1 Pop Culture and competing identities

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On 25 May 2007, Malaysia’s largest and oldest mobile telecommunications company Celcom officially appointed Indonesia’s best-known music group Peterpan as the company’s new ‘power icon’ as part of its marketing strategy. Under the newly launched service called Channel X, the company’s mobile phone subscribers will be able to download truetones, wallpapers and ‘Call Me Tones’ from Peterpan’s newest album Hari Yang Cerah (A Clear Day) and the group’s previous albums Taman Langit (Sky Garden) and Bintang di Surga (Star in Heaven). In addition to that, ‘Celcom customers can also get exclusive Peterpan voicemail greetings through Channel X’; and in return Celcom ‘secured exclusive rights to use Peterpan’s music and images for mobile downloads and the band will also be featured in some of the Company’s print and TV advertisements’ (Mobile88.com 2007).

The company’s move can be appreciated within its immediate context. By then, an estimated 200,000 copies of Peterpan’s various albums had been sold in Malaysia alone, when most of their domestic counterparts did not sell more than half that amount (Sartono 2007a), and two years earlier the group’s live performance mesmerized a 30,000-strong audience who sang along enthusiastically to the songs, outdoing the artists on stage.

The warm reception that the Malaysian public extended to Indonesian musicians has a longer history. It dates back several decades, with the success of artists such as Titik Puspa, Lilies Suryani, the Titik Sandhora-Muchsin duet, Koes Plus, D’Lloyd’s, Broery Marantika, Bob Tutupoly, Harvey Malaihollo, and Vina Panduwinata (Sartono 2007b). In the 2000s, Peterpan were only one of several Indonesian musicians that were well received in the neighbouring country. What distinguished Peterpan from their compatriots both past and present, as well as their Malaysian counterparts, was the degree of their popularity. Understandably, Celcom’s choice of Peterpan for its ‘power icon’ in May 2007 raised eyebrows among Malaysians, leading them to ask why the company had not chosen home-bred musicians instead (Sartono 2007a).

To better appreciate the broader significance of the phenomenon, one should take into consideration the fact that all the above took place when diplomatic relations between the two governments and peoples were lukewarm at best,
and occasionally antagonistic at worst (Jacob 2007; Kompas 2007a, 2007c). In more recent times, tensions between these neighbours pertained to issues of territorial boundary, Indonesian’s recurrent forest fires that resulted in the choking haze over the peninsula for over a decade since the mid-1990s, and the more thorny issues of human trafficking, Indonesian illegal migrants in Malaysia, and the mistreatment of Indonesian labour in Malaysia (Vatsikopoulos 2006; Kompas 2007b). Despite the geographical, linguistic, religious and cultural similarities between the two neighbouring countries, it is puzzling to see how few public and scholarly discussions there have been on and by people of the two countries (Alatas 1997: 150; Heryanto and Mandal 2003: 11–14; Noor 2005). Such mutual ignorance and long-standing lack of interest are distinct from, and harder to explain than, the common suspicion or hostility between neighbours that has characterized the Malaysia–Singapore, Singapore–Indonesia, and Indonesia–Australia relationships.

The unintended service performed by pop artists in mitigating political tensions between Malaysia and Indonesia can also be seen in reverse, with the female Malaysian singer Siti Nurhaliza being much adored in Indonesia. At the height of political tension between Indonesia and Malaysia over the territorial border near Ambalat Island in 2005, ultra-nationalists in Indonesia proposed a major military offensive measure against its neighbouring country. Some Indonesians took to the streets to galvanize public support for their rage towards Malaysia with shouting and banners invoking the 1963 confrontation slogan, with novel qualifications: ‘Ganyang Malaysia–Selamatkan Siti Nurhaliza!’ (Crush Malaysia–But Save Siti Nurhaliza!) and ‘Siti Yes, Malaysia No’ (Noor 2005). The ability of these non-state sponsored and commercially driven pop artists to win the hearts and minds of tens of thousands (perhaps millions) of Indonesians and Malaysians, and to transcend political animosity, makes the state-sponsored cultural events under the rubric of the ASEAN Arts Festival in Kuala Lumpur on 18 October 2003 (Kompas 2003k) pale into insignificance.

Another comparison is useful, this time with Indonesia–East Timor relations. A decade before Peterpan charmed Malaysian audiences, the journalist-turned-short story writer Seno Gumira Ajidarma attracted the attention of many Indonesians and outside observers alike for taking the innovative and politically risky step of bridging the gap (or breaking the silence, if an aural metaphor is more apt than a temporal/spatial one) that had separated the Indonesian public from the East Timorese people during the Indonesian occupation. In the mid-1990s, Seno Gumira Ajidarma declared his now well-known dictum ‘Ketika Jurnalisme Dibungkam, Sastra Harus Bicara’ (When Journalism is silenced, literature must speak up) (see Ajidarma 1997, 1999). This refers to his politically engaged literary activities in response to his removal from the chief editorship of the weekly news-magazine Jakarta-Jakarta, following the angry reaction of the Indonesian military to a series of graphic reports in his magazine of the Dili incident.
where Indonesian troops gunned down young East Timorese in a peaceful rally on 12 November 1991 (see Heryanto and Adi 2002: 62; Heryanto 2007: 531). The impact of the Dili incident and its media coverage is comparable with that of the Soweto incident in Apartheid South Africa in 1976 (Risse and Ropp 1999: 252). As he gradually receded from journalism, Ajidarma became increasingly prolific as a writer of short stories set in a violence-stricken unnamed place, depicting the plight of people in an anonymous – yet highly identifiable – land (i.e. East Timor). Journalistic materials that were available but could not be published under the severe censorship of the time provided raw material for his fiction.

What remains unclear is the extent to which East Timorese themselves had access to Ajidarma’s writings, and whether they could identify with the characters in his politically charged stories. In contrast, the blatantly apolitical Peterpan ‘rocked’ East Timorese, who had barely recovered from the trauma of the political violence during Indonesian occupation, particularly the infamous scorched-earth measures that followed Indonesia’s humiliating defeat in the UN-sponsored referendum for independence in 1999. On 13 November 2005, Peterpan thrilled an audience of 60,000 in Dili, the capital city of Timor Leste. President Xanana Gusmao personally welcomed these young Indonesian musicians (detikHot 2005). A former student of mine, Luke Arnold, who was present at the performance, described what he saw with amazement:

Almost every young person in town rocked up. People were climbing up phone towers and jumping over the stadium fences just to get a view. It seemed like civil order was about to break down, but this time it had nothing to do with independence struggles. Only five years or so after their independence, people were literally falling over each other to see a band from the country they had separated from. It felt like a moment of reconciliation. The woman next to me said: ‘we actually love Indonesians, we just hate their military’.

(Arnold 2006: 3)

For many reasons the political, moral, and ideological power of pop cultures has been received with ambivalence at best and underestimated at worst across the globe. Some of these reasons are more familiar than others. Most often this power has escaped the attention of scholarly investigation in general, including Indonesian studies. On the few occasions when scholars make mention of pop culture, it tends to be dismissed or misunderstood. This book is one of the growing number of recent attempts by scholars of Indonesia to redress the imbalance, and this first chapter aims to show some of the reasons why this endeavour constitutes an important contribution to any serious study of contemporary Indonesia and, indeed, Asia more generally.

This, and most of the subsequent chapters, underscore the importance of the study of pop culture far beyond what has been commonly recognized,
and these chapters raise certain methodological issues in studying the subject matter. Being understudied, pop culture has often been misunderstood, overlooked, or dismissed by many students of Indonesia, resulting in a serious intellectual gap in the study of the country as a whole. This chapter will examine what may at first look like a debate about popular entertainment, and it will show that the sustainability of Indonesia as a plural nation-state is very much at stake in this debate. Popular culture in this example is important, not simply for whatever it informs us about something else more important, such as national politics. The two are inseparable. The debate from popular culture practices to be examined below is at the very heart of Indonesian national politics today.

This chapter will specifically discuss two methodological issues. First, it is necessary for a study of pop culture to go beyond close reading of a particular work of pop culture. Neither is it sufficient to measure quantitatively its production and consumption. In some cases, as illustrated in this chapter, a serious consideration of the broader social, historical, and political contexts of any particular production or consumption of culture is imperative, not merely optional, to the investigation. In this chapter, I will argue that the contest of four major ideological forces (Javanism, Islam, liberalism, and Marxism) has fundamentally dictated the parameters of Indonesian nation-state building, and framed the debates in the production and consumption of pop culture. As will be elaborated below, I contend that the Inul controversy is a product of a specifically historical moment; it might not have taken place had Inul been born a generation earlier.

Second, this chapter illustrates how ethnographic field work can prove to be significantly instrumental as method of data collection in the study of pop culture. Although this is neither an original nor novel proposition, existing literature shows that this standard approach in anthropology has not been widely adopted or adequately appreciated in the study of Indonesian pop culture, and most likely elsewhere. The reason may be that of convenience. Many products of pop culture are widely available as mass-produced items for sale in shopping areas. It is easy for many researchers to restrict their material for analysis primarily, if not exclusively, to a copy of such items. In contrast, this chapter will show that many aspects of Inul’s unique strengths and sudden popularity in 2003 cannot be discerned unless one’s research includes field work in selected areas where she made her early career and witnessed some of the events there. These aspects include her unusual use of Javanese language in interaction with her audience and in comparison with other performers of the same genre, as well as the use of digital technology by the urban under-class that has usually escaped the attention of middle-class scholars and other cultural analysts.

Pop culture’s often close and unashamed association with crude profit-making in the entertainment industry has made it difficult for it to gain respectable status among elites of otherwise varied political outlook. For this reason, the pejorative term ‘mass culture’ has occasionally been used to
describe it (Strinati 1995: 10; Macdonald 1998: 22). The term ‘represents a debased, trivialized, superficial, artificial and standardized culture’ (Strinati 1995: 21). As noted by many (for a recent analysis of Indonesia see Hobart 2006), there is often a general concern that:

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.

(Strinati 1995: 41)

At the same time, the obvious power of top artists to seduce the majority of populations across the globe has made it difficult for business people, politicians and other professions to ignore popular culture if they want to be – or be seen to be – relevant, attractive, and up to date in the eyes of society at large, and particularly of their immediate constituents. Although Indonesian voters have not elected a movie star as head of state, as in the case of former Presidents Ronald Reagan of the USA (1981–89) or Joseph Estrada of the Philippines (1998–2001), presidential candidates in post-authoritarian elections have done all they can to woo the masses by demonstrating their sympathy for pop culture. The current president, Susilo Bambang Yudoyono (also known as SBY), went so far as singing to the public during the election campaigns, and in the finalist session of the Indonesian Idol contest (see Chapter 6; and Lindsay 2005). In the lead-up to the Australian election campaign, Australian Prime Minister John Howard posted a clip on youtube online (Gilchrist 2007; Sydney Morning Herald 2007).

