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POPULAR CULTURE AND IDENTITY POLITICS

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For too long, the study of Indonesia has been narrowly focused on its political and economic institutions and elite, at the expense of other issues of concern experienced on a daily basis by the majority of its many millions of citizens. Even when culture is taken seriously, academic studies of Indonesia tend to concentrate their inquiry around three types: the so-called "traditional," "ethnic," or "folk" cultures (which are often exoticized and presented as the "authentic" culture of the people), the state-sanctioned official version of national culture (as often propagated in schools and ceremonies), or the avant-garde or "high" cultures of the nation's intelligentsia (celebrated in the academy, theaters, and prestigious galleries). The everyday life, where popular culture permeates, is significantly understudied.

This continued neglect is even less forgivable in the early twenty-first century, as major political and economic institutions in Indonesia (along with many other countries around the world) suffer from a serious legitimation deficit. At the same time, increased access to mobile technologies and the proliferation of social media platforms have enabled the billions of the globe's "ordinary" population to make a strong presence in the world. In the public life of contemporary Indonesia, such trends have assumed an outward expression with Islamic features, as the scope of Islamization continues to expand at an unprecedented scale.

The above observation is not intended to suggest that political institutions or their elite can be considered as separate from, or less important than, popular culture. The rise of Joko Widodo's (best known as Jokowi) political career to presidency in 2014 served as a big wake-up call from millions of ordinary citizens. To a lesser extent, so did the case of the preceding president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (better known locally as SBY), who became the first directly elected president of the republic a decade earlier. Prior to his ascent, Jokowi was a furniture trader and a long-term dedicated fan of heavy metal music. Yudhoyono was a retired military officer before being elected president for two terms from 2004 to 2014. During his presidency, he composed pop songs and released four albums.

The electoral success story of both presidents reads like a David and Goliath contest, demonstrating the seemingly miraculous power of passionate volunteers and non-party groups against the old political establishments, and against all odds. Right up to the eleventh hour, the rapidly turned politician Jokowi was reluctant to run for the presidency and challenge an extremely well-connected Prabowo, who already enjoyed the benefits of a well-established political network and the strong support of nearly all of the mainstream media outlets in the country.

Unlike Prabowo, Jokowi had not built a career or network in political parties. In sharp contrast to Prabowo, Jokowi had limited resources and interest in mobilizing the masses to support him. In contrast to the flow of the familiar "money politics," a large number of individual citizens proudly published their bank slips on social media, showing off their laughably small donations to Jokowi's election campaign.

Jokowi's success in the 2014 presidential election can be attributed to many things, not least of all the spontaneous popular support of largely unorganized groups of ordinary Indonesians during the last few weeks before the election day. They converged in various forms, exhibiting a high degree of fluidity, and estimated to be as many as 1,000-odd groups of varying sizes. Most important among them were the Jakarta-based pro-Jokowi artists who were behind the July 5 music concert, which attracted over 100,000 people. Unpaid volunteers with no political party affiliation designed and ran the entire event. The term "people power" is inadequate for describing Jokowi's supporter base. Such a term is strongly associated with street mobilization, depicting masculine forces and creating martyrs of violence in the downtowns of cities like Manila, Bangkok, or Cairo. In contrast, Jokowi's supporters were inclined toward soft power, such as puns, visual arts, and music on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. It is significant that in this group women and the underprivileged were overrepresented, while others in this group could be characterized by the absence of politics in their daily lives, proudly belonging to none of the contesting political parties.

Like Jokowi, his predecessor SBY was never seriously considered a political leader, let alone a presidential candidate, prior to formally running for the elections in 2004. His Democratic Party was a fledgling underdog when it contested the elections and was in no way a rival to the other major party candidates. While its achievement impressed many, it won only a minority position in the parliamentary election. However, SBY won Indonesia's first direct presidential election. To explain SBY's sudden rise to power, and his reelection for a second term in 2009, it would be remiss if one completely overlooked the success of his campaign team in mobilizing the power of the mass media and popular culture.[1]

SBY's main rival was Megawati Sukarnoputri, chair of the Indonesian Democratic Party, one of the few big parties with a long history dating back to the struggle for Indonesia's independence. Her party already enjoyed the largest number of parliamentary votes. The major difference between the two presidential hopefuls was in their public presentations. Megawati often evaded media coverage; when confronted by journalists, she always said very little, if anything at all. In contrast, SBY paid generous attention to the demands of the media. He even went as far as singing at public functions, releasing three albums of his own songs, and attending the finals of the Indonesian Idol competition.

