

Introduction

Yvonne Michalik

Indonesia is the fourth largest country in the world, after China, India and the United States of America. It has 250 million inhabitants, of which more than 80% belong to the Islamic religion. Indonesia is therefore not only the world's fourth largest nation, but also the biggest country with a Muslim majority. The distribution of the Indonesian population across numerous islands – including popular tourist destinations such as Bali and Lombok, the five major islands of Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan (Borneo), Sulawesi and Papua, alongside another 17,500 islands – has created a unique linguistic and cultural diversity. All in all the Indonesian archipelago is populated by approximately 300 ethnic groups with a total of more than 250 regional languages and a myriad of local dialects. The Javanese, who inhabit the island of Java with the capital Jakarta, form the majority of the country's population, followed by the Sundanese, the Madurese, the Minangkabau, the Buginese, the Batak and the Balinese. The population as a whole extends across three different time zones.

Given the size and importance of Indonesia, it is astonishing that so little is known internationally about the country's film culture. The mass media of film is usually a good communication tool with which to transmit cultural practices and subjects. But Indonesian films are only seldomly seen at international festivals. It is particularly unacknowledged that alongside many male filmmakers, female filmmakers have played an important role in the history of Indonesian film culture and continue to contribute to this day.

Unfortunately, Indonesian women's film culture is still barely recognised even within the country itself and is almost wholly absent from international film discourse. The topic has largely been ignored by film academics. With the few exceptions of the researchers contributing to this volume, there is a dearth of articles and books dealing with the films of Indonesian female filmmakers. This is in spite of the fact that women have been directors and producers in Indonesia since the 1950s, with their numbers rising steadily since the 1990s. Like their

male colleagues, these female filmmakers explore the multiplicities of Indonesian culture. Of even greater significance is the fact that their films stake out a space for a female culture which has long been present in Indonesia but which is now gradually coming under threat by Islamic fundamentalism.

These filmmakers are women like Ratna Asmara, Sofia W. D., Citra Dewi, Ida Farida, Mira Lesmana, Nan Achnas, Shanty Harmayn, Budi-yati Abiyoga, Nia Dinata, Marianne Rumantir, Sekar Ayu Asmara, Upi Avianto, Ucu Agustin, Nucke Rachma, Lasja Fauzia, Sammaria Simanjuntak, Ratna Sarumpaet, Dian W Sasmita, Viva Westi, Lola Amaria, Djenar Maesa Ayu, Mouly Surya, Rayya Makarim, Rahmania Arunita, Wendy Widasari, Dewi Umayyah, Silati Timoti, Ariani Darmawan, Yuli Andari, Cassandra Masardi, Lisabona Rahman, Andi Azis, and Kamila Andini as well as camerawomen like Vera Lestafa and Anggi Frisca.¹ In their work they constantly struggle to establish a space for women within Indonesian film culture. Whether they are successful or less successful in this is not so important. What is key is that their work is recognised for the varied manner in which they are supporting women and women's rights in Indonesia and thereby counteracting an increasing religious fundamentalism which has no tradition in their country.

Surprisingly, it has been relatively difficult to find well-known researchers in this subject area. The enthusiasm may be there but active participation is lacking. This may be due to the fact that the research focus tends to be directed either towards Indonesian film or to the subject of gender itself. Indonesian women's film may be too special. Some researchers also lack knowledge of the films which are difficult to access even in Indonesia, especially if one does not know the filmmakers personally.

Nevertheless, it has been a welcome surprise to discover that many Indonesian researchers and journalists are currently writing about this subject and engaging intensely with the country's female film culture. This interest from writers inside the country demonstrates how important the issue is becoming. As such, this book – as the third volume in

¹ See also Ekky Imanjaya and Diani Citra's contribution and Novi Kurnia's interviews in this volume.

an academic research series about South East Asian film² – offers further insight into a vibrant region and considers women’s film culture in the world’s largest Islamic country. With its perspective on the trends of an as yet insufficiently analysed aspect of the global landscape of women’s film, it fills a significant gap in the field of film research.