But the significance of pop culture in contemporary Indonesia is never confined to the views and behaviour of the nation’s political elite. As is perhaps also the case in neighbouring countries, no other social institution in Indonesia has arrested public attention on the scale or with the intensity of the electronic media, especially television. Nothing has attracted the number of hours of attention on a daily basis from around 100,000,000 Indonesians as television programs. This alone warrants special investigation. Without it, any understanding of contemporary Indonesia would be seriously flawed. But there are even stronger reasons why such a study is urgently needed. While Indonesia has barely recovered from a decade of the economic and political crisis that began in 1997, its contemporary cultures (pop or otherwise) have been thriving as never before.

When the novels Saman by Ayu Utami (1998), and Supernova by Dewi Lestari (2000) were published, many literary critics and students of literature were stunned by their innovative and literary quality (see Clark 1999; Hatley 1999). Subsequently, more works of comparable quality by other young, and predominantly female, writers have been published. Since 2000, contemporary pop music has achieved sales figures that would have been
unimaginable even a few years ago. Peterpan is neither the first nor the sole success story. On a smaller scale in commercial terms is the unprecedented growth of underground music (Wallach 2003; Bodden 2005). Moreover, a decade after the demise of the Indonesian film industry, and in the context of disdain for domestic films over a much longer period, new titles from a new generation of film makers began to break new ground aesthetically, and to break commercial records, superseding the popularity of top Hollywood titles (Grayling 2002; van Heeren 2002b). Licensed presses have multiplied threefold since 1998, the number of commercial television networks has doubled, and over 50 new local television networks have been established (Heryanto and Hadiz 2005: 256–57). The media industry was the only industry in the country whose job market expanded in the wake of the 1998 economic crisis (Heryanto and Adi 2002) when millions of others lost jobs.

Despite all these developments, barely a single book in English on the phenomenon has been published, with Sen and Hill (2000) being an exception, although their work focuses more on the mass media than on pop cultures. English-language studies of Indonesian pop cultures are few and far between, and most focus on the New Order period. With a few important exceptions (Sen 1988; Heider 1991; Lockhard 1998; Kitley 2000), they have appeared in journal articles (e.g. Kleden 1977; Frederick 1982; Warren 1990; Zurbuchen 1990; Murray 1991; Henschkel 1994; Nilan 2000, 2001, 2003; Baulch 2002a, b; Barendregt and van Zanten 2002; Hobart and Fox 2006) or book chapters (Lent 1995). Incomplete or unpublished theses and conference papers promise to make a difference in the future. At the time this book went to press, there appeared to be not much more than scattered journal articles and book chapters dealing with fragments of the phenomenon. Three reasons may be offered to account for the dearth of serious analysis of Indonesian pop culture: (a) the newness of its prominence in public; (b) the dominance of certain paradigms in the study of this society; and (c) the prevailing masculine bias in our scholarship more generally. Let me a little bit more about each of these.

First, pop culture is, by default, a product of an industrialized society, where both the signifying practices and their observable products (i.e. culture) are produced or performed in a great number, often with the assistance of technologies of mass-production, distribution and duplication, making them highly accessible to the populace. Although Indonesian industrialization dates back more than 100 years, it is fair to say that sustained industrial expansion took place significantly only in the 1980s, at the height of the militarist rule of the New Order government (1966–98), an intimate partner of the Western bloc during the Cold War. Although pop culture was a topic of public debate in the 1970s among Indonesia’s intelligentsia, the lack of any in-depth study of Indonesia’s pop culture in stark comparison with the study of other aspects of modern Indonesia is a testimony to the novelty of this genre. The situation in Indonesia’s neighbouring countries is not very different. Even in those countries where industrialization began
slightly earlier or proceeded more robustly, pop culture is a fairly new phenomenon, and its study has just begun.

Second, there are internal problems with the study of Indonesian society in general, where the intellectual framework has been fixed too much for too long on nation-state building and modernization (McVey 1995; Heryanto 2005, 2006c; Bonura and Sears 2007), or the impediments to them (militarism, human rights abuse, rampant corruption, violent ethno-religious conflicts, and, lately, Islamist militants) at the expense of other issues of importance, and more enjoyable to millions of ordinary people.

This second set of problems in the study of Indonesia is closely related to a third, namely the masculine bias (see Pambudy 2003). As is the case globally (for a broader review see O’Connor and Klaus 2000: 379–82), the material aspects of, and the conceptual issues surrounding, modernization, nation-state building, the economy, religion, war or corruption are all seen as primarily activities about and for men. These issues are considered essentially masculine and of public importance. In contrast, in both real-life and scholarship, the other and devalued gender is relegated to the secondary ‘private’, or ‘domestic sphere, which is also the main sphere of mass-mediated (radio, television) leisure, entertainment, and pop culture. There follows a familiar, if deeply problematic, sense of division between the masculine world news and the feminine soap operas, or between serious newsmagazines and so-called women’s magazines.

Most observers of Indonesian culture devote attention to so-called traditional or ethnic cultures (often exoticized by many studies to be authentic cultures of the people), the state-sanctioned ‘official’ version of national cultures (as often propagated in schools and ceremonies), or the ‘avant-garde’ or ‘high’ cultures of the nation’s intelligentsia (as found in the academy, theatres and prestigious galleries). These categories are helpful for conceptualizing what we mean by ‘pop culture’, by highlighting what it is not.

Admittedly, there are many and equally valid concepts of ‘popular cultures’ (Strinati 1995; Storey 2006). In this book, and particularly in this chapter, the term refers to a variety of genres of widely circulated communicative practices prominently for a large number of ‘ordinary’ people, or by such people, or a combination of both. The first category (for the people) refers to mass-produced commodified messages (including music, films, and television) and related signifying practices. The second category (by the people) includes non-industrialized, relatively independent, communicative practices that circulate through various means (public events, parades, festivals), often, but not always, in opposition or alternative to the mass-produced commodities of entertainment and lifestyles.

This is not to say that there is no borrowing or mutation of particular elements between one category and the other. Any in-depth analysis of pop culture requires a reference to these other genres. While studies on all the other categories of cultures abound, in-depth study of Indonesian popular cultures has barely begun. At the core of the object of study is the
communicative practice (‘culture’) of, to, or by ordinary people, in the sense of those who are ‘neither members of the philosophical, aesthetic, or political elites, nor ... of the new proletariat or under-classes’ (Kahn 2001:19).

While pop culture provides a resource-rich venue for the study of various aspects of contemporary society, the politics of identity in the production and consumption of popular culture will be the focus of this book for very specific historical reasons to be elaborated below. In particular, this chapter is devoted to outlining the most important changes in the relationship between Indonesian politics in the broadest senses of the term and its pop cultures over the past 20 or 30 years. This chapter aims to provide the necessary historical context for the issues discussed in subsequent chapters.

Producers of pop culture do not always convey political value or messages in their work, and consumers of this work do not necessarily seek such value or messages. Pop cultures are often meant primarily to be objects of entertainment and commodity for profit, although there are cases where cultures (pop or otherwise) are overtly designed to make political statements, and may be celebrated, or banned, as such. As will be elaborated in a moment, the music of Rhoma Irama in the 1970s and 1980s (Frederick 1982), the music of Iwan Fals in the 1980s and 1990s (Murray 1991) and the theatrical productions of Teater Koma (Zurbuchen 1990) are some of the best-known examples. But in the past three decades, even what might initially have been intended to be purely entertainment often acquired political values as it circulated in public, and as it was received as such by the larger audience, occasionally on a scale larger than anyone could have expected. As will be examined in detail below, the case of singer–dancer Inul Daratista is one of the latest and most controversial examples of this phenomenon.

Given Indonesia’s highly politicized environment, it barely needs explanation why it is not possible for arts and cultures to be exempted from political contestation in the society at large. One argument that will be developed in this chapter refers to the important political shifts in the production and consumption of pop cultures since the ideological crisis of the New Order, which preceded by several years its formal demise in 1998. Until the mid-1980s the New Order’s authoritarian government was at centre stage of Indonesian public life. The political dynamics in the production and consumption of pop cultures was then caught in the polarity between those for, and those against, the status quo centred at the official ideology of the regime, which was a combination of Javanism, secularism, militarism, developmentalism, and indigenism (more in the next section). It must be noted that the fall of the New Order in 1998 did not entail a total break with all these orientations, dispositions, outlooks, structures of feelings, and social relations. Nonetheless, although their legacies persist, these elements are no longer as unified and dominant as they once were, while new and renewed forces have come into play, making the whole political constellation a new and contested field and with no centre of power to consolidate domination as yet.
In many ways, post-1998 Indonesia is reminiscent of the country in the 1950s when it enjoyed its first decade of formal independence. In both periods, Indonesia tried to rebuild a modern, sovereign, and respectable nation-state, following the demise of a long-running repressive government (colonial Dutch rule before 1945, and the New Order government from 1966 to 1998). In both periods, the project proved to be much more difficult than its proponents and supporters had initially anticipated. One of the fundamental reasons for this difficulty is the diversity and seeming incompatibility of the major social forces that constitute Indonesia. To understand these problems in greater detail, and to understand the space for pop cultures in both expressing and negotiating these political contestation, we need to step back several decades and gain a broader historical view of the incomplete project of Indonesia-making.

**Major Political Identities**

It has been said many times that Indonesia is a country of extremely diverse cultures, languages, religious beliefs, and traditions. An in-depth discussion of any selected parts of the nation’s cultures or history would necessarily require some sort of reduction of the other aspects of the country’s complexity. What should never be reduced or overlooked in our analysis, however, are the fascinating blends and dangerous tensions among the four major forces that make the foundation or backbone of Indonesia. One of these can generally be understood as the many vernacular ‘traditions’ in the archipelago, of which what has been conveniently called Javanese has appeared to be most salient. The other three forces are identified as exogenous and distinctively ‘modern’. A brief elaboration of these four major forces will be useful.

Students of Indonesian cultures in the past three or four decades have deconstructed, or at least problematized, notions of local cultures 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 travelled across the globe. In several parts of Indonesia’s archipelago, Hinduism and Buddhism have been embraced with varying forms and scales of modifications, giving new life to the traditions of the local ancestors (see Chalmers 2006: esp. Ch. 2, 4). What has come to be known variably as ‘Javanese’ culture, Javanism, or Javanist mysticism, are but salient examples of such assimilated traditions. The prominence of Javanism has to do with several factors, including the numerical size and the power of its followers in the formation of the nation-state (often at the expense of other traditions, especially in the eastern islands of the archipelago), and the contribution of colonial and post-colonial scholarship to the discourse of the subject. Even here, the reference to ‘Javanese’ culture or Javanism is just a convenient but deeply problematic shorthand for something more complex that has long been problematized and debated by its analysts, especially since Clifford
Geertz’s classic study (1964; see also Pemberton 1994). Javaneseness (whatever it may mean) 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.