To highlight the importance of the populous and the popular in selected events of political significance, however, is not the main aim of this chapter. Merely emphasizing how popular culture can serve or subvert the interests of the political elite, or exert influence over national politics, misses the point. It would risk a common error in reducing the significance of the former by subordinating it to the latter and in the process reproducing the elitist perspectives that require a serious critique. In contrast, this chapter aims to show how elite national politics and everyday cultural practices and contestations are mutually constitutive in complex and indirect ways, with a focus on identity politics in contemporary Indonesia as manifest in popular cultures. In a later section, I will present selected cases from Indonesian cinema and music performance to illustrate this point. Before we set out an empirical analysis of the dynamics of identity politics in contemporary Indonesia, it is worth examining the broader context, and consider why such an important topic has remained understudied for much of the history of Indonesian studies, as well as detailing why an in-depth investigation into identity politics in popular culture is a critical component to studying the social life of the world's fourth most populated nation.

Framework and history

There are many reasons why a privileged focus on elitism within the political and economic institutions prevails in most studies of Indonesia. Here it will be sufficient to note some of the more obvious contributing factors. As Ruth McVey (1995) has observed, for a very long time, the intellectual framework in Southeast Asian studies, including Indonesian studies, has centered too much on nation-state building and modernization (see also Bonura and Sears 2007; Heryanto 2005). Alternatively, the study of Indonesia has been dominated by a set of commonly perceived problems as essentially impediments to nation-state building and modernization: militarism, human rights abuses, rampant corruption, violent ethno-religious conflicts, and, lately, Islamist militants.

Pop culture's close and unashamed association with profit-making in the entertainment industry has made it difficult for it to gain respectable status among educators, moralists, religious leaders, or serious scholars and researchers. For this reason, the pejorative term "mass culture" has occasionally been used to describe it (Macdonald 1998: 22; Strinati 1995: 10). The latter term "represents a debased, trivialized, superficial, artificial and standardized culture" (Strinati 1995: 21). As acknowledged by many,[2]

> the consumption of popular culture by the general population has always been a problem for "other people," be they intellectuals, political leaders or moral and social reformers. These "other people" have often held the view that this population should ideally be occupied with something more enlightening or worthwhile than popular culture.
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> *(Strinati 1995: 41)*

Another reason for the preoccupation with Indonesia's elite and its political and economic institutions is the presence of a strong masculine bias (Stivens 1991). As is the case globally (see O'Connor and Klaus 2000: 379–82), issues concerning modernization, nation-state building, the economy, religion, war, and corruption are primarily stories about men and masculinity. It is taken for granted that these issues are of public importance, while other less valued genders are relegated to the secondary "private" or "domestic" sphere – a place where mass-mediated entertainment and pop culture are commonly consumed. Thus, we have the familiar and deeply problematic division between the masculine world news and the feminine soap operas or between serious news magazines and so-called women's magazines.

To be fair, popular culture is a product of an industrialized society. Its production and distribution requires technologies of mass production, distribution, and duplication. Since Indonesia's independence, sustained industrial expansion of significance only took place in the 1980s, at the height of the militarist rule of the New Order government (1966–1998). During the same period, the urban middle classes underwent phenomenal growth. Understandably then, a serious and sympathetic study of popular culture has arrived fairly late. Even as late as the 1970s, when popular culture began to make its presence difficult to ignore, the nation's intelligentsia tended to discuss the phenomena with disgust or contempt (see Henschkel 1994). More often than not, popular culture was perceived primarily as the unintended and undesirable excess of modernization and industrialization, comparable to air pollution or traffic jams.[3] Of course, such a negative perspective is not uniquely Indonesian.[4] It is only from the 1980s that we witness a growing interest and sympathetic, albeit critical, analysis of the issues, in Indonesia and overseas, with Heider (1991), Kitley (2000), Lockhard (1998), and Sen and Hill (2000) among the pioneering authors of books in English on Indonesian media and popular culture (for more, see those cited in Heryanto 2008: 6; Heryanto 2014).

