia when the past is set as an important point in nationhood discourse. Hari Tjan Silalahi, an Indonesian politician, offers a metaphor that perfectly fits the situation: “The New Order is like a ship swinging at anchor. It may drift, but it always swings back to the same place” (qtd. In Michael R. J. Vatikiotis 92).

During the Reformation struggle, students and pro-democracy activists could easily pinpoint its target: Soeharto. The problem with the post-Reformation struggle is that the personification of the “enemy” is no longer so clear. Now it comes in different sizes and shapes, such as radical religious or separatist groups who misuse and exploit the sudden democratic explosion. In addition, M. Mufti Mubarok and Affan Rasyidin state that to this day, many of Soeharto’s cronies in all levels of government have been “saved” and still hold important positions (36). They claim to be “clean” of any involvement with Soeharto’s corruption, nepotism or collusion, which is understood as the reason why the contemporary society has become skeptical and pessimistic about the current government. They are the new “ruling” groups who are a variation on the old.
As a result, sporadic repression, prejudice, and discrimination are still apparent and seem to get stronger in the present democratic atmosphere. The past is reflected through their manner and attitude in interpreting and expressing democracy after long exposure to the New Order’s governing manner. Their sporadic and decentralized nature makes the past influences more difficult to confront and contain. I refer to these new breeds of forces as the haunting past. In the same spirit, the national cinema also shows this concern through its films’ narratives.

**Indonesian National Cinema**

The idea of national cinema has always been problematic. Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen state that films are “clusters of historically specific cultural forms, the semantic modulations of which are orchestrated and contended over by each of the forces at play in a given geographical territory” (7). The authors question whether national cinema functions as an industrial or a cultural practice. This issue touches on several discourses and issues of struggle between dominant and non-dominant forces in defining national cinema. Within the domain of cultural practice, Indonesian cinema further complicates this discourse. Indonesia consists of such a variety of ethnicities that it is almost impossible to incorporate them together into a single Indonesian culture.

Anthony R. Guneratne and Wimal Dissanayake argue that Indonesia presents an even greater challenge to Third Cinema theorists, because, as an “extended nation,” it teems with sub-national cinema where the presence of diverse, culturally, and
geographically distinct ethnicities, confound the notion of a nation (20) and, consequently, the notion of national cinema.

Edward Bruner states that one is deluding oneself to believe that there is a fixed thing labeled modern Indonesian culture floating over Indonesia just waiting to be discovered and described (6). This creates a problem for the discourse of Indonesian cinema in determining which culture to appear on and absent from the screen and to represent the nation and why. Within the industrial practice, however, Indonesian cinema is all but monopolized by groups of people who dominate television programs, mostly producing soap operas. Thus, it is often argued that Indonesia has no established cinema industry, because the standards that pertain to production, distribution, and exhibition are not fully fulfilled. In addition, there is a substantial influence of government on the film industry, and this relation makes it more difficult to define the national cinema.

National cinema is sometimes associated with “art” films and films sponsored by the government. Within the Indonesian film industry, the government hardly ever provides financial support, yet its censorship board is very active and dominant. Almost all films during Soeharto’s regime were tailored to comply with the government’s ideology. A large numbers of art films were internationally sponsored and thus became transnational products. However, many of them portray Indonesia as traditional and exotic, which in many ways reinforces the Western view of the East. Contrastingly, the genre films that circulated nationally often portrayed modern Westernized Indonesians, which signal the lost of their cultural roots. Different treatments of film are also apparent in its placement within the state apparatus. Soeharto’s regime realized the power of film
as propaganda instruments and thus placed film under the Department of Information. With a strict censorship, film was treated like media such as television, magazines and newspaper. Meanwhile, theater, dance and literature had more freedom and space to expand under the Department of Education and Culture. Not until the regime ended was film placed under the Tourism and Culture Department. However, censorship still plays a strict role and is often accused of limiting the creativity of filmmakers. In this way, I argue that the treatment of films as powerful instrument of political propaganda echoes the legacies of Dutch and Japanese rule.

To understand Indonesian popular cinema requires a shift of attention to the Indonesian reception of Hollywood. Hollywood cinema as an invasion began in the early 1920s with a brief pause during Soekarno’s time and continues to the present (Sen, *Indonesian Cinema*). Salim Said (1991) asserts that the Hollywood style is the root of Indonesia’s commercial pattern of filmmaking and that this explains the high productivity of horror genre in addition to drama and comedy (6). Consequently, the audience’s taste had been shaped to such formula that a film without it does not sell well. Thus, the fittest way to describe Indonesian genre films is that they mimic or imitate Hollywood with a touch of local culture. Adapting Hollywood’s narrative structure, Indonesian film genre usually comprises the hero, the goal, and the obstacles between them. This classic formula that begins with order (exposition/introduction) that is followed by conflicts (rising action) and eventually resolved by the hero (resolution/denouement) seems fit to the regime’s ideology of order.

The stark difference between the Hollywood and popular Indonesian genres is the
role the government plays in the film industry. In her study on Indonesian cinema from 1965-1998, Sen asserts that “Indonesian cinema is political…whatever its overt themes or genre, tells us something about who has the power to speak for and about…whom and how in New Order Indonesia” (Indonesian Cinema 6). During the New Order regime, Indonesian film genre was treated like other media such as TV and radio as the government’s instrument to disseminate their ideology and policy. Strict censorship and a controlled narrative style became the signature of the New Order film industry.

The mystical and unpredictable nature of the monsters is inevitably the locus of people’s greatest fears. In the New Order narrative style, the monsters are part of their “master narrative” creation that generates fear and the danger of disorder. Besides atheism, the specter of Communism is the ultimate monster that the New Order regime constructed. The New Order regime relied on religion and the nation’s ideology, Pancasila, to deal with these “monsters” (Michel Picard 14). Through their asserted narrative style, the films kept reminding the audience of a constant overwhelming fear of disruption and chaos if disorder occurred. The New Order regime narrative style apparently associated fear and chaos with monstrosity and power with itself. Thus, the restoration of order at the end of the film reinforces the regime ideology, at the same time implying the demand for civic obedience to guarantee a safe and peaceful life.

Another important aspect of the New Order horror narrative is its display of a

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10 Pancasila is the official philosophical foundation of Indonesia that consists of five principles: Belief in the one and only God, Just and Civilized Humanity, The Unity of Indonesia, Democracy led by the wisdom of deliberations amongst representatives, and Social justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia. Francois Raillon argues that, “the epitome of Javanese politics was the state ideology or Pancasila as instrumentalized by Suharto” (93). The five principles which were formulated by the founding fathers are almost flawless but the way in which the regime exploits them has turned Pancasila into an Orwellian “thought police.”
strong and complex hierarchical structure that reflects the regime’s strategy “to curtail political participation and enable Suharto and the military to control society” (William Liddle 40). This structure clearly mirrors the Javanese power stratification in which order restoration is mostly performed by “wise men.” These wise men are the icon of order restorer in the New Order horror narrative that reflects the state ideology.”

With strict censorship restricting their moves, the pre-Reformation filmmakers had to find cracks and fissures through which to deliver their criticism and perspective towards the government. In contrast, in a much freer atmosphere, the New Order regime narrative and influence somehow kept oozing out from contemporary horror. This shows the New Order regime’s strong grip on film production during its own era and beyond.

My analysis of the Indonesian cinema is most immediately informed by three prominent Indonesian cinema scholars, among others, whose work considers Indonesian cinema with attention to cultural history: Salim Said, Karl G. Heider, and Khrisna Sen. Said investigates the history of Indonesian cinema through the lens of sociology. Writing during Soeharto’s time and considering the strict censorship and harsh punishment for breaking the law, he carefully avoids discussing the regime’s political position within the film industry. Sen emphasizes the political intervention of Soeharto’s regime in Indonesian film production. Heider formulates the meaning of being Indonesian in films through an anthropological approach. My dissertation combines the methods of these three scholars to show how the films allegorically talk about the nation’s historical trauma and the discourse of Indonesian-ness.
In many respects, their works also tacitly discuss the discourse of Indonesian-ness. Said’s social history of Indonesian film, which he brackets from the pre-independence to post-independence period (1991), considers the role of filmmakers as “dream merchants [who fail to] portray the realities of Indonesian life” (Shadows 4). It implies that Indonesian-ness is indeed a discourse, ever-changing and floating, and filmmakers play a significant role in elaborating it. Echoing Said, Heider discusses Indonesian cinema from 1950 to 1990 and argues that, “Indonesian cinema is a powerful vehicle for the development, shaping, and diffusion of a national Indonesian culture” (134). However, he deplores cinema’s artificial construction of Indonesian-ness. The cinema’s depiction of the multi-ethnic Indonesia only brushes the surface: through the commonly accepted stereotypes. Focusing on Indonesian cinema during Soeharto’s New Order regime, Sen describes a “New Ordered Cinema” that represents the ideological intervention of the government in creating “obedience and ordered” Indonesians (Indonesian Cinema). Her analysis concurs with Noel Carroll’s notion of the horror films’ three steps: normality to disruption and to final confrontation and defeat of the abnormal (106). This reaffirmation of the normal signifies the New Order’s hegemonic position. I found that such steps are almost nonexistent in post-reformation horror films, signifying shifts in the films’ ideological positions. Thus, their works are major references for my project, which begins where they stop, with a precise focus on the horror genre.
Indonesia, Genre, Horror

In *Popular Culture in Indonesia*, Ariel Heryanto examines film as a form of popular culture and offers insights into how new forms of media in popular culture contribute to the creation of the new generation of consumers. This phenomenon might explain the stability of horror film production despite harsh criticism and at the same time show another stage in Indonesian cultural history when new forms of media play a significant role. His work also offers a certain definition of Indonesian-ness, which is affected by a strong influence of media and the people’s consumption behavior. It shows “how the multilayered and contradictory processes of identity formation in Indonesia are inextricably linked to popular culture” (10).

Imitating Hollywood trends, the directors and producers negotiate with a set of conventions of how certain films fit a certain genre which reflects Rick Altman’s claim that genres are never entirely neutral categories. Within the context of Indonesian horror genre, historical categories such as urban legend, myths, and mysticism become the primary sources to establish the genre. In *Genre*, Stephen Neale argues that these categories are part of a “cinematic machine” that produces meanings and positions, “a machine for the regulation of the orders of subjectivity” (19). This fear-evoking machine that is constituted by monsters, psychopaths and ghosts, acts as a vehicle for the filmmakers to create positions and produce meanings for certain issues. I argue that the Indonesian horror genre, its narrative, and iconographies are three correlated aspects through which the historical trauma and the discourse of Indonesian-ness is allegorically depicted.
Indonesian cinema is inseparable from Hollywood, mirroring its western counterparts in many respects in style, narrative and themes. International scholars from a range of different disciplines agree that genre studies’ growing importance is brought about by Hollywood’s filmmaking, which is based on certain repetitive formulas within a studio system. As Robert Stam argues, the lingering questions for film scholars are whether the genre is “out there” in the world or is constructed by analysts, and how to define and place films when there is no fixed category (*Film Theory* 128). In *Film Genre*, Barry Keith Grant argues that the idea of film genre is surprisingly difficult and complex, supported by Neale who investigates the meanings and relations of cinema, narrative, genres, and subject. He argues that genres cannot be systematically characterized and differentiated based solely on the interplay of codes, discursive structure, and drives because genres are “instances of repetition and difference” (48) which makes it hard to pin down a fixed argument when talking about a specific genre. Rick Altman performs an epistemological investigation of genre theory. Starting by chronologically elaborating the history of genre studies, he ends by offering a semantic/syntactic/pragmatic analysis that shows genre as “a multivalent term multiplied and variously valorized by diverse user groups” (214). In other words, Altman argues that genre is not simply about specific terms for certain group of films or categories capable of clear and stable definitions, as has been the argument of the classic genre studies. In this regard, I argue that Indonesian horror genre too, has no stable definition. Its various main sources, which come from folklore, supernatural-related true stories, urban legends, and historical events, inform us that Indonesian horror genre is a narrative
mode. The defining traits of horror narrative mode are that they provoke fearful psychological, emotional or physical response. Thus, I argue that *The Act of Killing* is a horror film as it provokes such responses.

Numerous studies of the Hollywood/American horror film are also useful to my project. They are of great help in tracing Hollywood’s extensive influence on Indonesian horror movies and revealing the extent of its narrative style on the Indonesian horror genre. Lowenstein focuses directly on the allegorical aspects of horror films through film studies with an emphasis on the cultural, psychological and historical. His notion of allegorical moment in horror cinema that challenges the power of national narratives to regulate the meaning of collective trauma informs a similar method for my project. I intend to expand and apply his notion of collective trauma and method of allegorical moment in the context of Indonesian history and cinema.

Blake’s study “is concerned with the social, cultural and political function of horror cinema … It also addresses the way in which the generic and sub-generic conventions of horror allow for a decoding of traumatic memories already encoded within the cultural, social, psychic and political life of the nation’s inhabitants by shocking historical events” (5). Lim “looks at the spectral time of haunting and the affective temporality of nostalgic allegory” (38). Their works provide a fitting model for my project with a post-colonialist criticism of the horror genre through the discussion of both colonial and regime trauma which is an embodiment of colonial legacy. Lowenstein’s, Blake’s and Lim’s work share similar views on the horror genre, which they see as inseparable from past events, functioning as allegories, symbols or metaphors.
Another seminal work is Robin Wood’s “An Introduction to the American Horror Film,” in which he employs different elements of formalist, Freudian, Marxist, and feminist analysis to make distinctions between classical and contemporary horror. The Indonesian horror genre reflects Wood’s classical horror form which emphasizes the return of the repressed, the other and the monster (164). Worland cites significant introductory materials on the history of modern horror. He surveys the history, stylistic development, and social reception of the American horror film from the genre’s earliest importance to the present.

In all horror films, the monsters significantly appear in many forms and shapes for different purposes. Studies abound on the specific allegorical functions of the monsters within the international horror genre. Quoting Anderson, van Heeren’s “Return of the Kyai: Representations of Horror, Commerce, and Censorship in Post-Suharto Indonesian Film and Television” defines the horror genre as “a form of imagining and a technical means of ‘re-presenting’ elements of what constitutes the nation” (211). She examines the changing representation of the supernatural as part of the modern Indonesian nation after the fall of Soeharto. It implies that the horror genre acts as an allegory to Indonesian political and cultural history. Tony Williams investigates the allegorical functions of the zombies that haunt specific traumatic pasts of American history, such as slavery, World War II, and the Vietnam War. R.H. W. Dillard adds that George Romero’s film is “not simply a film that is more frightening (or disgusting) than its competition, [the film] is intended to indicate…the familiar political rhetoric of the later 1960s” (16). In an almost similar manner, Peter Dendle offers another look on zombie.
He argues that what scares the audience is the enraged, feral, and insatiable contemporary zombie that lacks control, dignity, and direction (54). The zombie represents “an over-leisurely society lacking in broader spiritual and communal purpose, left to the impulse of its unchecked power and its desires for consumption” (54). Their analysis examines shifts in the monster’s portrayal that fits to allegorize changes in society. They inform my project, which deals with different monsters as allegories of changes in the Indonesian cultural and political landscape.

Despite the constant appearances of different kinds of Indonesian monsters on the screen, there is no extensive study on them. The only available yet unreliable references are often personal internet blogs. Indonesian oral tradition and the superstitious nature of most Indonesians may be the reason behind this absence of studies. In *Hantu Nusantara/Archipelago Ghosts*, Yudis, Broky, and Pak Waw share the difficulties in developing their work due to lack of specific data and almost similar traits of monsters from different regions, which confirms the apparent trace of oral tradition. Their unofficial reference guide for Indonesian monsters is a comic book that offers a brief description of the types of Indonesian monsters in a comical manner. Thus, interestingly, the cinema becomes one major reference to Indonesian monsters. The audience learns and becomes more familiar with the monsters through cinema. The monsters on the screen are brought to “life” by the stories, urban legends, rumors, field research, and imaginations of the filmmakers. It is only in the safe and relaxing atmosphere of the cinema that the audience can safely express their curiosity and fear toward the monsters on the screen. Beyond the cinema building, production of horror films is almost always
shadowed by real supernatural incidents that the presence of “orang pintar”/shaman is always needed.

In turn, this cinematic “machine” which suggests an industrial-like repetitive production of goods, limits the variety of genre for the sake of profit. This is apparent in the almost nonexistent studies on the Indonesian film genre. Karl G. Heider succinctly mentions that the horror genre has strong roots in traditional folk beliefs, especially those involving supernatural powers. He argues that the techniques are similar to those of Western horror but always involve supernatural monsters (44). Thus, this dissertation intervenes in the absence of an extensive horror genre discussion by looking closely at the narrative modes and iconographies and treating them as allegories of a certain political and cultural history.

What distinguishes my dissertation from many of the previously mentioned works is its extensive analysis of the horror genre as allegory. Compared to the studies on global horror films, studies on the Indonesian horror genre studies are almost nonexistent—thus, this project directly addresses this absence. I begin with the question, “Why horror?” According to H. P. Lovecraft and Everett F. Bleiler, the attraction of supernatural horror provokes not only fear but also awe (13). I find his notion useful to explain the mixed appreciation of the supernatural-dominated Indonesian horror. At the same time it also allegorizes the horrific actions of Soeharto’s regime that produces feelings of awe and fear of the people; for example through the violent demonstration of well-organized military power in suppressing resistance. Steven Jay Schneider and Daniel Shaw talk about the catharsis theory of horror-pleasure that “focuses on the
vicarious feelings of power that horror films provide their audiences” (10), one of which is the “experience of catharsis through art [that] functioned as a social safety valve” (Rick Worland 13). There are four important words mentioned above: fear, awe, power and safety. During Soeharto’s regime, these words are the formula to preserve their position: with power they generate both fear and awe to create a “safe” environment for the people and themselves. I believe that extensive research on Indonesian horror genre and its allegorical function will help reveal the dynamics of Indonesian cultural history.

Almost all Indonesian horror films admit the existence and intrusion of either supernatural or natural power. In the context of my analysis, the process of ‘othering’ and supernatural/natural power is apparent—the lines between ‘us and them’ are clear and tragedy will occur when the lines intersect. Beyond the metaphorical realm the supernatural points to the conflict between the haunting past and present forces. The supernatural/natural’s power of disequilibrium is exhaustively recycled, refigured and reframed within different cinematic contexts. From the director/producer’s point of view these steps may be necessary to satisfy the audience. But as a consequence, this strategy may lead to an exploitation of horror icons and cause disinterest on the audience’s part. As an example, one Indonesian horror icon, kuntilanak, has been used and re-used in different forms and backgrounds that it has started to lose its grip as one of the most frightening icons. I argue that this over-exploitation may be one reason Indonesian horror films are marginalized and harshly criticized.

The emerging local horror filmmakers (Rizal Mantovani, Monty Tiwa, Helfi C.H. Kardit, and Allan Lunardi) and a foreign filmmaker (Joshua Oppenheimer) whose films
are examined were all born between the late 1960s to the early 1980s. It means they all experience or witness the collapse of the New Order regime and the rise of the Reformation state. Joshua Oppenheimer, an American filmmaker, spent more than seven years living in Indonesia to produce *The Act of Killing* and he too experienced the Reformation state and the residue of the New Order regime influence when he made the film. The local filmmakers are, according to the Constitution, *pemuda* who populate their films with young actors/actresses. They replace the archetypal figure whose role as authority or familial institution is to restore order. This tendency unmistakably proposes the face of contemporary and future Indonesia as young, intellectual and critical. Despite the effort, I notice that reminiscence of the old narrative style is still apparent, suggesting a strong influence of the New Order ideology. It also suggests nostalgic aspects as well as expression of repressed trauma that further attests the influential regime.

From the 1960s to the early 1990s the discourse of Indonesian-ness in New Order horror films was characterized by the depiction of rural and lower classes as well as Islamic communities (Katinka Van Heeren 137-138). The late 1990s in particular was marked by the growing production of films with a sexual/comedy theme set in urban areas. I argue that this genre poses a strong patriarchal and sexist Indonesian-ness discourse. This phenomenon indirectly shows the dualism of the New Order regime that often switched back and forth between modern and traditional values. The alternate depiction of rural and urban in popular genres such as horror and drama indicates the New Order regime’s attempt to balance the portrait of Indonesians: the modern but less faithful urbanists versus the more faithful and traditional villagers.
The New Order regime horror also emphasized the devoted Islamic communities that signified the regime’s hegemonic action to mitigate demonstrations or criticism and remind people always to be faithful. In the nation with the largest Moslem population in the world religion plays a significant role in people’s lives. The New Order regime treated religion as another means to achieve its ideological ends. The frequent appearance of kyai or religious leaders in horror films is a strong indication of religion’s role in maintaining order. Kyai (teacher of Islam), as van Heeren argues, becomes “a deus ex machina” to overcome evil at the end of the film (138). The role of kyai points at faith and piousness as another aspect of the New Order regime’s discourse of Indonesian-ness.

Scholars have noted that in looking at the history of horror film in Indonesia, the narrative trends mostly reflect the incumbent ideology (Heider 1991; Said 1991; Sen 1994). The fear of disorder and chaos is a constant narrative style throughout the history of the New Order regime horror, as part of its totalizing discourse. The strategy was to show the horror of disorder and the importance of religious faith to maintain order. There is almost no space for narrative variation; each film within the genre marks an implicit and assertive directive in people’s attitudes regarding monstrosity and fear.

Within the narrative level, contemporary horror’s break from the old narrative style is apparent in its different treatment of monsters and fear. At the allegorical level, however, the contemporary history of horror suggests that the reminiscence of the New Order regime’s ideology remains strong and influential. It resonates with Kusno’s argument that the post-Soeharto era is nothing other “than the specific reconfigurations of
the economy and power relations characteristic of the previous era” (6). He particularly
emphasizes people’s profound anxiety about how things have changed since 1998. The
discourse of contemporary Indonesian-ness, thus, is inseparable from the past
construction. No matter how hard the effort to break completely with the past, its
influence remains. Turner, quoting Pierre Nora, argues that this is related to memory,
which “represents all the possibilities of the past—including the possibilities of
remembering, forgetting, or even reviving lost parts of the past” (5).

In the first chapter I investigate the allegorical functions of *Jelangkung* and
*Keramat*. By locating the films’ cast, characters, narrative, and setting within the context
of political activism of contemporary pemuda, I examine the influence of the past regime
on the contemporary pemuda and the contemporary idea of Indonesian-ness. This
chapter illustrates the contention and negotiation of Indonesian-ness as seen through the
struggle between the trauma in a form of a dominant/powerful entity (the
supernatural/monsters), and the resistant power (the natural/humans). The dominant and
the resistant refer to the recycled old regime and the young people respectively.

The second chapter examines gender performativity and Indonesian-ness in *Air
Terjun Pengantin* and *Arwah Goyang Karawang*. As a country with a strong patriarchal
and hetero-normative tradition, gender performativity in contemporary Indonesia has
always been an issue of contention. I view these films as an exploration of the tensions
of gender and sexuality within contemporary Indonesian society with attention to
traditions and values of the past that confront the modern and more secular contemporary
culture.
In chapter three I explore the allegorical functions of *Karma* and *The Act of Killing*. These films represent the cultural history and historical trauma of Chinese-Indonesians. *Karma* is the first post-New Order horror film that I view as a celebration of Chinese-Indonesians’ freedom to show their Chinese-ness. *The Act of Killing* does not focus solely on the issue of Chinese-Indonesians; nonetheless, it strongly implies the historical trauma they suffer from. This documentary film shows a unique perspective of the communists’ killings in 1966-67.
CHAPTER 1: THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSOR: PEMUDA AND NEW ORDER REGIME

“If you serve fear, we only prolong the line of slavery”11

This chapter investigates two contemporary horror films, Rizal Mantovani’s Jelangkung (2001) and Monti Tiwa’s Keramat (2009), with the attention to how each film functions as an allegory of historical trauma. I argue that these films act as political allegory by expressing anxiety over the post-New Order era and fear of the return of the New Order regime. My view of allegory in this chapter is informed by Robin Wood’s notion “the return of the repressed” and my own reading of the New Order regime’s ideology as the return of the repressor.12 These two senses of allegory simultaneously appear within the filmic texts but point at different directions. The return of the repressor represents the fear of the return of the New Order regime’s ideology that has been forcefully embedded for thirty-two years.13 This point is the focal point of my textual analysis with attention to narrative structure and other filmic elements.

It is thus necessary to compare the New Order regime’s ideology-based narrative structure and that of the post-New Order regime to explore their shifts that inform the

11 A fragment of Wiji Thukul’s poem. He is an Indonesian activist and poet, whose whereabouts are unknown to this day as a result of his political activism against the New Order regime (Tempo special edition on May 1998-2013. “Opini” section (35)). The original text is as follows: “Jika kau menghamba kepada ketakutan, kita memperpanjang barisan perbudakan.”
12 “The return of the repressed” is drawn from a psychological condition in which a traumatized person cannot channel the trauma he/she experiences. As a result, the trauma keeps haunting the person through dreams or events that may trigger the memory. Wood argues that horror genre serves as a kind of “dream” that channels this trauma. This notion represents the anxiety resulting from the unresolved historic trauma that keeps haunting the present.
13 The New Order regime was in power from 1966 to 1998.
change of the allegorical functions in the filmic elements. For instance, the supernatural beings of the New Order narrative that once were a metaphor for the danger of disorder are now seen as the return of the regime itself.\textsuperscript{14} The close ending of the New Order narrative that represents the return of the order is now being challenged by the open-ending of the contemporary narrative that refuses the restoration of order. However, I note that the contemporary narrative fails to fully detach itself from the New Order narrative; they intersect in many points and sometimes clash.

This chapter gives special attention to the role of the young characters in the films and how they represent the pemuda’s political activism and the discourse of the ideal pemuda throughout Indonesian history in particular during the Reformation era of the late 1990s. Pemuda are the essential element in the discourse of contemporary Indonesian-ness.\textsuperscript{15}

Pemuda, as defined in the first Article of the Republic of Indonesia’s Constitution No. 40/2009 on Youth, refers to Indonesian citizens who enter the \textit{critical developmental and growing phase} and are between 16 to 30 years old (I add the italics). The italicized words signify their importance within the nationhood discourse as well as the state’s need to “control and guide” them. Within the society, Edward Aspinall argues that historically speaking, the pemuda, with their reputation as moral enforcers, bear the heaviest burden when power corrupts (7). Some studies on pemuda show their initiative to start changes,

\textsuperscript{14} The supernatural beings in the New Order horror films are representations of the agent of disorder, and they have to be defeated at the end of the narrative as the symbol of order restoration.

\textsuperscript{15} In almost all Third World countries, pemuda are the major forces that bring about change and Indonesia is no exception. Indonesian cultural and political changes are inseparable from the role of the country’s pemuda; they are seen as the core of the nation-state and the voice of the people. Historically and ideologically speaking, pemuda have always been regarded as the nation’s future, which explains their significant roles in the discourse of Indonesian-ness.
demonstrations and criticisms towards the corrupted regimes. Their traces in great changes that happened throughout the nation’s history are apparent (Anderson 1967; Aspinall 1993; Ryter 2001, 2002; Kurnia 2005; Piliang 2005; Ali 2008; Febrian 2008; Lee 2008; Yudhistira 2010). The Constitution explicitly states that pemuda are the nation’s “moral strength, social controller and agent of change” (26). Doreen Lee refers to the politics of pemuda as the voice of the rakyat (people), which is defined by their selfless heroic acts (7). Soekarno, the first Indonesian president, speaks highly of pemuda: “Give me ten youths and I will shake the world.”

When talking about post-New Order horror films, the correlation between pemuda and horror is apparent: pemuda are the leading characters that dominate the horror genre. As Doreen Lee argues, the collapse of the New Order regime makes the activist and pemuda the locus of desire in film and popular media (97), they being the “actors” that drove the Reformation movement. The young urban and modern characters depicted in the films undergo excruciating and horrifying experiences when they encounter the supernatural. They share a similar fate with the pemuda who criticized the New Order regime: their voices were subdued, subjected to the powerful elite; some were abducted and even killed. The characters unmistakably represent pemuda’s roles as the nation’s “moral strength, social controller and agent of change.” The deaths of the characters call out to pemuda that their task is far from over. I contend that their deaths inform us that the historical trauma and the latent threat of the past remains in the present, like a restless spirit that is unconstrained by the modern concept of linear time.

The collision between the New Order regime’s ideal portrayal of pemuda and
their contemporary portrayal is the focal point in *Keramat*. It is represented by the conflict between the young metropolitan characters and the traditional Javanese setting. In this way, the film allegorizes the contention between the growing sentiment of regionalism in the post-New Order era versus the New Order Javacentric government. I found that the title of the film also carries a significant reference to the regime. *Keramat* means “sacred,” reflecting the New Order regime’s desire to be seen as a “sacred” regime with undisturbed and unchallenged power channeled from ancient beliefs. Sacred invokes fear and respect, a perfect combination to preserve the power. It reminds me of Soeharto’s favorite reply to demands for a change. He always said that change must be done without disturbing the *status quo* (Vatikiotis 31).

*Jelangkung* is linked to *pemuda* political activism and its consequences. The curious and independent characters in *Jelangkung* represent the critical and politically active *pemuda* despite the regime’s restriction policy. The supernatural powers in the films act as a metaphor of the threat from the past which materializes in the tragic fate of the young characters. The conflict between old and new, modernity and traditional, young and old is apparent in the two films discussed, echoing sociologist Aswab Mahasin’s argument of post-Indonesian society as ever-swinging between Western Modernism and Eastern traditionalism (qtd. in Vatikiotis 100).