Of the three modernizing forces that have helped shape Indonesia, Islam was the earliest to arrive in the archipelago. The other two are various streams of thoughts inspired by liberalism and Marxism respectively. But it is never easy to know how these should be labelled. The term ‘developmentalists’ has sometimes been used to refer to those who have strongly identified themselves with the basic tenets of liberalism in the past and present. Confusing as they may be, terms like ‘leftist’ or ‘populist’ are often used conveniently to refer to those people who show marked sympathy or affinity with Marxian tenets, or have at least shown the influence of Marxian thought and orientation. It barely needs emphasizing that there are more than a few derivatives, variants of, and names for each of these three moral, intellectual, and ideological orientations. Also obvious in the discussion on these three modernizing forces, is their portrayal as ideal types. In reality, the distinctions among the four identified forces are much harder to draw, and this is further compounded by the interventions of other factors that cut across these categories (including class, gender, or ethnicity).

Like everyone else, Indonesians have more than one identity, and show some elements of their identity more strongly than others.

In the history of Indonesia the proponents of the above major forces have had moments of mutual respect, but more often of mutual suspicion and contempt. Notwithstanding these less amicable relationships, some of the strongly committed proponents of the three forces distinguish themselves from the first mentioned socio-cultural force by their commitment to what we can call ‘modernity’. Here ‘modernity’ is understood as including several of the following characteristics: aspiration to and an optimism for the idea of the progress of history; the need to break with the past; a conviction and celebration of the central role of human agency (as opposed to preordained fate, destiny or other supernatural forces); a conception of humans as basically equal and rationally capable beings for bringing about such progress in history; and a fundamental reliance on largely secular, or at least non-metaphysical, understandings and a mastery of science and technology, practice of law, and shared moral values.

In one sense, the success of Indonesian nation-building can be understood in terms of successfully managing these four major forces. Although these forces have co-existed or blended in heterogeneous and changing composites for at least a century, their relationships have also been characterized by profound tension or centripetal tendencies by default, rather than mutual respect and desire. At times, such tension has erupted into violent conflict. Such a situation is by no means unique to any modern nation-states. What distinguishes Indonesia from some of its more ‘stable’ neighbours (including the strongly Islamic Malaysia and Brunei, Buddhist
Thailand, or secular and developmentalist Singapore) is the fairly balanced distribution of power among these four major forces, making the struggle for a position of dominance among them a long-lasting one. Temporary peace and stability occur when one central power dominates all others, as during the periods of colonial rule and the New Order government. Both regimes were strongly developmentalist in outlook, anti-Islam, and anti-communist. Conversely, it has been easy for some of these major forces to collaborate and suppress their fundamental differences when they face a common enemy (as during the formation of opposition to Dutch colonial rule, and New Order militarist authoritarianism).

The ongoing tension between these forces permeates nearly all aspects of Indonesian life all the time. However, given the raw sensitivities, these tensions and the threat of violence are not always visible. Indonesia’s pop cultures are created and consumed within such contexts. One of the subtle, but nonetheless foregrounded, expressions of this tension, can be seen in the film *Selamat Tinggal Jeanette* (Goodbye Jeanette), released at the height of New Order rule, as instructively analysed by Keith Foulcher (1990). A more explicit illustration of a political battle in pop culture found expression in the debut of the *dangdut* singer and dancer Inul Daratista, soon after the New Order’s demise and during the years of Indonesia’s democratization. This was a period characterized by the absence of a single social force enjoying the privileged position of unchallenged domination at the top of the political structure. We shall now turn our attention to these two cases in the next two sections.

**Negotiating Indonesia-ness under the New Order**

The commercially successful 1987 film *Selamat Tinggal Jeanette* was clearly intended primarily as entertainment. I saw this film as an undergraduate student during its initial release in Indonesia. Foulcher’s (1990) critical and considered analysis brought back my own memories of the film, and persuaded me to see it in a very different light. Foulcher refers to the film as a case of the state’s hegemonic power in allowing non-state agents to create fictional narrative with some sense of liberty, although the act of producing and consuming this narrative is never autonomous. Although it is no longer fashionable to say this, one can argue that those involved in the production of the film and its consumption indirectly (and most likely unconsciously) were taking part in reproducing the dominant ideology of the time. Foulcher (1990: 306–9) re-narrates the storyline better than I can, but below is a brief summary that should serve the purpose of our discussion.

The film tells a love story involving Suryono, a male Javanese artist from a *priyayi* (middle-ranking aristocratic) family, and two women. The first is his French wife, Jeanette; the second is Trima, a house-maid in the house of Suryono’s mother in the city of Solo (one of the two major centres of high Javanese court cultures, the other being Yogyakarta). For most of the story,
Suryono and his wife live in his mother’s house. Jeanette and Trima are presented as polar opposites. Jeanette is highly animated, independently minded, confident, and thoroughly if not excessively ‘modern’. Following the stereotypes of the ‘liberal’ West so common in Asia, Jeanette is presented as a woman from a rich family, who has in the past fallen victim to drugs, and then went to Indonesia to seek spiritual and emotional tranquillity. In contrast, Trima is a peasant girl, who has no school education. She is noticeably timid, especially in showing her secret passion 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 resigns from work and returns to her village with a false story about a thief having raped her.

Actually there is another important woman in the story, Suryono’s mother. Her deceased husband left her with painful memories of their marriage as he was unfaithful to her. With Suryono her only child, and only next of kin, she is strongly attached to him, and she hopes that he will not repeat his father’s infidelity. Until near the end of the film, Suryono’s mother does not approve of his marrying a Westerner. Obviously she would not expect her son to have any serious relationships with Trima, the servant. From the priyayi perspective of Suryono’s mother, Trima’s pregnancy out of wedlock simply confirms her conviction of the low character of low-class Javanese peasant folk.

In a remarkable parallel to those forces that have made Indonesia today as outlined above, the relations between Suryono and these three women resemble Indonesia’s perception of a much desired, but also intimidating, West (Jeanette); of vernacular traditions whose qualities of innocence, purity, and sincerity seem exploitable and disposable (Trima); and of modern day priyayi Java (Suryono’s mother) as the foundation and antecedent of the existence of the Indonesian nation-state (Suryono himself). It is also clear that the masculine nation-state wishes to distinguish itself from others by virtue of having some power and desire to dominate the other three figures, all significantly females. The intention to unite them all under one domination is never a total success in the film, as in the case of Indonesia’s nation-building. 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. She decides not to reunite with her husband, but manages to reconcile with her mother-in-law thanks to the new-born baby. Both women have been disappointed by their respective husbands. They also share a disappointment with one man, the film’s male protagonist.

To go beyond Foulcher’s analysis, for the purpose of this chapter, readers will notice that two of Indonesia’s major forces are absent from Selamat Tinggal Jeanette. There are no elements with identifiable orientations towards Islam, or with the Marxian positions. It is well documented, the Indonesian Left has been banned since 1965, its proponents and sympathizers
were murdered, prosecuted, or exiled without trial for 10 years or more. The survivors and their relatives have been systematically stigmatized to this day. Segments within the more Islam-based social organizations (but also minority Christians) took part in the anti-Left wave of killings and subsequent witch-hunt. However, before long, these politicized Islam groups were themselves suppressed by the new militarist government that they had helped to seize state power. Many key Islamic political leaders were put in jail, and all Islamist politics was severely restricted. The suppression of political Islam lasted for at least 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).

During this time, Rhoma Irama became an important pop star, the first one with an explicitly Islamic identity. The lyrics of his music contain references to Islam and stinging social criticism of the status quo. Musically, Rhoma Irama devoted himself entirely to dangdut (a mix of Malay, Indian, and Arabic musical elements), until then considered markedly low-class, irrevocably crude, and artistically distasteful. Equipping himself with Western musical instruments, and inspired by contemporary Western pop music, Rhoma Irama created a whole new history of dangdut music, and indeed of Indonesian pop culture (Frederick 1982; Lockhard 1998: 94–105). It was his later association with an Islamic political party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, Development Unity Party), more than his choice of musical genre or the social criticism in his lyrics, that provoked the government’s harsh reaction. Dangdut was then banned in the then sole (state-owned) television network (TVRI) and many radio stations. Ironically, the suppression and stigmatization of dangdut only made it into a new icon of political opposition among the burgeoning middle-class in Indonesian cities. A decade or so later, in another major twist of history, no political party (not even the government’s Golkar party) can afford not to use dangdut during the election campaigns. The political history of dangdut, as well as Rhoma Irama’s position in it, altered dramatically again after the fall of the New Order in 1998. Before we examine this further in the next section, it is necessary to return to our discussion of the relationship between Islam, politics, and the New Order government.

The New Order government’s attitude to Islam began to change in the late 1980s, but political Islam gained its momentum in 1990, when the then aging President Suharto made a series of political moves over a short period of time. Suharto freed Muslim political leaders from prisons before their release dates, while courtrooms in several cities tried people being charged with making public statements that were deemed disrespectful of Islam. Suharto courted a wide range of Islamic groups, including their more radical elements, as part of his attempt to build new alliances and maintain his grip on state power in the face of a divided military that had until then become his main support base. In the same year, he decided to make the pilgrimage to Mecca for the first time, becoming a hajj in his political twilight.
He rescinded the ban on the veiling of Muslim school girls. His eldest daughter began to wear a veil at all her public appearances. The number of mosques increased significantly. The government restriction of new permits for the publication of newspapers was suspended, with the launch of the first explicitly Islamic newspaper *Republika*, affiliated with the new national Islam organization ICMI (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia, Association of Indonesia Muslim Intellectuals).

Elsewhere I have discussed in more detail the emergence of the ‘new’ Muslim in tandem with the early consolidation of a new bourgeois class from approximately the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s (Heryanto 1999: 173–76). Major bookshops began to create special spaces for Islamic books. During Ramadhan, fancy restaurants and major shopping malls were busy with Muslim families celebrating the holy events. Some five-star hotels held annual fashion shows of Islamic women’s clothing. The entertainment industry and organizers of pop culture events did not miss the opportunity to take advantage of the new climate, redefining what would sell. It became ‘cool’ to be a (new) Muslim, leading to a trend that Murray (1991) refers to as radical ‘Islamic chic’. In sum, I highlighted the dramatic change in Muslim identity at the time in the following terms:

Gone are the old and rigid meanings of ‘religion’ and ‘politics’, as well as the clear boundaries that separate them from ‘lifestyle’. In today’s Islam in Indonesia, old familiar images have been replaced by new ones. The associations of Islam with rural poverty, religious dogmatism, the Middle East, anti-Chinese, anti-West sentiments, and fundamentalists seeking to establish an Islamic state, are juxtaposed with new images. Now Islam is also associated with television talk shows, [business] cards with PhDs from prominent Western schools, erudite intellectual debates, mobile phones and consumption of *ketupat* during Ramadhan at McDonald’s.

(Heryanto 1999: 176)

A decade later, some of the practices have become normalized, some have expanded even further or intensified, while others have moderated, partly as the so-called war on terror intervened and complicated matters.