Notwithstanding recent booms in the media and entertainment industry, another less obvious problem is the fact that the majority of Indonesians today are unaware of the rich and complex history of popular culture prior to independence. Indonesian studies that have developed outside the country have not done enough to help Indonesians see this past either. A strong nativist vision of the Indonesian self since the 1950s has been responsible for driving a contemporary ethno-nationalism and rampant amnesia. Building the new nation-state in Indonesia meant denying or forgetting that history immediately prior to independence, a time when many non-natives took on pioneering and critical roles, including liberal or progressive Europeans, Chinese Indonesians, and the Left of various ethnic backgrounds. Independent Indonesia wants not only to "reject" its colonial cultural heritage but to deny and forget it, while it ambitiously attempts to "invent" a new culture (Reid 2016: 6). As Foulcher succinctly describes it, Indonesia "never looked back to ask questions that produce post-colonialist answers. . . . Rather, it looked forward" (Foulcher 1995: 161). When it looks back, it does so in a self-orientalizing fashion, indulging in the delusion of the past glory of the ostensibly authentic traditions of the various ethnic groups. The works of Barendregt (2013, 2014) Cohen (2006, 2009, 2016), Cohen and Noszlopy (2010), Strassler (2008, 2010), and Winet (2010) are just a few of a longer list of literature that redress this lacuna in the field of popular culture.

Methodologically, studying popular culture poses another challenge. The fast-changing life cycle of what comes to be considered a "popular" product or popular consumption often occurs on a massive scale in a relatively short period of time. As Chua comments in a slightly different context: "Film, television programmes, popular music and musicians . . . are often already off the screen [or the stage, or shops] way before any analysis is completed" (Chua 2004: 204). However, it is not the specific products of popular culture that should form our main object of analysis. Rather, popular cultures can be fascinating and highly instructive when considered from a wider perspective: as materials and sites for the performative contestation of various ideologies, class dispositions, moral inclinations, and identity politics. The rest of this chapter will be devoted to highlighting some of the most important identity politics in contemporary Indonesia. Before that, it will be useful to delineate the concept of popular culture adopted for this study.

For the purpose of this study, the term *popular culture* refers broadly to a variety of genres of circulated communicative practices, which figure prominently for a large number of "ordinary" people or by such people or a combination of both. Some products of popular culture are commercially produced (including music, films, and television) for mass consumption by the largest possible segment of people. Others are non-industrialized, relatively independent, communicative practices that circulate through various means (public events, parades, festivals), often, but not always, in opposition or as an alternative to the mass-produced commodities of entertainment and lifestyle. Of course, these categories are in practice not entirely separated. History shows a continuous and considerable borrowing or mutation of particular elements across one category and another. What they all share in common are the communicative practices ("culture") of, to, or by people of diverse backgrounds, who are "neither [exclusively or distinctly] members of the philosophical, aesthetic, or political elites, nor . . . of the new proletariat or underclasses" (Kahn 2001:19).[5]

Identity politics

It has been often repeated that Indonesia is a nation of extremely diverse cultures, languages, religious beliefs, and traditions. That is an understatement. Pisani (2014) more aptly describes Indonesia as an "improbable" nation. Diversity is a common feature of most metropolitan cities around the globe, and such diversity has often been celebrated by locals. However, it is limited

by the fact that these local residents visit the same or similar chain of grocery stores, exchange the same monetary currency, and share many television news and other programs with power from the same major suppliers of electricity. For the same reasons, the middle class population of Indonesia's capital city Jakarta shares a lot in common with its counterparts in San Francisco, Shanghai, or Melbourne in lifestyle, education, and aspiration.

What distinguishes most of Indonesia from these metropoles are the remarkable gaps and disconnections among the hundreds of distinct and scattered ethnic communities that inhabit the thousands of islands across this world's largest archipelagic nation. For students of Indonesian culture, an in-depth discussion of any select part of the nation's culture or history would necessarily require some sort of reduction and generalization. But for many citizens of Indonesia, "national identity" has always been a soul-searching question, a central and highly emotional topic of heated public debate and communal conflict, sometimes fatally so. Indonesia's vast territory and cultural diversity are a constant source of national pride, as well as a source of apprehension – about its fragile unity and potential breakup, its lack of security in the face of real or perceived foreign threats, and the unjustified domination of selected groups of fellow nationals over the rest.