*Keramat*

*Keramat/Sacred* is the story of a group of young filmmakers from Jakarta that consists of Miea (the director), Poppy (behind the scene crew/reporter), Migi (the leading
actress), Diaz (the leading actor), Sadha (the assistant director), Dimas (the production manager), Cungkring (the cameraman) and Brahma (a local guide in Jogjakarta). They travel to Bantul, Jogjakarta to make a movie and once there stay at a haunted house. The filmmaking process does not go well and gets worse when the main female character, Migi, is possessed. The crew’s attempt to cast off the spirit leads to Migi’s disappearance to the “other world.” With a help of a local shaman, the rest of the crew mysteriously enter the “other world” to search for Migi. They magically transport from one sacred site to another and end up at the foot of Mount Merapi, one of the most sacred mountains in Indonesia. There, the crew faces mysterious happenings that eventually lead to the deaths of some of them. In the pivotal scene, the crew meets the queen of the “other world” who urges them to leave the jungle before dawn without giving them enough time or direction. In the end, three of them, including Migi, survive.

The film style of Keramat is influenced by The Blair Witch Project, an American independent film that utilized a handheld camera throughout, thus giving the reality effect of documentary-found footage by generating a more personal and closer attachment to the characters. Keramat is made to look like a found footage of a film production behind the scene. The intentionally spontaneous and seemingly unedited result of the film resembles the footage of demonstrating pemuda during the 1998 demonstration against the New Order regime (see figure 1).
In the wake of the 1998 Reformation, media exposure became more significant, because, the closer the camera got to the action, the better it became in capturing the ambience and spirit of Reformation. The director’s choice to use this technique not only provides the film with a stronger sense of suspense and surprise but also draws a closer parallel to the demonstration footages that provide a sense of immediacy and intimacy.

The young characters’ physical and psychological representation allegorizes the image of contemporary pemuda. The way they express themselves and their boldness in the face of the unknown is akin to the traits of pemuda during their Reformation struggle against the powerful regime. Simultaneously, the representation establishes pemuda as a significant element of the discourse of Indonesian-ness.

The first five minutes of the opening scenes establish their idiosyncrasies that later are contrasted to a more traditional Javanese setting in which they find themselves to be out of place. The film creates this contrast by structuring the narrative around distinct spaces: Jakarta, Jogjakarta and its surroundings. The scenes shot in Jakarta cover only the first five minutes of the film, and the rest of the scenes are shot in Jogjakarta.
Nevertheless, those scenes in Jakarta are essential in establishing the notion of globalized and metropolitan characters.

The Jakarta scenes detail the shared passion and friendship of the film crew. The crew dynamic gradually changes when they are in Jogjakarta, as conflicts and unexplained incidents start happening. While driving from the airport to their lodging, out of nowhere, a random man knocks on the window while shouting “*Mulih wongso... Mulih wongso!*” (Go home, wongso, Go home wongso!). The scene foreshadows the protagonists’ fate when they ignore the “warning.” No one knows what the man means, but Migi thinks he called out her father’s name, Wongso, a Javanese name. The warning is specifically directed toward Migi, and when she disregards it, she is possessed and almost loses her life. During their first night there, they are disturbed by a sound of a woman crying, and when Cungkring and Sadha investigate, the *gamelan* set located in the living room suddenly make sounds.\(^\text{16}\) Then Cungkring’s camera accidentally catches an apparition of a woman wearing *kebaya* (a traditional Javanese attire for women) outside the house. On the next day, the script reading process that takes place in the living room does not go well, as if there were an unseen power that ruins their concentration. Miea ends up cursing and scolding everyone, and this signals the breaking up of the group. The next scene shows them visiting the Borobudur temple. The ambience is fun but on their way home at night, a car in which Diaz, Migi, Poppy and Cungkring ride, mysteriously loses its way, and in the middle of nowhere they witness balls of fire coming at them. They manage to escape and return home, only to be

\(^{16}\) *Gamelan* is a traditional music ensemble that typically comes from the island of Java and Bali. It usually accompanies traditional dance, singing, or *wayang* performance.
scolded by Miea, who thinks they went to a discotheque. On the following day of script reading, Migi suddenly feels sick and later she is possessed. They call a shaman for help and through him they learn that Migi is possessed by her ancestor. That night Migi mysteriously disappears and the shaman tells them that in order to save Migi, they have to follow her to the “other world.”

These conflicts and incidents are the result of the contrasting nature between the young characters and the traditional and sacred place. Their presence at the sites brings imbalance to the natural order and the nature (and the supernatural) reacts to restore the balance. The *wayang* tradition informs us about the notion of natural balance. I argue that these conflicts represent the fundamental dispute in the way the nation, especially the New Order regime, looks at *pemuda*. There are lingering fears that “cultural globalization [that] fosters metropolitanism and secularism” (Jean Gelman 1) will uproot *pemuda* from Indonesian cultural values. The traditional Javanese values believe that globalization and westernization create imbalance to the *pemuda*. The New Order regime’s obsession with “order” exploited the value to its own advantage, as the regime suppressed the *pemuda*’s political activism and radicalism to avoid disorder. I am aware that the notions of traditional and modern are themselves complex and cannot be

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17 The New Order’s “return to balance” ideology is influenced by the traditional leather puppet narrative where the battle between good and evil is always present and the good usually wins although the bad will always return to create imbalance. *Wayang* performance is an important aspect for Soeharto’s regime; it became an important propagandistic tool for the regime, and its narrative is obvious in the national cinema. The moralizing messages that go along with the government ideology are obvious in the early period of Indonesian horror.

18 Contemporary state-published books on *pemuda* still assert the importance of being an ideal *pemuda* that is quite similar to the stance of the New Order regime. For example, a book published in 2008 by the Indonesian Ministry of Youths and Sports (2008) warns readers about the danger of globalization’s impact, such as industrialization, free information and hedonism that erode the values of nationalism. The writer claims that at present a lot of Indonesians, especially the *pemuda*, are averse to or ignorant of the essential meaning of nationalism (31). Implicitly, a sense of “directives” is present, reminding people of the New Order regime’s assertive manner.
simplistically paired as opposition. However, since the analysis follows the traditional Javanese mindset that still uses binary opposition in many aspects of lives, I thus treat the traditional and the modern similarly.

As for the issue of fears about westernization, this fear also comes from the Javanese culture itself. George B. Whitfield III states that “Javanese culture separates the inner and outer beings of a person,” signifying a binary opposition. However one feels one should not show it because appearances/the outer beings must always follow the Javanese customs and norms. Adrian Vickers finds these values reflected in the New Order regime whose aim “was to create the appearance of order and control” (142). Vickers’ argument points at the significance of façade to New Order regime that covers the real conditions underneath the appearance.

From the perspective of this Javanese culture, I interpret Jogjakarta and its surroundings as a metaphor of the return of the repressor that tries to re-traditionalize the already westernized young characters. Although the regime has fallen, the present government is still dominated by Javanese who still hold onto the traditional norms. In this regard, the independent and active young characters embody the contemporary pemuda, who struggle against the prevailing patriarchal and authoritative structure of the regime.

The film marks the characters as westernized through their appearance, attitude and ways of thinking. Their appearance and behavior are normal in the eyes of the modern and urban society, but they are out of place in relation to traditional Javanese culture. The three female characters often wear short pants and sleeveless shirts when

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19 http://www.expat.or.id/business/appearances.html
they are among sacred and traditional objects, such as the *gamelan* set. Such a sight is common for international tourists but it is considered impolite for Indonesians because they should have known better on how to appear and behave in such a place. Miea is the most extreme: she smokes, screams and swears a lot, the perfect opposite of the traditional refined Javanese (see figure 2).

![Figure 2. Miea’s appearance is contrast to the traditional background.](image)

The male characters’ appearances are almost similar: shirts, jeans, sunglasses and cigarettes. Not only does their fashion mark them in opposition to traditional Javanese, they also openly express their thoughts. They speak their minds; they are emotional, rebellious, individualistic, and oftentimes disrespectful to the local tradition. The observation of their physical looks is significant regarding the New Order regime’s emphasis on the importance of personal appearance. Thus, I interpret the scenes when all the major characters are trapped in the jungle as a metaphor of the return of the repressor, when the prevailing New Order ideology of ideal *pemuda* punishes the “non-idealistic” *pemuda*. Their deaths are then seen as the consequence of this lingering fear of westernization that continues to the present day. There is an implied message that such
non-nationalistic attitudes and appearances will always be under scrutiny and pressure from the government as well as traditional society.

**The Supernatural as a Repressive Force**

There is an interesting connection between the New Order regime and Jogjakarta. Soeharto was born in Bantul, Jogjakarta, and he associated himself with the ancient Javanese king. Accordingly, he referenced the standards of Javanism as in his method of governing the nation. One particular aspect of Javanism that pertains to *Keramat* is the enforcement of the familial hierarchical structure.\(^20\) The father figure is the most respected one, the one whom everyone obeys completely. Accordingly, Soeharto placed himself as the “father” of the nation. In this way, the Jogjakarta setting, where this hierarchical structure is still enforced, informs how the character conflicts mostly occur because they do not fully ascribe to this structure. Even though Miea leads the crew, thus making her the “head of the family,” often the crew disobey and confront her, a situation that is almost impossible to occur in the realm of the traditional world.

Another important scene that illustrates the influence of this hierarchical structure is when the characters are trapped in the jungle. There, they encounter the queen of the other world. In this scene the queen is escorted by the guards in traditional Javanese attire, signifying hierarchical structure and an absolute power. The queen acts as a metaphor for Soeharto and the encounter symbolizes the confrontation between *pemuda* and Soeharto. She refers to the young characters as “children,” an obvious reference to the New Order regime’s familial structure. Soeharto saw himself as the “Supreme

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\(^{20}\) See footnote on p.7 for the definition of Javanism.
Father” who possessed “divine energy” and whose orders have to be obeyed unconditionally by his “children.” The queen gives them an ultimatum to leave the jungle before the sun rises or be forever trapped in the “other world,” a place where the subversive pemuda will be forced to go to if they do not obey the regime. The queen’s ultimatum echoes Soeharto’s supreme patriarch rule as evidenced by the Javanese saying “sabda pandita ratu”/“the priest king has spoken.” As Benedict Anderson explains, the saying symbolizes that once the authorities have spoken, the orders must proceed, and they cannot be recalled or contradicted (The Pemuda 7). If she wants to, the queen can easily show them the way out, but she intentionally gives the young characters a hard time, as if she actually wants them to stay. The queen’s action emphasizes the absolute power that she possesses and at the same time reminds us of the historic trauma. The scene acts as a historical reminder of how the New Order regime limited pemuda movement in the political arena, and how the regime repressively reacted with mass arrests and academic sanctions when the pemuda voiced their concerns.21

Furthermore, representations of repressive power are delineated in the scene when Migi is possessed. Spirit possession is considered to be a common occurrence in Indonesia, even to this day. Cases of mass possession happen regularly, mostly at school, signifying pemuda as the most often afflicted group. When Migi is possessed, she is no longer herself; her voice and her manners belong to a spirit of a Javanese woman who

21 Vatikiotis argues that one of the saddest aspects of the New Order regime’s impact on society was its “stultifying numbing of intellectual institutions” (110). Indra J. Piliang echoes Vatikiotis, stating that strict control by the government weakens the students’ movements on campus when students’ organizations are belittled and cut off from the political arena (xxxix). In turn, this restriction alerted the students to the need to reclaim their role as the agents of political and social change. The result was the 1998 students’ movement, dubbed as a “moral movement” (Suryakusuma 5) that brought down the New Order regime.
claims to be Migi’s ancestor. The spirit claims that possessing Migi is the way to save her. Indeed, Migi is one of the survivors. The director of the film has explicitly stated that the background of the film is the Jogjakarta earthquake of 2006. In this context, Migi is saved from the wrath of the nature which is represented by the queen. However, my interpretation demonstrates that Migi is saved from the wrath of the past New Order regime. This interpretation also indicates that the New Order regime acted as a controlling force of the “natural order of thing.” Consequently, the spirit that possesses Migi is not seen as a sort of guardian angel, but represents the New Order regime’s instruments of power. In a possessed condition, Migi does not have control over herself, both physically and psychologically. The spirit indicates a separation from the two worlds with an emphasis on the preference of the “other world” as a much better place. Again, we see a reflection of binary thought that separates the universe into two: the realms of human and the supernatural. In a similar way, the New Order regime’s attempt to distinguish “us,” who obey and are loyal to the regime, and “them” who oppose the regime, reflects this binary thought.

When dealing with pemuda, the New Order regime depolarized the pemuda way of thinking to prevent them from revolting against the regime (M. Amir P. Ali 21). Migi’s anguish reflects this attempt; the best pemuda to the New Order regime are the obedient and the loyal, just like the possessed Migi. I draw a parallel between a possessed individual with an indoctrinated individual: they experience almost similar conditions. In particular, the spirit possession reminds me of the regime’s infamous indoctrination program called Penataran Pedoman Penghayatan dan Pengamalan
Pancasila (P4) or “Training on Guidance of Pancasila Implementation and Comprehension” which began in 1978 and lasted for more than two decades. It intentionally functioned as an assertive, systematic, ideological indoctrination that covered all levels of Indonesian institutions, both private and public, stressing the importance of a single and unified ideology of Pancasila for everyone. No other form of ideology was allowed as the regime’s ideology was “Pancasila Democracy” (Liddle 39). The P4 indoctrination program was intensive and obligatory in nature. The duration ranged from three to four days or as long as a week with sessions lasting six to eight hours daily. As I myself experienced more than once, this program is exhausting and ineffectual that mostly discusses topics in the conceptual realm. At the end of the program, the participants receive certificates and are supposedly “changed” individuals now able to comprehend and implement Pancasila in their lives. In addition, this is not simply a once-in-a-lifetime program, because one has to participate again, if one is involved in more than one institution or moves from one institution to another. Similar to the case of possession, it can happen again and again, especially when a person, in Indonesian phrase, is “spiritually empty.” The closest parallel to the Western understanding is a person whose mind is wandering, sort of daydreaming, that he/she seems to be temporarily “detached” from his/her surroundings.

Raillon argues that, “the epitome of Javanese politics was the state ideology or Pancasila as instrumentalized by Suharto” (93). The five principles which were formulated by the founding fathers are almost flawless but the way in which the regime exploits them has turned Pancasila into an Orwellian “thought police.”

22 Pancasila is the official philosophical foundation of Indonesia that consists of five principles: Belief in the one and only God, Just and Civilized Humanity, The Unity of Indonesia, Democracy led by the wisdom of deliberations amongst representatives, and Social Justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia.
The goal of indoctrination was to take control of people’s minds like an act of possession, where one loses control over one’s body and mind. For more than half of the film’s duration, Migi is not herself, and only in the last few scenes does she regain her consciousness. Migi is supposed to be successfully “indoctrinated,” and I contend that that is the reason she survives at the end of the film after being turned into a “repenting” pemuda. This particular scene points to the contested discourse of Indonesian-ness of the past regime in which an ideal pemuda, and accordingly, Indonesians are those who are loyal and unconditionally obey the regime.

The next point of interest related to the supernatural involves the presence of the shaman in the film. In the context of Indonesian society and in the Indonesian film narrative, it is very likely that a shaman is summoned to help every time a case of possession occurs. The appearance of the shaman reflects the New Order narrative where he/she serves as the order restorer. His physical appearance is a typical New Order narrative “shaman”: an old man with long hair and clothed in black/white (see figure 3). However, Keramat takes a different direction when the shaman fails to help Migi. Instead of restoring order, the shaman’s failure leads to a great disorder, which indicates a further break from the New Order narrative. Politically, the shaman represents the New Order regime’s agent, who “straightens” the “lost” pemuda. However, the shaman’s failure does not mean that order restoration no longer exists in the film because at the end, the supernatural beings replace the shaman as order restorers. The scenes show how the old narrative style is still apparent.
The Return of the Repressor through the Cinematic Landscape

Returning to the discussion of the setting of the film, I argue that the traditional and sacred settings are used not only to elevate the suspense and horror aspects, but also to maintain the contrast between the settings and the young characters. This part of the chapter will focus on how the actual cinematic landscape of the film is translated into a representation of “the return of the repressed and repressor” that reflects the prevalent and extensive ideological influence of the New Order regime.

*Keramat* demonstrates the regime’s Javanist ideology when the young characters are forced to conform to the traditional Javanese culture through their ordeal in several sacred Javanese spots. From the middle of the film to the end, the characters are mysteriously transported from one sacred Javanese place to another, which are completely unfamiliar to them. These places symbolize typical Javanese virtues such as “self-correction, *politesse*, hierarchy, obedience, restraint, and adjustment to superior force” (Andrew Beatty 90), none of which is shown by the characters. These virtues were also apparent in the construction of the New Order regime’s space of power. The
re-appropriation of ex-colonial buildings into government official buildings is a good example of re-living the ambience of power in a certain space. In addition, Javanese belief considers places with certain supernatural atmosphere to be more important than other common places; thus a hierarchy is apparent. Some “spiritually significant” spaces in Java are known to be places that Soeharto often visited, signifying his association with the supernatural world. The characters’ ordeal becomes a strong political allegory to the New Order regime’s effort to deal with activists.

Besides the village Bantul, Keramat uses other sacred spots around Jogjakarta: the Borobudur temple, Parangtritis beach and Mount Merapi (see figure 4). These three places are culturally and politically significant to the nation, resonating Stuart C. Aiken and Leo E. Zenn’s argument that space and place are integrated with cultural and political dynamics. In film, space and place reflect “prevailing cultural norms, ethical mores, societal structures and ideologies” (5). In particular, the shape of the Borobudur temple that resembles a mountain (Mount Merapi) clearly signifies the hierarchical structure in which the Supreme power occupies the highest point. This landscape indirectly perpetuates an image of the dominance of the New Order regime. It resonates with Jeff Hopkins’ argument that cinematic landscape is never a neutral place but “an ideologically charged cultural creation whereby meanings of place and society are made, legitimized, contested, and obscured” (47).

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23 The best way to explore the correlation between the New Order regime and the supernatural is through the regime’s attachment to the Javanese mysticism called kejawen. For more than 50 years (1945-1998), Indonesia was under regimes whose presidents are kejawen devotees. In the context of state cultural production, Michael van Langenberg looks at kejawen as “the predominance of mystical religiosity plus the self-conscious identification with the great imperial tradition, looking back upon the ancient Javanese empire ‘Majapahit’” (27).
Figure 4. Borobudur Temple, Parangtritis Beach and Mount Merapi

The use of Jogjakarta and its surrounding as the setting is a perfect example of “the return to the past,” as Jogjakarta is the only city in Indonesia that has a direct connection with the last kingdom in Java, Mataram. There is also a clear association between Jogjanese and Javanese, as Selosoemardjan argues, so that in describing the state and the society, the two words are often used interchangeably (xix). To this day, the governorship of Jogjakarta is hereditarily (Vatikiotis 29) held by the Mataram king’s descendents, the Sultan, who is regarded as “the great initiator of social change” (Selosoemardjan xxi). The court/kraton where the Sultan lives is a sacred place filled with many sacred objects. To create the same ambience in a much smaller scale, the film uses an old house in Bantul in which a gamelan set placed in its living room becomes the focal point. The gamelan set is a strong symbol of sanctity and traditionality. Most of the scenes inside the house take place in the living room, whose ambience is strictly Javanese.

The scene on Parangtritis beach shows how the unknown power drags the young characters into its world. Parangtritis beach is spiritually known as the gate to the other world. When Migi is gone, the shaman leads them to follow Migi to the other world through this “gate.” While waiting for the shaman performing his mystical ritual, the
characters are approached by a female food seller. The male characters flirt with her before she leaves them and approaches the shaman. From afar, the young characters notice that the shaman bows in front of her, clearly suggesting that she is not just a food seller. Then she suddenly disappears. Still in shock and surprise, the shaman leads them to walk in lines, and one by one they are mysteriously transported to another place. In the New Order narrative, the shaman usually restores the order by defeating the supernatural beings, but in this case, he is actually working with them by “sending” the characters to the other world.

I argue that their journey to find Migi reflects the return of the repressed. It becomes a sort of spiritual indoctrination that debilitates their critical and open-minded thinking that reminds me of the New Order regime’s strategy in dealing with pemuda. The female food seller is the queen of the South beach in disguise. She is a powerful and fearful mystical figure in Indonesian myth. The fact that she disguises herself as a humble and traditional female Javanese reminds me of Soeharto himself. Soeharto is known as a smiling general, he smiles no matter how feels, emphasizing the importance of the outer appearance. Behind the smile, however, is the figure of the authoritative and repressive leader, just like the true self of the female food seller: a powerful and fearful queen.

The last scenes take place at the foot of Mount Merapi, whose significance is apparent in the wayang tradition. Wayang is the most well-known Javanese tradition that encompasses all life aspects of the Javanese. It is also known as the puppet shadow theaters in which the puppeteer/dalang manipulates the wayang and narrates stories taken
from the epic Mahabharata or Ramayana. The *wayang* tradition as an important tool of the New Order regime is significantly referenced in the film through a mystical *wayang* scene (see figure 5). The New Order regime’s adoption of the values and ideology of *wayang* in their governance is not a secret to most Indonesians. The regime considered *wayang* not only to be a cultural heritage but a guide and reference. What is striking about the film’s *wayang* scene is that the narrative is about the character *Semar* talking to his sons about humans’ destructive action towards mother-nature (see figure 6). Soeharto often associated himself with *Semar*, who is actually a powerful god disguising as a clown servant. Politically, the appearance of *Semar* is a perfect allegorical image of the return of the repressor.

*Figure 5.* A *dalang*-less *wayang* stage in the middle of a jungle.
Figure 6. Semar character, with whom Soeharto often associated himself.

In a wayang performance, dalang is the most important figure. What is interesting in the wayang scene, is that the dalang is absent. In other words, the wayang moves by itself. It is eerie and at the same time brings to mind the misinterpreted use of the word dalang in the social/political arena that carries a negative connotation. Often, when a crime occurs, the authority refers to the mastermind behind the crime as the dalang. During the New Order regime, numerous incidents advocated by the regime brought out mysterious and unrevealed dalang, which is exactly what the wayang scene points out. Similar to the mystical and invisible dalang, the New Order regime cleverly hides the dalang behind the atrocities they committed, leaving the people guessing and causing confusion. The absence of the dalang becomes a metaphor of the unresolved atrocities that lead to historic trauma, thus the return of the repressed.
A wayang performance begins and ends with a dance of kayonan/gunungan (see figure 7). A standard kayonan represents God’s pre-determined physical and spiritual world. In general, kayonan has iconographies that include objects of nature such as animals and trees, which fight with supernatural beings such as ogres, with whom they share a similar realm. In the bottom center of the kayonan there is a locked double door guarded by two giants on each side. The place beyond the door represents spiritual peace, and in order to go through the door a human has to defeat his or her secular needs. This prehistoric belief in the power of mountains gives birth to the belief that the spirits of the dead reside in mountains. In his research, Triyoga learned that some locals who live at the foot of Merapi believe that the place is a kraton/court of supernatural beings.

The kayonan metaphorically represents how the characters are trapped between the two worlds. Their journey to the foot of Merapi is an intersection of the present and the past. When they are led to Parangtritis beach, they become isolated from the world. Their mysterious “transport” from the beach to the foot of Mount Merapi signifies the
New Order regime’s isolation process for disobedient pemuda. The conflicts and struggles the protagonists face reflect the fights in the kayonan between the secular and the spiritual, where some of them are indefinitely trapped in the other world. Thus I view the characters as a representation of the modern and secular world, while the spiritual represents the New Order regime’s strong inclination toward Javanese mysticism. The journey becomes a sort of “cleansing and sorting process” of the secularly tainted characters. It is a process of indoctrination, isolation and punishment of the insolent, westernized pemuda.

I mentioned earlier that the gamelan set is an important representation of Javanese tradition and accordingly the New Order regime. There are two scenes in which the gamelan plays a role: in the characters’ lodging and in the jungle. In both occasions, the gamelan mysteriously plays by itself. A gamelan (see figure 8) has mystical and political functions, both of which fittingly reflect the New Order regime. Gamelan is not only about melody and dynamics, but also about harmony. Harmony cannot be separated from being in order: one of the regime’s buzzwords. Politically, gamelan is not to be listened to, but to create a passive and controllable society. This is a clear reference to the New Order regime’s ideology and control through the appearance of gamelan set; the vibration of the gamelan becomes an echo of the returning past.
Terror and *Pemuda*

Returning to the character analysis, I want to focus on the scenes in which the supernatural power kills the characters. They experience terror in the jungle scenes: the *dalang*-less wayang performance, the apparition of a scary old man and a young woman, and the encounter with the queen. At one point amidst the confusion and fear, the characters are separated from one another. This isolation draws attention to the issue of historic trauma when the New Order regime arbitrarily imprisoned Pramoedya Ananta Toer (Pram), a famous Indonesian activist and novelist. There are indeed numerous other similar cases of isolation that occurred during the New Order regime, but I chose this case because it is nationally and internationally known, considering Pram’s capacity as a global literary figure.

Pram, just like the young characters, was an active and vocal *pemuda* who dared to oppose the powerful. He was imprisoned and regularly abused in an isolated Buru Island for a decade (1969-1979) with the charge of being a communist. The 1970s were a difficult era for students when it came to political activities. The New Order regime
attempted to erase any association with the previous regime which was ideologically leftist. Consequently, anyone with even the slightest indication of being related to communism would be punished severely or in Pram’s case, isolated. The intention is to “correct” and depoliticize the *pemuda*. As one of the “punished children,” Pram experienced the suffering and torture for being vocal and open-minded, traits that do not fit the Javanism ideology and the regime’s “ideal” picture of *pemuda*. After being released, he bitterly saw Javanism as “the most devastating aspect of Indonesian culture” that is similar to fascism (Andre Vltchek and Rossie Indira 85). There is indeed the lingering fear of Javanization where the Javanese way of life may be nationally and legally enforced on every citizen. His release in 1979 did not mean freedom because he was under house arrest until fully freed in 1992. Before the regime imprisoned him in 1969, the Dutch colonizers already had him in prison during the war of Independence (1945-1949). This second imprisonment is obvious evidence of how the regime applied the same strategy as the colonizers to muffle any dissident.

I see a connection between Migi and Pram: both suffered under a powerful force, experienced a sort of trauma, and managed to survive only after experiencing punishment. The film does not inform about Migi’s fate afterwards, but a logical assumption is that she will be in a long state of shock and trauma, learning that her friends die mysteriously. She is as helpless as Pram, whose long imprisonment and abuses have weakened him physically and psychologically. Although he remained vocal in the last decade of his life, he was not as active as before.
The narrative leaves Migi, Sadha and Poppy as survivors. The first character to die is Brahma who finds a precious stone and a *keris* in the jungle, before he is literally dragged by a mysterious force in front of his helpless friends. Diaz dies after he meets a mysterious girl who lures him into accompanying her. The group gets smaller when they split in fear after running into a mysterious horrifying figure. Just like the dispersed students, they are weakened as individuals. Dimas is mysteriously gone when they are separated from each other, as Miea is possessed and brutally attacks Cungkring, who becomes the last victim.

Their deaths evoke the significant tragedy in the post-New Order regime that fell upon an Indonesian activist, Munir. Munir was a human-rights and anti-corruption activist. Just like the young characters who never stop looking for Migi, Munir tirelessly investigated corruption cases within the Indonesian government. He was aware that the reminiscence of the New Order regime in the form of corruption remained strong in the Post-Reformation period. The film delineates this reminiscence through the traditional and mystical settings that make reference to the past. The long-corrupted system is difficult to uproot. Tragically, Munir was poisoned and killed during a flight from Jakarta to Holland as part of a sophisticated assassination plot when he was travelling to continue his graduate studies. Indirectly, the characters are also “poisoned” to death. Brahma and Dias are lured with supernatural objects and a girl respectively. Miea is “poisoned” through possession. In the eyes of the New Order regime, Munir was without question an intimidating threat, just like the characters in the eyes of the queen. Munir is definitely not the regime’s “ideal pemuda.” Munir’s death proves that the fallen regime’s
influence remains strong. The victory of the supernatural over the modern characters becomes a metaphor of the powerful return of the repressor. Munir’s death during the post-New Order regime era reinforces the notion of the past haunting the present. The “grave” does not stop the past from remaining influential and committing atrocities towards the living. From this perspective, the last scenes remind me of the latent danger that the “dead” New Order regime brings to the future generation who tries to break away from it, just like Munir who demands the New Order regime to be held responsible for its atrocities.

*Keramat* was produced in 2009, about five years after the death of Munir in 2004. However, more trials are expected to occur with the accumulating and added evidence that may bring the real culprit closer to justice. Similar to the mysterious death of the characters, Munir’s death is still shrouded in mystery. Munir also cofounded the Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (*Kontras*) because of the innumerable unsolved cases of missing people during the New Order regime era. The similarity with the film is clear: the young characters are in a way dealing with a case of a missing person, Migi. The statement of one of Munir’s activist friends, Poengky Indarti, during one of the trials reveals a strong connection between Munir’s death and the New Order regime. Wendratama recorded this trial when Poengky stated that Munir’s thesis would be about unsolved abduction cases during the New Order regime era (164). If all the characters survive, they may demystify the mystery of the Mount Merapi (read: overpowering the returning repressor). However, their attempt is cut short, like Munir’s. This string of events, which escalates from the characters’ being isolated, abducted,
turned into one another, and eventually killed, represents the political coercion and strategies applied by the New Order regime to deal with the vocal and modern pemuda.