In the 1990s, as an executive with the power to appoint members of parliament, Suharto made the composition of the law-makers significantly ‘greener’ as the locals called it (referring to the colour of the then Islamic party’s flag). It was definitely ‘greener’ than at any other time in Indonesian history and ‘greener’ than anyone could have expected or imagined. The same was true of positions in the state cabinet and military. This rapidly trickled down to nearly all of state administrative appointments at lower levels in the provinces away from the capital city of Jakarta. For more than a few observers, this constituted one of the fundamental roots of what then developed into the series of protracted inter-ethnic, and inter-religious wars
on several islands in Indonesia at turn of the century (see e.g. Bertrand 2001; van Klinken 2001). Not all Islamic organizations and their leaders enjoyed or supported the changes initiated by Suharto. The more independently minded Muslims became seriously concerned with the politization of religion, and argued for the pursuance of a more pluralist, liberal, and inclusive democracy. During Suharto’s last years in power, such pluralist Muslims and their organizations were systematically marginalized or intimidated. Ironically, this repressive measure galvanized public discontent in the build-up of a new wave of democratization that ushered in the fall of the New Order in 1998.

Inulmania: Testing Indonesia’s Islamization

Nothing has articulated the fierce and ideologically laden contestation of the four major forces in contemporary Indonesia more vividly than the 2003 controversy over the performance of the *dangdut* singer–dancer Inul Daratista. Two years later Indonesia was further divided by the proposal of an anti-pornography law from the more Islamist inclined parties inside the parliament and supported by many outside it. Many see ‘Inulmania’ and the failure to repress Inul being one main impetus to this new bill, and that the moves to repress Inul and then to propose the new law are parts of concerted efforts by the Islamist politicians and social organizations to Islamicize Indonesian state (Hosen 2005; Allen 2007). At stake in what may look like a debate about a popular entertainment or pornography is no less than the cohesion and survival of the world’s fourth most populous nation.

If the rise of Rhoma Irama, as shown earlier, can be seen in tandem with the resistance of political Islam to the New Order and a herald of Indonesia’s new Islamization, Inul’s rise to prominence complicated that trend. Another contrast is worth noting here. Rhoma Irama’s music came to the fore with strong political messages. By asserting a new identity politics and moral correctness, he risked serious consequences from the militarist state, and actually paid dearly. Inul Daratista’s performance had no such political agenda. Celebrating the bodily pleasures of singing and dancing, she made no political statement. Nonetheless, her performances were received differently, rapidly provoking a series of comments and counter-comments with strong political overtones, first at the local level but increasingly moving to the centre of national politics.

Inul (as she is popularly known) was born on 21 January 1979 as Ainur Rokhimah, the first of the six children of Abdullah Aman and Rufia, in the small town of Gempol, East Java. Her change of name from a markedly Arabic and Islamic sounding name to a Javanized Indonesian one on the eve of her successful debut is testament to the dramatic change in her life and status. She began her career as a rock singer in high school, before performing at several major hotels in Surabaya, the provincial capital city of East Java. Feeling that she would never succeed in the business of singing
rock, she shifted in 1991 to concentrate her energy on dangdut, whose fans had until then come mainly from the rural population and urban under-class. Before 2000, she had already had the privilege of performing in Japan at the invitation of the Indonesian Consulate-General in Osaka (Bajuri 2002). Subsequently, she performed in several other countries including Taiwan, Brunei, Malaysia, Korea, the Netherlands, and the USA (Bintang Indonesia 2003). But in her homeland until mid-2002, she was little known outside small towns in East and Central Java. Soon afterwards, she transformed herself and was transformed by a series of historical conditions, becoming a new icon of pop culture well beyond anyone’s imagination, including her own.

As a secondary-school student in the 1980s she was paid Rp. 3,500 (roughly US$2 then, but equivalent to US$0.30 in 2003) to perform (Bintang Indonesia 2003; Nurbianto 2003; Kompas 2003c). A decade later she was making Rp. 10,000–15,000 (roughly US$4–6) for performing at weddings, circumcisions, or local festivals (Susanti 2002; Djunaedi 2003). By early 2003, her monthly income reportedly reached Rp. 700,000,000 (roughly US$78,500) (Abhiseka 2003), or Rp. 60,000,000 (US$ 6,200) per show (Mustafa et al. 2003; Nurbianto 2003), making her one of the richest artists in the country during the protracted economic crisis. This revenue came mainly from her various major television appearances. For one 60-minute show in 2003, one station reaped as much as Rp. 900,000,000 (roughly US$92,000) from advertisers (LIN 2003).

Before 2003, Inul made several album recordings, including Two In One (English original), Kepiye Mas (Javanese ‘What’s Up, Brother?’), Pacar Asli (True Lover), Cinta Suci (Sacred Love), and Mbah Dukun (Mr. Dukun – a traditional healer). None attained any significant success. Her rise to fame in 2003 was to a great extent thanks to the then underestimated power of the new digital technology among the urban under-class. The significance of this new medium deserves further discussion, and I will return to it towards the end of this section. For now, let me focus on the scale of the distribution of her recording as a way of illustrating her fame, and then discuss the significance of the ensuing controversy over her allegedly indecent style of performance.

It is not easy to assess the total volume of the circulated recordings of Inul's performances on an estimated 15 different VCDs. Estimates range widely between 3,000,000 (Walsh 2003) and 6,000,000 (see Anom 2003) or even 10,000,000 copies as suggested by local observers in East Java where I conducted field work in early 2003. This achievement was unprecedented, as the highest sales figures for dangdut had been 500,000 (Anom 2003), and this remained unrivalled at the time of writing in 2007. The largest sales figures of any Indonesian music recording – including that by Peterpan, and many others before them such as Sheila On 7, Padi, Dewa, Jamrud, and Slank – was slightly over 1,000,000 copies (see Mustafa et al. 2003). Inul was one of the first and few Indonesians to have been covered by Time Asia, where her debut was described in the following terms:
Virtually overnight, Inulmania swept Indonesia, and within weeks, Inul was bumping and grinding on the cover of major national magazines and appearing on television more often than the country’s President. . . . TV programs in which she appeared consistently drew 14 share points, well above the norm for music shows.

(Walsh 2003)

Inul reached people of all ages and from all walks of life. The respected English daily *The Jakarta Post* (2003c) reported the so-called Inul’s pencil being ‘the hottest-selling item in the capital’ among schoolchildren. ‘The pencil sways while in use, which is said to be similar to Inul’s gyrating dance on stage’. A professor of physics from the prestigious University of Indonesia made an analysis of Inul’s controversial movements to explain ‘chaos theory’ to a non-scholarly audience (Kebamoto 2003). Television companies competed with each other to maximize their share of Inul’s time (see Atmowiloto 2003; Mustafa et al. 2003). So did major political parties, particularly the nationalist Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan (Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle) and the inclusive Islamic Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (the Awakening Nation Party), in the wake of the 2004 general elections for parliament and the presidency (Nurbianto 2003). Some compared the Inul controversy to controversies concerning Eminem (*Astaga* 2003; Walsh 2003), Madonna (Pambudy 2003), Michael Jackson (*Kompas* 2003g), or Elvis Presley (Aglionby 2003). During my field work in East Java in 2003, I repeatedly heard how crowds at *dangdut* concerts became impatient and demanding if Inul did not show up, or performed too little, or too late.

Controversy immediately followed Inul’s rapid success. For the purpose of our analysis, it is useful to identify several distinct phases of the controversy. The first began with a series of bans by local governments and religious edicts from local Councils of Ulamas in early 2003, especially after Inul was discovered in late 2002 by a television industry that had been undergoing rapid expansion since 1999 (Heryanto and Adi 2002). The controversy entered a new phase in late April 2003, when Inul met Rhoma Irama (*Media Indonesia* 2003b; *Suara Merdeka* 2003c). The next one and a half months were anti-climactic, marked as they were by Inul’s withdrawal from public appearance, only to be resurrected by a major television event in early June 2003. Not long after that the emotional controversy that split the nation, along with Inul’s aura, seemed to dissipate. By 2004 her name was barely making the national news. This continued until April 2006 when some Islamist groups in Jakarta attacked her civil rights at the height of another nationwide controversy, this time over the new Anti-Pornography Bill. The story of Inul constitutes an important chapter in the history of Indonesian pop culture, and in the history of identity politics of the nation more broadly, especially in Java.
To her critics, Inul epitomizes the moral corruption and decadence of Indonesia, and of the global Western-styled modernity that Indonesia had adopted. Her unique style of dancing (called *ngebor* by locals, literally meaning ‘drilling’) fascinated many, and was an object of disgust for many others who saw it as being sexually vulgar. While there was really nothing new about such performances in as number of regions in Indonesia, including her own, and while she was neither the first nor the worst case in this profession, Inul’s prominence in public consciousness took place at a particular moment that made it explosive. Her success provoked concerns among many morally conservative segments within society, among whom the Islamic groups and Council of Ulamas enjoyed the strongest power and authority in an increasingly Islamized Indonesia. The latter made the sharpest criticism, calling upon the Muslim-majority society to denounce any patronage of Inul’s performance. It is not clear to what extent such a statement can be interpreted as an explicit and strict ‘ban’ by religious leaders, with which their followers had to comply. But the edict definitely carried significant authority and generated effective intimidation among many, Muslim and non-Muslim alike.

In the first three months of 2003, several local governments issued declarations banning Inul from performing in their jurisdictions. These statements were often made in public with reference to, or in support of, earlier statements from regional Councils of Ulamas. It must be noted, however, that neither all local governments nor all Islamic groups were unanimous on this matter. Some even strongly welcomed Inul and her performance in their regions when others banned her.

It must also be remembered that this controversy was taking place just when the National Council of Ulamas had issued an edict of war against widespread pornography, and the nation had witnessed the growth of urban militias across the archipelago (see Chapter 2). Claiming to be representing and defending the honour of Islam, these militias took to the streets, yelling the standard cry ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ (God is Great), donning Middle Eastern clothes, and attacking social groups and gatherings (such as human rights, labour, or gay activists) and public places that they considered *kafir* (infidel), morally corrupt, or anti-Islamic (such as prostitution, gambling, night entertainments, houses of worship with suspiciously deviant articles of faith or legal status, and restaurants that opened during the hours of fasting). In most cases, the perpetrators of these illegal acts of destruction of premises and of physical assaults enjoyed impunity for their actions.