What should never get lost in the necessarily generalized or reductive analysis of Indonesia's identity politics, are the fascinating, as well as dangerous, tensions among the four major forces that make the foundation or backbone of Indonesia. One of these four forces can generally be understood as the many vernacular "traditions" in the archipelago, of which what has been conveniently called Javanese (itself diverse and complex) has been salient. The other three competing forces are commonly identified as exogenous and distinctively "modern": Islamic, liberal, and for want of a better term, "socialist."[6] A few words on each of these four major social forces will be useful.

For many decades, students of Indonesian culture have deconstructed the notion of local culture as something pristine, authentic, essential, or indigenous. Many of these local traditions have a long history of change and interaction with one another. They have also interacted with and adopted elements from other traditions that have traveled across the globe. In several parts of Indonesia's archipelago, Hinduism and Buddhism have been embraced with varying modification in form and scale, giving new life to the traditions of the local ancestors (see Chalmers 2006: Chapters 2, 4). What has come to be known variably as "Javanese" culture, Javanism, or Javanist mysticism are products of a long history of such traditions blending from local and distant places. In any case, "Javaneseness" is never one and the same thing for the long-term residents of the island of Java, including those who have been identified or self-identify as ethnically Javanese and members of the sub-ethnic groups. To varying degrees and complexity, the same can be said about other ethnic groups of Indonesia.

Of the three major modernizing forces that have shaped Indonesia, Islam was the earliest to arrive on the archipelago and has become the most prominent in the early decades of the millennium. The other two sources of modernity are a little more difficult to label with accuracy. For want of a better term, they will be referred to here as the various streams of thought inspired by liberalism and socialism respectively. Liberalism is regarded as a dirty word by some in independent Indonesia; the term "developmentalism" has been preferred among those who subscribe to some of the basic tenets of liberalism in the past and present. Problematic as they may be, terms like "leftist" or "populist" are often used conveniently to refer to those people who show a marked orientation toward, or affinity with, Marxist or socialist thoughts and ideological orientation.

Certainly, there are more than a few derivatives, variants of, and names for each of these four moral, intellectual, and ideological orientations that have shaped Indonesia past and present. For

the purpose of analysis, they are portrayed here as ideal types and conceptualized in the simplest terms; they do not provide an empirical description of Indonesia's overwhelmingly complex history. It is also worth noting that in reality there are no clear-cut boundaries that would separate out these four identified forces, although in some major conflicts their distinctions can be overdrawn and their occasional overlaps denied.

The challenge of keeping the "improbable" nation intact is managing these four major forces. In the 1960s President Sukarno tried to strike a balance with three major ideologies in his concept of NASAKOM, an acronym of Nasionalisme, Agama, and Komunisme (nationalism, religion, and communism). The impetus for this slogan was the looming crisis of a country clearly teetering on the brink of civil war, and also partly the unresolved questions since independence about the nation's identity and subsequently the heat of the global Cold War. The army (backed by liberal democracies in the West) in alliance with the intelligentsia from both "developmentalist" quarters and "Muslim" quarters confronted the Indonesian Communist Party (the world's largest outside the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China). From the end of 1965 and for the next several years, the socialist/Marxist/Communist oriented segments of the population and their cultural works were physically annihilated. Survivors and their relatives were systematically stigmatized for decades. President Sukarno was marginalized before being put under house arrest where he remained until his death in 1970.

For the next three decades, a version of Javanese political culture (called the *priyayi*) took center stage in national politics under the military dictatorship of General Soeharto's New Order government (1966–1998). During this period, Indonesia witnessed an illiberal "developmentalism," which sponsored an expansion of industrialization. The history of the Indonesian left, including its brutal demise in the 1960s, was completely erased from the history textbooks. Any contemporary public discussion regarding its fate or legacy risked official censure, legal prosecution, or threats of retaliations from non-government groups.