I interpret the three survivors: Migi, Sadha, and Poppy as a metaphor of different aspects of the return of the repressor. Migi is a good example of the “repenting” pemuda who is “subdued” through the possession. Sadha, compared to the other characters, is reserved and calm; he seldom speaks his mind and he obeys Miea. In the early scene during his interview with Poppy on the train, Sadha says that he has no ambition in life. In the last scenes, Sadha is the one with initiative to grab Migi from the clutch of the supernatural beings and takes her to safety. I see Sadha, among the rest, as the most idealistic pemuda. He is resourceful, obedient, and can control his emotion. Despite his westernized appearance, his attitude most closely conforms to the Javanese norms. Poppy represents a uniter, the glue of the group. She is the most compassionate character and a buffer for her friends when they have conflicts. In this way, she is a perfect metaphor of the New Order regime’s ideological emphasis on the importance of unity among diversity.

The allegorical function of Keramat leads to contending interpretations on the discourse of Indonesian-ness between the New Order regime’s past construction and the contemporary one. The New Order regime’s strong association with Javanese mysticism is still apparent to this day, reflecting the assertion of Indonesian-ness discourse as Javanese-ness. Although decentralization and regionalism have replaced the notion of centralization in contemporary Indonesia, Javanism is undoubtedly still alive and active. Even as more young Indonesians become more metropolitan and less regional, the
Javanese traditional values of vertically oriented familial hierarchies are still apparent. Vatikiotis’ expression fits the condition of contemporary Indonesian society, which is caught between tradition and renewal. Just like the young characters, contemporary Indonesians have two contrasting faces: the modern and traditional, where both are competing in the larger discourse of Indonesian-ness (101). The proliferation of regionalism, decentralization, and fanatic religious groups definitely reinforces a more traditional, even primordial Indonesian with a strong emphasis on tribes and religious conservatism. The film implies that the version of the New Order regime’s ideal of the Indonesian youth as having a strong faith in God and preserving traditional values, is very much alive today. The death of the characters indicates a warning for the contemporary young audience to respect the traditional values and behave accordingly.

**Jelangkung/The Uninvited**

*Jelangkung* is the story of four young characters who share a similar interest: to prove the existence of supernatural beings. They are Ferdi, the leader; Gita, Ferdi’s girlfriend; Soni, the aggressive, soldier-like man; and Gembol, the merrymaker. Most nights they visit sites that people believe to be haunted. They cannot find any supernatural beings in the city and decide to go to a haunted jungle outside the city limit. Unknowing to everyone, Soni stabs a *jelangkung* doll in a lone grave and his action leads to their tragic endings. Upon their return to the city, some restless spirits follow them and eventually kill them.
The film’s title refers to a game derived from the hereditary belief of summoning the spirit of the dead. It is a centuries-old Indonesian-mystic game, especially well-known in Java. Suwardi Endraswara categorizes *Jelangkung* as “man-made idolatrous spirits/ghosts” (172), referring to its materials and creation process (see figure 9). Similar to the western ouija board, it mediates the spirits and the living. The puppet has a coconut shell head, crossed wood as the body and arms, and a piece of linen to cover the body.

![Figure 9. Illustration of a *jelangkung* puppet. Source: maskuss.blogspot.com](image)

Certain incantations and rituals must be performed and, if successful, the possessed puppet will move and communicate in writing with a pencil tied to its hand. Historically, this ritual of summoning ancestors came from China and the ancestors are believed to be protectors of children. The ritual, pronounced *Cay Lan Kung* in its original form, became *jelangkung*. In time, the ritual evolved and somehow turned into a
summoning of spirits game. Summoning spirits signifies an intersection between the past and the present.

I argue that Jelangkung represents the rules and policies that the New Order regime set up to preserve power. They are, like the Jelangkung, non-natural and thus man-made ideological tools which are “sacred” and not to be questioned. Like Jelangkung, the rules and policies become a mediator between the powerful elite and the common people. People have to respect and enforce these rules and policies if they want to live safely and peacefully. People who question them will face overt or covert punishments, just like the spirits that haunt the protagonists after one of them “plays” with Jelangkung. I also argue that allegorically the film shows a stark parallel to the Indonesian Communist killing of 1966-67.

The Scenes of History and Violence

The film opens with a flashback scene to the year 1938 in a fictitious Javanese village, Angkerbatu. It is night and the eerie score heightens the terror with a group of angry people, led by a shaman, holding a seemingly possessed eight-year-old boy. The film’s powerful figure is definitely the village shaman who continuously chants to cast out the evil. The boy’s eyes and mouth open wide, he gurgles unintelligibly while thrashing to free himself. The chant grows louder, accompanied by deafening bamboo instruments, as if trying to muffle the boy’s struggle. The shaky camera movements and shots alternating between the faces of angry villagers and the boy heighten the tension.

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Four men hold the boy down and the shaman, after chanting some prayers, butchers the boy. He looks possessed and that alone is a sufficient proof for the villagers to put all the blame on him. From a modern point of view, the boy’s state might be caused by some medical condition, but a superstitious society does not have such a consideration.

Possession is perpetually related to evil-doing, and it is believed that the child’s death will restore order. This scene is a lucid description of a superstition-driven society. The villagers interpret their misfortune as the work of evil, they are driven to find the source and destroy it. This violent and inhumane action is a reflection of the return of the repressed, and represents the unresolved and arbitrary violent actions that occurred during the New Order regime. This is the main reason why the New Order regime is referred to as the “state of violence.”25 In particular, the scene is reminiscent of two historic traumas: one in 1966-67 when arbitrary killing of suspected Communists occurred and the more recent incident of the killing of Reformation activists in 1997-98. These two historic events are prominent, because the first one gave birth to the New Order regime whereas the latter marked its death. The scene also emphasizes the horror of common people’s ignorance and close-mindedness under the spell of the enforced New Order “totalizing discourse” (Heryanto, *State Terrorism* 10-12). It also allegorically shows the success of the regime’s fear of communism discourse in which the people were turned into uncontrolled “monsters” as part of the regime’s “master narrative.” There is an evidence of hierarchical structure in the scene in which the shaman acts as the leader that all the villagers blindly obey and follow. The New Order regime used a similar sense of

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25 Some scholars associate the New Order regime with violence that becomes one keyword to describe the regime (Aspinall 1993; Lee 1999; Anderson 2001; Wessel 2001; Nordholt 2002; Siegel 2002; Eklof 2005; Heryanto 2006).
this hierarchical structure, which was extraordinarily useful in maintaining its centralized and vertical governing system.

Immediately after the boy dies, a sudden strong wind sweeps the village, followed by low-level camera shots that move fast, zigzagging towards the village, suggesting the arrival of an unworldly force or perhaps the boy’s vengeful spirit. The scene ends with the same camera movement closing on the shaman’s terrorized face before it cuts to the opening title. Then the villagers one by one disappear mysteriously after the incident which is another reminiscence of the 1966-67 Communist killings. The closing scenes of the opening show that instead of a restoration of order, the villagers experience terror and chaos, marked by the fast zigzagging movements of the camera. From a plot perspective, the whole opening scene leads to the disruption of the New Order horror narrative that glorified order restoration.

The opening scene significantly mimics the typical ending of the New Order “mass scene” narrative. During its reign, the New Order regime often emphasized the importance of a controlled mass with an emphasis on obedience and homogeneity. The significance of massa during the New Order regime reflects two aspects of the regime’s discourse of Indonesian-ness: unity and integration. Individuality is undermined to mitigate critical and vocal opposition of the individual. I argue that by a continuous assertion on the importance of unity and harmony, the New Order regime attempted to create a homogenized society that is easier to control. In contrast, Jelangkung attempts to undermine the role of authority and uplift the power of individual thinking and action, no matter the outcome.
On the massa, James T. Siegel states that it was comprised mostly of underclass people who were economically weak, and middle class people who “transformed” themselves into the underclass for fear of losing what they have during a major mass movement (“Early Thoughts” 82-83). Anderson also adds that the massa are only realized when the middle class finds its fears about to come true. He asserts that this massa is activated at certain anxious or difficult moments (Violence and the State 117). Thus, the accumulation of the mass in the opening of the film hints at this moment when continuous disaster falls upon the village (see figure 10). The chaos that occurs at the end of the opening sequence can be read as the Reformation force against the powerful. The director’s decision to begin the film with what is usually considered an at-the-end scene indicates a breaking point between the New Order horror narrative and the contemporary one. There is no better way of showing that one is going in a different direction than to start from where the old narrative style leaves off and to reconstruct everything.

Figure 10. A typical New Order mass scene at night time.

The New Order narrative usually puts this typical scene at the end of the film
when order is eventually restored. As if emphasizing a clean break from this narrative, Rizal Mantovani, the director, begins the film with this scene. Instead of order restoration, this past tragedy becomes the starting point of “future” disorder, at the same time signifying the return of the repressor. Although the mass scene occurs in the beginning rather than at the end of the film, it is executed precisely as it was done in the past: It takes place at night and is accentuated by the shouting mass holding torches while beating on some bamboo instruments. The scenes are reminiscent of a typical old horror narrative that may re-live nostalgic aspects and make reference to the return of the repressed. However, the opening scenes are the only scenes reverberating with the New Order’s narrative and its rhetorical order restoration. In contrast, Jelangkung is open-ended with the death of the young characters, leaving no place for the massa, religious leader and authority in the narrative. They are all replaced by individuals who act and make decisions independently.

**Characters as Modern Pemuda**

The next scene jumps to a more modern time, as rock music is used in the score, which signifies an even stronger break from the New Order regime narrative. Jelangkung is the first contemporary horror film loaded with popular songs, and its score actually becomes an important part of the film. The score is clearly aimed at the pemuda as the

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26 John A. Lent argues that “Particularly in Indonesia, after the end of thirty years of Soeharto’s New Order, filmmakers have enjoyed more freedom, no longer heeding requirements to obtain production or location permits and freer to use social criticism content that would have been censored before” (14).  
27 There are many examples of crowd scenes in the New Order horror narrative, for example, Beranak Dalam Kubur (1971) depicts the rage of the workers/villagers towards a cruel master. The scenes are taken at night, and the crowd is typically holding torches and shouting.
designated marketing target. The scene is at night and is set inside an abandoned old house somewhere in Jakarta. The camera is at a low angle and tilts upward to reveal the major characters’ silhouettes.

Figure 11. The characters in their supernatural hunting night.

Instead of torches, the young characters hold flashlights, and instead of casting off ghosts, they are looking for them, indicating another shift in the narrative style: the different way in which the supernatural beings are treated (see figure 11). The New Order horror narrative mainly deals with the supernatural beings or rituals that become a source of spiritual power and knowledge. The narrative circulates around the characters’ quest to achieve them, and the supernatural power is always feared and respected. In contrast, the search for supernatural beings in the contemporary horror films is mostly driven by curiosity and thrill; often the encounter is not intended but accidental. Jelangkung is a case in which the protagonists deliberately seek for the supernatural beings.

From the way the characters treat the supernatural, there is an obvious shift in the

28 Before the Reformation era, as Heider argues, Indonesian horror film had long concerned itself with the traditional legends and folklores of the monsters’ repertoire such as the stories of Nyi Roro Kidul, Telaga Angker, Siluman Ular and other stories (44). These stories are mostly Javanese-based, as if confirming the mystic-shrouded New Order regime and implicitly emphasize the horror of disorder.
characters’ mindset (through the director/producer) in the contemporary horror narrative. 29 Most characters in the New Order horror narrative undoubtedly believed in and respected the existence of the other world and its beings. There were rarely any horror films that depicted skeptical characters, as if everyone took it for granted that the supernatural world always exists side-by-side with our world. This situation also reflects the superstitious society and allegorically points to the people’s obedience and fear of the regime. I interpret this situation as the effect of the New Order regime’s totalizing discourse that encompassed all aspects of everyday life.

On the other hand, most characters in contemporary horror films like *Jelangkung* are more skeptical and logical, although this does not mean that they completely disregard the possibility of the existence of the supernatural world. They look at that world more as a myth or make-believe than as truly existing side-by-side with the human world. From a broader perspective this shift indirectly reflects a change in Indonesian attitude following the Reformation. 30 The logical traits, boldness and disbelief toward the supernatural expressed by the characters represent the change of the Indonesian political paradigm from fear and compliance in relation to the New Order regime to being more critical and vocal against the government. In Heider’s words, there is an apparent shift in

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29 As Norman Fairclough argues, the socio-political situation during the post-Soeharto era/Reformation era “induced several tentative, incomplete, and contradictory changes in the shifting discursive practices of the media” (52).

30 The emerging horror filmmakers (Rizal Mantovani, Monty Tiwa, Helfi C.H. Kardit, Joko Anwar, and Allan Lunardi), whose films are examined were all born between the late 1960s to the early 1980s. It means they all experienced and witnessed the collapse of the New Order regime and the rise of the Reformation state. One unifying aspect they share is the deployment of the new narrative style. This effort to break away from the traditional style can be read both as a desire to detach from the influence of the New Order regime and as a rebellious act against them. The filmmakers are, according to the Constitution, *pemuda* who populate their films with young actors/actresses. They replace the archetypal figure whose role as authority or familial institution is to restore order.
the characters’ basic drive from “social embeddedness,” like the massa, to “individual autonomy,” (29) like the young independent characters. Although the characters work as a group, the film focuses more on individual struggles and their inner state. It is in stark contrast to the opening scene, in which people act as an unidentified mass and are driven by social rather than individual force. The young characters’ nightly adventures to prove the existence of supernatural beings are seen as an attempt to break from the superstitious circle and allegorically as a quest to uncover the 1966-67 killings. Although they know that there is always a risk in their action, they are unafraid to move on and face the powerful unknown. Their actions and portrayals symbolize a modern, skeptical and more logical attitude. Allegorically speaking, the film’s sense of pemuda obviously represents a new face of Indonesians: pemuda who have no fear of the powerful elite.

**The Haunting Supernatural as the Return of the Repressor**

One particular scene of a philosophical argument between Zul and Ferdi carries a significant meaning in the discussion of Indonesian-ness discourse and the return of the repressor. They are talking about Ferdi’s supernatural haunting obsession. It should be remembered that the notion of supernatural in this chapter is related to the return of the repressor. Zul’s question to Ferdi (“So, you still want to find the supernatural?”) becomes a kind of warning not to mess around with the “other world,” or in my reading, the New Order regime circle of power and the historical trauma (the communist killings). As a response, Ferdi argues that since the beginning, the supernatural has existed to tempt human beings and he argues that instead of God, humans are more afraid of evil, which is
absurd and makes him fearless of the supernatural. I interpret the phrase “tempting the humans” as the New Order regime’s hegemonic control of the people. Drawing a parallel between “evil” and the New Order regime, Ferdi’s fearless attitude reflects the pemuda who are immune to the New Order regime’s threat and domination. Ferdi further argues that supernatural beings share the same space with humans but at a different frequency and that is why one cannot see them. Zul replies that if human senses cannot detect such beings, then all Ferdi’s efforts are meaningless. And if they share the same space with humans, then all the trouble going to certain places to find them is useless because the beings may always be beside Ferdi. Zul’s argument represents people’s negligence and unawareness of the New Order regime’s repression, showing the superiority of the regime’s hegemony. They had been under an authoritative regime for more than three decades and the regime’s hegemonic policies had put people under their spell. Besides, just as it is taboo to fiddle with the supernatural beings, it is unwise and foolish to confront a strong and powerful opponent like the New Order regime or to uncover their atrocity. I argue that this sort of ignorance results in repressed traumas that will always haunt people. Ferdi’s insistence on proving the existence of supernatural beings represents the strong-willed nature of pemuda to confront the return of the repressor and deal with the historic trauma although they realize the risk and danger. The fear and terror Ferdi and his friends experience once they confront the unknown become a reminder that the New Order regime, even when no longer in power, is still powerful, particularly in establishing the fear of Communism, and can frustrate pemuda in their effort to slough off the New Order regime’s influence and to uncover their atrocity.
The scene elaboration above leads to an argument that the break in narrative style does not necessarily signal the end of the New Order regime’s influence. Fear, anxiety and unsafe feelings are still the favorite underlying themes that point at the return of the repressed and the anxiety of facing the future. Contemporary horror narrative is, in particular, pitiless towards its young protagonists and often ends with their tragic deaths, as shown in *Jelangkung*.\(^1\) In contrast, the New Order horror narrative punished only those who committed evil. It focused more on the importance of natural balance than on punishment of the antagonist, reflecting the strong Javanese philosophy influence within the New Order regime.

Contemporary horror becomes the antithesis: innocent characters die while the supernatural beings or antagonists prevail. This relates directly to people’s profound anxiety in the post-New Order era. This point is represented by the films’ chaotic endings and non-existent order restoration. Again, it does not mean the end of Javanism. The fact that most filmmaking processes and sets are mostly done in Java, especially in its big cities, only confirms that Java and, accordingly, the traditional values of Javanism, are still dominant. In addition, the present Indonesian government is still dominated by Javanese, which implies the ever-presence of the influence of the New Order regime. By referring to Ariel Heryanto’s notion of the New Order regime’s totalizing discourse strategies, I read the contemporary horror films and their monsters as a reflection of these strategies through the trauma, haunting, punishment and death of the young characters.

\(^{31}\) In the wake of the Post-Reformation era that in particular that witnessed a sort of “space-clearing” in the realm of imagination and expression in filmmaking, most contemporary horror films break away with the conventional close-ended narrative. It means that the usually defeated supernatural beings or monsters now become more powerful and “die hard” while at the same time the young and independent characters that replace the traditional wise-old men or the authority turn into the victims of the monsters.
Jelangkung’s reflection of trauma, haunting, punishment and death occurs at the turning point of the film when the protagonists decide to go outside Jakarta to Angkerbatu village to hunt the supernatural that they cannot find in the city. Zul warns them not to go there, saying they will only dig their own graves. In this respect, Zul serves as a sort of New Order agent by constantly reminding his friends of the danger in fooling around with the supernatural world. Zul is a character that prefers to be on the safe side than going out and challenging the supernatural. He represents people who submit to the regime’s authority. The scene when Zul warns them foreshadows the fate of the characters. Ferdi and the others have made up their minds and decide to go. The trip from Jakarta to Angkerbatu metaphorically means a one-way-ticket, signified by the contrasting ambience between the city’s bright, smooth highways and the suburban dark, uneven dirt paths. It foreshadows their tragic fate: from brightness to darkness. Their decision to go beyond the city indirectly means re-visiting the New Order narrative style which alternately depicted the city and suburb as films’ backgrounds. In the New Order narrative, the suburb or village was almost always where the monsters dwell. Often, the educated characters or intellectuals from the city, besides the local wise men, become the heroes who defeat the monsters. The narrative indirectly indicates the suburbs and villages as the antecedent of the supernatural world while the city and its modern people are the emissaries of order and prosperity. It reflects the New Order regime’s attempt to recognize villages and suburban areas as an integral part of the nation, but at the same time it fosters the stereotypes of uneducated and superstitious villagers in contrast with the modern and educated urbanists. The narrative also reflects the New Order regime’s
double nature of advocating modernity and preserving the (Javanese) traditional values and norms as its ideological foundation. *Jelangkung* turns the role of urban versus village upside down; the intelligent and modern *pemuda* from the city are now helpless against the monsters. It is as if they are caught in a traditional world with which they are unfamiliar. Their logical and skeptical attitude toward the supernatural is crushed under the terror and haunting of the monsters.

The four characters experience this breakdown. Two of them, Ferdi and Soni, play more significant roles than the other two. Ferdi is the leader of the pack, with Soni as his right hand man as well as his opposition. In some scenes they argue over leadership and decision-making. Soni is agile, focused and physically well-built, clearly indicating soldier-likeness. I interpret him as a representation of a paramilitary organization that was comprised of thugs and gangsters, *Pemuda Pancasila*, loyalists of the New Order regime. Loren Ryter says that the pro-democracy activists often charged *Pemuda Pancasila* members with mobilizing the masses to counter the students’ demonstrations against the New Order regime (*Youth, Gangs* 125). *Pemuda Pancasila* members were also notoriously known as Suharto’s thugs who performed dirty jobs for him like raiding NGO offices, expediting land clearing, acting as private bodyguards for the Suharto family, and intimidating students and activists. In addition, they played a significant role as killers during the 1966-67 killings. Essentially, this youth organization is the antithesis of the struggle for democracy. In some respects, Soni embodies these characteristics: he does not get along with the others and his negligence and selfishness bring damnation to everyone. He discreetly brings a *jelangkung* puppet to *Angkerbatu*
for his personal agenda. Just like *Pemuda Pancasila*, he represents the role of provocateur. When they arrive at the village, Soni provokes the others to trespass, eventually leading them to the lone grave. It is Soni, who provokes the supernatural beings by thrusting the *jelangkung* puppet into the grave which releases the beings.

When later on the characters ask a shaman for a help, Soni attempts to bribe him to take care of the problem. The New Order regime often employed this provocateur strategy in different contexts to preserve its power and position. Bribery was part of this strategy. There are thousands of cases where provocation and bribery were suspected, and numerous cases where *Pemuda Pancasila* were suspected of foul play for the sake of the powerful elite.

In the film, after the long drive from Jakarta, Ferdi and the others arrive at a lone house in *Angkerbatu* in which an old couple lives. The old man physically resembles the shaman in the opening scene. By using the same actor with older make-up, the film suggests he is the same person. This strategy intensifies the suspense and concurrently connects the past and the present, signifying the return of the past, since the audience will connect the old man with the opening scene. In Heider’s term, the old shaman acts as the “agent of disorder” (35) and explains why he is still alive and not punished for the murder of the young boy. The concept of order and disorder of the New Order narrative is apparent. It does not judge a person as “good” or “bad” but focuses more on the social outcome: the restoration of order. Punishment is not always necessary; in fact, the so-called agents of disorder are often converted and avoid punishment. In contrast to the New Order narrative, *Jelangkung* uses neither the disorder to order nor the good versus
bad concept; it intentionally stays in a grey area where the boundary between good and bad, order and disorder remains unclear. *Jelangkung* severely punishes its characters even when they are innocent. The tragic punishment of the innocent reflects both the return of the repressor and the repressed, reminding us about the unresolved old-regime atrocities.

When the characters ask for directions, the old couple specifically reminds them not to take a left turn, a clear “direction” for the *pemuda* to avoid “leftism,” when they arrive at a certain spot. However, Soni manages to convince his friends to take that turn, emphasizing his role as the “agent” of the New Order regime and at the same time allegorically establishing their quest to uncover the 1966-67 tragedy. They camp in the middle of the forest and find nothing but a lone unmarked grave. On the night before they leave, Soni secretly thrusts a *jelangkung* puppet onto the grave and performs a ritual, an act that represents the return of the repressor through the medium of supernatural beings. The effect is not immediate and Soni thinks that the ritual did not work. From this point on, I notice that Soni’s role changes from old-regime agent to victim because he is also punished and killed. After the group’s visit to the village, they are able to see the supernatural beings, not only during their ghost-hunting but also in their daily activities. A parallel between these supernatural beings and the New Order regime is apparent: they both generate fear and trauma, encompassing all aspects of life.

Feeling terrorized and afraid, they submit themselves to the traditional means of dealing with a supernatural problem through a shaman. Their action reminds the audience of the opening scene, where people do anything that the shaman tells them to
do. In this way, the shaman symbolizes Soeharto, whose power can force anyone to do what he wanted. The plot is circling back to the past that signifies its intersection with the present. The characters in the present now attempt to do what people in the past did: to cast out the supernatural beings. The influence of the past in the present cannot be clearer than in this scene. This scene points to traditional values, in particular superstition, taking over logical thinking. This situation resonates with the dualistic nature of Indonesians: they are drifting between the traditional and the modern. This scene also signifies that the timeless influence of the New Order regime is still very much traditional.

The shaman tells them to go back to the lone grave and remove the *jelangkung* puppet. His remark towards them reminds me of the values of the New Order regime concerning respect and obedience towards the elderly and powerful. Their decision to contact the shaman is in a way a sign of their submission to the traditional way of dealing with the supernatural. Although they do not want to go back to the grave, they follow the shaman’s advice, and as a result they die. They are killed for digging up the past, the traumatic past that the regime attempted to bury. If the characters do not follow his advice, they may still be alive but forever haunted by the supernatural, ironically fulfilling their obsession to encounter the supernatural. Thus in this case, the shaman is the agent of the New Order who muffles the subversive force. The characters were disrespectful of the unknown supernatural power by playing *Jelangkung*, representing the subversive and curious *pemuda*, who are against the regime, questioning the regime’s ideology and past atrocity; thus, they have to be punished. The characters’ mysterious
and tragic death reminds me of the unaccounted for deaths of many people who confronted the New Order regime and who were accused of being Communists in 1966-67. In the final scene, the characters somehow get separated in their search for the lone grave, and they meet their deaths individually by the supernatural.

The film’s open ending indicates the latent danger of the New Order regime and a reminder of the old-regime atrocities. It also points at a post-Reformation Indonesia that is characterized by two contrasting values: the traditional and the modern. In this sense, the discourse of Indonesian-ness must be understood as a hybrid creature constructed by the modernized traditional and the traditionalized modern, where the tension between them is signified by the persistent old influence and the desire to move forward. The discourse of Indonesian-ness in the Jelangkung version refers to metropolitan, independent and open-minded pemuda who dare to explore and take risks. At the same time, the tragic fate they meet reflects the haunted and anxious Indonesians who fail to detach themselves from the long-embedded traditional values and ideology transmitted for many generations.

The whole set of novel elements in this film re-ignites the passion for horror. This phenomenon is a path to channel and express the historic traumas that were repressed for decades. Even though there is no direct reference between the film and the Reformation struggle, the film’s tagline (“It comes uninvited; it leaves on its own”) indirectly alludes to the mysterious abduction and killing that occurred during that particular time, which was analogous to uninvited monsters.
CHAPTER 2: GENDER PERFORMATIVITY IN AIR TERJUN PENGANTIN AND ARWAH GOYANG KARAWANG

This chapter examines two horror films, Rizal Mantovani’s Air Terjun Pengantin (2009) and Helfi Kardit’s Arwah Goyang Karawang (2011), in regard to their visual representation of gender. These two films allegorically highlight the contention between contemporary discourses on gender and New Order gender politics. In particular, this chapter explores three elements of gender performativity: body images, sexuality, and gender roles. Significantly, both films incorporate elements of horror that inform each film’s distinct use of allegory and engagement with issues of problematic gender construction.

The New Order gender politics is patriarchal and it sees women as a threat to its structure. Robinson asserts that “The New Order promoted gender differences. Officially sponsored images of femininity portrayed Indonesian women as subordinate to men, within the family and the state” (“Women” 237). The so-called “1965 communist coup” created a chance for the new regime to control women’s political involvement. The new regime arbitrarily demonized the leftist Indonesian Women Movement (Gerwani) by accusing them of committing inhuman atrocities on kidnapped military officers before killing them. The “official” report says that the Gerwani women cut off the penises of one the generals and danced wildly while torturing them. These “actions” even appear as a relief in the national monument that commemorates the 1965 tragedy. The demonization of Communist and women is so influential that many Indonesians today still believe it to be true despite the contradictory medical reports from
distinguished medical examiners when they examined the corpses of the generals. This “demonization” of women was maintained throughout the New Order regime period, when women had almost no place in the nation’s political life. In the film industry, the demonization and submission of women continues through the appearance of seductive and dangerous female monsters and victims and the exultation of men as the order restorers.

_Air Terjun Pengantin_’s exploration of black magic practices in contemporary Indonesian society indicates a clash between the tradition/superstition and the modern/secular. _Arwah Goyang Karawang_ revolves around the dynamics of a traditional dance troupe. The dance is called _Jaipongan_, a famous Javanese dance traditionally associated with sexuality.

I employ Judith Butler’s sense of gender performativity to analyze each film’s use of the body and representation of sexuality. Butler argues that the notion of gender performativity is the “acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires…of the bodies that point to…an illusion discursively maintained for the purpose of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality” (136). Film has the capacity to represent the dynamics of fabrication in terms of gender performativity, and I intend to deploy Butler’s idea in the textual analysis of the two horror films. The following discussions investigate how these two horror films detail issues of fabrication, the representation of the body, and the regulation of sexuality. These films conform to and challenge Indonesian discourses of gender and the larger discourse of Indonesian-ness.
A critique of gender roles can be perceived as a “fundamental goal of feminist theory,” which looks into “how gender relations are constituted and experienced” (Jane Flax 622). Butler’s emphasis on the inseparability of gender “from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained” (3) identifies the emphasis of my analysis on each film’s representation of the body and sexuality. Her argument also indicates the fluidity of gender construction within contemporary Indonesia.

Gender cannot be separated from conceptions of the body and sexuality. As Carol J. Clover argues, the horror film is significant to discussions of the body, gender, and sexuality because “the target [of a horror film] is the body, our witnessing body…the body in sex and the body in threat” (“Her Body, Himself” 69). Historically, Indonesian horror genre shows a similar tendency to target bodies. In fact, Indonesian horror films will not survive without incorporating sexualized and threatened bodies. I treat the two films as cinematic demonstrations of discourses on body image, sexuality and gender roles.

Historically, women characters in Indonesian horror film stereotypically function as the victim (the object), or the ghost (the abject), both of which are subservient to their male counterparts. Khrisna Sen states, it is not peculiar to the New Order regime and Indonesian people in general to see women as sexually threatening and thus women characters often need to be “punished” (Indonesian Cinema 9). The standard formula of New Order horror regime reflects this treatment of women: most of the supernatural beings are women, and at the end of the films they are always killed or subdued by a
patriarchal power, such as shamans, authorities, wise men, or religious leaders. The films challenge this view and address how gender representation echoes historical trauma.