Given the serious imbalance in the power struggle in the nation, in favour of those with Islamic credentials during this time, supporters of Inul wisely avoided any confrontation with the religious leaders, and their anti-Inul sentiments. Sympathy for Inul and broader concerns over freedom of expression only burst out when Rhoma Irama, the ‘King of Dangdut’, moved onto the scene, and took a leading role in a new anti-Inul movement. In April 2003,
speaking on behalf of PAMMI (Persatuan Artis Musik Melayu Indonesia, Malay Musicians Association of Indonesian), which he chaired, Rhoma Irama and many of his close associates denounced Inul and several other dangdut performers for having damaged the honour of dangdut, something he claimed he had built from scratch and had now been thrown back into a ‘ditch’ (Pradityo 2003). Rhoma Irama banned those performers from singing any songs composed by other members of the Association. On 24 April 2007, and reportedly under duress (Triono 2003), Inul came to see Rhoma Irama to apologize and resolve the dispute (Suara Merdeka 2003c). Instead of achieving reconciliation, the meeting aggravated relations between them, and prompted a major public backlash of public support for Inul. One major public figure who came to her defence was none other than the controversial former president Abdurrahman Wahid. Seeing this reaction, Rhoma Irama backed off from further confrontation. He came to see Wahid to ‘clear any misunderstanding’ (Media Indonesia 2003c), softened his stance towards Inul, and claimed to have been victimized by inaccurate media reports and the dirty tricks of a media industry that was reaping profit from indecent business (Shofiana 2003; KCM 2003).

Despite the formal resolution of the dispute with Rhoma Irama and his supporters, Inul chose to withdraw from public performance for over a month following the meeting with him. She seemed severely traumatized by the whole incident, and her temporary retreat helped ease the nationwide tension. But on 4 June 2003, she made a surprising come-back on a special program on the TransTV network, which was devoted specifically to her return into public. This time she appeared with a completely different persona: a combination of someone trying to give a professional smile without being able to hide a profound mental pain. The show also appeared to be a tool of promotion in the hands of top fashion designers; an object of political statements by Jakarta’s liberals in response to the intimidation from Islamist groups; and simultaneously a newly inaugurated star under the sponsorship of a major corporation (more detail below). The show drew an overwhelmingly warm response from the public, so much so that the television network decided to re-broadcast a recording of the show for a second and third time at one-week intervals (11 and 18 June 2003) (Kompas 2003j). All was fine, except that this was also Inul’s last major performance in Indonesia. She continued to perform, but with less frequency, thinning crowds, and less media coverage. Her huge popularity dissipated as rapidly as it had come.

With the Inul phenomenon now in the past, we have the opportunity to ask what this may tell us about contemporary Indonesia, particularly in relation to the dynamics of its popular culture. Two questions come to mind. First, did the Inul controversy represent more liberal trends in Indonesia, including in sexual matters, or did it represent new conservatism, or both? Second, can the controversy tell us anything of importance about Indonesia beyond issues of morality and decency as these were presented in public; and if so,
what? I will sum up my answers here, and then elaborate on them in the remainder of this chapter.

As suggested earlier, and contrary to appearances, the controversy about Inul has a lot more to do with Indonesia’s identity politics than with issues of decency in relation to an individual artist. By Indonesian standards, Inul’s eroticism was mild, but the ideological war of the major political forces in contemporary Indonesia was not. The controversy over Inul demonstrates a series of ideological contests. Crudely put, these contests involve the following pairs with some overlap among them, and complexities that cut across them: (a) local sentiment/national authority; (b) syncretic Javanism/new Islam piety; (c) patriarchy/the women’s movement; (d) lower/upper-class cultural tastes; and (e) digital divide/empowerment. The remainder of this section will be devoted to elaborating each of these pairs.\(^{13}\)

Journalist John Aglionby (2003) has described the Inul controversy in the *Guardian* as being on a ‘completely higher plane than anything I’ve come across anywhere in the world since the death of Princess Diana’. The significance of the controversy can be appreciated historically, taking into account its immediate political contexts. As we have seen, militarism, Javanism, paternalism, nativism, and secularism enjoyed high status in the making of the official national identity for more than 30 years under the tight grip of the New Order government. During that period, the New Order government also vigorously propagated a set of ‘communitarian’ morals and ideological values under the rubric of *kekeluargaan* (literally ‘family-ness’, from *keluarga* ‘family’). One can say that this is the Indonesian equivalent of the ‘Asian Values’ argument that was propagated in Malaysia, Singapore, and a few other Asian countries.\(^{14}\) Under such a regime, sexual pleasure in what came to be called ‘traditional’ cultures was tolerated, Islamic piety was politically suspect as potentially subversive, but most importantly social hierarchy (male over female, senior over junior, social harmony over individual rights, urban over rural, nation over region) was strongly prescribed, and social conflict proscribed (Sen and Hill 2000: 141).

All of these elements came under serious challenge with the end of the New Order government in 1998. The central state, the military, Javanism, and male dominance all came under attack from various quarters. Although regionalism and the women’s movements made impressive advances in national politics, only Islam of various political colours (including the violently inclined militias, the liberal, the moderate, and the exclusivists) has gained new and dominant authority. Contemporary Indonesia is marked by plurality, a multi-centred political orientation, and a fierce ideological battle for dominance in the nation, where Islamic groups have continued to have enjoyed stronger positions than any others since 1990 (see above). The popularity of Inul and the controversy that her success entailed were more directly attributable to this specific historical moment than anything in her dance movements *per se*. 
It would have been difficult for Inul to enjoy the success she did had she been born 20 years earlier and had she grown up under the militarist regime during the Cold War period. To begin with, the digital technology that spurred Inul’s debut did not yet exist. Various Javanese traditions of erotic dance were tolerated as long as they were practised mainly in rural towns and among the urban under-class, and did not penetrate the public imagination through the medium of the national television. Neither pious Islamist politicians (Inul’s main opponent) nor Indonesian feminist activists (Inul’s staunch supporters) were allowed to flourish during much of the New Order period.

Regional Pride/Capital Power

It is easy, especially for a distant observer, to see the whole saga of Inul as just another rags-to-riches story. But to do so would be to overlook the more important dimensions of Indonesian history that the incident has helped bring to the surface. I was lucky to be able to conduct field work in East Java in early 2003, allowing me to observe her rise to fame in ways otherwise inaccessible before she became an object of controversy. In most cases, her shows were held on poorly constructed stages with temporary metal poles, wooden or bamboo floor and stairs, and a plastic shelter. Her audience came to the open-air space on foot from their villages kilometres away to watch, dance, and cheer the much-adored performer. Their movement to the site several hours before the show’s commencement, and their dispersal afterwards always created a scene in the heart of the towns hosting the show. The scene of such crowd on the move is comparable with that generated by a major soccer match, except Inul’s crowd seemed to be predominantly rural people and the urban under-classes. It was not predominantly male, or aggressively rowdy like some soccer spectators.

From the beginning, two things in particular struck me about her: her ability to command authority during the entire show, and the strongly East Javanese-accented nature of her speech and style. To non-Javanese, there is often an assumption that Solo-Yogyakarta court-centred cultures represent Javaneseness (which, in turn, is often taken at a more distant level as an emblem of Indonesianness). This is to overlook the variations between these court cultures and those to be found at the western ends of Java (bordering with Sundanese ethnic cultures), the coastal Northern Javanese, and another set of Eastern Javanese variants which are strongly egalitarian. There is indeed a long history of mutual mockery between Central and Eastern Javanese: the former stereotyped as superficial, pompous, slow, and hierarchical versus the latter’s coarseness, down-to-earth demeanour, and rowdiness. Inul demonstrated some of the latter’s traits, at least in the years just before she became a national star. The nation’s capital city of Jakarta also has many of the East Javanese characteristics combined with a strongly cosmopolitan outlook that East Java lacks. The sibling rivalry
between Jakarta and Surabaya (the nation’s second-largest city, and second-
largest industrial site) is reminiscent of those between Bangkok and
Chiangmai, Beijing and Shianghai, or Sydney and Melbourne.

The Javanese language is markedly hierarchical. There are no neutral
speech acts. *Krama* (high), *Madya* (medium), and *Ngoko* (low) are the
most commonly known levels in that language, although linguists identify
as many as nine levels. The art of switching between these levels is much
more visible in the hierarchy-conscious Central Java than in Northern
and Eastern Java, where the low level (*Ngoko*) is customary and accep-
table in daily conversation among strangers in the markets and streets.
With any given speech, one often has to take the position of a superior or
inferior in relation to one’s interlocutor, although one can switch levels at
different moments in the course of a conversation. But the language does
not allow a mix of levels within one sentence construction. As a norm,
younger people speak in high Javanese to elders, children speak it to
parents, subordinates to superiors, and wives to husbands, but not vice
versa.

A speaker will usually address a mixed audience in high Javanese
(*Krama*). When on stage, most pop music performers usually speak in
Indonesian, the national language. This has nothing to do with nationalist
sentimentalism. It is simply a matter of convenience, simplicity, and a way
to fit in in a situation where communication involves people of various
ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Furthermore, speaking in Indonesian in
a context that is not specifically Javanese-focused allows the Javanese to
transcend their communitarian confinement (see Anderson 1990: 194–237).
It is also a standard courtesy to an audience belonging to a nation where
only Indonesian is officially prescribed and is widely respected as the
modern language of a sovereign people (see Heryanto 2006c).

In contrast to most other *dangdut* performers past and present, Inul
spoke to her audience in low Javanese (*Ngoko*). This was especially striking,
given her fairly young age, and gender. But there was something more in
Inul’s style of speech when she was not singing. Most *dangdut* performers
speak Indonesian in a style that emulates the speech of professional per-
formers on television (self-consciously modern and national, professionally
courteous, but formulaic). Usually the master of ceremonies (often male) in
a show commands the highest authority, directing the attention of the
audience, setting the order of the programs and making occasional jokes
about them. In contrast, Inul was in full control of her own shows. She
addressed her audience in a commanding, yet intimate, fashion in *Ngoko,*
pointing her finger at local village heads, teasing the respected elders, and
making irreverent jokes about them or herself in the style of a rock singer
speaking to classmates in a school concert – all in aggressively low Javanese!
Anticipating my conclusion, I should point out that all of this ‘authority
speech’ disappeared when Inul was made a star in the capital city in mid-2003.
She had to speak in Indonesian to the national audience; her clothing,
make-up, and performance style were dictated by professionals and were under their full control (discussed further below).¹⁵

What impressed me about Inul’s early shows in East Java was the degree of tolerance that the local elders granted to such irreverent behaviour; more so than their tolerance for her erotic comments and dancing style. These were things she could do in her home base in Java. From late 2003, Inul lived luxuriously, occupying a large and very expensive residence with private guards in one of Jakarta’s most prestigious neighbourhoods. But, until early 2003, she did not show any desire to seek a better career in the capital city or pursue some kind of rags-to-riches dream. She looked extremely contented in her home base. When asked in 2002 why she did not want to move to Jakarta, she explained that she was too happy in East Java. She also mentioned an accident in 1992 when she was offended by a sexual proposition from someone in Jakarta who offered her assistance in having her singing recorded (Susanti 2002; Dewanto and Flamboyan 2006).

When tensions heightened between supporters of Rhoma Irama and those of Inul, many in East Java took serious offence as a matter of regional pride. They took to the streets to protest against Rhoma Irama and to show their moral support for Inul with a regionalist tone of solidarity (Kompas 2003g; Mawardi 2003). One banner in these street rallies read ‘Inul for President’ (Tempo 2003a), referring to the general elections in the following year.