Throughout much of the 1970s and 1980s, Islam became the next target of suppression by the military dictatorship. Many Islamic political leaders were jailed under the draconian anti-subversion law. The suppression of political Islam lasted for about 20 years, ironically marking a period of strongly anti-Muslim politics over an extended period in the world's largest Muslim nation (see TAPOL 1987). However, serious division within the top political elite of the New Order led President Soeharto in 1990 to make a radical change to his political strategy by actively courting Islamic groups of various ideological orientations. This shift heralded the beginning of an unprecedented wave of Islamization, continuing into the early decades of the twenty-first century. Since then, the question of Islam versus non-Islam, as well as the more intricate question of what is (not) Islamic, has dominated Indonesia's social life from the top of national politics right down to the banality of everyday life. As will be shown in the next section, these issues are clearly visible and resonate loudly in social media and the popular culture of everyday life.[7]

In the opening section of this chapter, I referred to Jokowi's remarkable political career and his rapid ascent to the presidency. It is worth noting that the single most serious challenge that he confronted during his presidential nomination was the smear campaign launched by his opponent, which questioned his religious faith, as well as the accusation of his having a past association with the communist movement. Furthermore, in late 2016, Jokowi's key political confidant, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (a.k.a. Ahok), Jakarta's governor, became the target of two large street protests – the largest since the 1998 mobilizations that brought the military dictatorship of Soeharto to its knees. These rallies were presented as an Islamic protest against Ahok, a Chinese Indonesian and a Christian. The official pretext for the protest was an allegation that Ahok had made a blasphemous statement against Islam. But not all Muslim leaders in Jakarta were in agreement about this accusation. Most observers saw the protest as a blatant campaign to undermine Ahok's

nomination for the upcoming governorship election, in competition with two other candidates, both of whom had capitalized on their Muslim credentials in an attempt to woo Muslim voters.

Politics of identity in popular culture

Certainly, popular cultures are often designed, produced, and distributed with no intention of ever becoming a conduit for political messages. The majority of mass-produced products are intended to provide entertainment for the potential consumer as a source of profit. Likewise, most consumers patronize these commodities with no interest in politics. So, it is important not to politically over-read such cultural products. However, Indonesia has many examples of culture (popular or otherwise), which have been overtly designed to make political statements and are celebrated for exhibiting political values. Some are banned for being politically subversive. The music of Rhoma Irama in the 1970s and 1980s (Frederick 1982), the music of Iwan Fals in the 1980s and 1990s (Murray 1991), the literary works of Pramoedya Ananta Toer, and the theatrical productions of Rendra's Bengkel Teater and Nano Riantiarno's Teater Koma (Zurbuchen 1990) are some of the best known examples of politically engaged artworks that bore the brunt of the New Order censorship.

My main concern in this chapter, however, is not the kind of cultural works with overtly political content or intent. Rather, more fascinating and instructive are cases where what is crafted and performed with the pure intention to entertain unintentionally acquires political value when circulated in public or is received as such by the audience, beyond the control of the producer or performers. This section is devoted precisely to such cases, including one in 2003, when popular singer-dancer Inul Daratista found herself at the center of a national controversy.

Needless to say, the relationship between national politics and popular culture at any given time is never simple, straightforward, one-directional, or homologous. While popular culture is not entirely autonomous from its immediate political environment, it is not its mirror either. As briefly mentioned above, Soeharto's New Order government (1966–1998) delegitimized leftist politics and culture. It suppressed political Islam, before making a complete about-face in 1990, marking the beginning of a huge wave of Islamization. For most of the period of the New Order rule, a gentrified version of Javanese culture and political etiquette enjoyed a dominant position. With considerable support from Western investment – minus the Western liberal thinking – Indonesia's capitalist industrialization expanded stridently while labor unions were controlled as tightly as the press, the parliament, the justice institution, and the universities. In brief, it was a political environment where the production and consumption of pop culture was caught in the polarity between those for and those against the status quo, centered as the official ideology of the regime, which was a combination of Javanism, secularism, militarism, developmentalism, and indigenism.