I work with the premise that *Air Terjun Pengantin* (2009) and *Arwah Goyang Karawang* (2011) each contain sociopolitical representations of the masculine and feminine that act as renegotiations of gender construction. In this way, each film addresses how the idea of gender materializes between the undying paternalistic and misogynistic Indonesia and the contemporary gender discourses in Indonesia.

**Air Terjun Pengantin**

*Air Terjun Pengantin* opens with an intertitle that states that black magic practices are still performed in Indonesia, and that about 18,000 cases of black magic had already been recorded before the film was produced (2009). The story tells about a group of young people who vacation on a remote island somewhere offshore Java Island. Their vacation turns into a nightmare when they meet a psychotic shaman who practices black magic and kills whoever comes to that island. The characters are slaughtered one by one until Tiara, the final girl, defeats him.³²

The film’s opening scene is a flashback that shows a mass of people chasing down a man who abducts a woman in a forest near a village. The film later reveals that the action is located on a remote island offshore Java island (see figure 12). This scene is reminiscent of the opening sequence of Mantovani’s *Jelangkung*, the film discussed in

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³² The term “final girl” is introduced by Carol J. Clover in her seminal essay “Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film” (1987). The final girl refers to the female sole survivor who defeats the monster in slasher films. She argues that the final girls are usually masculinized to survive, signifying that they cannot survive without masculine attributes.
the previous chapter. In a similar way, the scene evokes the style of New Order filmmaking, as the massa scene usually appears at the end of the story before all conflicts are resolved. The presence of a leader/wise man among the massa as the person who resolves the conflicts adds a stronger touch of the New Order style and its patriarchal hierarchy.

![Figure 12. The shaman holding the woman while the villagers surround them.](image)

Eventually the man being chased is cornered by the mass of villagers at the edge of a waterfall. In his desperation, he throws the woman over the waterfall and escapes. This act signifies the title of the film, which translates as “The Bride’s Waterfall.” He later finds her dead and his animal-like scream signals a vengeful rampage as he begins to kill some of the villagers. The villagers burn his face, a traditional act to cast off evil. Screaming in pain, he escapes for the second time. As the narrative continues, the shaman eventually kills all the villagers and becomes the sole survivor on the island.

Through the lens of gender performativity, the opening scenes demonstrate the horror of patriarchal power as “monsters” with the raging villagers and the shaman. The
submissiveness of femininity is represented by the “bride of the waterfall,” the helpless and objectified woman who dies at the end of the scenes. The fact that the woman is abducted because of “love” points to the men as active agents and women as passive ones. The scenes indicate a strong presence of the New Order patriarchal structure in which males are supposed to protect the weak females. The woman is helpless, which makes a clear reference to the New Order’s *kodrat wanita* (women’s moral code) that framed women as meek and submissive. The norms determine that good women are pure (preserving their virginity until marriage), loyal and obedient as wives (“taking care of and being in relation with other”), and domestically functional (“nurturing, mothering, preserving”) (Flax 637). The “stained” or non-normative women are marked as outcasts.

**The Body and Sexuality**

*Air Terjun Pengantin* teems with female bodies. The way the film treats the female is related to sexuality, the abject and the uncanny. As Michel Foucault writes, “sexuality is an historically specific organization of power, discourse, bodies and affectivity” (qtd. in Butler, *Gender Trouble* 92). As for the abject, Julia Kristeva defines it as that which “disturbs identity, system, order [and] does not respect borders, positions, rules” (4). The notion of the uncanny pertains to Kristeva’s abjection that refers to something familiar yet strangely unfamiliar. With these concepts in mind, I argue that

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33 Examples from the films are the masked psychopath shaman and the *cebol*/dwarf boat driver who possess human physical characteristics yet are somehow different. The shaman physically looks like a normal human being but the way he dresses himself, the mask he wears, his obsession with the supernatural, and the fact that he is killing people puts him at a distance from being “normal.” The *cebol*’s disproportional physicality definitely creates this familiarity/unfamiliarity feeling. These sexualized, mutilated, and non-normative body images are contained in a specific power relation and discourse.
the films’ treatment of the female and male characters is in conversation with contemporary Indonesian gender discourse. In this way, the films might be thought to illustrate a problematic history of gender discourse in Indonesia.

There are five major female characters in *Air Terjun Pengantin*: Tiara, the leading character; her cousin, Mandy; and Amy, Dinar, and Stacy, Mandy’s friends. The film ambivalently treats these female characters that defy, challenge, or perpetuate the New Order gender discourse. Throughout the narrative and from the perspective of patriarchal binaries, the female characters’ bodies are explicitly sexualized in the manner of objectification and “male gazing.” When they have been exhaustively objectified, they are turned into the abject through bloody mutilation with regard to New Order norms; they turn into a figure that “disturbs identity, system, order” (Kristeva 4).

Through the lens of postmodern feminism, sexualized and objectified bodies carry different meanings in terms of the conception of women’s identity and freedom. This specific theory of feminism is relevant to the contemporary Indonesian gender discourse, to which challenges the symbolic order of the patriarchal structure in laws and other social norms (Susan J. Hekman 8). Butler’s notion of gender performativity is one significant contributor to this branch of feminism and in a way, as Flax argues, “feminist theory is a type of postmodern philosophy” (624). This branch does not only fit but also reflects the contemporary Indonesian gender discourse. As I stated in the introduction, Indonesia is influenced by postmodernist thought, in particular the refusal to accept the “meta-narrative” that results in the proliferation of multiple narratives. The postmodern challenge to modernism’s dichotomous structure is in particular relevant to the challenge
of the New Order regime’s strong dependence on the masculine/feminine binary for the exercise of power. The postmodern feminist concept of deconstructing the concept of the “Other” and transforming it into a positive stance to unpack the patriarchal ideology and norms is particularly significant to reveal the richness of contemporary Indonesian gender discourse (Riant Nugroho 81).

In the film, after the dark and violent opening flashback scene, the narrative distinctively shifts to a contemporary time with a shot of a modern house in a bright morning. After the drastic and tense opening, the morning ambience soothes. There is a jump cut to a static shot of a beeping alarm clock and Tiara waking up in her two-piece lingerie. The camera, in Laura Mulvey’s notion of the male gaze, “consumes” Tiara’s seductive image, lingering on the curves of her body. There are two other similar scenes in which the camera exposes her body. The first one is the scene of their journey to the island in which Tiara sunbathes in the boat bow while the aerial camera consumes her body. The second one is on the island when Tiara and the other female characters show their bodies off in two-piece swimsuits in a “traditional exhibitionistic role” (Shohini Chaudhuri 35). For almost five minutes, there are several jump cuts from one female body to an other, alternating with the shots of the male characters gazing down at the female characters. The only shots showing the female gazes at the male character is Tiara’s when she playfully seduces Lilo. In short, the montage illustrates the characters “doing gender” (Judith Lorber 9), with the female as the sexual object and the male as the agent of the look.
These particular scenes both perpetuate and challenge the norms of the New Order gender construction. The camera is lingering longer at the women’s bodies than the men’s, signifying the reduction of female sexuality as an expression of male dominance (Flax 639). At the same time, these scenes challenge gender construction, especially when it is read through postmodern feminism. The postmodern feminists believe that to take back authority in gender construction, women should express themselves, and one way to do so is by feeling proud of their bodies as a means to challenge the concept of the Other. Rather than passively being gazed at, women should actively control the gaze. These scenes show just that. Despite the obvious sexualized body images of the characters, I notice that the female characters are actually the ones who control the gaze, or in other words, they reverse the gaze without being in the masculine position. The female characters “force” the male characters to gaze at them and at the same time prevent the males from fulfilling their gaze by creating a distance through the abrupt jump cuts.

In addition, not all gazes in those scenes belong to the male characters. Some belong to Dinar, who “sees” the other females through her camera viewfinder, thus making her the active gazer who controls what we see. In the same sequence, Tiara gazes at Lilo while playfully seducing him by rubbing some lotion to her body, and challenges him to return the gaze. But he seems to be shy and looks away from her seductive gaze. Also, throughout the whole beach scene, the camerawork prevents us from fixing the gaze to any particular body for more than two or three seconds through the constant move of the camera that abruptly jump cuts from one body image to another. Indirectly, the
camera, as one of the active gazers, seems to lose its “confidence” as it fails to firmly fix its gaze on the body just like the male characters. Thus, the sexualized body image is not necessarily generated or constructed by the camerawork or the filmmaker in a voyeuristic or scopophilic manner but is controlled by the female characters themselves who reverse the gaze and act on it. They possess their own agency by disrupting the male’s fantasy creation and refusing to conform to the notion of kodrat wanita. Clearly they do not embody the identity of the New Order’s ideal a maternal, nurturing, and pure femininity. None of them are nurturing mothers or loyal wives, and considering the state of their relationship one can safely assume that they are no longer pure. The early house scenes do not indicate anything related to female domesticity; it only appears briefly and the narrative never returns to the house. Chronologically, Tiara comes out of her feminine space of the domestic home into the space of masculinity (the shaman’s island) and indirectly makes it “her territory” when she kills the shaman.

In contrast, when the men are caught gazing at the women, they look away in embarrassment, pretending not to look at them. As for the shaman, even though his gaze is more direct and lustful, he never does it without his mask on, except in the last scene when he faces Tiara. His “inability” to gaze at the female characters without the mask equates him with the rest of the male characters: lacking in self-confidence. They are fantasizing about the women, but the women are the ones who control the fantasy, forcing the males to restrain themselves from fulfilling their fantasy and making them timid against the overpowering female sexuality. In conclusion, these scenes are problematic because on the one hand they reflect the dichotomy between the subject
(camera/men)/object (body/women), and on the other hand, they can be read as a part of a discursive process of gender construction in which the women play a more dominant part. Instead of being a sexualized and dominated object, they possess agency through their sexuality, by proudly expressing it.

In the initial bedroom scene, there is one unexpected scene that supports the notion of Tiara as the main drive for the narrative and as the film’s main instrument that challenges the New Order’s construction of gender. The scene is a flashback to Tiara’s past, when she was almost buried alive in a single car accident. The unexpected shots that suddenly change the film’s tone disrupt the flow of the “perfect” and seductive body image of her in the bedroom to images of her screaming inside a wreck of a car in the middle of the night, as if pulling back the audience from the comfort of the images. The fact that she survives the crash and shares the reminiscence with us hints that she is a non-normative female and a survivor.

The shots of Tiara’s body that are juxtaposed with her flashback show what Thomas F. Cash and Thomas Pruzinsky claim that body image is “the multifaceted psychological experience of embodiment” (xv). These scenes establish Tiara as a multifaceted character who acts as an active agency and has control over the narrative as well as her body. At the same time these scenes function as a challenge to the traditional treatment of female body image in horror films. The disruption from the “gazing” shot of Tiara’s body to the same body almost buried alive in the car indicates the break from the New Order patriarchal perspective on women’s weakness and dependency on men. To
further support this claim, there is no figure of a man present in these establishing scenes for Tiara.

The most significant scene is the climax when Tiara defeats the shaman in a duel. This scene not only shows the defeat of the antagonist and the survival of the final girl, but also indicates the defeat of the patriarch, embodied by the shaman, by the hands of a non-normative feminine. The scene allegorizes the independence of women from men in constructing women’s identity and rejecting women’s position as supplicants. During the chase scene, Tiara stabs the shaman on the back with a pair of scissors, but fails to kill him. The shaman chases her down, and the climax occurs fittingly in the bride’s waterfall. When Tiara falls on her stomach, the shaman gropes her body and seduces her, talking creepily sweet to her about marrying him and bragging about his invincibility as a black magic practitioner. There is a strong sexual implication in his dialogues as well as a dominating sense of a patriarchal figure when his body looms over Tiara’s. When he is off guard, Tiara pulls the scissors out of the shaman’s back and stabs it in his eye, before she eventually spears him on the chest with his own weapon. While still holding the spear, she screams wildly, mimicking a wild beast upon killing its prey (see figure 13).
Figure 13. Tiara screams as he holds the shaman’s spear.

The scene shows how Tiara’s body and sexuality transgress the patriarchal binaries by killing the patriarchal monster. She does not cower but bravely fights the shaman in a masculine and aggressive manner. In the context of Indonesian horror genre, the masculine traits are often related to physical strength, bravery and resourcefulness in overcoming obstacles, the traits that Tiara possesses when she faces the shaman.

Borrowing Elizabeth Hills’ suggestion on her study on the *Aliens* heroine, Tiara is transgressive and transformative in her ability to “confound binaristic logic…access[ing] a range of emotions, skills and abilities which have traditionally been defined as either ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’” (39). Battered and bruised, she keeps fighting for her life. Even when she is cornered, she remains calm and strategic to make him off guard. She is transgressive when she actively exploits her body and sexuality to defeat the shaman, embodying her as a “gender hybrid” (Jane Chi Hyun Park 244). This scene also indicates that the male gaze and lustful desire can be turned against males. At the same time, it actualizes the threat of women’s body image and sexuality. Her act of stabbing the shaman in the eye, back, and chest with two sharp objects (scissors and a spear) is symbolic. A pair of scissors does not usually signify a weapon but an object most
associated with domesticity. The stabbing scissors symbolize the transformative aspect of Tiara, who resourcefully utilizes whatever object is available to defeat the shaman. The stab to the eye definitely punishes the male gaze that signifies its permanent absence. The final blow with the spear is a symbolic take-over of the patriarchal power by the female. The stabbings allegorically refer to the “intrusion” of the domestic into the public/masculine space. The spear also carries a phallic power that is transferred to Tiara. She disrupts the patriarchal binaries and the traditional norms as Tiara and the shaman share masculinity and struggle over phallic power. As Carol Clover notes, Tiara “materialized in ‘all those phallic symbols’… [and in] … the castration of the killer at her hands” (“Her Body, Himself” 93). The final shot of her victory as she stands on top of the dead shaman, while screaming, also symbolizes the disruption of heteronormativity or the asas kekeluargaan (family foundation) that became the ideological foundation of the New Order regime (Kathryn Robinson, “Indonesian National” 73).

The discussion of Tiara’s body image and sexuality above allegorizes the re-framing of the contemporary gender construction. However, the other female characters do not get equal treatment, especially at the end when their bodies, except for Mandy’s, become the “food” for the shaman. In other words, they are turned into cadavers as “the ultimate form of the abject” (Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine* 9). Among the other three female characters, only Amy possesses almost similar traits to Tiara. She is different from the traditional slasher female characters that cry and cower in the face of death. Her voice, in Kaja Silverman’s notion on female voice in films, is not merely tied
to bodily spectacle. Like Tiara, Amy actively threatens to “castrate” through her depiction as a brave, resourceful and decisive, female who undermines her male counterparts (see figure 14). The narrative eliminates her because there can only be one final girl. Her horrible death by decapitation indicates a sort of “punishment” by the patriarch power for crossing the boundary between male and female “normative” identity.

Figure 14. Amy does not cower or cry at the hand of the shaman.

Another interpretation of Amy may lead to an interpretation that she is a lesbian. She never hints at having any interest in Icang despite his constant attempt in approaching her. Moreover, she dies because she sacrifices herself so Mandy can escape from the shaman. Indeed, one can interpret differently, but sacrificing oneself for another strongly suggests that the person is very special. The first female victim, Dinar, experiences a similar fate. Her death is actually prolonged compared to the others. First, she is tied in a chair and then the shaman chops off her finger and drinks her blood from it, before he plants an ax on her head. I argue that her “sin” is her overtly public display of affection for her boyfriend, for which there are two consequences. First, it triggers the

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34 In *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, Kaja Silverman argues that the female voices in films are oftentimes tied more to their physical bodies rather than their traits.
shaman’s hatred and jealousy at a couple in love. Second, the scene is a reminder of the New Order moral norm that forbids such behavior before a couple is legally married. This perspective puts the shaman as the “executioner” for the prevailing New Order moral norm. Thus, Amy and Dinar represent a non-normative femininity through a disruption of the heteronormativity and traditional norms of how a woman should behave. At the same time, their death and “abjectification” as the punishment for transgressing the patriarchal space returns the favor to the patriarchal binaries. The threat they carry through the exposure of their unfeminine manners, body images and sexuality is suppressed by their deaths.

(A)sexual Male: The Rigid Mr. Right, The Impotent Romantic, the Lustful Merrymaker, and the Materialistic Dwarf

The discussion on masculinity in the film is contextualized in discussions on the Post-modernism because “men and male subjectivity are historically mutable and ideologically unstable, constantly constructed and reconstructed in representation” (Chaudhuri 106). On Indonesian discourses of masculinity, Clark argues that the post-New Order period is marked by the renegotiation of “the state’s homogenizing conception of gender, and gendered roles,” (117) which turns the masculine space into a site in which “the battle of identity is fought” and “the dominant male heterosexuality is depicted as a victim as much as it an aggressor” (123). In a broader discourse of Indonesian-ness, the post-New Order concept on masculinity is marked by its multiple narratives that question, challenge and disrupt the previous and prevailing notion of the
“ideal masculine,” signified by the dominant figure of a father, a religious leader, or a wise man.

The New Order regime’s masculinity concept is based on the Javanese patriarchal structure that makes males superior and dominant. Being Javacentric, the regime adopted wayang characteristics that define the masculine identity: refined and brave like the satria/knight, wise like the dewa/gods, or rough, lustful and ambitious like the buta/ogre. Soeharto associates himself with the wise character of Semar. One can clearly see these stereotypes in the New Order horror films in which the male characters typically play roles as the wise, the intellect, the logical, and the superior. As the antagonists are cunning, brave, ambitious and strong, they can accordingly only be defeated by the male protagonists.35

Although such figures are disappearing in contemporary horror cinema, the contemporary male figures in the media, as Pam Nilan argues, still suggest “hegemonic principles of patriarchal praxis” (340) in which the male characters eventually refer to or turn into “traditional men” in terms of embodying the New Order’s picture of the “ideal masculine.” Her study proves that the influence of the New Order patriarchal binaries is very much alive today. This concept undermines any disruption to the “ideal male” identity as being non-normative, and consequently needs to be suppressed. For example, besides the “ideal man” type, there are two other types of males that often appear in the

35 As an example, even though the protagonist and antagonist in Beranak dalam Kubur (1971) are women, they are conditioned to be dependent on the men. In the case of the antagonist, she has to embody male traits to show superiority and fierceness as the evil character. Eventually, the order is restored by their father’s sacrifice (wise father figure), and at the end the protagonist is crying on the lap of her husband (the brave and gallant young man).
New Order narrative: the dwarfs and waria (transvestite) that are considered “the deviant ‘Other’” (Clark 122). Their “othering” indicates another level of hierarchization within the male structure that reflects the hierarchical levels of wayang characters by which their roles and relations in a performance are determined.

Through its male portrayal, Air Terjun Pengantin disrupts the hierarchy and the normative masculinity and body image. It clearly becomes the battleground in which the male characters and their masculinity are re-constructed and re-interpreted. This re-construction involves the emergence of the multiple narratives on the idea of the ideal male identity in addition to the constant appearance of the New Order version of male identity that indicates the strong and embedded influence of its concept in the mind of many Indonesians.

The “hypermasculinized” portrayal of the male characters exaggerates their traits and turns them into stereotypes (Nilam 329). Besides the existing prevailing male stereotypes, the film offers variations that enrich and problematize the construction of contemporary male identity. The five male characters, including the shaman, do not survive. I focus on four characters in which one is a minor character. My interest on the character lies in regards to his body image as a cebol/dwarf. The other three characters are Lilo, Tiara’s fiance; the shaman; and Icang, Mandy’s friend. I do not include the character Bram, Stacy’s boyfriend because he shares almost similar traits with Lilo in a less significant way. Thus, his portrayal is already represented by Lilo.

Lilo is portrayed as masculine and handsome. He represents, borrowing Nilan’s words, the cool and sensitive cowok trendi (trendy male) type (328). He embodies the
New Order’s ideal male character by being depicted as brave, good-looking, authoritative, protective, and able to survive any ordeal. Some of these values are clearly the vision of Javanese masculinity, such as being “refined, mystical, spiritually potent, impractical, delicate, non-Islamic, controlled, and sexualized in a repressed way” (Laurie J. Sears 57). He embodies some of the values but clearly lacks the authority and definitely does not survive. He seems to be the “Mr. Right” for Tiara except that throughout the narrative he is depicted as a rigid, emotionless character, who cares more about always being cool in front of the others than being more attentive to Tiara. He symbolically represents a “proud” phallus that is traditionally identified with “power and privilege” (Chaudhuri 107).

I want to expand Lilo’s discussion by reading his depiction against the normative masculinity of the New Order regime and the Post-New Order era. Clark argues that Indonesia’s model of hegemonic masculine behavior and identity is evidently the Javacentric hegemonic ideal which ironically remains “a model” (27) that is based “on traditional Javanese cultural attitudes of deference and obedience, ideals inspired, promoted and reified by the Javanese epic theatrical and literary tradition” (29). Lilo’s rigid and emotionless behavior becomes this model that reflects the Javanese aristocrats’ model of emotional self-restraint.

His first appearance is in the bedroom scene, when we are introduced to Tiara (See figure 15). After Tiara’s flashback scene, Lilo enters the room and plays his part as the comforting male. Lilo is a picture of the ideal Javanese man who can restrain his
emotion and remain calm in any situation, characteristics that were perfectly embodied in Soeharto.

Figure 15. Tiara and Lilo in their home.

The film ridicules this “ideal man” and his normative masculinity through exaggeration of these traits, making him a robot-like character without obvious emotional expression. As if to further ridicule him, he is executed in a sacrificial-like killing and stripped of his masculinity when he lies helplessly on Tiara’s lap (see figure 16).

Figure 16. Lilo on Tiara’s lap.
The film “makes” him the leading patriarch by visually positioning him in a higher ground than the others or in front of the others, as if materializing the hierarchy. When Mandy and her friends arrive at the dock, Lilo and Tiara stand high on the upper deck of the boat, and while Tiara comes down to greet them, Lilo remains there and establishes his “higher” position as the leading male (see figure 17). Throughout the boat trip, Lilo is always on the upper deck, driving the boat, while Tiara and Mandy stay on the lower deck. Lilo is the one familiar with the island, and it automatically puts him as the man in charge, only to be challenged later by the shaman, the patriarch of the island.

Lilo’s patriarchal role is a mockery of the New Order version of an ideal man. It is confirmed through his failure in saving Tiara and his death in the hands of the shaman. Being cool, refined, and emotionally self-restrained does not save, another mockery that points to the fate of the New Order regime.

One particular scene ambivalently shows that Lilo both embodies and challenges the New Order normative masculinity. It occurs not long after they arrive in the island. Tiara asks Lilo to commit to their relationship, and Lilo clearly avoids the topic by
busying himself with the boat. Tiara is tired of getting questions about marriage. Lilo simply asks her, “Do you want to marry me or your family?” The New Order’s gender ideology of family foundation is clearly reflected through this scene, especially when Tiara mentions the “peer pressure” on their marriage plan. Lilo’s response marks the New Order Javanese-based normative masculinity. In addition, the way he responds to Tiara suggests his domination. At the same time, his ignorant response, which implies the unnecessary bond with the family, and his reluctance to bring their relationship to marriage undermine the significance of family foundation in male-female relationships, thus in a way challenging the normative masculinity.

In the course of the narrative, Lilo and Tiara are separated. When he looks for her, the butcher catches and butchers him. Interestingly, the camerawork maintains his “high” position as he falls into the shaman’s tree spring noose trap that results in his hanging with his feet above. His dying position ridicules the so-called leading masculine. With little effort, the shaman uses his machete on Lilo’s hanging body as if he is a fig (see figure 18). The other characters manage to at least fight the shaman back, but Lilo is the only one who never physically fights the shaman. In fact, he is the shaman’s easiest prey. This scene explicitly denies the traditional climactic “final battle” between two leading male characters, demystifying the heroic and masculine figure that saves the day. It also omits the possible reunion of Lilo and Tiara. The non-normative masculine represented by the shaman defeats the hypermasculine Lilo. There is nothing heroic about his death, but it triggers Tiara to confront the shaman, as if his death brings out her “masculine side,” resonating Clover’s argument that the re-framing masculinity of the
film is usually followed by a further marginalization of the construction of femininity

(*Men, Women* 105).

*Figure 18.* Lilo is helplessly hung with the shaman besides him.

The shaman is the “impotent romantic.” First of all, he is a black magic practitioner, and in the tradition of the New Order narrative such a person is usually celibate or made impotent as the price for receiving a certain supernatural power. We learn that the man is a shaman from continuous intercuts of shamanic objects shots during the chasing scenes. Shaman is usually portrayed as a solitary character isolated from society. The shaman in *Air Terjun Pengantin* constantly needs human sacrifice to make him stronger and invincible which ironically suggests his weakness. His long, unattended hair and black attire make him a typical traditional shaman. He wears a mask to cover his deformed face, making him an uncanny character. The shaman is the evil force and, gender-wise, he is constructed as non-normative masculine. In the world of *wayang*, he is the ugly and rough ogre. He fulfills his pleasure through control, domination, and punishment, thus making him a sadist.
Allegorically, he represents the undying misogynistic and patriarchal New Order. He is an embodiment of the New Order authoritative patriarch through his actions. First, he practices black magic that is interpreted as the New Order regime’s strong attachment to the Javanese *kejawan*, an ancient belief that also incorporates the supernatural. Second, he has a “devilish guardian” in the form of a bearded old man wearing traditional black attire that clearly refers to the figure of *dukun* or shaman in New Order horror narrative, further suggesting that it is the shaman’s master. Furthermore, we learn that this “spirit” guides and orders the shaman to perform all the rituals, including the killing, thus making the spirit a suitable allegory to the authoritative New Order regime (See figure 19). Third, the shaman speaks in a strong Javanese accent, drawing him closer as a representation of the Javacentric regime. His death in Tiara’s hands means the stripping of his masculinity that indirectly disrupts the New Order’s masculine norms. The shaman’s ambiguous portrayal possesses double meanings. First, it allegorically represents the fluidity of the contemporary male identity, and, second, it mocks the New Order’s notion of ideal Indonesian male identity.

*Figure 19. The shaman-right and his “spiritual guide”-left.*
The shaman is impotent. Visually there is no indication that he ever has any sexual contact with his female (or male) victims. His deformed face makes him undesirable. The killing of the (mostly) weak female characters only reinforces the belief that women’s sexuality can “weaken men and the only way…to overcome this is [by removing] the threat of the impending danger” (Wazir Jahan Karim 30-31).

Another interesting aspect of the shaman’s portrayal is his mask. It is a black wooden mask with a protruding phallus-like nose that strongly indicates a sort of compensation to his impotency (see figure 20). I interpret this allegorical impotency as the failure of New Order’s patriarchal norms, Javanism, and its kejawan (Javanese spiritual belief) to save Soeharto. The shaman also carries a long spear and a machete that further indicates his weakness and insecurity. To borrow Adam Wadenius’ words, he is the “deviant masculine” who is “burdened with a particular sexual dysfunction” (130).

His hiding behind a mask is another indication of his lack of manliness. Firstly, it is senseless to wear a creepy mask to hide an already deformed face, which suggests that he is not confident to terrorize his victims without a mask. The mask symbolizes his domination or superiority over his victims. He does reveal his face in the final battle against Tiara because Tiara is the “chosen one.” This unmasking scene reminds one of a veiled woman whose veil can only be opened by her husband which often suggests submission or loyalty. From this perspective, in a way the shaman becomes a romantic feminine who submits himself to Tiara and who reveals himself only for the one he really
wants, or in Clover’s words, the shaman is a “gendered-impaired feminized male” (“Her Body, Himself” 109).

Figure 20. The shaman in his mask.

As for Icang, he is a typical merrymaker/fool character that everyone bullies. For example, everyone laughs at him when they find out that he is sea-sick, and in another scene when he seduces Amy, she gives him the middle finger, a strong sign for him to back off, which he does not seem to understand (see figure 21). Physically Icang is a cowok trendi, like Lilo. However, the way he carries himself, his talkative nature, and his narcissistic manner make him a “feminine man.” His constant failure to approach Amy indicates that he is portrayed to be different from the traditional “macho” man who always gets the girl. Every time he approaches Amy, her reaction shows that Icang is not manly enough for her, or perhaps she sees him more as feminine. And every time Amy responds to him, he is “defeated,” turns timid and backs away.
Even though Icang is less masculine, throughout the narrative he is the most “active gazer,” who indirectly channels our gaze of the female body image and sexuality. However, he remains only a gazer who never succeeds in fulfilling his desire, which refers to his ever failing approach to Amy. In fact, he is the only male character in the group who does not have a partner. The handheld camera he brings signifies that he is an active gazer. In his first appearance, he is recording and introducing himself, which is narcissistic and child-like. He then records and gazes at the others, while introducing them. Through his camera we are first exposed to the body images and sexuality of the female characters, as if cuing that the narrative will offer similar “visual pleasure” in the coming scenes. In a scene when they find an abandoned fish-canning factory, the girls decide to take a shower and Icang slyly peeks at them, reinforcing the idea of him as the representation of the active and “consuming” male gazer who indirectly “fulfills” the male audience’s lustful desire. At the same time, his vision through the hole in the wall that also becomes the audience’s establishes the position of the females as the object “to–be-looked-at.” Satirically, as if to punish him for gazing and peeking at the females, his death involves the loss of his eyeball.
Finally there is the *cebol*/dwarf, the boat driver (see figure 22). He has no important role in the narrative except as the first victim of the shaman. In reference to the past, the image of *cebol* in the New Order narrative is not uncommon. A lot of Indonesian horror films use them as objects of horror or humor, but often they exist to generate “uncanniness.” Indeed, the use of “uncanny” figures has a long history in world filmmaking, and the strong influence of Hollywood is clearly evident in the presence of such a typical figure in Indonesian horror films. In other words, the New Order narrative acknowledges the presence of such non-normative bodies on the screen but denies them as part of the normative masculinity. They are present on the screen to reinforce established norms by contrasting them with the ideal males.