My thanks go first and foremost to Ekky Imanjaya who has given me many recommendations and has contributed a chapter with his colleague Citra Diani to this volume. I would also like to thank the film school “HFF Konrad Wolf Babelsberg” for their support during the research period and the Goethe-Institut Jakarta, and especially Katrin Sohns, for the financial support of this publication. Furthermore, I am indebted to Barbara Hatley, Sonja van Wichelen, Rachel Rinaldo, and Katinka van Heeren who have all recommended other authors, some of whom are represented by a contribution to this volume. All these contributions elucidate the work of women in a country which has always stood poised between tradition and reorientation. Its multi-ethnic status means Indonesia is complex and ambivalent when it comes to socio-cultural allocations and this is also true in relation to the role of women. The Minangkabau in Sumatra are just one example: traditionally a matriarchy, they are coupled to an Islamic, patriarchal religious system. There are many other examples of the contradictory nature of the role models which are open to women in Indonesia.

Precisely for this reason it is important and useful to deal with films which reflect women’s issues and with the female filmmakers themselves. In this way, social changes as well as the position of women in Indonesian society become more easily visible. The filmmakers and their films are mirrors of the political, cultural and social developments and tackle topics which may not otherwise be addressed. They are the voices of women in Indonesia, addressed out to the world to form a fairer society for both genders.

During the past 13 years women’s issues and women’s film have both increased in Indonesia with the emergence of a new wave of women filmmakers. A vivid feminine or feminist culture is now demanding attention. The book’s first chapter by **Yvonne Michalik** will therefore

² Michalik, Yvonne and Laura Coppens (eds) (2009): *Asian Hot Shots – Indonesian Cinema*. Marburg, Schüren Verlag and Michalik, Yvonne (ed.) (2011), *Singaporean Independent Film*. Marburg, Schüren Verlag.

give a brief overview of the first emergence of women filmmakers in Indonesia until the present day.

After this the chapter by **Novi Kurnia** discusses the term 'feminism' from an Indonesian perspective. Derived from a PhD research project on women film directors and their films in the post-New Order Indonesian context, Novi Kurnia's chapter deals with the subjectivity of women directors in relation to gender and feminism. Kurnia argues that there are now women directors who bring an awareness of their agency and identity as women to their filmmaking and that through this they challenge the patriarchal culture of film production inherited from the New Order. Some of these filmmakers clearly state that they are aware of their identity as women and adopt a 'women's perspective' (or 'feminist perspective') in their filmmaking. However, it seems that the New Order ideology of 'ibuism' still influences these women filmmakers so that most of them choose the position of being "a feminist, but ..." in order to show they are assertive in promoting a women's perspective in their films but they can still be considered as 'good women'.

Then **Olin Monteiro** provides a survey of women's issues in Indonesian films. For this she has chosen to look at four films which are symbolic of a new feminist paradigm in Indonesia. The first is the award-winning *Pasir Berbisik* from Nan T. Achnas, a senior filmmaker and lecturer living in Jakarta. Nan Achnas began the new century making her heartbreaking tale of a young woman living with her single mother at the time of the 1965 riots. The film also tackles an incident of the sexual violence which has formed a part of women's struggles through the decades. A similar topic is portrayed in Lasja Susatyó's film *Cerita Jakarta*, one part of *Perempuan Punya Cerita* (an omnibus by four female directors). The main protagonist is an HIV-positive mother who struggles to take care of her daughter whilst living with the stigma of her illness within the family of her mother-in-law. The third film is *Mirror Never Lies*, a first feature by young, award-winning filmmaker Kamila Andini. This film is about a young girl from Sulawesi Island searching for her father who has never returned from sea. The film focuses on the girl's estrangement from her mother and her ambivalent feelings when a new male character enters their life. The last film is *Minggu Pagi di Victoria Park* by Lola Amaria, where a different topic is explored: the female work abroad.

As a background to these films, Olin Monteiro also examines the term 'feminism' and reveals there is still some resistance to this term in

film theory and film studies. Few filmmakers would actively identify their work as 'feminist film'. Olin Monteiro therefore argues that the story and characters in these films show the true condition of women in Indonesia and therefore represent women's voices. These four films epitomise Indonesia and the dynamic of the situation of women living there. The female directors seek to engage the audience's hearts with different aspects of women's lives. They are creating a new paradigm as well as a 'taste' of women's values. Hence these films by female filmmakers give feminism in Indonesia a fresh face with a local perspective by depicting strong, independent, unique and determined new characters.