Keith Foulcher's (1990) analysis of *Selamat Tinggal Jeanette* (Goodbye Jeanette) (1987 Sandy), a commercially successful film released at the height of the New Order rule, is highly instructive. Undoubtedly, the melodramatic film was intended mainly as entertainment.[8] But Foulcher's critical and considered analysis demonstrates persuasively how the film can be read as a case where a non-state agent voluntarily and unconsciously created a fictional narrative that reproduced the hegemonic ideologies of the time and where a contemporary version of a priyayi perspective was central. Here priyayi implies

> an eclectic combination of aspects of a *kebatinan* [Javanese mysticism] world view and the Dutch colonial mix of public morality and private self-interest, all elaborated against a backdrop of the arts, customs and etiquette of the courts of Central Java.
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> *(Foulcher 1990: 303)*

The film tells the love story of Suryono, a male Javanese artist from a priyayi family and two very different women: Jeanette (his French wife) and Trima, a peasant woman who works as a housemaid in the house of Suryono's mother in the city of Solo (the home of Javanese court culture). For most of the story, Suryono and his wife live in his mother's house. Jeanette and Trima are polar opposites. Jeanette is highly animated, independent-minded, confident, and thoroughly if not excessively "modern." Following the stereotype of the "liberal" West commonly portrayed in Asia, Jeanette is presented as a woman from a rich family, who having fallen victim to drugs in the past, travels to Indonesia to seek spiritual and emotional tranquility. Trima, in contrast, is a peasant girl, with no school education. She is timid, especially in showing her secret love for the married son of her employer-cum-patron. When their marriage breaks down, Jeanette leaves Suryono and returns to Europe. After some time, Suryono rapes Trima, and she becomes pregnant. To cover the shame, Trima is forced to resign from work and return to her village with a false story about a thief having raped her.

Suryono's mother plays a third important woman in the story. Her deceased husband was unfaithful to her, leaving her with painful memories of their marriage. Having Suryono as her only child, and her only next of kin, she is strongly attached to him. Until near the end of the film, Suryono's mother does not approve of his marrying a Westerner, or worse still, a housemaid. She sees Trima's pregnancy out of wedlock not so much as her son's shortcomings. Rather, her priyayi perspective confirms her conviction of the low character of low-class Javanese peasant folk.

Foulcher suggests that the relations between Suryono and these three women resemble the New Order state-sponsored notions of three significant others: the enchanting but also flawed and intimidating West (Jeanette), the vernacular traditions whose qualities of innocence and backwardness seem exploitable and disposable (Trima), and the modern-day priyayi Java (Suryono's mother) as the foundation and antecedent to the Indonesian nation-state (Suryono's self). The film, presumably unconsciously, also asserts a local version of a hyper-masculinist self (in Suryono) by distinguishing itself from the "others" as female. It reaffirms its entitlement and desire to dominate all three females.

The intention to unite these others under one dominating self is never a total success in the film, just as in New Order Indonesia. Near the end of the story, Suryono marries Trima. Jeanette returns to Solo with a baby (Suryono's son) to learn the truth about Suryono's new status. She decides not to reunite with her husband but manages to reconcile with her mother-in-law thanks to the newborn baby. These two women are disappointed by their respective husbands. This potentially subversive ending must have not been intended by the producer. Neither was it taken as such by many of its viewers, if the reception and published reviews of the films are any indicator.

Significantly, two major forces are absent from *Selamat Tinggal Jeanette*, and their absence goes without comment in Foulcher's otherwise excellent analysis. There are no elements with an identifiable orientation toward Islam or with socialist aspirations. As indicated earlier, these two major forces were unwanted during much of the New Order rule. Off screen, they were either dead, in prison, or "released" with no civil rights and under regular surveillance. From 1990, Soeharto began to court Islamic politicians in an attempt to reaffirm his grip on state power. Immediately after the official end of Soeharto's New Order rule in 1998, Islamization began in earnest. How Islamization altered the production, circulation, and reception of popular culture in Indonesia (and Malaysia) has been addressed in Weintraub's edited volume (2011). Following Foulcher's steps, and reading specific cinematic text as an allegory, I found the hugely successful feature film *Ayat-ayat Cinta* (2008, Bramantyo) remarkable for the ways in which it threw light on the ideological changes occurring in post–New Order Indonesia.