*Figure 22. The Cebol on his boat.*

*Air Terjun Pengantin* does not ridicule the *cebol* but surprisingly treats him as a normal person, which is reflected by how the other characters normally and respectfully interact with him. I argue that his presence adds a sense of oddity and mystery. He is, like the shaman, an uncanny character. Being uncanny, we may suspect him to be involved in a foul play together with the shaman to trap the visitors to the island, but the
narrative treats him as a regular boat driver who earns money by transporting people to the island. I argue that he is there to “mislead” the audience into thinking that he must have played a part in the killing. From the lens of contemporary masculinity, his “normal” role can be viewed as a disruption of male hierarchization. Lilo explicitly demonstrates it by going down on his knee when he talks to him, suggesting an equal position (see figure 23).

His death by the shaman complicates the male hierarchization because the cebol poses no immediate danger to the shaman, but still he kills him. In addition, both of them represent the non-normative masculinity and they are the uncanny. One can argue that he kills him so that the group cannot return to the mainland, but from the discourse of body image, his murder is the shaman’s own “body dissatisfaction” (Thomas F. Cash, “A Negative Body” 269) that he projects to the cebol’s non-normative body. From this perspective, the cebol becomes a sort of unwanted “mirror,” which only reminds the shaman of his own “negative body image” (269).

Figure 23. Lilo and the cebol.
The Discourse of Gender Roles

Gender roles refer to the relationship dynamics between the male and female that is heavily influenced by a society’s normative perspectives. Historically and traditionally, Indonesian gender roles are structured around heteronormativity and patriarchal foundations, the ultimate goal of which is for individuals to have a family of their own. The New Order norms of heteronormativity include the importance of women’s virginity, women as good mother, and women as obedient and loyal wife. Women thus are supplemental to men. The New Order horror narrative clearly reflects these norms, which, by the way, are almost universal to the horror genre. Even when the protagonist is a female, she usually still depends on a male character as a husband or a boyfriend. When a female character is depicted differently from the norms, she is usually turned into the antagonist, the abject or the monster, who is punished at the end of the film for not conforming to the norms. In fact, the New Order horror narrative and the contemporary ones still heavily depend on “demonic sexual women” (Sen, Indonesian Cinema 9) as the source of their horror; this can be seen, for example, in the constant remaking of mythical female monsters like kuntilanak (a revengeful, pale-skinned female ghost with long hair and dressed in white, who is believed to die while giving birth), sundel bolong (a female ghost with long hair, dressed in white and whose back is holey, showing the inside of her body, suster ngesot (a ghost of a female nurse, usually dressed in white with long hair, who moves by dragging her feet using her arms) and other restless and vengeful female ghosts.  

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36 Sen argues that Indonesian horror genre often portrays a “monstrous female” that is drawn from folklore. In addition, these monstrous females usually are sexually corrupted and they find their prey through their
The film hints at this prevailing heteronormativity and at the same time disrupts it. Besides the heterosexual unrequited love of the shaman, there are two heterosexual couples: Tiara and Lilo and Bram and Stacy. The latter unashamedly show their affection publicly while Tiara and Lilo are pictured as more mature in their relationship. Such public affection agrees with the heteronormativity, yet specifically in Indonesia, an exaggerated one is usually unacceptable on the screen because of the “moral and religious pressure on the pattern of sexual behavior and partnering” (Nilam 83-84). The death of Bram, Stacy and Lilo indicates the film’s unwillingness to follow traditional norms of society. The opening scene already hints at this with the shaman’s failure in his relationships, because he is also unwilling to conform to the societal norms. Moreover, the survival of the two female characters undermines the traditional nature of gender relations.

The New Order discourse of heteronormativity culminates in the notion of a family. Family institution is the core institution for the New Order regime and is still important in contemporary Indonesia. Soeharto claimed to be the “father of the nation,” a “superpatriarch” (Saskia Wieringa 72) who perpetuated the importance of family. With the normative societal goal of having a family, questions that may offend Westerners such as: Are you married? When will you get married? Do you have a boy/girlfriend? How many children do you have? become common questions. The Indonesian gender discourse of the regime treats the family institution as an instrument to marginalize women, containing women in a domestic scope, submitting them and making them sexuality. Indirectly, she argues, that in the horror genre there is a constant objectification of women and a perpetuation of women’s body images and sexuality as a threat to masculine domination.
supplemental to their husbands. An unmarried woman is seen as a violation of the norms, whereas it is considered less violating in men. Just like the almost universal notion of women’s dependency on men, this notion, although arguable, is universal with different degrees of pressure for the single women. The strong peer pressure for these women is seen as a sort of punishment. This treatment is evident in most horror films of the regime, in which lustful and other non-normative females are usually punished.

In contrast, *Air Terjun Pengantin* omits any mention of a nuclear family and denies any possibility of creating one. The case of the shaman is the first evidence. His love is unrequited and afterwards his “bride” is dead and he lives his entire life searching for a replacement. The “promising” future for Tiara and Lilo is abruptly destroyed by Lilo’s death. The other couple, Bram and Stacy, also meets their end before they take a further step in their relation. These scenes about love breaking apart are more than a challenge to the importance of the family institution. They disrupt the roles between women and men within the institution, specifically through the survival of the final girl and her niece. The shift does not necessarily mean that the traditional norms are completely gone from the scenes; they remain there and are challenged. The slippery and ever-changing nature of gender roles reflects the dynamic life of contemporary Indonesian gender construction.

I want to return to the scene when Tiara has an argument with Lilo about the state of their relationship. The way Tiara nags at Lilo hints at the heteronormative pressure to get married that seemingly affects Tiara more than Lilo. Lilo does not seem to worry about tying the knot soon, and he keeps avoiding the topic. This initial scene draws the
audience to the New Order norms of family importance, yet the narrative turns this around by killing Lilo who is actually going to propose to Tiara on the island. The scene when Tiara is holding Lilo’s dead body on her lap is the focal point of the masculinization of the female protagonist and the feminization of the male protagonist. In addition, it also questions the familial hierarchy that puts man as the leader. Usually the male holds the helpless female character on his lap as an assurance of safety and care, but the film turns it the other way around. It is clear that Tiara’s action of single-handedly defeating the shaman shows her independence and resourcefulness. In addition, the futile death of Lilo only reaffirms Tiara’s independence from men. However, as the film shows, the female protagonist cannot be the heroine without, at a certain point, exposing her sexuality before being masculinized. Tiara’s and the other female characters’ body images and sexuality prove this point.

Pertaining to the discourse of Indonesian-ness, the elaboration of gender roles above shows that there is no easy answer to the definition of what it means to be an Indonesian in a relationship. There are multiple collective voices that celebrate this complexity. During the New Order regime, although resistance existed, the answer was simpler because the regime regulated everything, including the nature of male/female relations. The post-New Order period, which is particularly marked by a “sudden freedom of expression,” has denied any attempt to uniformize gender discourse within a certain ideology. In fact, this situation generates multiple narratives on gender discourse that range from a hyper-liberal view to a religion-infected and fundamental one.
In brief, the narrative seems to mimic the New Order regime’s order-disorder-order pattern, because at the end order is returned with the death of the shaman. However, there are some details which show that the ending is actually breaking away from the old pattern. The old pattern usually glorifies the appearance of a male hero as the order restorer, the re-construction of a broken familial structure, and accordingly, the superiority of the patriarch. *Air Terjun Pengantin* ends in the opposite way. Despite the return of order, there are no male survivors. Heteronormative relationships fall apart, and the survivors are two women, who show a strong sisterly bond. The non-normative femininity represented by Tiara and the others are a threat to masculine identity and the disempowerment to men. The only way to dismiss the threat is to objectify, subjugate, or kill them and turn them into the abject through decapitation or body mutilation.

From a different perspective, the victory of the final girl can eventually be seen as the victory of the patriarchal structure, because at the end everything goes back to order and normalcy (patriarchal domination). The film shows this return of the patriarchal structure in the final shot in which Tiara and Mandy comfort each other, and, while they watch the sea, we can see the arrival of some police boats (the authority) (see figure 24). The arrival of the authority indicates the necessity for complete closure, in which the safety of the seemingly helpless and traumatized women is ensured. This ambivalence is proof that there is still a strong tension in the film’s gender discourse between the desire to break away completely from the patriarchal structures and the relentless influence of the very structure the film tries to escape.
Arwah Goyang Karawang

*Arwah Goyang Karawang* revolves around the story of two *jaipongan* dancers, Neneng and Lilis, who compete against each other to be the primadonnas of the dance troupe. Neneng feels threatened by Lilis’ return to the troupe, and they both are willing to do anything to get their boss’ attention. Lilis had a twin, Lela, who committed suicide several years before. Lilis is married to Aji, who loses his job and forces Lilis to dance again. Lilis’ arrival is followed by deaths in the troupe, of her husband, Neneng, and culminates in the death of the troupe’s boss. We learn that a spirit possesses Lilis and turns her into a killing instrument, until the spirit also kills Lilis. At the end of the film we learn that throughout the narrative, Lilis is actually Lela. Lela impersonates Lilis, taking over her life and marrying Lilis’ boyfriend. Only after she gets her success does Lela’s “real” nature re-emerge. The film ends with the spirit taking over Lela’s body and impersonating Lilis (again). The scene shows her on the way to the airport to go to Europe accompanied by a wealthy old lecher who definitely will be one of her victims in the future.
Arwah Goyang Karawang is controversial in different degrees. It has two sensational and sexual artists, Julia Perez and Dewi Persik (see figure 25 and 26), and brings the artists’ real-life competition into the film. The film created a sensation by including a supposedly “real physical fight” scene between the two artists that later becomes a part of the film marketing strategy. The narrative depends mostly on the two artists’ body exploitation, and the film is criticized because of it. Lastly, the film is accused of abusing the traditional jaipongan dance from Karawang by overtly exaggerating its erotic aspect.

Figure 25. Julia Perez as Lilis/Lela

37 The two artists are notorious for their controversial actions and the media loves to exploit their sex-related actions. For example, the news of Dewi Persik having a hymenoplasty surgery; the banning of their performances in some regions in Indonesia due to their sexual dance movements; the boycott of Jupe’s CD release “kamasutra” which includes a condom inside the CD sleeve; the news of their imprisonment because of the fight in the film; or the news of Julia Perez opening a fried chicken restaurant “JFC” (Jupe Fried Chicken) that offers ranges from “seductive” menu such as “Paha Jupe” (Jupe’s tight), or “Dada Julia” (Jupe’s breast).
Despite the film’s focus on the two female characters, the film foregrounds a male-constructed world with masculine standards in which the female characters are fighting for fame, wealth, and acknowledgment. I will return to this point later in the discussion on gender roles. With the addition of a female restless spirit that also competes with the two living female characters, the film is turned into a supernatural-slasher film in which a possessed character turns into a killing machine.

Upon watching the film in February 2011, Herman Saksono, a website blogging scholar, comments that *Arwah Goyang Karawang* realizes the fear that Indonesian horror genre is degrading back into the 1980s horror films that are loaded with slapstick, (female) breasts, and sex. I intentionally bring this quotation from a non-film scholar to show how a general audience feels about the film. Indeed, the film teems particularly with breasts (although never explicitly exposed) and sexuality. The film did not receive positive comments let alone discussion in scholarly criticism.

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38 Excerpted from Herman Saksono’s blog titled *Arwah Goyang Karawang*. The original text: “Jika ada kekhawatiran film Indonesia akan merosot ke era 80-an yang dipenuhi horror, slapstik, dada dan seks; maka sebetulnya itu sudah terjadi. Film Arwah Goyang Karawang telah membuktikannya.”
This film belongs to what Linda Williams has characterized as a “body genre” that is marked by “gratuitous sex, gratuitous violence and terror, [and] gratuitous emotion” (268). The film combines pornography which is “the lowest cultural esteem [and] gross-out horror [which] is the next to lowest” (269). The film’s controversial reputation and the horror and pornographic “systems of excess” make it more interesting, not to mention that the film came out through the box-office and became the most watched film in 2011.\(^{39}\) The representation of man and woman in a popular genre like horror is usually simplified, exaggerated and stylized, which provides a clearer and broader picture of how the gendered subjects are constructed. Thus gender-wise, the film offers abundant data on contemporary Indonesian gender discourse. Besides the concept of body image, sexuality and gender roles, I add to my analysis the discussion of the beauty myth that deals with the horizontal competition between the female characters, which further complicates the gender discourse, and a specific discussion on the *jaipongan* dance, which is associated with sexuality and eroticism.

The film’s narrative seems to incline more to New Order gender construction which situates women as subordinates and objects. However, this chapter investigates how the film, despite the obvious hints of being anti-feminist, also carries pro-feminist arguments that eventually disrupt and challenge New Order patriarchal, heteronormative and masculine norms. These arguments compete with the mainstream masculine narrative and create multiple narratives in the discourse of contemporary Indonesian gender and, eventually, the discourse of Indonesian-ness.

\(^{39}\) Williams adapted Altman’s notion on his study of the movie musical, in which spectacles and parallel constructions are excessive in horror genre. They perform a similar excessive exploitation of the body and the horror itself (269).
The Body and Sexuality

Almost half of the film is devoted to images of the female bodies of the two leading characters. Thus, the film appears to intensely display an exploitation of the female body. I focus on five major characters: Lilis/Lela; Neneng; Aji; Pa Awal; Dios the waria (male transvestite), Neneng/Lela’s assistant; and a minor yet significant character: the female restless spirit.

The range of characters shows a variety of traits and characteristics: the traditional opposition of the male and female binary, the third gender waria, and the monstrous female. I analyze the film against the New Order gender discourse because the film carries apparent traces of the New Order narrative style of the 1980s films in the way it treats body images and sexuality. Just as in previous discussion of Air Terjun Pengantin, Arwah Goyang Karawang also represents Linda Williams’ sense of the “body genre” and the tendency of the sensational body” (Williams 1991). In the case of Arwah Goyang Karawang, the film focuses on two sensational female artists. This sensational body, according to Williams, refers to “the bodies of women figured on the screen [that] functioned traditionally as the primary embodiments of pleasure, fear, and pain” (“Film Bodies” 270). Lilis/Lela and Neneng embody this idea, when their stage dances “please” the male audience in the film as well as in the movie theater. The restless female spirit that sometimes possesses Lela further turns the female body images and sexuality into the unwanted and disgusting, projecting the males’ castration anxiety. Eventually the female characters’ horrible deaths signify the pain and turn them into the abject, as a punishment for disturbing the gender system and order (Kristeva 4).
My analysis of Neneng and Lela/Lilis will mostly be seen from the perspective of the *goyang Karawang* (Karawang dance), which is part of *jaipongan* dance, and which provides a “legitimate space” for the female characters to expose their bodies and sexuality. At the same time, these performances “legitimately” allow the audience to watch the bodies without falling into voyeurism because the bodies are intentionally there to be looked at; after all, it is a dance performance.

The *jaipongan* dance in the film does not follow traditional style, yet its basic pattern is similar, “[blending] folk dance and *pencak silat*, martial art performance of West Java” (Irawati Durban 37). Lela/Lilis and Neneng are the female dancers called *ronggeng*, which is the central figure of the performance. According to Manuel and Baier, traditionally the *ronggeng* is a professional dancer who is often assumed to be a prostitute, thus traditionally “respectable” women do not participate in such performance (92-93), although in its development *jaipongan* manages to detach its association with prostitution (99). However, the film’s overt-exploitation of the artists’ bodies and sexuality within the context of *jaipongan* dance indirectly recalls and revives the sexual and erotic association of the dance. This controversy has triggered protests from Karawang’s female activists, religious leaders, and the local Karawang officials, who believe the film has undermined the dance by adding striptease elements and eroticism.

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40 The dance originated in West Java and was created by Gugum Gumbira in 1974 as the response to president Soekarno’s policy in 1961 of reviving indigenous Indonesian art and prohibiting Western music. Soeharto’s affirmation of Western culture created a new wave of *jaipongan* moves that suggested stronger and sexier women “without being necessarily labeled as ‘bad’” (Durban 39). The dance is a popular mass music form, a variant of “gong chime” performance that can be found all over Indonesia (Peter Manuell and Randall Baier 91).
They argue that the film gives a negative impression of Karawang dance.\textsuperscript{41} After waves of protests, the film’s title was changed into \textit{Arwah Goyang Jupe-Depe} (Jupe-Depe refers to the acronyms of the two artists: JUlia PErez and DEwi PErsik). These protests reflect the Karawang society’s insecurity when exposed to non-normative body images and sexuality that are associated with them. Their reaction indicates the strong influence of patriarchal heteronormativity in Indonesian society. From the perspective of the filmmakers, any media coverage, including the negative, is a good marketing tool. The protesters must see the film to know what they are protesting against, and the more people protest, the more curious people become to watch it. This ongoing media coverage may answer why the film topped the 2011 box-office list.

From the perspective of the post-New Order era, where artists have more freedom to express themselves, the dance may be read as the next wave of \textit{jaipongan} style that goes even sexier and bolder, blurring the boundary between art and eroticism. One particular scene that indicates this “shift” is when Pa Awal persuades Lela to perform a striptease \textit{jaipongan} in front of VIP guests and argues that this dance is a perfect blend of western and eastern culture. Lela agrees to do it for the sake of money, although after just two shows she decides to stop and argues that she “has betrayed” the dance art by contaminating it with eroticism.

There are six \textit{jaipongan} scenes that each last for only two to five minutes. As both artists are singers and dancers, the dance scenes become a “performance within a performance,” with the presence of audience in the movie theater and in the film. The

\textsuperscript{41}Mukhamad Kurniawan’s “Arwah Goyang Karawang Menuai Protes.” \textit{Kompas}. 16 February 2011. par. 4.
camera shots alternate between the dancers and the male audience, signifying the enjoying gazers versus the gazed-at performers. Gradually these dancing scenes become less *jaipongan* and more striptease-like, such as in two scenes in which Lela and Neneng, at different times, attempt to seduce Pa Awal by performing a sensual dance in front of him.

The standard shots of the *jaipongan* scenes are as follows: the dancers are dancing on a raised stage with accompaniment of loud music and blinding colorful lights. The (mostly) male audience is on the ground level, dancing in ecstasy and sometimes slipping some money (the action is called *saweran*) between the dancers’ breasts, indicating that the women are being eroticized as well as desired (Mulvey 96). The best dancer will get the most *saweran*, and just like a waiter, *saweran* is a sort of “tip” outside her regular salary. As mentioned before, the dance moves are highly sexualized, with body movements that explicitly refer to female sexuality. When they dance, their bodies becomes “a form of ecstasy” with a “shared quality of uncontrollable convulsion or spasm—of the body ‘beside itself’ with sexual pleasure” (Williams, “Film Bodies” 296). Even further, the bodies of the female dancers are “in the grips of an out-of-control ecstasy that has offered the most sensational sight” (270). The most obvious scene is when Lela is possessed by a spirit when she dances and becomes “a different person” who has no control over her body. These erotic spectacles position the female body as the lustful object, which places the male audience under its ecstatic spell. The act of *saweran* has made it worse by likening the dancer to a prostitute. In addition, the tradition of
saweran, which “allows” the audience to have a physical contact with the dancer, even lowers the position of the female as a sort of “lust-fulfilling object.”

The most obvious example of exploitation is the film’s continuous focus on the breasts of the female characters. Overall, it promotes women’s attractiveness through their “sexiness.” For example, when Lela approaches her former agent for an opportunity to dance again, her agent warns her that there are many other younger and prettier dancers in the troupe, indicating that he undermines the actual skills of dancing and favors the physical looks. Another proof of this “breast-focus” is that every time the two characters argue, they are pressing each other’s breasts, as if it were a statement of “virility” and productive sexuality. The film even makes this “breast war” the focal point of its poster (see figure 27) as well as their standard pose when they argue (see figure 28). The film’s overt-exploration on their breasts makes them phallic extensions in the context of the fetishization of women as an attempt to make the females body images “‘safe’ for the enjoyment of the male gaze” (Chaudhuri 38). More literally, the way in which the male audience in the film is separated from the stage is a sort of strategy to create a “safe distance” from the overwhelming sexuality of the dancers who threaten the males’ dominance.
Undeniably, both artists are notorious for displaying their bodies whenever they have a chance, and the public has already associated them with their breasts. If one searches on the Internet for their images, the results teem with their sexy images. Of
course, the strict censorship, the scrutiny from the hardline religious groups and other traditional mass organizations prevent them from explicitly exposing their bodies in the film or in the internet, but this does not stop them from continuously being sensational. They consciously commodify their “assets” as an important selling point and accordingly, the filmmaker ensures that it will be the focal point of the film.

How then can this obvious objectification of female body image and sexuality in a patriarchal world constructed by male standards and norms be read as pro-feminist? First of all, this is seen through the two artists’ strong determination to be “themselves” in the film and in their real lives, indicating their challenge to the normative feminine and their refusal to be dictated by how to be a woman. One may argue that their overt-sensuality in a patriarchal world only reinforces them as “lustful objects” and objects of the gaze, not to mention that their actions are based on the need to be approved of and acknowledged by men. Nevertheless, they are the ones who control men’s desire by manipulating men’s lustful desire to the female characters’ own advantages. They control the male’s fantasy and create, within the masculine space, their own space in which they regulate their body images and sexuality, and at the same time, “threaten the males by their sexuality” (Sen, *Indonesian Cinema* 9).

The trace of the New Order narrative is apparent when the film “punishes” the non-normative feminine characters either by turning the female into an abject over whom the audience will feel disgust, or a monstrous female. Seen from the perspective of the New Order normative female that sees women as subordinate to men within the family and the State, the two characters are definitely non-normative and transgress masculine
space through domination. They are both also “figurative girls,” who are “unable or unwilling to become mothers” (Park 254), and they deny the traditional role of the female body as a symbol of biological and cultural reproduction and thus criticize the patriarchal structure through their non-normative portrayal and manners.

Lela and Neneng die at the end, but not before Lela “punishes” the patriarch representations (Aji and Pa Awal). In addition, the restless spirit as the monstrous-feminine not only adds the threat to the masculine domination but actualizes it through the killings. One can argue that the male-constructed world and the male-dominated film industry initiate the abject figuring of the females. However, the film has also, from the beginning, abjected the male characters by “castrating” them through their less dominating roles, thus making them “unwanted” and failures in their normative roles. The male characters will be addressed below.

Another pro-feminist point is that the success of the restless spirit taking over Lela’s body and becoming a sort of “final girl” strongly indicates the film’s break from the traditional horror narrative by making the non-normative feminine, the bodiless spirit that defies the basic tenet of a female with body image and sexuality, the survivor. Indeed, the world structure in which they live is male constructed; the males set the standards and the females should conform to it, except for the spirit which can trespass any boundaries. In contrast with the traditional portrayal of females, the female characters non-normatively take a more aggressive strategy by blending their femininity (the body images, sexuality, and dance skills) with masculine traits (dominant).
The next point is drawn from Youna Kim’s post-modern feminist perspective which would see the two controversial artists as the freest women in terms of female sexuality expression despite the criticism and condemnation from both males and females. Indeed, the two female artists have received countless criticisms and threats for their non-normative behavior in the film and in their real lives. However, none of them changes who they are. In fact, they keep making a sensation that I believe is a strategy to sell themselves and an indication of their strong agency, which can overcome or at least challenge patriarchal domination and normative gender construction.

Their characteristics indicate “female individualization” that is characterized by “a growing emphasis on individual autonomy and independence from traditions and social institutions” (Youna Kim 9). Neneng and Lela embody this non-normative female and build a life of their own with the set of skills that they have. They create their own space within the male constructed world. They are competing not only for fame but for “fashion, beauty and luxuries” that are “signifiers of the independence and hard work” (Kim 19) of modern and independent women. But unlike Kim’s argument that Asian women still need to portray a traditional, “soft and gentle” femininity, the two female characters refuse to do so. They are far from being soft and gentle. Lilis, the only “normative feminine” with her gentle, submissive, and soft manner has long been killed even before the film begins, indirectly signifying the film’s refusal to portray such stereotypical female character.

There is another pro-feminist aspect in the scene when Lela becomes her grumpy, jealous and rough old-self, after finding out that Aji has been sleeping with her co-
worker. When she joins another troupe after Pa Awal dies, she becomes an arrogant and dominant person, who thinks highly of herself and undermines other people’s contribution to the troupe. At this stage, she becomes more masculine in terms of her assertive and direct way of speaking: she is the star of the troupe and without her it will not survive; thus she has to be respected and consequently get paid more than the others. Her “new yet old” self sounds more logical (which is related to the male) than emotional (female). Even to the last moment of her life when Aji ties her to a chair and interrogates her, she remains unchanged and frustrates Aji who thinks that his intimidation will break Lela. After all, she is a cold-blooded murderer and a psychopath, who, after killing her own sister, comfortably takes over her sister’s life by impersonating her. The interpretation of her portrayal at this moment can be ambivalent: from the lens of the feminist, Lela, as the monstrous-feminine, transgresses and threatens the male/female sphere with her sexuality, domination and manipulation. Mulvey argues that women’s bodies are threat to men for generating “castration anxiety” (348) and the film amplifies this anxiety when Lela’s death gives birth to the spirit who now possesses a body and accordingly, the “body” is still there, continuously spreading the threat.

The *jaipongan* dance also offers important pro-feminist points. As Hanan argues, the *ronggeng*, or the professional dancer sometimes has the power to dismiss a guest if his dancing is not satisfactory to her (87). In an extreme manner, there is one scene in which Lela/the spirit “dismisses” a VIP guest after he dances with her. She lures him

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42 David Hanan’s “*Nji Ronggeng: Another Paradigm for Erotic Spectacle in Cinema*,” talks about the “importance and the widespread nature of the *ronggeng* dance tradition in Indonesia” (88) from a classical film *Nji Ronggeng* (1969). He argues that the film provides a new paradigm for “considering erotic spectacle” (107).
into a deserted room and butchers him there. The film does not explain why that particular guest, among some others, becomes the victim. One can argue that perhaps his over-reaction towards Lela’s dancing triggers it. Whatever the reason, it indicates the power the ronggeng has over the male audience.

Further, Hanan argues that the dancing male spectators also become “part of the spectacles...their behavior is watched by the crowd [in the film and us] and is subjected to their investigative gaze” (103). As I mentioned above on the jaipongan scene shots, the camera alternately shoots the ronggeng and the dancing audience, making them both the object of gaze and disrupting the “male gaze” notion. Most of the time, the shots ridicule the “intoxicated” male audience who unashamedly and awkwardly (compared to the ronggeng artistic dance) dance in front of the stage. When the ronggeng dance, the authority is given to them, the male audience cannot arbitrarily do whatever they want; they “should dance with restraint and fairness, even in the state of desire” (103). This authoritative power breaks down Mulvey’s paradigm on the powerlessness of woman as the object of the male gaze. In David Hanan’s words, “there is a dialectic of stimulation and control which results in maximizing eroticism, but also in controlling and refining it” (104). Neneng and Lela’s positions as ronggeng dominate the narrative, going beyond the sphere of the dance stage, which reinforces the idea of female authority even more. To draw an almost similar conclusion with Hanan, in an efficient way Neneng and Lela amplify the way in which women are seen as a threat; precisely because the males “cannot deal with their own emotions, but their social power enables them to project this
failing on to women” (109). Thus, both of them challenge the patriarchal structure and norms “in the widest and most general sense” (109).

Felicia-Hughes Freeland argues that the “normative modernist representations of women continue to be ambivalent, caught up in the discourses of appropriateness for the future while being set against a past from which it is not so easy to escape” (419). The representation of modern women through Neneng and Lela shows a positional and spatial shift from being marginalized (or domesticated) into a public/subject sphere which is growing exponentially especially after the fall of the regime. They are economically more functional than the males and less dependent on them. For example, only three years after Soeharto stepped down from presidency, Indonesia had its first female president, Megawati Soekarnoputri, but not without controversy, one of which pertains to her style that “fitted a dominant Indonesian image of motherhood” (Susan Blackburn 165). As Freeland notes, the past keeps catching up, which is evident in the film’s misogynistic tones and sexual exploitation. The following discussion of the male characters will further clarify these points.

**The Threatened Males**

Despite the male constructed world foregrounded in the narrative, the film’s portrayal of the major male characters is as problematic as that of their female counterparts. These problematic male characters will further emphasize the pro-feminist notion that the film, consciously or not, presents. The two male characters that supposedly represent the dominating patriarchal power are Aji, Lela’s husband, and Pa
Awal, the *jaipongan* troupe owner. I use the word “supposedly” because the film ridicules them by granting them an “illusory” patriarchal power: Illusory because they seem to own it, but the real power is with the two female characters and the female spirit. As I argue earlier, the film has already castrated these men by making them weak characters. Consequently, both characters can be read as “impotent” who clings to their “empty” power that is represented by muscle and money, but never the mind. They have become the “abject” of the masculine world.