During that difficult time, Inul herself was contemplating a return to East Java, but eventually she only took an extended break, without moving back from Jakarta permanently. The regionalist solidarity with Inul came to the fore again in 2006 during another debate that divided the nation with scattered scuffles, between those supporters and opponents of the Anti-Pornography Bill (see Chapter 2; also Allen 2007). In support of the Bill, 50 members of a Jakarta-based and Islamist militia group Forum Betawi Rempug (Betawi Brotherhood Forum) went to Inul’s residence and business office on 27 April 2006 in an intimidating manner.¹⁶ They demanded that she leave Jakarta immediately or make a public apology for having danced indecently in public, and thus spoiled Jakarta’s reputation, and for having supported the rally against the Anti-Pornography Bill in Jakarta (Dewanto and Flamboyan 2006; Kompas 2006). Some of Inul’s supporters in East Java were outraged and threatened to force people of a Betawi ethnic background residing in Surabaya to leave.

**Javanist Pleasure/Islamist Piety**

One of the most significant aspects of the Inul debate, obvious to students of Indonesia but largely unspoken in the debate itself, was its articulation of the centuries-old tension between the Javanese syncretic adoption of Islam, and the more pious-minded Muslim advocacy for a correct or pure adherence to Islam. Earlier, I mentioned the significance of the change of name from the Arabic-sounding Ainur Rokhimah to the more Javanese-sounding
Inul Daratista. Inul had the inclination toward erotic dancing (no matter how ‘mild’ it may have appeared to some), as well as the nerve to invoke Islamic-derived expressions in making statements about her worldly passion for bodily pleasure. On one occasion during a show she turned her back to the audience, showed off her buttocks and asked if they were beautiful. Upon hearing the cheering crowd, she exclaimed with the typically Islamic expression ‘Alhamdulillah’ (Thanks to Allah), and started her next song with a line thanking God for her beautiful buttocks.

A decade earlier, such a gesture would probably have been more common and would have taken little risk. But in the 2000s, this could easily spark violent outrage if done in the wrong place, where religious matters were taken in a fatally serious manner. Even without such provocative behaviour, however, it was only to be expected that many contemporary Ulamas would not be impressed by Inulmania. While Inul’s critics were not confined to the overtly Islamic organizations and communities, the fact remains that those markedly Islamic agencies have become the strongest opposition to Inulmania in Java, if not beyond. She was banned in several areas, including the neighbouring towns of her place of birth (Nurbianto 2003; Shahab 2003) and in areas such the Yogyakarta Special District (Jakarta Post 2003a), which had previously hosted her (Suara Merdeka 2003b). But, in the city of Solo (Yogyakarta’s major rival with regard to Javanese court culture and politics) (Suara Merdeka 2003a), and in Semarang, the capital city of Central Java (Yasa 2003), she was warmly welcomed.

That views among the Muslims were vastly diverse (after all, even Inul professes the faith) is attested to by the following incident. In first week of March 2003, a man telephoned the Great Mosque of Al-Akbar in Surabaya with a false identity. Claiming to speak on behalf of a local Islamic youth group, this caller demanded that a painting currently displayed in the mosque as part of an art exhibition be removed, or he would set the mosque on fire. Entitled Berdzikir bersama Inul (To recite religious texts with Inul) the painting was the work of a highly respected Ulama, KH Mustofa Bisri. It depicted a group of men in a circle reciting the sacred text, with Inul dancing in the middle of the circle. While security measures were increased, the demand was not met, and the threat was not carried out (Sugiharto 2003).

The sensitivity to the long-standing conflict between Islam and Javanism, and the less than unified stand among the Islamic communities in Java prevented many from mentioning it in public debates over Inul’s performances. But, perhaps out of ignorance of this undercurrent of tension, many commentators referred to controversial figures in American or Latin American pop cultures and compared them with Inul (for instance Susanti 2002). For many of her critics, Inul was a problem not so much for her being Javanese, whose tradition was allegedly tainted by mysticism, backwardness, and sexual promiscuity, but because she was linked to Westernization and capitalism in Indonesia generally, particularly with the blatantly profit-
driven entertainment industry (Media Indonesia 2003a). However, as Julia Suryakusuma noted:

various aspects of Indonesian culture are very sensuous. They predate the arrival of Islam and can be seen in carvings in the various Hindu temples in Central Java and in many traditional performing arts. Compared with the jaipongan dance of West Java, the tayub of Central Java, or indeed, other established dangdut singers, whose movements are slower but more suggestive, Inul’s dancing is much less erotic. . . . Dangdut, the music of Inul’s motion, is a reflection of Indonesia’s rich culture and ethnic diversity. It is a blend of music from India, the Middle East, Portugal and Spain concocted by local artists into a distinctive Indonesian Malay rhythm.

(Suryakusuma 2003b)

All of the above suggests that the debate over Inul’s dangdut covers a broader area and more complex issues than the majority of commentators have indicated. Most of their statements are about an individual performer and her morality.

**Patriarchy/the Women’s movement**

With the steady growth of the Indonesian women’s movement and of public discourse of gender imbalance, it is not surprising that many activists in women-focused non-governmental organizations lent their support to Inul during the controversy. Neither is it surprising that more than a few have analysed the controversy from a feminist perspective, using the case to illustrate the gross arrogance of power in a strongly patriarchal society, and the lack of respect for women (Iswara 2003). For some, therefore, Inul epitomized a potential for women’s emancipation (Pambudy 2003).

The world’s major religions are biased in favour of males. It is not accidental that the majority of key figures who opposed Inul’s performance were male, occupying important positions in governmental or religious institutions. When Rhoma Irama and his disciples launched their condemnation of what they saw as the degradation of dangdut, several names were identified as the culprits, among whom Inul was one. All the others – Anisa Bahar, Uut Permatasari, and Ira Swara – were also women.

It is interesting to note that the view of the Sultan of Yogyakarta on this issue was in direct opposition to that of his wife. Without making a strong statement of condemnation as many others had done, the Sultan expressed some endorsement for the restrictions upon Inul performing in Yogyakarta (Heru 2003). In contrast, his wife disagreed with the general criticism launched against Inul as being immoral or degrading women. She described Inul’s performance as beautiful, and she expressed her surprise that Inul had been made a target of criticism. Any problems associated with
Inul, according to her, were problems of perception among men (Swaranet 2003).

While male officials in the government and male-dominated society at large debated the vices and virtues of Inul’s performance, many wives of state officials approached Inul and requested that she teach them to dance like her (Pos Kota 2003). The gender battle appeared to outlast the Inul controversy. Not long after Rhoma declared his dispute with Inul over, a series of emails circulated on the internet questioning Rhoma’s marital fidelity, and one tabloid even published it. In response, Rhoma filed a lawsuit against the publisher (see Yuliawati and Utami 2003).

The profiles of those involved in the debate were more complicated than simply those of pious versus syncretic or moderate Muslims, or parochial East Javanese versus metropolitan Jakartans. There was a strong division along gender lines as well, as conceptually distinct from biological sexes (see Chapter 2). But as Pioquinto (1995) and Browne (2000) have shown, issues of gender in dangdut are multi-faceted, with ambiguities and contradictory fragments, making it difficult to state unequivocally that dangdut in general, or Inul in particular, is a clear-cut case of women’s empowerment or subordination. There is an element of both.

Lower/Upper Class Cultural Tastes

Just as it was with the film Selamat Tinggal Jeanette discussed earlier, an unequal distribution of power was also visible in terms of class positions and cultural dispositions among those involved in the Inul controversy. In the case of Inul, as with the film, the under-class was there but was largely precluded from taking an active part in the public debate. I agree with Wardhana (2003) and Widijanto (2003) who argue that the dispute between Rhoma Irama and Inul was an expression of a class-based conflict of cultural tastes, but we need to go further.

It must be emphasized that the term ‘class’ is used here not in any strict Marxian sense, with specific reference to capitalist and proletarian classes. Rather, the term is understood here in the Weberian sense as a distinct hierarchical position of honour, authority, prestige, and market opportunity. This allows us to distinguish, in the broadest terms, the elite on the one hand, from the subordinate or subaltern on the other. In contemporary Indonesia, the former includes the newly emerging bourgeoisie, state officials, top military officers, and party elite, as well as urban professionals, and the wealthy. Among these groups one can expect no or very limited attachment to dangdut music. Rhoma Irama claimed rightfully that he and his group had been responsible for the increased popularity of dangdut among the privileged class. We can add that one secret of his success was his ability to modify and gentrify dangdut to satisfy the senses and tastes of the privileged class. He did not challenge the class distinction itself.
Inul was slightly different, at least until early 2003. When I conducted field research in East Java, most air-conditioned shopping malls had shops that sold all sorts of VCDs and DVDs, but none sold VCDs of Inul! I had to go ‘down’ to the wet market, and kiosks outside the market to find vendors who sold them. Many of these vendors had only a sheet of plastic or a mattress unfurled on the pavement, on which the vendors displayed their merchandise. A VCD recording of a live dangdut performance at someone’s wedding, birthday, or village festival cost Rp. 5,000 (slightly over US$1), or about 20% of the cost of most VCDs produced and consumed by the privileged class, and sold in the shopping malls. Inul’s VCDs could be easily found among those sold on the sidewalks. The quality of these VCDs is very poor; in fact, most that I bought could be played only in parts.

Inul asserted her style in the manner of the subaltern that appeared too coarse for the taste of the privileged class. She appeared to have no problem with that and did not attempt to do otherwise. Her challenge to the status quo was not, or was not only, to do with issues of moral decency and sexuality. Rather, she had managed to attract a significant segment of the privileged class to her style of performance. Apparently, it was this unwelcome ‘invasion’ of the privileged public sphere, polluting or corrupting the respected culture of the privileged class, that upset members of that class which constituted most of her critics. Globally, this class has a strong tendency to be conservative, morally and politically. Unsurprisingly, among the privileged class, many quickly compared Inul with the Malaysian singer Siti Nurhaliza mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Siti was best known and much loved in Indonesia for her singing talents in a genre called Melayu (‘Malay’), which is dangdut’s antecedent (see YOT and Mutia 2003). In this comparison, Inul versus Siti equals vulgarity–decadence–eroticism–revolt versus authentic Malayness–beauty–civility–chastity (Mustappa 2003).

In the eyes of Inul’s supporters, Rhoma Irama represented a particular class position, closely associated with authoritarianism and not simply maleness, Muslimhood, or Jakartanness. Several commentators on the Inul controversy expressed an indignation against his arrogance and abuse of such self-righteous power (Abhiseka 2003; Jakarta Post 2003b; Kurniawan 2003a; Tempo 2003a, b), without any reference to religious difference or to regional or gender politics. To make matters worse, many commentators noted the double standards and hypocrisy among the privileged class. Why attack the poor performer, they asked, when big-time corrupt officials had been left alone (Asy’arie 2003; Nurbianto 2003)?