As Olin Monteiro already discusses in her chapter, *Pasir Berbisik* is an important feminist film produced following the fall of the authoritarian regime in 1998. While female directors were almost entirely absent in the early history of Indonesian cinema, post-authoritarian Indonesia witnessed the birth of female filmmakers who challenge pre-existing notions of gender and sexuality and assert a feminist perspective. **Intan Paramadhita's** chapter therefore focuses on *Pasir Berbisik* and argues that through this film, the filmmaker Nan Achnas develops a distinctive feminist aesthetic by exploring women's voyeuristic pleasure in order to challenge the politics of the gaze. Within its aesthetic framework, the film questions gender politics by re-appropriating rather than wholly rejecting Oedipal narrative structure.

The chapter by **Ekky Imanjaya** and **Diani Citra** also focuses on narrative structure in its analysis of *Demi Ucok* by Sammaria Simanjuntak and the topic of 'state ibuism'. Two decades ago, Julia Suryakusuma coined the term 'state ibuism' to encapsulate how the New Order government used ideologies of gender and sexuality as a form of social control and to create a national identity. One of these was the foundation of the *Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga* (PKK, Family Welfare Movement) which contained the five roles for women (*Panca Dharma Wanita*): wife standing by her husband, household manager, mother with responsibility for reproduction, educator of children and citizen of Indonesia. From a political standpoint, the role of mothers and wives underwent 'housewifisation' and domestication. Following Suharto's downfall in May 1998, 'state ibuism' lost some of its institutional power. Subsequently, the interpretation of 'state ibuism' became decentralised, re-conceptualised, and challenged in many different contexts, including that of film analysis.

Using the portrayal of gender roles in *Demi Ucok*, Ekky Imanjaya and Diani Citra's chapter delves into how traditional gender roles are being re-conceptualised and challenged by one of the youngest in the generation of female filmmakers in the post-Suharto era. The film contains an interesting relationship between a mother and a daughter and their different interpretations of the institution of marriage: as the mother not only glorifies the concept of marriage (and its indication of housewifisation and domestication, where these can lead the bride to abandon her career or passion), but also strengthens it with traditional customs via the philosophy of the Batak people.

Wiwik Sushartami tackles a different issue in her chapter where she examines the representations of women in conflict areas by closely examining the video *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik* (Women in Conflict Areas) by *Yayasan Jurnal Perempuan* (YJP), an Indonesian women's organisation. Sushartami shows that the laments and silences of the female victims set a tone in the presentation of the film which appear to be in line with the feminist characteristics the filmmaker wants to underline: the representation and 'voicing' of women's concerns, using female logic, language and perspective. The YJP's ideological tendencies may influence the way the filmmaker represents the female victims and constructs their subjectivity. In relation to this film, YJP's political bearings are strongly visible in the contention that female victimisation in conflict areas is about silencing the victims of violence and is conducted by the state and its apparatuses. The film emphasises the silencing of female victims and at the same time highlights the need for an arena in which to voice their suffering. In response to the general discourse of victimhood that considers the absence of a space for the victims to voice their loss of agency, *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik* attempts to provide such a space.

The chapter by **Jan Budweg** focuses on a totally different topic: he discusses the role and position of Indonesian actress and film producer Christine Hakim in the development of Indonesia's post-Suharto film industry. After becoming Indonesia's foremost actress of the 1970s and 1980s, Christine Hakim minimised her film appearances in the 1990s. She returned to filmmaking in 1998 as a producer of feature films and later documentaries, whilst continuing her career as an actress in both Indonesian and international productions. In these dual functions, she has utilised her talent and fame for the development of the Indonesian film industry since the early days of *reformasi*. Her appearances in In-

donesian cinema at numerous festivals over the years have made her the best-known international face of Indonesian cinema, increasing the reputation and fame she uses for its advancement. Jan Budweg shows that, alongside her own productions, Christine Hakim has extended her influence by supporting up and coming young talents in Indonesian film. She often produced and supported the debut works of artists who themselves later became well known in the country. In addition, Jan Budweg examines Christine Hakim's social and educational activism which covers several areas of interest and which does not appear to be separate from her filmmaking. Jan Budweg argues that Christine Hakim has had a strong influence on the development of filmmaking in Indonesia since 1998.

Alongside these scientific contributions, it is also important to give the filmmakers themselves a voice. In the form of interviews, a group of women filmmakers discuss current developments in Indonesia and its film industry and make their own intentions and positions clear.