The film portrays the two male characters as two opposing extremes on a spectrum. Aji (see figure 29) is young, strong, emotional, physically good looking; he has a beautiful wife but no money or job. On the other extreme, Pa (Mr.) Awal (see figure 30) is a calmer, much older man. The film never mentions his wife, but he has money and a troupe of beautiful *ronggeng*. They share a similarity with the victims of the manipulative Lela.
Aji can be characterized as emotional and abusive. From the very beginning, the film ridicules him by stripping him of the very basic norm of the New Order masculinity: being a dominating and leading figure of the family as the breadwinner. Throughout the narrative, Aji is mostly portrayed to be illogically emotional, shouting and hitting Lela for, ironically, saving their lives. Aji’s persistence in reminding Lela of her pre-marriage arrangement that forbids her from dancing indicates a weak, illogical, and child-like self that hides behind his emotion to cover his impotency. Instead of making an effort to find a job, Aji does nothing but try to claim Lela’s working/public sphere as his own. In one scene he goes berserk out of jealousy, another “more feminine trait” that he has. He interrupts Lela who is dancing in front of the VIP guests, hitting and wrecking the room like a whining child who wants to get his toy back.

Aji is an outcast in the masculine world, a fool who cannot even tell that the woman he is married to is not the woman he loves. He ridicules the New Order’s norms of masculinity as rational, self-controlled, virile, and having superior spiritual and mental
faculties over women. Losing his job and finding out that his wife is actually not his “wife” further ridicules him, whose physical “normative” masculinity is not counterbalanced by the normative inner values. For example, when Lela refuses to have sex with him, in an immature manner he unashamedly sleeps with Lela’s co-worker, Tike. In more than two scenes, Aji furiously slaps and grabs Lela by the hair to show his strong disapproval of Lela’s working. His actions are a projection of his “impotency,” as by sleeping with another woman, he is trying to convince himself that despite his inability to feed his family, he is still capable of sexually satisfying a woman, indicating his “castration anxiety.” His unrestrained sexual desire is another non-normative trait of the New Order ideal of masculinity and the belief that man is innately “more capable than women of controlling [his] base passions and instincts” (S. Brenner 30). By physically abusing Lela, he tries to confirm his dominance, which actually displays his weakness even more clearly. All these actions undermine him as the normative man who is supposed to protect his wife.

Unlike the other characters who die at the hand of the spirit-possessed Lela, Aji is directly killed by the spirit, which happens when he is about to kill Lela, after she reveals her true self. Suddenly the spirit grabs Aji by the feet and pulls him high to the ceiling, before dropping him to death. The way he dies ironically reflects his condition at that moment. His being lifted up symbolizes his “winning moment” when he figures out the mystery and is about to get back his pride and respect by defeating Lela. His winning moment comes as fast as his fall. His fall to his death completes his tragic fate as an impotent and a fool. It also destroys the New Order’s rhetoric of the husband as the
“kepala rumah tangga (head of the household),” who is “seen as able to preserve harmony and order” (Sharyn Graham Davies 100), and at the same time indicating the obsoleteness of such a masculine type in the contemporary period.

The second male character is Pa Awal. He is portrayed as a business-oriented character willing to exploit his employees to get more profit. Throughout the narrative, it is clear that he sees his dancers as objects, not in terms of “lustful” but “money generating” objects. He is practical and money-oriented, but unlike Aji, he does not show any sexual desire even though in two different occasions, Neneng and Lela privately perform a sort of striptease dance in front of him. One can interpret his “cold” reaction as “impotency” because heteronormative men always demonstrate sexual desire towards women. The case of Pa Awal is interesting because from the patriarchal perspective, he is the dominating figure, the “father” of his troupe, who is also the breadwinner. In a glimpse, his calmness and persuasive manner reflects the “wise person” figure of the New Order horror narrative. When one reads him against the anti-patriarch perspective, he becomes an authoritative, heartless and exploitative figure who slaves his employees for profit. His unexplained reason for stopping Neneng from performing a striptease in front of him may be read as his moral conscience, but his position as the owner of the troupe dismisses this interpretation, as he forces Lela to perform a striptease jaipongan for the VIP guests. Thus, a more likely interpretation is that he is simply impotent or not a heterosexual. Whichever one, his portrayal disrupts the New Order normative masculinity and at the same time offers a new variant of Indonesian masculinity.
Pa Awal’s tragic death is a poetic justice for exploiting his employees, but it carries a more significant meaning in the context of heteronormative masculinity. He dies in the hand of Lela while she is performing striptease in front of him. Initially, Lela comes to tell him that she no longer wants to perform *jaipongan* striptease after realizing she has abused the dance art. Pa Awal argues that she makes a breakthrough by blending the western striptease and the eastern *jaipongan*. Being persuaded to continue performing *jaipongan* striptease, the spirit possesses Lela and makes her perform the striptease dance in front of Pa Awal. When she is on Pa Awal’s lap, she butchers him with her bare hands. His death in his own office reinforces the notion of Lela’s transgressive manner into the masculine/public sphere and consequently exposes his most private sphere as the patriarchal figure to the female. Pa Awal’s “impotency” in front of Lela and Neneng is a sort of punishment for not performing the normative masculinity.

**Dios, the Waria (Male Transvestite)**

Before discussing Dios, a short discussion of the *waria* in Indonesian cinema is necessary to understand their position in Indonesian gender discourse. James L. Peacock states that “Transvestism on Java is today associated primarily with the theater…linked historically to dualistic cosmologies…,” (210) which are influenced by Hinduism, particularly through the *wayang* world.43 Semar, the god clown, is portrayed as “fat and

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43 In his blog titled “Srikandi” in *Tokoh Wayang Purwa*, (posted on 22 July 2012), Budi Adi Soewirjo talks about traces of transgender characters in the world of *wayang*, for example in the Indian version of the Mahabharata, Srikandi is actually a female transvestite, who eventually becomes a real man after she meets a man with whom she exchanges her sex (Soewirjo 2012: par. 1). Arjuna, the most handsome yet gentle Pandawa, is once cursed by a female *bidadari* (a female “angel”), Urwasi, to become a transvestite for a year because he refuses her (par. 4). The original texts are as follows: “Ada perbedaan besar antara Srikandi versi pedalangan Jawa dengan wiracarita Mahabharata asli India. Di Mahabharata India, Srikandi adalah
grotesque, with female breasts” (Peacock 212); he embodies the dualism of universe, including male/female. This long history of transgender characters may become the reason why, despite their non-normativity and the society’s suspicion and hostility, they remain existent. Moreover, the New Order regime, as well as the previous regime, was strongly Javanistic and treated wayang narrative as a source for virtue and gender norms. What is interesting, the previous and current Indonesian government never explicitly issued any laws regarding their position in Indonesian society, which indirectly places waria “beyond” the law/gender norms without “legal” status.

Dede Oetomo, an Indonesian gay activist argues that the general public “recognizes banci [or waria] as a separate gender, embodying male and female elements” (“Gender and Sexual” 266). The term waria comes from blending the word “wanita” (women) and “pria” (men) that fittingly describe the male transvestites. Other popular vernacular terms for waria are banci or bencong, in which the word banci can also have the meaning of “effeminate men” who are not necessarily a transvestite. The word bencong is a gay language variant of banci (Tom Boellstorff 161).

Male transvestite characters in Indonesian horror cinema have a long history and frequently appear. On the one hand, their appearance in the media becomes a sort of acknowledgment that they are a third gender alongside men and women (Oetomo, “Impressions of a Night” 23). On the other hand, their portrayal is always notoriously
stereotypical, which perpetuates their gender identity as a source of ridicule. Thus their role revolves around being laughing objects or merrymakers who add slapstick-like humor to films. Dios still plays the “old typical” *waria* along with its necessary purpose of delivering comical scenes. When it comes to social position, *waria* are integrated as members of contemporary Indonesian society.

The way the film industry (and the society in general) associates the *waria* with a clown tells a lot about the nation’s failure to “see” this “third gender” or “male femininity” seriously; they are non-normative, seen more as “freaks” of nature whose uncanniness interestingly attracts and entertains people (Boellstorff 161). In horror films in particular, *waria* seldom die, generating an assumption that they already suffer enough as a *waria* and should be spared death. Accordingly, the character Dios survives the wrath of the restless spirit.

Dios’ first appearance indicates that the film has already structured his initial scene to make him the ridiculed object because of his nonconforming gender identity. He first appears together with Neneng and we would assume that he is Neneng’s bodyguard and not her personal assistant, because his physical look suggests so. He looks as “macho” as a man can be with dark sunglasses, a black leather jacket and pants, in addition to his “menacing” look that is highlighted with unattended beard and moustache (see figure 31). This sort of “look” is a typical “masculine look” not only in Indonesian

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44 Even though they have a role of the protagonist (which is very rare), their flat and stereotypical characteristics remain the same. For example a well-known Indonesian comedian actor, Benjamin S., played as a *waria* in a comedy film *Betty Bencong Slebor*/*Betty the Drunk Transvestite* (1978) that marks the gradual significance of *waria* in Indonesian cinema and at the same time marks the perpetuation of their stereotypes. Another memorable *waria* figure is Emon, played by another Indonesian top actor, Didi Petet in *Catatan si Boy*/Boy’s Diary (1987). Similarly, the character Emon is more or less stereotypical, although he plays as a side-kick to the major male protagonist.
cinema but in world cinema that more or less signifies machismo. Dios’ impersonation of a macho man is a direct satire of this stereotypical concept of masculinity; he undermines masculine norms by being the non-normative masculine. Oetomo argues that waria in Indonesia, even though they physically look like women, are associated more with men than women; thus, they are the derivative of the masculine rather than a new type of feminine. For example, Oetomo notices that the sign of the restroom in one of the events that involves waria says “women” and “male/waria,” although some waria may use the women’s restroom (“Masculinity in Indonesia”54).

While the film represents Dios as macho, suddenly Neneng tells him to stop pretending to be someone else, and he drastically changes his manner and behaves androgynously, revealing his true self (see figure 32).

45 Oetomo argues that someone is labeled waria “when s/he appears androgynous in dress, physical features, or both, or behaves androgynously” (“Masculinity in Indonesia 47). In films, these characteristics of waria are usually exaggerated with female-like accent/way of speaking; overt-feminine body language; overdressed in usually bright and colorful clothing plus the accessories; and always talkative, expressive and merry. In addition, they are “considered sexually passive, impotent, and genitally defective” (Oetomo,
This scene may only be meant as a pleasant surprise, because the presence of a waria is a guarantee for laughter, but from the gender perspective his presence reinforces the prevailing existence of waria in Indonesian cinema. Unfortunately, the film’s treatment has not changed a bit and ironically amplifies the ridicule and undermines the waria as a “normal” human being. Dios becomes the other object of “male gaze,” because interestingly, as Oetomo argues, “waria are clearly attracted to men,” (“Impressions of a Night” 24) which can be explained by the fact that waria are actually men and thus they do not sexually (through their body images) pose a threat as women’s bodies do.  

The film further portrays him as an opportunist who is loyal to whoever can provide him a better income. Indeed, there is no “fixed” trait that waria have in films but often they are portrayed as loyal to their friends. Thus it is interesting to see a capricious

“Gender and Sexual” 269), which explains the absence of waria’s love scene in Indonesian popular horror genre.

46 On this fascination, Oetomo argues that men have multiple sexualities and in this case we must make “a distinction between [their] sexuality with women and sexuality with waria (and even perhaps men)” (Masculinity in Indonesia 49). Further he argues that having sex with waria is perceived as “‘safer and cleaner’ since it does not result in pregnancy” (50).
waria like Dios. When Lela rises as a new star of the troupe, Lela persuades Dios to be her assistant and quite easily Dios agrees and leaves Neneng. When Lela becomes more uncontrollable, Dios changes his mind and works again for Neneng. One can read his indecisive nature as a reflection of the indecisiveness about his gender identity.

Another interesting aspect of his portrayal is his closeness with the female characters and his seemingly suspicious manner towards the male characters. In the New Order horror narrative, they are usually more attached to the male characters than the female (because they are supposed to be homosexual), and this resonates with Oetomo’s argument that often waria see women as “poison” because they take away the men from them (Masculinity in Indonesia 55). In Dios’ case, he has a sort of “sisterly bond” with the two female characters although never at the same time. Dios despises Lela when he works with Neneng and in turns he looks down on Neneng when he works with Lela. But he never shows any emotion to the male characters. His closeness to them identifies him as a lesbian waria than a gay waria, making his gender identity more complex and at the same time offering a more nuanced picture of contemporary Indonesian masculinity.

The Restless Female Spirit

The following discussion will focus on the restless female spirit that adds more complication to the already complex gender narratives that the film offers. As Creed argues, “All human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject” (“Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine” 35). The Indonesian monstrous-feminine is often materialized typically as a
woman with long hair that covers her white and horrifying face, and usually dressed in white. Some figures are drawn from folktales and myths while others are from imagination. The spirit usually can appear, disappear and reappear anytime it wants and can always hurt people physically or psychologically. As if not enough with two “monstrous-feminine” figures represented by Neneng and Lela, the film adds a restless spirit. The spirit in *Arwah Goyang Karawang* embodies all the typical traits above with a slight variation in the clothing. She is dressed in blood-red clothing, a sort of dancing costume that hints that she was a dancer when she was alive (see figure 33). The film never explicitly explains who the spirit is, which is unusual in traditional Indonesian horror films, which puts the revelation about who the monster is and why it haunts people as two required elements. The absence of explanation of the spirit may create multiple narratives on the feminine discourse, refusing a single normative femininity.

![Image](image.png)

*Figure 33.* The spirit with a “typical” monstrous-feminine look.

The spirit can be read as Lilis, Lela’s twin sister, based on the following arguments: the spirit appears at first to Lela, it only possesses Lela, it turns Lela into a
killing instrument. The last scene suggests a sort of “family reunion” between Aji, Lela, and Lilis as the spirit that ends with the death of the living and the “resurrection” of the dead. What is interesting about the “manner” of the spirit is that she treats Lela ambivalently: she can be her guardian angel, for example when she helps Lela become the leading dancer and when she protects Lela from the perverted guest and Aji, who wants to kill Lela. But in other scenes she turns Lela into a grim reaper, possessing Lela and killing anyone who threatens Lela. The twin sisters blend into one when the spirit possesses Lela, making her dominant and doubling the threat to the masculine power with her sexuality, body image and abjection as part human and part monster.

Kristeva states that “once the abject is in place, then ‘meaning collapses’” (2). When one reads this against a pro-feminist lens, the monstrous-feminine as an abject entity disrupts masculine domination, collapsing meaning singularity. The spirit becomes the anti-thesis of the slasher film’s male monster whose “fury is unmistakably sexual in both roots and expression; his victims are mostly women” (Clover, “Her Body, Himself” 88). The spirit’s fury is not sexual but vengeful; it kills with specific reasons and not randomly as the male monster in a slasher film usually does. The film amplifies the threat of the monstrous-feminine when it takes over Lela’s body: a corpse that signifies “the most basic form of pollution—the body without soul” (Creed, “Horror and Monstrous-Feminine” 39). Overturning the finality of the corpse as an ultimate abject, the spirit provides the soul for the corpse and brings back the female into completeness.

It is interesting to see how the film plays with the notion of body and soul as integral parts of humans, in particular the female characters. As twins, Lela and Lilis
have similar physicality, and what contrasts them is the soul: Lilis is the “angel” while Lela is the “demon,” another example of the overt-simplistic New Order binary. When Lela kills Lilis and impersonates her/claims Lilis’ soul to be her own, Lela omits the competition to be the best dancer. In turn, the spirit is now a bodiless soul. Lilis returns to completeness when, deservingly, she takes over Lela’s body. In the masculine world, which often reduces femininity to mere body images and sexuality, the blend of female body and soul marks a subversion of the normative femininity and a reinforcement of the notion of female bodies as a site of mystery and fear (Creed, “Horror and Monstrous-Feminine”). Moreover, the ability of the spirit to appear, reappear and disappear anywhere and anytime indicates the female’s power to transgress the male constructed boundaries.

Despite its objectification of the female body and sexuality, and the abject framing of the females as monstrous-feminine figures, the film subversively disrupts the New Order norms of heteronormativity, which include the importance of women’s virginity and the domestic role of women through the non-normative portrayal of the masculine and the feminine.

Firstly, the relationship between the females to the notion of Naomi Wolf’s “beauty myth” is apparent through the competition between Neneng and Lela. The competition among them is the consequence of living within the masculine constructed world. They are trapped in the construction of a beauty myth, which according to the standard of the dance troupe means attractive, sensual and young. This standard is believed to bring them wealth and fame. Beauty myth in the Indonesian context is
heavily influenced by media construction, which frames women’s beauty as having a slim and fair-skinned body with long and straight hair. Women compete to achieve this standard to be seen as beautiful, and the two leading actresses are a good example. They compete to get acknowledgment and position in the male-controlled environment. This results in friction between the female characters over the beauty myth, which according to Wolf is “all about men’s institutions and institutional power” (13). More specifically, “competition between women has been made part of the myth so that women will be divided from one another” (14). Neneng and Lela compete against each other over the position of the leading dancer and over being the most beautiful and sexy. Lela, who is older than Neneng, has more to lose because in the world of jaipongan, just like the agent says, youthfulness is the key while “aging…women are ‘unbeautiful’” (Wolf 14), so it is logically explainable why Lela is willing to do anything to get the job.

The female-female relationship of the film, in which the female characters are killing each other, does not necessarily undermine the feminine narrative. On the contrary, their competition signifies a strong “female individualization” (Kim 9) that is marked by a growing independence from men and male institutions. Their deaths may be read as the result of a male strategy to divide women or as a sort of “punishment” for being non-normative. However, in this case, their deaths do not signify a conclusive ending where masculine domination is restored, but they resurrect a new “breed” of femininity, which possesses not only worldly threat to the masculine (body and sexuality) but also otherworldly power. In this instance, this new breed of femininity acts as a metaphor for a more independent, resourceful, educated, and, physically as well mentally,
stronger modern woman of Indonesia, who emerges after the misogynistic New Order regime crumbled. They are new faces of Indonesian women among the more traditional ones. At the same time, their portrayal reinforces the New Order regime’s discourse of “seductive and dangerous women.” However, the film makes a significant break by intentionally not confining the threat, instead letting them to be uncontrollable, as shown in the last scene in which the spirit is about to go to Europe.

This last scene can be interpreted differently when it is read against the New Order regime’s influence on contemporary Indonesian society. As I have mentioned, the two artists are controversial because of their overt sexuality. Before them, Indonesia had Inul Daratista, another dangdut dancer who is famous for his “Goyang Inul.” Due to the pressure from the public, especially the Islamic preachers, Inul was “tamed” and no longer performed her famous “drill” dance. Julia Perez and Dewi Persik are more ignorant and daring, although they have been criticized and cursed by many, they still exist. The situation in which Jupe’s and Depe’s actions become the target by the media and the public reminds us that the fear of “threatening women” is still alive and is reminiscent of the New Order regime discourse on women. Thus, the last scene in which

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47 The controversy around Inul, Jupe or Dewi Persik shows the ongoing and lively debate between advocates of Islamic orthodoxy and defender of Indonesia’s liberal attitudes towards sexuality. “Ms. Inul became a hero for millions of moderate, modern Indonesians who say they are tired of being told how to behave by what they view as old men in mosques” (Timothy Mapes 3). In many ways, both Jupe and Depe continue what Inul stands for.

48 Inul’s “drill” dance created controversy and several fatwas by the Islamic clerics issued against her dancing “disgraceful.” Her sponsor and network executives suddenly boycotted her performances. In a press conference, Inul and Rhoma Irama, known as the Indonesian “king of dangdut,” appeared together. He called her dance trash and made her apologize in public and afterward kiss his hand before she slunk away from him submissively. Ironically, Rhoma Irama, a womanizer and a male chauvinist, was seen as Inul’s “savior.”
the spirit is going to Europe implies that such a woman, a threat to men, is not welcomed in the country.

In general, male-female relations are ambivalently depicted in the film. There is an obvious hierarchical structure within the film that normatively situates the males on top. Pa Awal sits at the top, and his agent is positioned below him. The members of the troupe are at the bottom of the hierarchy. The film clearly reflects how this structure plays: Neneng and Lela have to work their way up to get approval and support to be the leading dancer. In some scenes, they have to seduce the dominant males to get what they want. Neneng and Lela clearly do not reflect normative femininity in terms of the virtue of virgin females: Lela is married and Neneng admits that she sleeps with her agent so he can promote her. In one scene, the agent even gives a misogynistic comment on Lela, when he says that as a married woman, Lela no longer possesses a “firm and sexy body,” which consequently will reduce her chances of becoming a favorite dancer. Nevertheless, this condition does not situate them as the subordinate. On the contrary, they drive the narrative and accordingly are the dominant characters. The hierarchically superior characters, Pa Awal and Aji, do not have determining and significant roles except serving more as exploitable figures by female employees (Pa Awal) and wife (Aji).

Hierarchically, the female characters spatially trespass the male public sphere that consequently disrupts the structure. This spatial shift is worth mentioning as it is related to the gender norms that “have everything to do with how and in what way we can appear in public space; [and] how and in what way the public and private are distinguished”
(Butler, “Performativity, Precarity” ii). Within the Indonesian patriarchal structure, the regulation of women’s space is based on a premise that women’s place should be at home as mother, wife, lover or obedient daughter. The two female characters challenge this dualism of space. In fact, by constantly shifting smoothly between the private and public space, they conflate the spaces into their territory in which they freely express themselves.

There are layers of space in the film where femininity trespasses. It begins early in the opening scene where Lela and Aji argue. Lela insists on going back to work as a dancer although Aji forbids it. The opening scene shows them in a medium shot from their side, positioning them in one frame (see figure 34). Instead of applying the reverse angle shot where we can look at their facial expression more clearly, the use of a stable medium shot offers a sense of neutrality, placing them at the same height level. This establishing opening shot foreshadows the position of the feminine as the focal point. From the perspective of the pro-feminist this shot reflects the non-normative femininity because not only does it place the feminine at the same level with the masculine, but it also shows a disobedient feminine, challenging the relational norms between a husband and a wife, not to mention undermining the masculine position by stripping his role of as a breadwinner.
This role-switch challenges the New Order gender construction on the domestication of women through what Julia Suryakusuma dubs as “State Ibuism” (“The State and Sexuality” 98) (Ibu means mother as in a married woman). Suryakusuma states that State Ibuism is “promoted as the context for exemplary models of femininity, giving women value and status as wives and mothers” (96). Neneng and Lela are both independent characters who opt to depend on themselves in life. Instead of becoming “Ibu of the State,” women are becoming more independent and individual, in contrast with popular understandings in Indonesia that “women are still considered innately suited to the home environment, while men are seen as better equipped for engagement in the public world” (Davies 99).

The male constructed world does not prevent them from achieving what they want; they actually exploit it for their benefit from the way they interact with Pa Awal

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49 Freeland’s “Women’s Creativity in Indonesian Cinema” explores emerging women filmmakers who use documentary films to express themselves and contemporary gender problems in Indonesia (418).
and the agent. Their deaths confirm the absence of the males’ involvement, signifying that the male constructed world is powerless over the fate of the female characters and it exists merely as a backdrop in which the female world is orbiting. Their deaths do not mark the defeat of the monstrous-feminine; on the contrary, they mark the resurrection of a much more deadly monstrous-feminine who possesses a body and sexuality as well as supernatural and transgressive power that triples the threat to masculine domination.

Concerning domesticity, several domestic scenes are dominated by unending arguments between Lela and Aji. These scenes signify the subversion of the value of the nuclear family within the New Order regime. As I mentioned above, familial structure is a significant element in New Order governance. These scenes privilege Lela as the dominant although in some scenes she repeatedly falls down and cries after Aji physically abuses her. His abusive manner confirms Wieringa’s argument that the New Order’s idea of masculinity, as the film reaffirms, promoted women’s sexuality as dangerous, and it is men’s responsibility to control women’s sexual behavior (339). At the same time, Aji’s action also confirms his powerlessness and makes him the domesticated one because he is unemployed. Despite her physical weakness, Lela becomes the strong and resourceful character.

Another aspect of the gender relationship is the verbal interactions between the male and female characters. The film is littered with misogynistic action and dialogue that horribly undermine female body image and sexuality. At the same time the film conforms to the male constructed world and the patriarchal norms, despite the fact that two female artists are the leading characters. The obvious one is Aji’s treatment of Lela:
he is abusive and disloyal, treating her like an object. In the climax, he ties Lela on a chair and physically abuses her (again) while interrogating her, ironically amplifying his weakness. Verbal abuse, for example, is also apparent in a dancing scene. While watching Lela dance, a random spectator comments on how her breasts are no longer firm but her hip moves stimulate him sexually. Pa Awal refers to his dancers as his “collection,” another indication of female objectification. In another scene when Lilis enters the troupe van, she receives verbal sexual abuse from two male musicians between whom she sits. They comment on her big bottom, saying that it is as if there are two people sitting there. As if to counter the misogynistic tone, the two female characters curse and call each other *lonte* (whore) when they argue. *Lonte* is a very harsh word to be directed at women, and the fact that the females are throwing that word to each other in a way undermines the male misogynistic comments about them, making them “toothless” compared to the curse by the female characters. In addition, this dominating female voice, literally and metaphorically, challenges the traditional cinematic representations that favored “female silence or mutedness” (Sen 1994).
CHAPTER 3: THE DISCOURSE OF CHINESE-INDONESIANS IN KARMA AND THE ACT OF KILLING

“The Chinese [Indonesians] are everywhere with us, but they are not of us...” (Rush 2).

This chapter analyzes two contemporary Indonesian films, Allan Lunardi’s Karma (2008) and Joshua Oppenheimer’s The Act of Killing (2012), with special attention to Chinese-Indonesian-ness. The above quotation indicates the consequences of the “Othering” as it pertains to the cultural history of Chinese-Indonesians. The New Order regime (1967-1998) maintained the political hegemony inherited from the colonial era that maintained a separation of Chinese-Indonesians from the indigenous population. In this way, the government sought to control the presumption of potential Chinese-Indonesians’ dominance economically speaking and to scapegoat Chinese-Indonesians whenever a political upheaval occurred. The political issue is usually turned into an issue of economic gap, where the Chinese-Indonesians are victimized because of their economic status. Jemma Purdey notes that the New Order regime saw Chinese-Indonesians as “useful ‘buffers’ between the elite and the public, not only in the area of trade and commerce, but also in time of social hostility” (Anti Chinese Violence 25). The New Order regime’s discourse on Chinese-Indonesian becomes the “official narrative” for Chinese-Indonesians, while their own “ideal” narrative is suppressed on behalf of maintaining order.

50 The Dutch colonists divided the people into three categories: the white colonizers on top, the skilful and educated immigrants (Chinese, Arabs, Indian) on the second level, and the indigenous/native Indonesians on the bottom. This segregation policy was manipulated by the Soeharto regime in creating a “Chinese Problem” discourse, which essentially problematizes the Chinese-Indonesian discourse.
This chapter continues the dissertation’s focus on the allegorical functions of Indonesian horror films with a focus on how these films can be interpreted as an articulation and critique of Chinese-Indonesian trauma. The films evoke memories that have been inscribed “as wounds on the cultural, social, psychic and political life of those who have experienced them” (Blake 1). The effort to allegorically re-textualize the violent past events is open to a variety of interpretations that both challenge and reinforce the nation-state’s grand narrative of the events. Blake argues that the horror genre is a “wound-obsessed genre [that] can be seen to address [itself] to the psychic and social sites where individual and group identities are constituted, destroyed and reconstructed” (2). On observing the difference between the horror films of New Order regime and the contemporary ones, Barker concludes that “the trauma of contemporary horror films is really the trauma of a past violence” (2) whereas the trauma in the regime’s horror films are caused by disorder (thus the importance of order is emphasized).

The two films address these histories through different approaches. Released on 24 July 2008, almost exactly one decade after the May 1998 tragedy, *Karma* acts as a commemoration of the tragedy especially with an almost all Chinese-Indonesians cast depicting the tragic life of a Chinese-Indonesian family.⁵¹ The film frames the traumatic past as the source of the present misery. In addition, the film explicitly refers to the May 1998 riot as the narrative backdrop that fittingly indicates the presence of the regime’s

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⁵¹ For the record, the first popular film on Chinese-Indonesians in Post-New Order regime is *Ca Bau Kan/The Courtesan* (2002), a romantic drama set in the colonial Dutch era of the 1960s. The film is adapted from a novel by Remy Sylado under the same title. Afterwards, there are some films on Chinese-Indonesians produced, but not many received the media attention that *Ca Bau Kan* did. The film *Pocong* (2006) is actually the first horror film that allegorically addresses the May 1998 tragedy, but the film was banned by the censorship board and never made it to the screen.
“fingerprints” on the ill-fated Chinese-Indonesians. Near the climax of the Reformation struggle in May 1998, a sudden unexpected ethnic riot happened in Jakarta, where ethnic Chinese were targeted. This resulted in 5,000 Chinese owned-buildings being burnt, several thousands of Chinese killed, and at least 164 Chinese girls and women raped (Choy 2). Purdey argues that “After May 1998, anti-Chinese violence became part of the national experience and discourse of reform and justice-seeking” (Anti Chinese Violence 211).

*The Act of Killing* premiered on 31 August 2012 at the Telluride Film Festival in the United States. The film has gone on to be screened in seventeen countries but has not been officially screened in Indonesia. The Indonesian screening was very limited and unofficial due to the sensitivity of the content that further confirms the authority’s reluctance to address the historical past. I first watched the film in Athens, Ohio when a fellow Indonesian student and activist brought the film. The film refers to the killing of thousands of accused Communists in the aftermath of the September 1965 so-called Communist coup. It re-narrativizes the traumatic memories through the re-enactments of the killing by the actual perpetrators.