In her interview with Time Asia, Inul did not take issue with the Council of Ulamas on details of religious teachings. Rather, Write this down (she commands). The MUI should realize that Indonesia is not a Muslim country, it’s a democratic country. . . . Why should they...
care about me when there are pornographic VCDs and prostitutes in the street? They choose me because I am an easy target.

(Walsh 2003)

The law enforcers did not simply remain passive when Inul's civil rights as a performer were illegally violated; in fact, many officials were too busy trying to extort extra revenues from those who ran the entertainment business and organized events for Inul, by imposing extra fees (Kompas 2003d).

In light of the above, one can hypothesize that Inul would have been left alone with her ‘bad taste’ activity, had her popularity not transcended her hometown and the neighbouring towns. In fact, Inul was left alone until she became popular nationally. Indeed many of her counterparts, past and present, have been left alone, as none of them have been even half as successful as Inul. It is important to note that Inul’s allegedly ‘pornographic’, ‘indecent’ or ‘erotic’ behaviour pales into insignificance against most dangdut performers before, during, and after the controversy of 2003 (Pioquinto 1995; Kompas 2003b, c, e). Even the Chair of the largest Islamic mass-organization, KH Hasyim Muzadi of Nahdlatul Ulama, explicitly concurred upon this point when Inul was attacked by other leaders of the same and other Islamic organizations (Media Indonesisa 2003a).

With the same logic, we can understand how the Inul controversy came to an end. Her reappearance in June 2003, the setting of the show, and the kind of audience invited to watch her live performance in the studio, were all the complete opposites of her performances in small towns of East Java barely a year earlier. In June 2003 Inul looked dazzling in her exuberantly flamboyant clothing, in a flashing multi-coloured studio at the nation’s most self-consciously upper-class station TransTV. On top of her designer clothes, she wore what looked like a winter coat with fur around the neck, which she took off as she started her second song, accompanied all the while by different groups of professional back-up dancers. As she appeared in the main television screen, viewers could not miss the messages displayed at the bottom of the screen showing a long list of credits for Jakarta’s top fashion designers who had contributed to her appearance for the evening.

The audience that evening included many celebrities. Indeed, it looked the who’s who of the Jakarta elite, carefully selected for their liberal outlook. The camera moved back and forth between Inul on stage and the distinguished members of the audience. During several and lengthy intervals, the master of ceremonies interviewed members of the audience who expressed their views of Inul’s performance and the recent controversy. Many of these statements were greeted with long applause. Without exception, all articulated enthusiastic moral support for Inul and asked her to remain strong in the face of the attacks against her.

While the laudatory remarks made her seem a new heroine of the nation, Inul actually looked timid in the shadow of her highly credentialled
audience. The male commanding master of ceremonies directed the entire show himself, instructing Inul when to move, sing, or speak. The multi-dimensional conflict that had unfolded over several months came to an end here, with the media industry being the major victor. Inul had not only been recuperated by the privileged class, but had, in fact, been admitted to membership of this class.\textsuperscript{22} Her status was upgraded, but she was stripped of all her power, and all her subversive subaltern attributes. Order had been restored, at least until the anti-pornography debate broke out, and the class hierarchy of cultural politics was once again well entrenched.

Digital Divide/Empowerment

I have noted the triumph of the upper-class in the story of Inul. Below, I offer a slightly contradictory story. At the beginning of this section on Inul, I suggested the critical contribution of digital technology to Inul’s early career, let me now return to this issue.

During the Inul controversy, some gaps appeared in the common understanding of the use of digital technology, particularly in what used to be called ‘Third World’ countries such as Indonesia. One such common misunderstanding was that this technology – like any other technology that had come before it – mainly served the interests of the powerful, and wealthy. Such a problematic view is symptomatic of the mindset of many in the ‘First’ as well as ‘Third’ worlds who live under the spell of modernization theory with its unilineal perspective of history. Electronics is one – and perhaps the only – commodity yet invented that is consistently becoming more and more accessible to a wider range of people, its function increasingly user-friendly to the masses, and its cost consistently cheaper as it develops over time. This trend is attested to by the production and consumption of watches, radios, and mobile telephones. Its power as one of the most equalizing forces in contemporary societies has been misunderstood (with some overestimating and others underestimating it). Another common misunderstanding has to do with issues of legality and copyright, symptomatic of the age of mechanical production, the rise of the nation, prints, and private ownership under capitalism from the past century.

The story of Inul provides an opportunity to re-examine many of these common assumptions. Despite some validity in the arguments about the digital divide across the globe, we often oversimplify matters, by underestimating the capacity of the under-privileged classes to take advantage of what is available to them. For example, in Indonesia no organization has made the most of the internet as extensively as the bygone jihađi network called Laskar Jihad, and precisely because of their limited resources (Hefner 2003). While many observers agreed on the contribution of VCDs to Inul’s success, they have often inaccurately described them as ‘liar’ (wild) or ‘bajakan’ (pirated), or ‘amatir’ (amateur) (Bajuri 2002; Bintang Indonesia 2003; Gunawan 2003; Kompas 2003a, h; Wasono 2003).\textsuperscript{23}
Actually, most of these early VCDs of Inul are neither ‘wild’ nor ‘pirated’ in the sense of being illegal reproductions of pre-existing official copies of the ‘original’. In no known case did any other or more ‘official’ and ‘original’ copyrighted copies of these video recordings existed. Many of these VCDs were recordings of dangdut performers at social events, such as weddings, circumcisions, or festivals; they were mass reproduced before being sold. Whether or not they are ‘amateur’ is more difficult to say. They are so in the sense that many of these recordings carry the text ‘not for sale’ that runs through the moving image when played. But they are not so ‘amateur’ in the sense that these recordings are widely distributed for sale. Neither are they ‘wild’ nor ‘amateur’ in the light of the fact that the full name and contact details of the companies that produce these recording are displayed in the moving images as well.

The story behind the production of these recordings may be unfamiliar to many observers, especially those coming from highly commercialized societies where private property is monetarily valued and copyright well protected. In many small towns of Java in the early 2000s, aspiring dangdut performers would go to one of these recording companies and pay several million rupiahs (around US$200 or so) to have their singing recorded with video cameras. This recording might take place at the studio of the recording company with no audience, or at one of their live performances at social events as mentioned above. The junior singers would then circulate copies of these recordings to friends and relatives as promotional materials (Kompas 2003f). One might suspect that, in some of these cases, selected titles were reproduced in large numbers for sale without the prior consent of the singers, but perhaps with their knowledge after the fact. In cases involving more popular singers such as Inul, recordings of their performances might not involve payment on the part of the singers. The recordings might be taken with the authorization of the host of the event, and perhaps not of the singers. Copies of such materials would circulate among friends and relatives, until they arrived in the hands of someone with an entrepreneurial instinct who would reproduce them for sale in the streets.

Whether the singers took the initiative and paid for the recording, or their performance was recorded without their prior consent, no share of the profit from the sale would go to the artists. But no single case has been reported of an artist complaining, or demanding that their copyright be respected, and a share of the profit be paid to them. In fact, the opposite is true. In all published reports on this practice, including those pertaining to Inul, the artists expressed gratitude, acknowledging the non-material and non-immediate rewards of being promoted by the unauthorized circulation of the VCDs (Bajuri 2002; Wasono 2003). It was this misunderstanding background that led a Time Asia reporter to the problematic conclusion that ‘Indonesians snapped up copies of illegally recorded VCDs of Inul … making her perhaps the first musician to owe much of her fame to piracy’
(Walsh 2003). In the new world of post-modernity, digital technology works for, and serves, the underprivileged in ways that are not always readily obvious or logical to the members of privileged class with their ideas about the rule of law, copyright, and private ownership.

The Chapters

Subsequent chapters in the book examine, more specifically and in greater detail, different aspects of the issues introduced in this opening chapter. These chapters address old and new questions of nationhood (Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 8); Asianness (Chapters 3 and 5); globalization (Chapter 6); gender (Chapters 2, 5, 7 and 9); youth (Chapters 3, 6, and 9); ethnicity (Chapter 4); and class (Chapters 5 and 9) as they appear in ideological battles in contemporary Indonesian popular culture. Materials for their analyses are taken from various sources and cover a range of media technologies, including film (Chapters 2, 3, and 4); television programs (Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8), and urban staged concerts (Chapter 9).

What bring all these chapters together is a common concern with the open-ended questions of identity for the great majority of Indonesians – the common populace – as articulated in popular cultures at this particular historical moment, full of promise, but also of threats, uncertainties, and some nostalgia for a selectively understood past. It is a moment of history with multiple centres of power, the trauma of post-authoritarianism and economic crisis, as well as seductive worldly pleasures in tension with strong and increasing belief in a divine solution. With different emphases and styles, each of these chapters takes details of their materials seriously for analysis, acknowledging the socio-historically situated expression and consumption of culture at the popular level. Each of these chapters also considers the broader issues of negotiated identities as implicated in the production and consumption practices of pop cultures during the past decade or so.

In Chapter 2, Marshall Clark explores the interconnections between politics, gender, and censorship in contemporary Indonesian cinema. Contextualizing Indonesian cinema within the broader processes of Indonesia’s social and political transformations, he examines to what extent cinema has benefited from the crumbling of censorship, and whether new threats to the freedom of expression will cast an unwelcome shadow over the development of cinema. His chapter also looks at what Indonesian films themselves reveal about these threats. By analysing the production, consumption and aesthetics of several Indonesian films, this chapter shows significant thematic directions in Indonesian cinema, including the representation of violence and the masculine, which have hitherto remained understudied. An understanding of the cultural logics of violence and masculine behaviour in recent Indonesian cinema will support the thesis on an emerging ‘masculinist cast’ in contemporary Indonesia.
Issues of gender from female perspectives or with specific emphasis on women in Indonesian films are critically analysed by David Hanan in Chapter 3. He compares two films from Indonesia (Catatan Si Boy, 1987, and Ada Apa Dengan Cinta, 2001) and two from Thailand (Kling Wai Gorn Por Son Wai, 1991, and Girl Friends, 2002). Based on his close reading of these films, Hanan argues that these movies are concerned with reinventing and preserving traditions even as they embrace a culture of the future. Hanan notes significant differences in ideas of the group and particularly of body language from those one finds in Western counterparts.

In Chapter 4, I offer a preliminary assessment of the political significance of the increased presence of the Chinese ethnic minority in contemporary Indonesia’s popular culture. Against the backdrop of the broader changes in literary writings, television shows, and urban lifestyles, this chapter analyses two recent semi-historical films, Ca-bau-kan (2002) and Gie (2005). Both feature a Chinese Indonesian as the main protagonist. To appreciate the significance of the new trends, this chapter takes into account the long-standing absence of the Chinese minority from Indonesia’s national literature and films, and of any mention of the social tensions that grew from the position of this ethnic minority. Their absence in these media is odd, given both the attention paid to them in other genres of public discourse and the large share of Chinese Indonesians in the production of Indonesian literature and films.