No film – and certainly no "Islamic" film – has attracted the amount of public attention and celebration in contemporary Indonesia as the film *Ayat-ayat Cinta* at the time of its release. Not all Muslims agreed that it contains Islamic values or serves the interests of the Muslims (Yumiyanti 2008); some even alleged it is anti-Islam. Notwithstanding the controversy, the film broke new records as soon as it was commercially released. Viewed by more than three million Indonesians in the first few weeks of its release, the film surpassed all other titles previously screened in the country, regardless of country of origin, language, or genre. The film was based on a best-selling novel of the same title by Habiburrahman El Shirazy, an Islamic intellectual and proselytizer.

To put it in a broader perspective, the downfall of the New Order left in its wake a vast political, cultural, and ideological vacuum and led the various surviving social forces (indigenous mysticism, Islam, and liberalism were among the strong contenders) to compete for dominance. The success of such a story as *Ayat-ayat Cinta* marked a high point of Islamic cultural strength in this ideological battle, not least in cinema. Significantly, prior to the production of *Ayat-ayat Cinta*, the two most commercially successful films shown in Indonesia were *Jelangkung* (2001) and *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* (2002). The first is a horror film, but not in the tradition of the genre from previous decades or the longer history of mystical practices among the more devoted followers of Javanese tradition. Rather, *Jelangkung* represented a new generation of horror films that are distinctly based in the urban middle classes. The film tells the story of a group of very critical and competent university students who, with much earnest curiosity, endeavor to find out about the possible existence of ghosts. The second film, *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* is a shamelessly Americanized melodramatic love story between two middle-class Jakartan youths. Both titles attracted slightly over one million viewers, outdoing the major Hollywood blockbusters that had dominated the nation's cinema for nearly half a century. The arrival and success of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* not only brought contemporary Islam on par with the more Western-oriented and indigenized-oriented popular cultures on the nation's cinematic screen in terms of box office sale figures but well surpassed them.

Perhaps it is not purely accidental that both priyayi-centric *Selamat Tinggal Jeanette* and (supposedly) Islamic *Ayat-ayat Cinta* tell a love story with a male protagonist who is surrounded by several women who are in love with him. However, when read as political allegory, their contrast is striking and instructive. *Ayat-ayat Cinta*'s male protagonist, Fahri, appears to resemble post-1998 Indonesia during a period of a post-economic crisis. Fahri has a very modest family background. As a quasi-superhuman, he is a capable and conscientious student, with heart-throb charm and a certain naïveté. Such attributes are in line with the official propaganda, spouting a self-delusion about Indonesia's magnificent potential and natural resources, which have attracted the world's superpowers over many centuries.

In a post-9/11 environment, Indonesia's Islamization has also been a cautious one. Indonesia is proud to be seen as the world's largest Muslim country, striving to be a respectable player in contemporary world politics but preferring to maintain its own "authentic" identity rather than ape the West or become Arabized. It is committed to retaining its status as a secular state. The male protagonist in *Ayat-ayat Cinta* is a pious Muslim who welcomes pluralism and globalism with a moderate stance and a Western lifestyle. He speaks Arabic, English, and a little German in addition to Indonesian. He is neither a militant jihadi nor a syncretic-cum-traditionalist mystic follower; neither is he Arabized in his appearance or cultural orientation. He duly remembers his origins, respectfully stays true to his Indonesian identity, and remains in contact with his mother in the motherland.

We have seen how the film *Selamat Tinggal Jeanette* can be read as an unconscious testament to a late-1980s ideological perspective, dominant during the New Order rule, where Javanese

priyayi represented the state-sponsored image of the nation's self. Both Islam and the Left are significantly missing. We also considered how two decades later, the film *Ayat-ayat Cinta* articulated the significant alteration Indonesia had undergone with Islamization becoming the single most dominant feature of public life. I wish to conclude this discussion with a brief mention of the case of Inul Daratista, a non-priyayi Javanese popular culture performer who came to prominence for a short while in the early 2000s, provoking a major backlash from all directions, especially from the Islamic-oriented elite.