*Karma*

Allan Lunardi’s *Karma* visually and narratively explores the Post-Reformation (1999- present) freedom of Chinese-Indonesians to express their Chinese-ness.\(^5^2\) This

52 Chinese-ness is simply defined as anything that is related to being “Chinese” in terms of “ethnicity, identity, language and cultural resources” (Chau-Yang Hoon 161), for example the “physical features like skin color and eye shape” (Setijadi 74) or other tangible manifestation such as architecture, festivals and
freedom, however, is superficial, as they are still treated differently from the indigenous
Indonesians. Thus, fundamental freedom is yet to come. The film subverts the “insular
indigenized imaginings of Indonesian belonging” that has been a feature of Indonesian
“national” cinema (Charlotte Setijadi-Dunn and Thomas Barker 27). Instead the film
resurrects the glorious past of Indonesian cinema when “early local films were diverse,
cosmopolitan, and projected an image of Indonesia that is complex, idiosyncratic, and
unique, yet connected to global flows and modern practices” (27).53 One way to show
the diversity and complexity of a nation is through a specific and complex description of
any of its ethnicities set against the idea of the national. The complexity is required to
prevent the film from simply falling into a stereotypical description of “the ethnic.”
However, one question lingers: does the representation of Chinese-Indonesians in Karma
complicate, simplify or perpetuate the Chinese-Indonesian discourse of the New Order
regime?

*Karma* tells the story of the Guan family, which consists of Tiong Guan (the
wheel-chaired grandfather), Phillip Guan (the son), and his two sons, Martin and Armand
Guan. In the aftermath of the May Riot 1998, Armand returns to Jakarta with his
pregnant girlfriend, Sandra. During her stay in the Guans’ house, Sandra continuously
encounters restless spirits that tell her to leave. She insists on staying and starts
investigating the mystery shrouding the Guan family. She finds out that young Tiong

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53 Setijadi-Dunn and Barker refers to the Chinese filmmakers and producers of the 1920s whose films “had to appeal to both indigenous and ethnic Chinese audiences from various societal class, so they experimented with many genres and themes, combining local narratives and images with international styles in order to satisfy different target markets” (27).
Guan committed evil deeds that turned into bad karma for him and his descendants. Sandra thinks that murdering Tiong Guan will discontinue the bad karma. In a tragic twist, the bad karma remains and Sandra dies. Her baby boy survives only to suffer the seemingly unending bad karma.

The four generations of Chinese-Indonesians in *Karma* are bound to a hopeless fate of bad karma. They function as an allegory of the cultural history of the ill-fated Chinese-Indonesians who had been historically seen as a homogenous ethnic group. By depicting different generations of Chinese-Indonesians, the film offers a complex and heterogeneous depiction of Chinese-Indonesians that challenges the homogenizing way the national is traditionally visualized in Indonesian cinema. Tiong Guan, who still possesses a Chinese name, embodies the second generation of Chinese-Indonesians born in Indonesia but still maintaining his Chinese-ness. The narrative flashback indicates that he represents the earlier generation of resilient and hardworking Chinese-Indonesians. Phillip Guan represents the third generation who automatically inherits their father’s business. The choice of him and his offspring to no longer use Chinese names resonates with the Presidential Instructions in 1966-1997 about the “policy of name-changing as the most effective assimilation policy” (Leo Suryadinata 3). Armand and Martin Guan are the fourth generation: the modern and westernized Chinese-Indonesians. Armand’s baby boy is the next generation whose future, judging from the last shot of the film, will be as bleak as his ancestors. The unending bad karma can be interpreted as a fitting representation of the anxiety and unresolved trauma of Chinese-Indonesians.
The Unspeakable Trauma from the Past

*Karma* explicitly makes a reference to the May 1998 tragedy in the opening scenes, and it continuously refers to it, albeit in an allegorical form. Chang-Yau Hoon views the tragedy as evidence of the failure of the assimilationist policy of the New Order regime (“Assimilation, Multiculturalism” 149). This failure generated “a renewed awareness among this minority of their ethnicity and particularly of their vulnerability in Indonesia” (Purdey, *Anti Chinese Violence* 423). In other words, there was no guarantee for the safety of Chinese-Indonesians, let alone a proper solution to the trauma.

Setting the traumatic event as the foreground, the film expresses a remembrance of the trauma in the sense of a conception of remembrance where “the traces of traumatic histories remain present, arriving as a return of memory, hopeful of an attention not indifferent to the experiences and events these traces reference—however incompletely” (Roger I. Simon, Sharon Rosenberg and Claudia Eppert 3). To observe the film as a remembrance of the event refers to the allegorical function of the horror genre with attention to how these type of films are “uniquely situated…to expose the terrors underlying everyday national life and the ideological agendas” (Blake 9). The monsters, psychopaths or the supernatural forces in horror genre are generally related to trauma from the past and thus makes the genre well-suited to talk about the return of the past.

*Karma* deals with supernatural beings whose presence psychologically haunts the Guan family. The choice of presenting supernatural beings rather than flesh-and-blood monsters creates a stronger reference to trauma as invisible but ever-present. The psychologically traumatized characters allegorically point to the psyche of contemporary
Chinese-Indonesians. Judith Herman states that the common denominator of psychological trauma is “a feeling of intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation” (33). In the cinematic context, these feelings are what the horror genre evokes to heighten the suspense and fear. The characters show these symptoms that fittingly represent the present condition of the Chinese-Indonesians. They are psychologically traumatized by their dark past and economically by the post-1998 recession that affects their family business.

The main protagonist is Sandra who acts as the agent of remembrance because her arrival triggers the Guan Family to remember their traumatic past. In the opening scene Sandra explicitly says that Jakarta “does not change much since 1998.” This reference to the May1998 tragedy signals a latent threat to Chinese-Indonesians due to the government’s failure in addressing the trauma. The authority’s silence, the absence of monuments and commemoration of the event indicate a systematic erasure of memories instead of a remembrance of the event that prolongs the trauma. In other words, to overcome the trauma, remembrance becomes essential in the sense of “institutional practices of justice, reparation … reconciliation … legal prosecution, institutional apology, and state-funded compensation” (Simon, Rosenberg and Eppert 3). The film shows a parallel erasure process through the Guan family’s silence about their dark past and the absence of family photos in their house.

The absence of remembrance evokes a sense of insecurity and anxiety that is more significant than merely fear. According to Sigmund Freud, while fear requires a definite object of which to be afraid, the state of anxiety lacks a definite object (Freud
1923, 1984: 399; 1920, 1984: 282). The bad karma and the supernatural beings represent this state of anxiety. The Guan family in particular is anxious about Sandra’s fate.

*Karma* allegorically expresses the consequences of failing to address trauma. The film performs this through the different ways the Guan family copes with their trauma. While the Guan family unsuccessfully attempts to forget and erase the past error, the “outsider” character, Sandra, attempts to address trauma. Sandra has been living and studying in Melbourne since 1998 and she returns to Indonesia to marry Armand. Thus, Sandra represents the many Chinese-Indonesians who fled abroad after the May 1998 tragedy. Many of them are still living abroad for fear of the traumatic past, but the majority still stay in Indonesia and live with the trauma. In the aftermath of the 1998 May Riot, airports and hotels were packed with Chinese-Indonesian families, who ran for safety. Some fled overseas or to other parts of Indonesia. Sandra returns to deal not only with her past, but also with her husband’s family past. In this way, Sandra demonstrates Judith Herman’s point that “remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites...for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims” (1). Thus the film is a sort of remembrance project to cope with the trauma.

The Guan family represents those Chinese-Indonesians families that chose to stay in Indonesia. The post-1998 monetary crisis was especially traumatic for Chinese-Indonesians, whose livelihood was mostly dependent on their businesses. The film makes a reference to this crisis through some scenes in which Armand and his father are seen in business meetings. In contrast, there is no single scene in which the Guan family openly talks about their dark past, especially to Sandra. Sandra figures everything out by
talking to people outside the family. Their reluctance to talk about the past can be interpreted as the inability of Chinese-Indonesians to talk openly about their trauma under the regime’s suppression.

The climax and the most horrifying scene is Sandra’s decision to drown her grandfather-in-law. The scene begins with a silent confrontation between Sandra and Tiong Guan that results in an understanding that Tiong Guan wants to end his misery (see figure 35). At the same time Sandra believes murdering Tiong Guan will end the bad karma. Without hesitation Sandra pushes the wheel-chaired Tiong Guan into the pool and without any struggle Tiong Guan accepts his death. Tiong Guan’s death reinforces the allegorical interpretation of the film: that murdering the origin of the bad karma is akin to erasing traumatic memories that only deepen the trauma.

May 1998 was not the only time in which Chinese-Indonesians were victimized. During the New Order regime, “the indigenous population often targeted the Chinese people when expressing their frustration [and the regime] endorsed such popular racism”
because the government needed to “sustain legitimacy and credibility among the indigenous majority” (Heryanto, “Silence” 28). The regime had systematically suppressed the historical narrative of Chinese-Indonesians for a political purpose through the creation of a “Chinese Problem” discourse. Only fragmented memories that went along with the regime’s ideology were allowed to stay within the grand historical narrative. The regime nurtured prejudice and hatred toward Chinese-Indonesians to their own advantage. What Sandra experiences when she only knows the fragmented past of the Guan family resembles this suppression. The Guan family hides its dark past from her to maintain the family “order.” However, the unresolved trauma finds a way to surface and, in a tragic twist, Sandra dies after knowing the whole picture of the family’s past. In Silverman’s argument, Sandra, as the agent of remembrance, provides “a psychic locus for the foreclosed of the past” (185) when she shares and “remembers” the Guan family memories. Sandra is to be wounded by their wounds when she knows the truth. More precisely, Silverman argues, Sandra lets the traces of Guan family struggles, passions, pasts, resonate within her own past and present and destabilize them (185). Sandra fails and dies because she shares too many similarities with the Guan family as Chinese-Indonesians and as a traumatized victim herself. Besides the May 1998 tragedy, we learn that her family disavows her after knowing about her pregnancy outside marriage. Thus Sandra indeed “destabilizes” the Guan family trauma by murdering

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54 “In 1967 the New Order government formed a committee to examine the ‘Chinese Problem’ with a brief to find a way through the various contradictory positions” (Purdey, *Anti Chinese Violence* 20). As a result, the “Coordinating Body for the Chinese Problem” gave the following instructions (Christian Chua 470): “Guidance in assimilation in the framework of the realization of unity of the nation should be geared towards the establishment of unity in the value system. [...] All forms of cultural affinity based on the country of origin should be removed, in order to give all elements of culture in Indonesia the opportunity to develop according to the Pancasila” (Tan, “The Social and Cultural” 115).
Tiong Guan, the major patriarch and the source of the karma. However, her failure to cope with her own trauma by focusing too much on the Guan family’s problem tragically draws her into the family’s traumatic circle and leads to her death. Her death in the middle of her labor is visually horrifying as a spirit approaches and stands right next to her. Her last moment is the up-close shot of her eye from where we can see the reflection of Ling Ling, which signifies a sort of “unity” between Sandra and Ling Ling (see figure 36). Allegorically, her death by the restless spirit reminds us of the unresolved raping cases during 13-15 May 1998, which psychologically and physically traumatize the reproductive capability of Chinese-Indonesian women. They are a part of the victims, as long as the trauma remains unresolved.

Figure 36. The last moment of Sandra’s life, her eye reflects the image of the ghost.

The film does not provide any single clue about Sandra’s family. We only know that her family has disavowed her. The absence of her family and their disavowal of her is even more horrifying than the Guan’s bad karma. She has not yet come to terms with the May 1998 tragedy and has to deal with the disavowal. More tragically, she chooses a
“wrong” family that indirectly causes her death. In addition, the horror escalates with the constant apparition of the restless spirits in front of her, telling her that it is too late and that she should go away. With the heaviest burden of remembering and coping with the trauma on Sandra’s shoulder, her failure as the agent of remembrance acts as a warning about the immediacy of coping with the trauma and as a sign of disappointment towards the reluctance of the government in dealing with the national trauma.

Another layer of allegorical meaning of the Tiong Guan’s murder scenes pertains to the desire for a new Chinese-Indonesians discourse. As mentioned before, Tiong Guan represents the second generation of Chinese-Indonesians who live under the New Order regime. Sandra is the face of the modern Chinese-Indonesian who no longer performs her Chinese-ness fully. On the one hand, Tiong Guan’s murder represents the desire to break away from the regime’s discourse of Chinese-Indonesian and the “Other.” On the other hand, Sandra’s death signifies the prevailing New Order discourse that haunts the present day. The film expresses the haunting through different scenes during Tiong Guan’s wake. As a tradition, Phillip Guan throws a pair of bean-shaped pieces of wood to the ground that is believed to give a hint as to whether the deceased is ready to leave the living world or not (see figure 37). The deceased is ready to leave if the piece lands on different sides. Three times the piece falls on the same side and in frustration, Phillip turns one of them over. Tiong Guan’s unreadiness to leave represents the undying Chinese-Indonesian discourse of the New Order regime that also refuses to change.
Tiong Guan, the oldest member of the Guan family, is the origin of the bad karma. He exemplifies a person who fails to cope with this trauma and ends up living in loneliness and fear. The film flashback depicts a corrupt, opportunistic and ruthless young Tiong Guan, whose characteristics reinforce the stereotypes of Chinese-Indonesians. His greed and love of money brings bad luck not only to him but also to his descendants. The old Tiong Guan shows all the symptoms of a traumatized person: the way in which he alternates between feeling numb and reliving the event. The film literally makes him numb by limiting him to a wheelchair. The spirit of Ling Ling that lingers with him represents the reliving of the event. To make the event more “alive” and horrifying to Tiong Guan, she wears the wedding costume she dies in (see figure 38).

Tiong Guan’s inability to walk or talk negates bodily functions such as speech and text, which are essential in dealing with the trauma. His disability represents his failure to respond to the trauma. Tiong Guan is a representation of the old generation of Chinese-Indonesians, who work their way up to wealth and success. Tiong Guan’s strategy to approach Ling Ling’s father, insist on marrying her corpse, and eventually inherit the family’s wealth is a vivid remembrance of how rich Chinese-Indonesian businessmen are...
historically branded to be collusive, corrupt and greedy. Their closeness to Soeharto
during his regime allowed them to gain easy access to business and get safety. From this
perspective, Tiong Guan’s visual representation pervades the indigenous Indonesians’
collective consciousness about Chinese-Indonesians and ironically reinforces the
politically constructed perception of them. The representation is a scary reminder of the
unclear ethnic relations in contemporary Indonesia today (Soebagjo 149). In Jennifer L.
Griffiths’ words, the representation creates a kind of “secondary traumatization” (93),
one that occurs through stereotyped representation and interpretation that in a way
simplifies the experience of Chinese-Indonesians. The simplification resonates with the
regime’s reduction of the ethnic Chinese as a homogenous ethnic group to retain easier
control over them and construct a uniform grand narrative for them. The consequences
of this policy are alienation, prejudice, and disengagement of the ethnic group from many
aspects of national life.

*Figure 38.* The ghost of Ling Ling in her wedding gown.
Like his father, Phillip Guan chooses to deal with the trauma by not remembering it. He turns to religion to make peace with the past. Phillip Guan’s first source of comfort and protection is God (Herman 52). The film visually depicts his piety in several scenes in which he prays at the family altar in his house. Interestingly, the praying ritual scene is depicted more as terrifying than comforting from the way the camera focuses on a figure of a furious god on the altar. In another scene, some unnatural wind blows the paper offerings on the altar that clearly signals rejection. At Tiong Guan’s wake, his prayers seem unanswered when the two bean-shaped pieces of wood keep falling on their same side. When a traumatized person does not get comfort from God, he or she may feel utterly abandoned, alone and disconnected from the world (Herman 52). His condition is like a psychologically traumatized person: living always in loneliness and in a constant fear of annihilation, similar to the experience of Chinese-Indonesians. His experiences indicate that the film downplays the “power of faith and logic” (praying that the karma will end and killing the source of the karma respectively) that allegorically refers to the illogical and unspeakable nature of the violence against the ethnic. The prayers and offerings are nullified when the restless spirit succeeds in taking Sandra’s life. The death of Tiong Guan does not change anything but only adds more death to the family.

Phillip Guan’s son, Martin, develops a compulsive sexual behavior as a result of the bad karma. The film depicts him as an introvert and quiet person. He watches porn movies and masturbates a lot to overcome his loneliness, as seen in one scene in which he is seen taking rolls of bathroom tissue into his room and then moaning and crying can be
heard. Self-satisfaction becomes Martin’s choice as an instrument to regulate his internal emotional state. In an allegorical reading of his situation, his fear of committing to a relationship because of the bad karma represents the difficulties Chinese-Indonesians face in mingling with the indigenous, because of the prejudice and discrimination caused by the “segregation wall” that keeps them separated. As a result, many Chinese-Indonesians live in their own “world” among fellow Chinese-Indonesians and manage minimal contact with their indigenous neighbors, just like Martin who confines himself most of the time in his room. In fact, the Guan family is living the same way, confined in a big and empty house, surrounded only by family members and housemaids. The film does not show any intense interaction between them and the indigenous people outside the house.

In reality, the majority of Chinese-Indonesians like the Guan family who live in Javanese cities prefer to live in exclusive communities. There is a reluctance to know the indigenous neighbors for fear of being discriminated against, considered “intruders,” or even being extorted for being “Chinese” because being Chinese is equated with being wealthy. Thus, the intercultural interactions are limited to official matters of government and business. The exclusivity of the Guan family is apparent in a scene when Sandra meets Ria, Martin’s ex-girlfriend. Ria introduces herself as their neighbor and Sandra asks her which neighbor. Ria does not specifically say which neighbor and instead refers to the hugeness of the Guan’s house, somehow indicating it as a sort of fortress that prevents them from knowing their neighbors.
Phillip’s other son, Armand, is portrayed as the most logical character who avoids talking about mysticism and superstition around the house. I argue that he represents the young western-educated Chinese-Indonesian businessperson. His marriage to Sandra brings hope to the continuation of the Guan family. He immerses himself in family business as a way to forget the trauma. At first he appears as a flat and typical business-oriented character, but closer observation reveals him to be the most troubled character in the film. The other members of the Guan family accept the bad karma and deal with it in their own ways, but not Armand; he denies that the bad karma exists. Being away from home for years to study indicates his avoidance of the problem. When he comes back he eludes the topic by spending more time on a business trip than at home with Sandra. What is worse, he does not tell Sandra about the bad karma. If one applies Herman’s notion on trauma coping to the film context, Armand is practicing a “dissociation, voluntary thought suppression, minimization [an] outright denial…to alter the unbearable reality” (87). In De Vries and Weber’s words, Armand performs an “externalization” (191) process when he decides to stay on in the neighborhood (his house and Indonesia in general) and recreates an imaginary “good and safe neighborhood” by blaming an external force, in this case the economic crisis, as the perpetrator of trauma, not the bad karma/superstition. Armand’s denial and externalization of the trauma and fear represents the Chinese-Indonesians’ experience. When they blame the state—not their neighbors, for the violence that falls upon them, they deny the reality. The most accepted conspiracy theory on the May 1998 tragedy is that the army special force was behind the communal riots, trying to divert the issue from the Reformist’s demand for Soeharto to
step down to the issue of ethnic relations. This circulated conspiracy theory is an example of the externalization of the trauma: that the Chinese-Indonesians believed their neighbors did not do it on purpose but because they were provoked to do so by the state apparatus. Just like Armand, they attempt to recreate an imaginary neighborhood that is safe and peaceful. The violence and trauma themselves “come close to the status of ‘hyperreal,’ in the sense Jean Baudrillard speaks of simulacra” (Heryanto, “Silence” 28-29). Chinese-Indonesians, borrowing Baudrillard’s argument, almost lose the ability to make sense of the distinction between the actual violence and trauma and the artifice due to the recurrent media coverage of violence against them. When the neighbors they know for years suddenly turn into monsters and hurt them, the condition becomes “hyperreal” and they refuse to accept the condition as a reality. In many accounts and interviews of the victims, most of them reacted in disbelief and shock to the violence.

**Chinese-ness as a “Curse”**

*Karma* is a kind of curse caused by someone’s past actions. The film contextualizes the bad karma to be endless. I view the endlessness of the bad karma as an allegory of the “curse” of being Chinese-Indonesians, the sense that “Chinese-ness represents a curse rather than a blessing” (Thung 183, qtd. in Hoon 177). The word “blessing” in this sense refers to one aspect of Chinese-ness: economic superiority. Yet, for some this, does not guarantee happiness. Most literature on Chinese-Indonesians argues that the greatest threat of Chinese-Indonesians to the nation is their economic domination. Being a dominant minority creates jealousy and hatred from the majority.
Guan’s family is economically stable; they own a big house, luxurious cars and a large business. However, they are imprisoned in the house and depicted to have no or minimal contact with their indigenous neighbors. The Guan family perfectly represents contemporary Chinese-Indonesians’ lives in general. Regrettably, the filmmakers’ effort to picture the “real” Chinese-Indonesians family is trapped in the stereotypical representation of them: wealthy, exclusive, and greedy. The film title itself, *Karma*, strongly suggests that Chinese-Indonesians deserve what they get.

The cultural history of Chinese-Indonesians is characterized by the compartmentalization of people during the colonial time that positioned the ethnic Chinese as driven by a hardworking ethnic that marked them as economic opportunists. The lack of arenas outside economics for the ethnic Chinese made their grip on economics even stronger. During the New Order period in particular, a good relation with the powerful through collusion and bribery was a certain guarantee for “everlasting” profit and safety. The film flashback to the time of young Tiong Guan is a representation of this cultural history. We learn that the young Tiong Guan is charming but lazy, and the only thing that drives him to work hard is money. This cultural history, just like Tiong Guan’s past life, is the bad karma that the Chinese-Indonesians have to bear just because they were born as Chinese-Indonesians.

The Guan family’s bad karma relates to the absence of a woman figure in the family. This can be viewed as an allegory of the absence of “motherland” for Chinese-Indonesians. The diasporic Chinese immigrants in Indonesia, as Coppel argues, struggled to call Indonesia home, while at the same time their homeland (China) no longer saw
them legitimately Chinese due to the long acculturation that the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia had experienced. As Coppel states, “from the perspective of China [they] scarcely seem to merit the description ‘Chinese’” (*Violence Conflicts* 1). When they return to China, which they believe to be their motherland, they discover that they are too “foreign” in China and do not receive the same treatment as the local. Ironically, from one generation to another, the Chinese-Indonesians fail to be completely accepted as “Indonesians” because they are not acculturated enough and because the concept of being Indonesians is associated with indigeneity. Sharing a similar fate with the women-less Guans, contemporary Chinese-Indonesians are still struggling to get the motherland’s “unconditional love.”

This issue of the absence (or death) of women in the Guan family allegorically functions as a representation of the absence of closure on the raping and killing of Chinese-Indonesian women on 13-15 May 1998.\(^55\) The bad karma that affects the women in the Guan family acts as the instrumental reminder of the history of rape. Parallel to the bad karma, the restless spirits function as the representations of rape victims who search for justice. Sandra embodies the re-enactment and re-living of this trauma in the contemporary context. According to Herman, rape victims experience destructive lasting effects of the trauma that can definitely affect reproductive ability (49-50). Disempowerment and dissociation are other effects that are not only experienced by the women but also the men. The Joint Fact-Finding Team on the May 1998 tragedy faced difficulty in providing proof of rapes due to the “the rape victims’ tenuous position

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\(^{55}\) “Based on reports gathered from victims, their families and other witnesses, it stated that 168 women had been raped during the rioting and twenty of them killed” (Karen Strassler 689-690).
as members of an ethnic minority with weak claims to speak for, and to the nation clearly exacerbated the difficulty of making visible their suffering” (Karen Strassler 690). Armand’s skeptical response towards Sandra’s story of the spirits can be read as the government officials’ fixation on proof. Strassler further argues that “the demands for proof in the rape debates were implicitly calls for the visibility of the victim, transformed, through photographic exposure and circulation, into a ‘witness of history’ [saksi sejarah]” (691). Indeed, the existence of the spirits cannot be visually proven, which frustrates Sandra. She finally gets a sort of proof through a photo she finds in Tiong Guan’s drawer that shows a horrifying image of the young Tiong Guan married to a corpse (see figure 39). Sandra as “a witness of Guan family’s history” ironically dies after she reveals the dark past and kills Tiong Guan. The horror Sandra faces when she is laboring eerily resembles a rape victim in the way they both share the feeling of helplessness. In the middle of labor the spirit approaches her. There is nothing she can do; she is paralyzed like a rag doll upon seeing the spirit’s face, frozen in time. This scene emphasizes the vitiation of the female characters that leads to the effemination of the male characters, as represented by the wheel-chaired Tiong Guan and the “mute” Martin. The bad karma indicates a forced “un-fertilizing process” by not letting the family have female descendants.
This allegorical reading shows that the film expresses an effort to disrupt the singularity of the regime’s narrative on Chinese-Indonesians by offering a close-up and personal look at a Chinese-Indonesian family. The film challenges the fragmented memories that haunt Chinese-Indonesians: the Chinese-Indonesians as the “Other” and the discourse of the “Chinese Problem.” I interpret the cinematic representation of a Chinese-Indonesian family with their problems as an attempt to “de-otherize” the Chinese-Indonesians and to nurture a multiculturalism that answers to the Chinese Problem discourse. Thus, the film’s visual representation of Chinese-Indonesians becomes a sort of “remedy” to the absence of Chinese-Indonesians’ representation in cinema through the depiction of a fictional “story of the people,” i.e. the Guan family. However, the big question lingers: does the representation complicate, simplify or perpetuate the politically constructed Chinese-Indonesians discourse?

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56 There is a shift from assimilationist policy to multiculturalist in Post-Reformation Indonesia which is more consistent with the national motto: “Unity in Diversity” (Hoon, “Assimilation, Multiculturalism” 149). However, J.L. Thung argues that the possibility of nurturing multiculturalism is still remote (23). In addition, the understanding of multiculturalism in Indonesia is artificial and decorative, and merely displays difference rather than providing empowerment to the minority. In fact, the freedom the Chinese-Indonesians have to express themselves through media, language and social/political organizations become a boomerang, because the expression is often celebrated Chinese-ness, which only sharpens their differences and reinforces the socially stereotyped construction.
The Act of Killing

The Act of Killing focuses on the triumphant “butchers” of thousands of accused Communists in 1966-67 in Indonesia and the society that emerged from that genocide. Set in Medan on Sumatra, the city in which much of this genocide occurred, the narrative has two layers: the performance of the “actors” during the preparation of the filmmaking of their “heroic” deeds, and the performance within a performance in which the “actors” re-enact the killings. The film documents the imagination and memories of the butchers that are actualized through weird, sometimes funny, yet appallingly horrific acts of re-enactments.

The two central characters are Anwar Congo and Adi Zulkadry (see figure 40 and 41), two of the hundreds of unaccounted and unpunished butchers. What separates this documentary from the others is the way in which the director gives freedom to the perpetrators to re-enact the killings in any way they want. The result is an unapologetic documentary that does not try to provide new evidence on the tragedy but explores the already known facts of that tragedy. The film blends fact and fiction through the actual perpetrators’ re-enactments of the killings in an ultimately surreal tone.

Figure 40. Anwar Congo
The fictional/theatrical re-enactments of the killings became a form of historical reckoning for the actual perpetrators. Oppenheimer states that this is a film “where we go into the way that imagination, storytelling, fantasy play into evil acts.” Indeed, the re-enactments and narrative are based solely on the perpetrators’ imagination, storytelling, and selective memories. The fictitious aspect of the re-enactments is also established by the perpetrator’s reference to classical Hollywood films such as gangster, musical and epic movies, when they decide on how to perform them. In fact, the massacre site was right across from the movie theater where the perpetrators worked. Anwar Congo describes coming out of the movie theater one night, “dancing his way across and killing happily … acting was always part of the act of killing for the men in the film.” That is why we see a mixture of weird, out of place and time costumes, accessories, song-and-dance sequences, bloody makeup, mock sessions of torture, music, and other peculiarities in the re-enactments (see figure 42). Anwar Congo admits that he learned some of the ideas on how to efficiently kill people from gangster movies.

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58 Errol Morris’ “The Murders of Gonzago: How did we forget the mass killings in Indonesia? And what might they have taught us about Vietnam?” 15 Jul 2013.
This film shows what most Indonesians knew about the tragedy and tried to forget. Thus, the film “pours some salt on the open wound” to make people aware that the tragedy is still there and needs to be addressed. These re-enactments are personal narrativizations of the violent events although “the right to establish authoritative versions never rests with the individual telling the story alone” (Antze and Lambek xvii). The event and narrative are open to a variety of interpretations and require interlocutors, and while there are many versions of what happened, Oppenheimer opts to focus on the “complex psychology of mass murderers.”

**Indonesian Horror Genre Re-Defined**

Regardless of its official label as a “documentary film,” this film uses a horror mode. If we look at the tenet of contemporary horror film productions that focus on the past as a source of terror, then this film is undoubtedly a horror film. In his interview with Errol Morris, Oppenheimer explains that the film is “an examination of the

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Indonesian mass killings of 1965-66” in which he “convinced [the actual perpetrators] to act in a movie about the making of a movie about the killings.” The film’s documentary style explicitly mentions the perpetrators’ treatment of the Chinese-Indonesians at that time, and the fact that the perpetrators are still living freely is indeed appalling. The two central characters, Anwar Congo and Adi Zulkadry, become the embodiment of the word “horror.” They are the ghosts and monsters from the past that haunt the present. I argue that the “horror” comes from the fact that the “actors” see themselves not as war criminals but as “heroes” who served their country. Similar to the idea of “American gangsters” that they adopted from Hollywood movies when they committed the killings, they saw themselves as “defenders of the right,” whose authority is often not bound by the law. They take pride in the killing, and there is almost no remorse as they construct the memories as happy ones with reference to Hollywood films, Elvis Presley’ songs, and dance. The most horrifying aspect of the film is that every re-enactment and story they perform and tell occurs in contemporary Indonesia, thus merging the past and present, fusing the temporal and spatial through the re-enactment of the violence at the actual site with the actual perpetrator (see figure 43).