Closely related in theme, the next chapter, by Rachmah Ida, investigates the unprecedented scale of popularity of Asian-imported television drama series in contemporary Indonesia. Many of these series present ‘oriental’-looking, Mandarin speaking protagonists to viewers in society where a long-standing anti-Chinese sentiment prevails, and anyone with an oriental look can be indiscriminately stereotyped as ‘keturunan Cina’ (of Chinese descent). What intrigues the author is how the local television markets have accepted and consumed the foreign (and non-Western) TV dramas in ways that suggest a resistance to the long-standing dominance of American pop cultures. Another important aspect of this chapter is its grounded study, focusing on urban under-class women in the city of Surabaya in their engagements with the characters in a Taiwanese TV drama, Meteor Garden. The chapter suggests how class, gender, and age matter when these viewers react to the (male and female) characters in the television show. Chapter 6 continues a critical examination of whatever magic television shows have worked upon their urban viewers, but this time with a focus on very different class tastes and aspirations. In her study, Penelope Coutas studies how a new celebrity identity has been created in and by the media in twenty-first century Indonesia. Examining reality television shows, particularly talent quests such as Indonesian Idol, Akademi Fantasi Indosiar, and Kontes Dangdut Indonesia, this chapter considers issues of cultural imperialism, globalization, audience interactivity, and ‘glocalization’. Materials in this chapter offer a rich source for exploring issues of celebrity production and
consumption in Indonesia today, and for examining the notion of the ‘active, interactive audience’ within a context of globalization and increasing commercialization of cultural products and practices. Significant to further study of pop cultures in Asia, Coutas’ findings suggest that there is not only a new kind of celebrity in Indonesia, but also a new kind of fan, forcing us to reconsider traditional notions of the celebrity-fan relationship in Indonesia and beyond. The next two chapters continue the examination of television programs, especially those that project fantasies and contempts of, or among, the nation’s top elite. In Chapter 7, Vissia Yulianto focuses on ‘gossip shows’ popularly known as ‘infotainment’. Gossip shows are usually understood to be an option for viewers during leisure time. In contemporary Indonesia, however, Yulianto discovers that viewing gossip shows has become a main activity for many women during the day. Many young girls, university students, housewives, and workers appeared to have become obsessed with these programs, which are screened between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. Unlike reality shows that fictionalize ‘real life’ (e.g. Big Brother), infotainment is documentary, but it is produced and consumed primarily for its entertainment value. Love affairs, divorce, and conflicts between celebrities and the like are the main content. This study examines how ‘gossip shows’ have further developed patterns of gossiping. In the next chapter, Edwin Jurriëns appraises the significance of an extremely popular television program called Newsdotcom, which narrated a fictional country called Republik Mimpi (Republic of Dreams). The program can be easily classified as parody, but Jurriëns argues there are many more important things that can be said about it. Using the concept of hyper-reality, or simulated reality, the author analyses the television show as an attempt by democratically minded Indonesians to project and consolidate their vision of the process of social, political, and economic reform known as Reformasi. According to Jurriëns, this program decouples ‘simulation’ from ‘simulacra’ (opaque, empty, or non-referential signs), while signalling a phase in Indonesian politics and social life where people no longer have to rely on relatively few and indirect strategies such as parody for expressing diversity or dissent in the public sphere.

In their separate analyses of television shows, these last two mentioned chapters engage with the problems of distinguishing facts and reality in television consumption. Similar problems are the object of scrutiny in the last chapter by Martin Richter. The author analyses several music events in Yogyakarta in 2001, and identifies the participants’ highly physical and animated entries into what he terms ‘Other Worlds’. These other world musical ‘physicalizations’ fall into two categories based on the performance setting and dance form: neighbourhood trance dancing, and the commercial zone swaying of the entire body in rebellion and/or celebration. The chapter argues that these acts produce outlets of expression that help to transcend the performer/audience divide and gender, generational and class divisions. Additionally, by comparing popular culture forms that are found in
neighbourhoods and commercial-zones respectively, the chapter problematizes the correlations often made between ‘coarse’ (kasar) behaviour and social powerlessness in Java (as was also observable in the case of Inul, discussed in the earlier section of this opening chapter). Collectively, chapters in this book raise a set of questions (and offer some answers), about newly negotiated social identities in post-authoritarian Indonesia. In this complex field of identity formations and negotiations, issues of gender, ethnicity, class, regionalism, nationhood, globalization, and youth appear most pressing. Most of the contributors to this book are emerging scholars from Indonesia and Australia who aspire to engage with fresh perspectives in the newly developing area of pop culture within the scholarly communities of Indonesian and Asian studies. The book seeks to make some modest contribution to cultural, media, and Asian studies by raising questions of common interest to researchers, analysts, practitioners, students, and anyone working in those areas.

The book is not oriented towards theorization. However, by providing a critical analysis of first-hand collected materials from field study, it raises several critical issues of methodology that may contribute to further efforts in theoretical enquiry, and comparative analysis with cases from other societies. This chapter argues for the need to take pop culture more seriously than has been done in the study of contemporary societies, including Indonesia. The importance of the Inul controversy of 2003 and, closely related to that, the Anti-Pornography Bill debate of 2006 is not reducible to whatever valuable information they contribute to our understanding of something ‘more important’ at a higher level, such as national politics or history. In Indonesia, those controversies are at the very heart of Indonesian national politics, the people’s diverse senses of identity and self-respect. At stake in these divisive debates is the future of Indonesia’s sustainability, and indeed its survival, as a plural nation-state against the threat of disintegration or tyranny.

In analysing the Inul controversy, this chapter underscores two methodological issues. First, the need to go beyond close reading of a particular work of pop culture, and quantitatively measure its production and consumption, as have strongly characterized many studies of the subject matter in the region. A consideration of the political and historical contexts of the controversy is imperative, not optional, for capturing the long-standing significance of the whole debate. This goes far beyond issues of moral decency as the controversy has been mainly articulated. Second, this chapter also illustrates how an ethnographic field work can be significantly instrumental to the study of pop culture. A study of the Inul controversy will be seriously flawed without adequate understanding of the minute details of her early performances and the use of digital technology by the under-class. These latter aspects of Inul’s career are not readily available in major shops and libraries. Indeed, they have largely escaped the attention of middle-class scholars and other cultural analysts alike.
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Notes

1 During his tour to Indonesia in 1988, and following his rowdy concert in Jakarta, Mick Jagger was hijacked by a New Order state minister to accompany him to launch a bicycle race (Foulcher 1990: 304). I recall a conversation in the early 1990s with poet-cum-journalist Goenawan Mohamad if he would be interested in running for presidency in the future. In his typical style, he replied he was poorly qualified, because he did not play saxophone (alluding to President Clinton playing the musical instrument as reported in Indonesian media).

2 The crisis in the film industry in the early 1990s was a result of several factors, including the severe state censorship, a huge increase of imported films, especially from Hollywood, the emergence of private television networks with attractive entertainment programs, and dissemination of videos, most of which were cheap pirated copies (Sen and Hill 2000: 137–41).

3 In the first half of the 1960s, President Sukarno tried to strike a balance among three major ideologies which he termed Nasakom, abbreviation for Nasionalisme, Agama, and Komunisme (nationalism, religion, and communism). For a different take on the matter, but to which my analysis here is partly indebted, see Cribb (1999). Elsewhere, I attempted another discussion on these major forces that have made today’s Indonesia (Heryanto 2005: 63–65).

4 I am indebted to Harvey (1992: 9–12) for this conception.

5 Directed by Bobby Sandy, the film was based on a novel of the same title, authored by Titie Said (1986). Foulcher’s analysis, which is summed up here, is based on the film, which departs slightly from the novel. Ria Irawan (as Trima) won the 1988 Indonesian Film Festival Citra Award for the title of Supporting Actress.

6 This is a very murky period that has received a considerable attention from a wide variety of analysts with diverging conclusions. I have referred to some of the more important literature on this subject matter in my own analysis of the impacts of the mid-1960s violence on the lives of many Indonesians in the 1990s (Heryanto 2006b).

7 For a brief history of the early formation of dangdut see YOT and Mutia (2003), for a more recent one see Kompas (2003b).

8 Social changes during this period have generated voluminous analyses with diverging emphasis and arguments. The works of Robert Hefner (1999, 2000) are probably better known among many, although reviewers of his book (2000) are somewhat mixed in their reception (see Fealy 2001).

9 Walsh (2003) made a more modest estimate, ‘from $1,100 to $1,700’ (USD).

10 For further estimates and calculations of her income, which may exceed that of the salary of the President, see CyberTainment (2003).

11 VCD stands for video compact discs, playable on CD and DVD players, but with a lower quality and resolution than DVDs.

12 Some of these political parties were so desperate to obtain her support in 2004 that they offered to pay her Rp. 30,000,000,000 (US$3.1 million) for 24 shows of party campaign (Tempo 2004). She declined. Inul has always stayed clear from any party politics.

13 I have previously discussed these tensions in a briefer version in Heryanto (2006a).
For more on the attempt to propagate a nativist Indonesian set of values, see Bourchier (1997); for an assessment of Asian Values see Ang and Stratton (1995), Chua (1995).

Hera Diani (2004a) of *The Jakarta Post* is seriously mistaken and overtly metropolitan-biased when noting that after being famous and rich Inul ‘no longer appeared to be the coy small-town girl made big’.

Betawi is the name of what has been commonly understood as the ‘native’ ethnic community of Jakarta and the immediate surrounding areas.

Incidentally, I noticed another case in point. Indonesia’s most commercially successful theatrical show *Opera Kecoa* (The Cockroach Opera) by Teater Koma contained jokes with allusions to Islam piety and moralism when first staged in 1985, but these lines were deleted when the same play was staged in 2003. For discussion on other aspects of *Opera Kecoa*, see Zurbuchen (1990).

A music program for television featuring controversial Inul was also banned in Malaysia, because it was considered ‘too raunchy’ (*Jakarta Post* 2003d).

Exceptions include *Kompas* (2003i), Suryakusuma (2003a, b), and Sutarto (2003), all acknowledging the centuries-old tradition in Java, thus problematizing the arguments that Inul’s eroticism is ‘foreign’ to Indonesia’s self, culture, and history.

For a critique of how ‘little people’ has been constructed and misappropriated by the middle-class discourses in media, see Weintraub (2006). For a discussion of the intersection of subordinated class and subordinated gender in a variety of *dangdut* performances in Java see Browne (2000), and of *dangdut* in the formation of civil society in Indonesia see Mulligan (2005).

Incidentally, Inul’s home town is next to that of Marsinah, the legendary labour activist who was brutally murdered in 1993. Nearly all published reports of her case incriminate the complicity of members of a local military corps. As noted earlier, Surabaya, the capital city of East Java, is home of the second-largest industrial site in the country.

The show begins with video clips, showing Inul in solitude, wiping her tears. Called *Rindu Inul* (‘Missing Inul’), the show was presented with a theme of a poor innocent girl unjustly being assaulted by villains on moral grounds. The message was conveyed by the selection of the songs with relevant lyrics, and by the way the interspersed discussions were conducted.

One exception is Adi (2002).