In 2003, the sensual singer-dancer Inul Daratista stirred up a nationwide controversy. Her performance represented a resurgence of an old tradition of non-priyayi Javanese cultural practice, this time from the lower classes of East Java, which celebrates bodily pleasure and sexuality. Being the single largest ethnic and cultural group, the Javanese, with their resilient mysticism, have for centuries been the main buffer preventing Indonesia from becoming an Islamic state. Although Inul's critics are drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds, the staunchest and loudest critics have been those with an Islamic institutional basis or background. She was banned from performing in several cities (and in Malaysia), while being much lauded in others.

Partly triggered by Inulmania, but also in response to a broader expansion of other related erotic-focused elements in the entertainment industry, a proposal for a new anti-pornography law was tabled before parliament in 2006 and ratified on October 30, 2008, with a significant number of lawmakers walking out of the session in protest.[9] The controversy about both Inul and the anti-pornography law has a lot more to do with Indonesia's identity politics than with issues of decency in general or with an individual artist. By many traditional standards among many ethnic groups in Indonesia, Inul's eroticism was mild, but the ideological war brewing among the major political forces in contemporary Indonesia was definitely not.

The controversy over Inul and the anti-pornography law can be considered as another iteration of a series of ideological contests among the four major forces outlined earlier, that have shaped Indonesia. Elsewhere, I have elaborated how this contest has taken shape in the case of Inul (Heryanto 2011). Suffice to note here that the Inul controversy encompasses a multidimensional ideological battle in at least four overlapping areas. The first is the teetering tension between local sentiment (East Java) and the national authority (Jakarta); the second is between syncretic Javanism and the new, rising Islamic piety; the third is the tension between a feminist consciousness, which is gaining momentum, and the old established patriarchy; and finally the fourth involves class conflict between Inul's lower-class fans and the middle- and upper-middle-class citizens who have long dominated the nation's cultural scene.

Concluding note

It is a miracle that the unity of an "improbable nation" as large and diverse as Indonesia has survived imminent divisions. I have identified four major social and cultural forces that have dominated the nation and have been competing with each other over the past seven decades since independence. Indonesian history is to some extent a history of the dynamic relations among these four forces, fraught with occasional fatal conflicts among the segments of two or more of these major forces. While analyses of political and economic elites and institutions abound in Indonesian studies, their power relations in everyday life among the millions of Indonesians, mediated by the new power of digital technology, remain understudied.

From an enlarged perspective in the twenty-first century, there are additional reasons for a more serious study of Indonesia's identity politics. Violent conflicts, which have raged in many parts of the globe after the end of the Cold War, have been more concerned with identity politics than having any legitimate control over a population, natural resources, or a territory. Kaldor

(1999) and McDonald (2013) call them the "new wars." But identity politics has not always been about conflicts and wars. For millions of Indonesians and non-Indonesians alike, everyday forms of identity politics also mean an articulation of their visions, aspirations, and commitments to solidarity or simply the apprehensions or pleasures pertaining to their personal life or immediate social circles. Popular cultures abundantly demonstrate these sentiments on a massive scale in quotidian fashion.

Notes

1 I am grateful to Mark Hobart, who helped me see this point through an informal communication exchange.
2 For similar elitist perspectives in contemporary Indonesia, see Hobart (2006).
3 Indonesia's most prestigious social sciences journal, *Prisma*, dedicated its June 1977 issue specifically to discussing the general theme "pop culture." With very few exceptions, the dominant tone throughout the issue in articles, commentaries, and interviews is one of condemnation, scorn, and pillory. Such a view was commonly shared by scholars, critics, and artists.
4 Macdonald (1998) is a classic example of the elitist American view in the 1950s of popular culture as "mass culture."
5 For other equally familiar concepts of "popular culture," see equally valid concepts of "popular cultures" (Strinati 1995; Storey 2006).
6 For a different take on the matter, to which my analysis here is partly indebted, see Cribb (1999). Elsewhere, I have made similar attempts in Heryanto (2005: 63–5, and 2008: 9–11).
7 I attempted a more nuanced account of these changes in Heryanto (2014).
8 The film was based on a novel of the same title, authored by Titie Said (1986). Foulcher's analysis, which I sum up here, is based on the film, which departs slightly from the novel.
9 The bill may have a longer history of antecedents. It had already been the subject of much serious discussion in parliament in 1997 but was not formally drafted and submitted for ratification in parliament until February 14, 2006. Since then, it has continued to provoke an unabated nationwide controversy.

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