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Judith Herman argues that “secrecy and silence are the perpetrator’s first line of defense” (8). In the Indonesian context, authorities have not publicly acknowledged the tragedy and have remained silent: “There has been no truth and reconciliation commission, nor have any of the murderers been brought to justice.” Anti-Communist sentiment remains strong in Indonesia, suggesting the prevalence of the New Order regime ideology in contemporary Indonesia. Any attempt to bring back the tragedy that goes against the nation’s grand narrative about it is still considered subversive, which explains the absence of an official screening of this film in Indonesia. “The fact that many of the film’s Indonesian crew members are listed in the closing credits as ‘anonymous’ suggests that the wound in the national consciousness is unhealed.”

Oppenheimer is very aware of the danger he is facing by making this film. In one interview, he mentions that during the secret screening of the film, he tells his production crew to standby at the closest airport in Jakarta in case something bad happens.

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62 See footnote 58.
The personal account of the perpetrators about the killings invalidates Herman’s argument above. Oppenheimer says that every perpetrator he meets is boastful and open to him about the tragedy. In a leisurely manner, Anwar Congo and Adi Zulkadry share their narrative of the killings. There is no secret about their stories and there is definitely no silence. The perpetrators, as Oppenheimer finds, are more than eager to reveal the history themselves than are the survivors, mostly because the military does not allow the victims to speak.

The absence of blood, monsters or ghosts does not make the film less horrifying or unbearable to watch. It redefines what horror means through the exploration of the killer’s memories, psychology, physical actions, and especially the style of their re-enactments. These re-enactments “transform the temporal into the spatial and are intensely visual” (Paul Anzte and Michael Lambek xii). In other words, the sub-texts (the horrifying re-enactments) underlie the text of the documentary. In one scene Anwar Congo does mention ghosts:

There’s many ghosts here, because many people were killed here … They died unnatural deaths. They arrived perfectly healthy. When they got here they were beaten up and died … Dragged around … And dumped … At first we beat them to death. But there was too much blood. There was so much blood here … So then we cleaned it up, it smelled awful. To avoid the blood, I used this system. Can I show you …? (Oppenheimer, The Act of Killing 2012)
The horror of the restless spirit pales against his detailed description of the killings. This scene shows the transformation of the temporal memory into the spatial (he re-enacts the killings at the same place) and the visual (he physically shows how he kills a person), which deepens the trauma. What makes this scene more horrifying is that he is not aware that he embodies the ghost, as one journalist puts it, “[Oppenheimer] confronts great, incomprehensible evil and puts a human face on it”.  He is a “ghost” who comes and brings the past with him and the past follows and haunts him.

The opening and closing scenes show how the re-enactment style creates horror. They depict surrealist images of dancers in colorful costumes dancing in front of a waterfall with Anwar and Herman as the focus (see figure 44). Anwar wears a black robe, while Herman is grotesquely cross-dressed in a bright pink gown, like a drag queen. The scene is supposed to be a symbolic enactment in which the victims present Anwar with a medal and thank him for sending them to heaven. Anwar and Herman definitely see themselves as a type of angel in this re-enactment. Oppenheimer says that this scene “elicits weeping from Indonesian viewers, but laughter at the same time—because there is for Indonesian viewers the cathartic joy of seeing the whole regime unmasked … This is a society that was founded on mass murder, where the perpetrators are in power, where the victim should be thanking them for sending them to heaven.” Through this film, cinema has bred a new kind of horror, in which generic conventions re-encode the traumatic memories within the cultural, social and political life of a nation-state by

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63 See footnote 59.
bringing the memories to life. At the very least within the Indonesian cinema context, the film redefines the meaning of horror when the film blurs the line between fictional and historical horror, when the survivors of the tragedy live and breathe in the land in which their family and friends are butchered, when the killers have power and are called heroes, when the government does not acknowledge the tragedy, and lastly, when the trauma materializes in figures who live among the survivors. In other words, the film re-defines Indonesian horror mode by actually bringing the “evil” itself to the present to re-enact the horror. The film further depicts how the evil is very much alive and powerful in the present. What is more, the film eerily suggests that the “faceless” evil can be any of us when the film says that there are “hundreds of other Anwar Congos out there.” Thus, the horror is not only haunting, but it is here and now, lurking among us.

Figure 44. The opening surreal scene under a waterfall.

The Act of Killing and the Chinese-Indonesians

The Act of Killing opens with the following introduction:
“In 1965, the Indonesian government was overthrown by the military. Anybody opposed to the military dictatorship could be accused of being a Communist: union members, landless farmers, intellectuals, and the ethnic Chinese. In less than a year, and with the direct aid of Western governments, over 1 million ‘Communists’ were murdered. The army used paramilitaries and gangsters to carry out the killings. These men have been in power—and have prosecuted their opponents—ever since…” (Italics added). (Oppenheimer, The Act of Killing 2012)

The ethnic Chinese was the only ethnic group specified as a target during the tumultuous period of 1965-66. The ethnic Chinese were accused of being complicit with the Chinese Communist Party. Of the more than one million deaths, Coppel concludes that the total number of Chinese killed was about two thousand (Indonesian Chinese 58). Cribb and Coppel state that the city of Medan in North Sumatra was one region where reports of the mass killing of Chinese-Indonesians in December 1965 occurred (450). Joshua Oppenheimer’s The Act of Killing is set in contemporary Medan, thus the re-enactments of the ‘Communists’ killings in Medan not only triggers traumatic memories but also confirms that prejudice and hatred toward Chinese-Indonesians remains to this day.

In one scene, Adi Zulkadry proudly boasts:
I killed every Chinese I saw … I stabbed them all! I don’t remember how many, but it was dozens of Chinese. If I met them, I stabbed them. All the way to Asia Street, where I met my girlfriend’s dad. Remember, I had two motives: crush the Chinese and crush my girlfriend’s father, so I stabbed him, too! Because he was Chinese too! He fell into a ditch. I hit him with a brick. He sank. (Oppenheimer, *The Act of Killing* 2012)

When he narrates this memory in a leisurely manner while driving around Medan city’s Chinatown, how can the Chinese-Indonesians overcome the trauma when it manifests itself in flesh-and-blood? When the trauma is not something frozen in time and wordless, but is present at this moment and has a voice? His horrifying statement not only re-states the past but produces a continuous sense of fear and anxiety on Chinese-Indonesians. The trauma then no longer remains repressed memories but a publicly “celebrated actualization.” While Communism has no face, the Chinese-Indonesians became the face for Indonesian Communists as they were an easy target to recognize and kill. In the present day, they are still an easy target for extortion and violence.

Memory is an important part of identity. When the horrific memory is brought to life and locates the Chinese-Indonesians as the target, then the Chinese-Indonesians will keep seeing themselves as one because their memories are undermined and not given a place in the nation’s grand narrative scheme.
There are conspiracy theories circulating that those targeted during the “purges” were not Communists but ethnic Chinese, or anyone with left-wing views. Adi Zulkadry’s confession is powerful as he speaks of arbitrarily killing Chinese-Indonesians probably not because they were Communists but because they were ethnic Chinese. When he kills his girlfriend’s father, his past action and present words serve as a reminder that the threat to Chinese-Indonesians is latent and can come from anyone close to them. Adi’s stabbing a father in front of his daughter does not only create maximum terror but also violates the physical and moral integrity of the victimized groups (Peter Van der Veer 198).

Interestingly, they never mention the words “Chinese” to the victim actors during the re-enactments. In fact, there is no scene that explicitly re-enacts the killing of Chinese-Indonesians. In one scene, a film crew offers a story about how his Chinese-Indonesian stepfather is killed, and Anwar and the other killers instantly dismiss the story as inappropriate for the film without explaining why. There is something off when Anwar, who brags about killing Chinese-Indonesians, never actually performs any re-enactment of their killings. We can only speculate on the reasons. He may always associate “Communists” with Chinese-Indonesians and that might make it unnecessary to mention them. If the story is inappropriate because it is too cruel, then all the re-enactments should also be inappropriate. Thus, what he means by inappropriate may have something to do with the position of contemporary Chinese-Indonesians.

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The film was made in 2012 during a period when Chinese-Indonesians had made significant political gains. If Anwar and Adi are still the same persons they were before, then the decision to exclude any re-enactments on their killings may be a way to nurture the anti-Chinese sentiment because the re-enactment of their killing may generate sympathy and support for the ethnic Chinese. This interpretation shows yet another pattern of how forgetting specific details of an event can prolong the trauma of the victims and their descendants. Above all, Adi remembers without remorse as if it were a happy occasion. The scene indicates that no matter how long the event has passed, the trauma and wound will keep haunting Chinese-Indonesians. The remembrance from the perpetrators’ point of view that brings the trauma to life becomes an anti-therapeutic process of trauma resolution that does not produce catharsis or resolution.

In an interview, however, Oppenheimer argues that the materialization of trauma in figures such as Anwar Congo and Adi Zulkadry actually brings greater pressure for an immediate public acknowledgment of the tragedy. Some survivors of the tragedy have told Oppenheimer that “We need a film that comes to Indonesia like the child in ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’ and exposes for Indonesians what they already know.” 66 The film may also indicate that the perpetrators are only the tip of the iceberg of people who openly share the hatred and prejudice towards Chinese-Indonesians. 67 Even though the contemporary Chinese-Indonesians may not have experienced the tragedy firsthand, the

66 See footnote 60.
67 The most recent example is the continuous criticism and rejection of the first Chinese-Indonesian vice governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) by mostly the fundamentalist religious groups and other primordial parties regarding his cleanliness and commitment in performing his duties.
memories and hatred Anwar brings on the killings remind the Chinese-Indonesians that they are still fragile and unsafe.

The film shows this through a scene when members of *Pemuda Pancasila* (Pancasila Youth) go into a market and shake down the Chinese market stall owners. Before that scene, Anwar Congo recalls that there were many Chinese-Communists in the 1960s. He remembered getting a thick book with all the Chinese-Indonesians’ names. He would visit them and asked them how much they would pay. If they refused, they were killed. The scene obviously says that the killings they performed are not about Communism per se but more about power and money. It is like saying “I don’t care if you are a Communist as long as you pay me.” The army recruited people like Anwar because the army knew that Anwar was capable of doing “dirty” work, especially when he was told that the Communists banned Hollywood movies which would affect his source of income.

Anwar’s actions in the past is re-enacted in the extortion scene in the market by the present *Pemuda Pancasila* (see figure 45). Visually, one can tell how genuinely terrified the Chinese-Indonesians are when these thugs come with their fake smiles and hospitality. The camera catches how one store owner is literally trembling when he puts some money in an envelope. In that scene the *Pemuda Pancasila* members are “acting” because the camera is there. Like the other re-enactments, what they perform is not re-enactments of what happened in the past, but actual re-enactments of their present day.

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*Pemuda Pancasila* is a paramilitary group formed by the army to perform the New Order regime’s dirty work, including the massacre of the “Communists.” The members are mostly gangsters, thugs and mafia. Anwar Congo is one of the founding fathers. To this day, *Pemuda Pancasila* still exists.
“chores.” The scene vividly pictures one aspect of the fear and anxiety Chinese-Indonesians currently face each day.

![Image of an extortion scene](image)

*Figure 45. A re-enactment of extortion of the Chinese-Indonesians.*

The scene affirms that the *Pemuda Pancasila*’s capital in the past and present is fear. When some of them participated in the filmmaking, they did not intend to look good, but to look fearsome. The two scenes in which Anwar and Adi speak about the killing of a Chinese-Indonesian store owner and the extortion of Chinese-Indonesians by *Pemuda Pancasila* ironically demonstrate how Chinese-Indonesians are considered to be a “cash cow” or source of income. In the political arena, however, they remain the pariah. This situation eerily responds to Soebagjo’s observation on the Chinese-Indonesians’ history: “A consequence of 1965 was the continued nurturing of anti-Chinese sentiments which had been festering, in some form or other, since 1740 when 10,000 Chinese were massacred in Batavia by colonial soldiers, and driven out of the

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69 I personally feel traumatized with this one scene as it accurately reminds my own family experience with these thugs. They came regularly to my family store, just like the one in the film and politely asked for money. Of course they always said that we did not have to comply, but we understood that it was just a lip service and there would be consequences if we refused.
walled city. Then, as in 1998, the Chinese quarter was burnt down and shops were looted, and the Chinese fled” (138). Thus, the trauma and fear come not only from the figure of killers such as Anwar and Adi, but also from the government-backed organization that remains active to this day.

Bringing the perpetrators to justice is another way to deal with traumatic experience, yet in this case what happens is contradictory to the ideal. Anyone who attempts to address this “wound” might end up in jail or die while the actual killers are respected and honored, signifying the government’s complicity: “The killers were neither brought to justice nor given reason to believe that they had done anything wrong.”70 In an article in Tempo magazine, the Indonesian Minister of Political, Law, and Security Coordinator states that if it (the killings) did not happen, our country would never be like today.71 His statement is over-optimistic, in a way, since he believes that Indonesia “today” is a better place to live for all its citizens. It also implies the impunity for the killers, as proved in one scene in which Adi Zulkadry proclaims, “We were allowed to do it. And the proof is, we murdered people and were never punished.” Oppenheimer serves as a good example when in an interview he is asked whether he can go back to Indonesia. He says that he thinks he can get in, but he is not sure he can get out again.

Horror and trauma as the premise of the film is amplified through the scene of revelation when Anwar realizes the horror of his actions. Behind his overt-calmness and confidence as a “local hero,” Anwar psychologically suffers from the trauma of killings,

70 See footnote 60.
which the film gradually reveals. It begins by his questioning himself whether he is sinful to the moment when he confesses that he has a recurrent nightmare of a victim’s eyes staring at him. From the hundreds of people he killed, he vividly remembers this particular one whose dead eyes stared at him after he killed him. He regrets that he did not close the victim’s eyes. This particular victim somehow becomes the catalyst that triggers the trauma of the killings. The revelation reaches the climax with his breakdown when in a site of the killings he suddenly feels like throwing up but fails to do so, signifying his struggle to repress the trauma. The revelation strips him of his pride and confidence when the last scene shows him sitting feebly in silence. For the first time we see him as an ordinary and weak old man.

When authority justifies genocide, when children at school are still taught that the victims deserve what they got, and when the killers become heroes, then the wounds of the nation, especially those of the Chinese-Indonesians, will never heal. In a controversial manner, this film shakes Indonesian audiences up precisely to open their eyes and minds to the fact that there is a gaping unattended and unhealed wound that tragically lies at the foundation of Indonesian society. Indeed, the film cannot possibly change the hegemony of the half century of indoctrination on the anti-communism and Chinese problem discourses, but it manages to significantly puncture that hegemony. It is high time for Indonesia to reconcile with its “wounds” before they reach the irreconcilable point.
CONCLUSION

On 30 September 2013, exactly 48 years after the Indonesian “communist coup,” Joshua Oppenheimer, the *Act of Killing* director, released the film freely to Indonesians. The main page of the film’s official website goes as follows:

The history of the 1965 genocide is your history. For that reason, we are giving our film to you on September 30, the anniversary of the start of the atrocities. We want you to screen it, discuss it, distribute it to friends across the archipelago. I made this film in collaboration with over 60 anonymous Indonesians who, like you, wanted to know the truth about their history, and to understand how impunity for past atrocities underpins a present day regime of corruption, thuggery, and terror. We worked together for seven years to open a space in which you can discuss these issues without fear, in the hope that it will help you in your struggle for truth, reconciliation, and justice.

— Director, Joshua Oppenheimer. (www.actofkilling.com/)

Oppenheimer’s statement resonates with this dissertation’s goal: to better understand what it means to be Indonesian and to deal with the fear and anxiety that are still present as the consequence of the long corrupted and violent New Order regime. Commenting on the issue of national trauma, Garin Nugroho, a well-known Indonesian filmmaker, states that:
Indonesian history goes from trauma to trauma, the most obvious cases being the Japanese era, to G30S/PKI [i.e. 1965-1966] which victimized more than 500,000 people, the New Order regime to the current transitionary period which has produced various forms of political and social violence which we have not yet had a chance to describe (Nugroho 35).\textsuperscript{72}

The sudden proliferation of horror film production in the beginning of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century right after the fall of Soeharto’s regime is not a coincidence. The proliferation implies the need to address the various forms of unresolved political and social violence that Nugroho mentions. While the first five films discussed implicitly address the historical trauma pertaining to the 1960s, \textit{The Act of Killing} is the only film that explicitly and shockingly explores it. The chapters specifically discuss three significant components of the nation-building that are profoundly affected by historical trauma: pemuda/youth activists, gender performativity, and ethnicity, in particular the Chinese-Indonesians.

The allegorical reading of the films confronts the audience with the historical trauma that revolves around the New Order regime under Soeharto. The two most important trauma-inducing events were related to the regime’s birth and death: the 1965 communist coup that led to the killing of communists in 1966-1967 and the fall of the regime which was marked by student demonstrations, military and inter-ethnic violence, and the abduction of activists.

Rizal Mantovani’s \textit{Jelangkung} and Monty Tiwa’s \textit{Keramat} acts as political allegory by expressing anxiety over the post-New Order era and fear of “the return of the

\textsuperscript{72} Qtd. from Thomas Barker’s “The Trauma of Post-1998 Indonesian Horror Films” (2).
repressor” (the New Order regime). *Jelangkung* broke three decades of propagandistic narrative style that put the horror genre into the service of state ideology (Barker 5). The active and vocal young characters embody the students who were politically active during the 1998 Reformation that ended the New Order regime. This break also signals the yearning to re-visit the repressive past and address the nation’s trauma which has never been addressed properly. The discussion shows that the ideological influence and power of the fallen regime still prevails to this day, allegorized by the deaths of the young characters who, despite their creativity and independence, fail to overcome the “haunting” that eventually destroys them. The open-ended narrative that becomes the trademark of post-Reformation horror film ironically emphasizes the young characters’ impotence against the repressor.

*Jelangkung* allegorically depicts the struggle and negotiation between the politically active *pemuda* and the prevailing New Order ideology that prevents them from doing so, while *Keramat* allegorically focuses on the ideological clash between the New Order regime and the Reformation era through its portrayal of “ideal *pemuda*.” The monsters that represent the return of the repressor become more powerful and almost impossible to defeat, yet the young characters’ bravery and criticality indicate that there is still hope.

The discussion demonstrates that the films do not only serve as a temporary “outlet” for the unexpressed trauma and horror, but they are also reminiscent of the “return of the repressor.” *Pemuda* as the essential element of Indonesian-ness are the ones that suffer most from the trauma and horror. *Jelangkung* and *Keramat* effectively
show the tension between the pemuda and the New Order regime ideology through the characters, monsters, and conflicts between them.

In addition, the posters of the two films reinforce the existing conflict between the pemuda and the prevailing New Order ideology (see figure 46 and 47). On the one hand, the proliferation of the pemuda figure on the posters signifies their role as “contemporary faces of the nation,” besides, of course, as a marketing strategy to attract young audiences as the majority of movie-theater goers. On the other hand, their unsettled expressions (other than as a part of marketing “fear” and their being in posters of horror films) metaphorically point to the conflict. The anxious and fearful expressions of the characters in the Jelangkung poster allegorically represent the contemporary pemuda’s anxiety and uncertainty of Indonesia’s future. The possessed Migi as the focus in Keramat’s poster fittingly represents subdued pemuda who fail to express themselves and fall under the New Order regime’s conception of “ideal” pemuda.

Figure 46. Poster of Jelangkung
Rizal Mantovani’s *Air Terjun Pengantin* and Helfi Kardit’s *Arwah Goyang* *Karawang* allegorize the contention of Indonesian gender discourse. Gender discourse plays an important part as “a means of stabilizing the Indonesian nation” (Blackwood 295). In her work on the birth of the New Order state in Indonesia, Wieringa (2000, 2002, 2003) analyses how sexuality has been used to shape the nation, arguing that the legitimacy of the New Order government “rested on the measure of control it exercised both over its own women as well as over the abject Communist women and the enemy men who were portrayed as being responsible for the perverse, inhuman, primitive behavior of their women” (73), spreading fear about “the uncontrolled sexual powers of women with the assertion that women’s disobedience would endanger a man’s masculinity and destabilize the Indonesian social system (“The Birth” 82). The regime “creates sexual metaphors linking women’s political activity with sexual perversion and moral depravity” (*Sexual Politics* 1) as a campaign to suppress women’s political
activity, construct ideal Indonesian women as meek, and contain them within a hierarchical male order.

The discussion of *Air Terjun Pengantin* and *Arwah Goyang Karawang* shows the contention and negotiation between the prevailing New Order gender conception that desires stabilization for patriarchal power by marginalizing and turning women as threat and abject, and the growing awareness of the contemporary gender discourse that refuses the New Order gender conception. Contemporary Indonesian gender conception, resonating Davies’ findings, witnesses “a veritable increase in the diversity of gender and sexual representations” (87). The two films visibly challenge the “fixed” New Order gender discourse and negotiate their way against any notion of essential forms of dominant gender discourse. As Davies notes, the films negotiate by offering diversity and multiple narratives on contemporary gender discourse. *Air Terjun Pengantin* specifically challenges the notion of New Order’s heteronormativity while *Arwah Goyang Karawang* disrupts the New Order’s familial structure in which males dominate. The outcome enriches the fluidity of the discourse and “prevent[s] any generalizations about gender regimes” (Sen and Stivens 8).

Both films disrupt the masculine domination through their non-normative characters: Tiara the final girl in *Air Terjun Pengantin*, and the return of the spirit to the world of the living in *Arwah Goyang Karawang*, whom I dub as a “supernatural final girl.” While Tiara’s position as the final girl is temporal with the arrival of the authoritative males who “restore” the male domination, the spirit’s position as a threat to male domination is just about to begin at the end of the film.
The way in which the film treats the female characters ambivalently indicates the complexity of Indonesian gender discourse. Referring to Mulvey’s suggestion on the non-monolithic nature of the patriarchal culture, the female characters locate the gaps and fissures within culture through which they question it and assert changes. The female characters act as a threat to the patriarchal binaries; at the same time they represent a growing female activism.

The discussion of the males’ body image and sexuality leads to a conclusion that men’s bodies in Post-New Order Indonesia are treated similarly to women’s as commodities and consumptions (Youna Kim 18). The films demonstrate how masculinity is highlighted and problematized as much as the femininity. The film’s non-uniform types of male identities disrupt and ridicule the New Order’s masculinity norms and heteronormativity and at the same time stage a (temporary) collapse of the patriarchal order.

Despite the films’ various representations of gender, the dominant gender ideals remain heteronormative that reflect the prevailing patriarchal domination. The end of the two films suggests this “return to patriarchy” scheme. *Air Terjun Pengantin* ends with the shot of Tiara at a dock, staring at the sea and waiting for the arrival of the police (male authority) who we see are coming from the distance. The arrival of the authority confirms that Tiara will be saved (the return of the patriarchy). *Arwah Goyang Karawang* ends with the restless spirit leaving the country, suggesting the “expulsion of a female threat” and consequently the return of the patriarchal order. It suggests that such an uncontrolled and dominant female is not welcomed in the country. Bagus Haryono
argues that the masculine will instinctively always try to “maintain the imbalance power relation or the dependency patterns” (16). The unwillingness of the masculine to share power signifies the ever-present influence of the New Order gender norms. At the same time, the films disrupt the New Order masculine norms and challenge them through different portrayals of masculinity. Thus, it is almost impossible to exactly pin down the dominant societal gender ideology in contemporary Indonesia.

The last chapter focuses on ethnicity, in particular Chinese-Indonesians. Allan Lunardi’s Keramat and Joshua Oppenheimer’s The Act of Killing are seen as allegories on the Chinese-Indonesians’ cultural history. When the government eventually revoked the ban on displaying Chinese-ness in 1999, Chinese-Indonesians were hopeful that it would mark the beginning of a new era when they would be finally accepted as Indonesians. On the contrary, the freedom of displaying Chinese-ness in fact brings the ethnic both further away from becoming “true” Indonesians and closer to their stereotypes. Indigenity remains the barometer of being Indonesians.

At a first glance, Karma seems to fall into the trap of celebrating Chinese-ness that reinforces Chinese-Indonesians’ stereotypes through the depiction of Chinese actors/actresses, Chinese names, and Chinese tradition. Upon further scrutiny, the bleak and hopeless fate of the characters points to the ongoing horror and fear the Chinese-Indonesians’ face. With the span of four different generations, the family represents the life of Chinese-Indonesians in general. The Guan family’s reluctance to discuss their family trauma represents their fear of reprisal.

73 The original text is as follows: “mereka juga senantiasa berusaha untuk mempertahankan hubungan kekuasaan atau pola ketergantungan yang tidak seimbang tersebut” (16).
The issue of alienation and loneliness through the depiction of the characters, the unresolved trauma through the mention of the May 1998 tragedy, and the longing for a “motherland” through the absence of women-figures in the family reverberate throughout the narrative, signaling an immediate demand to be addressed. All these issues take root in the regime’s ideological product of socio-historical processes that particularly pertains to the construction of nationhood (Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr. 501-533).

Joshua Oppenheimer’s *The Act of Killing* answers the repressed desire to explicitly voice the historical trauma. He broke the taboo by talking about the tragedy of communists’ killing in 1966-67 upon which the New Order regime was founded. In a way, this film confirms the fear and anxiety that the other five films allegorize. Nonetheless, Oppenheimer’s documentary filmmaking style raises some fundamental questions on a documentary film: does it really happen? Is it real? Is it fiction? The film depends on the actual killers’ memories in re-enacting the killings in any styles they want. Consequently, the weird and often surrealist re-enactments generate the feeling of belief and disbelief, blurring the border between fiction and non-fiction.

The discussion particularly focuses on the historical trauma and present fear of the Chinese-Indonesians that are shown through both memories of the perpetrators and the actual re-enactments of the present day perpetrators as they extort Chinese-Indonesians. Through the perpetrators’ boasting and fear-evoking actions, the film shows how impunity for past atrocities has discouraged Chinese-Indonesians from voicing their trauma. Added to that is the New Order regime’s long-nurtured sentiment against them that are used to control and extort Chinese-Indonesians.
Silence of Chinese-Indonesians underlies the theme of the films. Our knowledge of who they are is informed by others. In *Karma*, the silence is not only literally but also metaphorically shown through the visualization of their empty and silent big house. Sandra knows everything about the Guan family from the housemaids, the family photographer, Tiong Guan ex-wife, and the temple caretaker, but never from the Guan. When Sandra thinks she has dealt with the trauma by murdering Tiong Guan, she herself turns into a victim, prolonging the trauma and the family silence.

*The Act of Killing* shows a more literal silence of Chinese-Indonesians. In one scene, we learn about how Anwar Congo sees Chinese-Indonesians as Communists and a source of income. We never learn how the Chinese-Indonesians see themselves. The scene when the thugs extort some Chinese-Indonesians in a market emphasizes their silence as victims. The camera catches their expressions: the first victim puts on a smile while giving some money. Nevertheless, we can tell that he is terrified. The other victim definitely experiences more terror as he cannot even look at the thugs and we can see his shaking arm while giving the money away. Their silence signals the repression, terror, and inability to fight back as the authority is the “enemy.” It also signifies Chinese-Indonesians as easy cash cows. Purdey succinctly concludes that “six decades after independence and in a new era of democracy, Chinese Indonesians remain second-class citizens, with economic privileges but few political rights” (*Anti-Chinese Violence* 218).

The discussion demonstrates that Indonesian-ness discourse is an ongoing negotiation process. The ideology of the New Order regime is still influential despite the Reformation. This condition points at the difficulties and reluctance to detach from the
prevailing and ever-present influence of the New Order regime. Asep Kambali, historian and founder of the Indonesian Historians Community commented that “The heads of the people are full with anti-PKI doctrine…It was one way to legitimize mass murder. Only Suharto knows exactly what happened.”  

He clearly suggests that it is not easy to cope with this historical trauma. “The repercussions of a thorough investigation could be grave,” he added. The Act of Killing may provide a good momentum to investigate the mass killing, but there is still a doubt that the Indonesian government will be fully committed to do so. When The Act of Killing is nominated in the best documentary category in the 86th academy award, Teuku Faizasyah, the presidential spokesman for foreign affairs, responds negatively. He argues that the film shows Indonesia “as a cruel and lawless… [and] backwards nation.” He further says that “We will settle the issues of our bleak past, but it certainly cannot be done in an abrupt way… It takes [time]. Can the public accept that?” His statement implies that the public, whom Asep argues to be anti-communists due to the New Order indoctrination, are not ready to accept the truth.

Until the government acknowledges and addresses the historical trauma, the discourse of Indonesian-ness will always be haunted by the unresolved past and the influence of the New Order. “History is honest, but it might be painful,” Asep continues. “Negative or not, the truth must come out.” In the light of this historical background and public reaction to The Act of Killing which is then highlighted by the hesitance and

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74 PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia), or The Indonesian Communist Party, the largest party during Soekarno era.  
76 See footnote 74  
77 See footnote 74
slowness of the Indonesian government to reveal the truth and reconcile the conflicts, it is safe to argue at this moment that the Indonesian horror cinema with its repeated referral to the traumatic past through its allegorical function serves as an important instrument to channel the unresolved trauma.
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