

# Exploiting Indonesia: From *Primitives* to *Outraged Fugitives*

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Indonesian exploitation films emerged from a particular political economy of the New Order and its film industry. From *Primitif (Primitives)*, Samtani & Sisworo, 1978) to *Without Mercy (Outraged Fugitive)*, Samtani & Anthony, 1995), about fifty of these exploitation films were produced. Seen within the dominant paradigm of the time, these films were exploitative and contributed nothing to national development or national culture. However, the producers and filmmakers behind these films pioneered new transnational connections as they tried to tap into global film markets and networks. This article explores the historical and structural background of the Indonesian exploitation films, and the aspirations behind their production. By tapping into global film markets and following genre trends, Indonesian producers had hoped to emulate the success of exploitation films globally. And by the mid-1990s, just as the domestic film market collapsed and the era of television arrived, Indonesian film producers had already put Indonesia on the map of global cinema. Today, Indonesian films of that period have begun to take on cult status as fans and others rediscover the country's colorful cinematic past.

*Keywords:* Indonesia, cinema, cult films, exploitation, New Order

## Introduction

Until the recent worldwide release of the *The Raid* (Sagantoro & Evans, 2011), Indonesian film had sat on the periphery of global pop culture circuits. *The Raid*, a high-octane martial arts film starring *silat* practitioner Iko Wais, was picked up by Sony Classic Pictures and earned over US\$15million worldwide. Part of its appeal was its ultra-violent take on the SWAT raid genre, combined with *silat* or Indonesian martial arts. The film quickly became a cult favorite, bringing attention to Indonesian cinema and producing a sequel, *The Raid 2: Berandal* in 2013 (Sagantoro & Evans, 2013).

*The Raid* may be the most recent example, but it was not the first Indonesian film to have adopted this kind of strategy nor found overseas distribution. A number of Indonesian filmmakers and producers sought to go international with their films early on, beginning in 1978 with the film *Primitif (Primitives)*, Samtani & Sisworo, 1978) and ending with *Without Mercy* (a.k.a. *Outraged Fugitive*, Samtani & Anthony, 1995) in 1995 (see

Table 1). This article explores the history of these transnational productions, including how they began and developed over time, how they were perceived locally, and some of the characteristics of the films. This article also argues that these producers pioneered new transnational connections as they tried to tap into global film markets and networks.

Coming from a country located off the map of world cinema, Indonesian producers had little chance of entering the global first-run circuit. Instead, they adopted exploitation motifs to enter alternative circuits. At home, Indonesian producers faced pressure from an authoritarian regime, which sought to shape cultural production in a way that was ideologically designed for social control (Sen, 1994). Two forces were at work locally that pushed local producers to go global: the prevailing ideology of *film nasional* and the political economy of the New Order film industry.

When the Indonesian pop culture industry began to expand in the decade following the end of the New Order regime in 1998 (Heryanto, 2008; Barker, 2011), there was a simultaneous 'rediscovery' of old forms of pop culture, including films, music, and comics. Partly this was due to a sense of nostalgia for the 'good old days' before the era of globalization in the 1990s and democratization in the 2000s. Before the 1990s, popular culture was more stable, predictable, and controlled. Contemporary pop culture can seem confusing, with its ever-changing icons, trends, high turnover of stars and formats, especially with the spread of digital technologies such as the Internet and smart phones. Just as niches form in pop culture, such as Islamic pop culture, so too has there been a return to the past, where there is less change and more predictability.

Critics of contemporary film industry similarly look to the past to find examples with which to criticize the present. For these critics, contemporary film production continue to be plagued by the same issues that it had during the New Order when local output was dominated by producers and filmmakers who made films for popular tastes, rather than for edification. Chairil (2010), for example, look up to the so-called forefather of Indonesian cinema Usmar Ismail and his idealist and nationalist principles. Whereas films made after 1998 are seen as vacuous and commercialized, celebrating only pleasure, the films of Usmar Ismail are remembered as being artistically made, reflecting Indonesian values.

At the same time, there has been renewed interest in what are called *film jadul* (*film jaman dulu* or "old school films") mostly in reference to popular films made from the 1970s to the 1990s. These three decades were particularly productive in Indonesian film history, with over 1500 titles made over the thirty two years of the New Order regime (Ardan, 2004), producing iconic actors such as actress Suzzanna, popular heroes such as

Jaka Sembung, the Warkop DKI comedy trio, and anti-colonial epics such as Djarot's *Tjoet Nja' Dhien* (1988). In the face of upheaval and change, *film jadul* has become a form of popular memory for which contemporary Indonesians can feel a sense of pride and cultural connection. A subset of these *film jadul* form the focus of this article.

## Thinking Back

Hindsight provides a different perspective on films made in Indonesia and other parts of the world during the 1970s-1990s. How we now see films made in the past is often different to how they were perceived at the time of their release. Films often undergo changes in how they are interpreted, classified, and valued in the years and decades after their initial release. Films initially ignored or considered unpopular may become important statements of a period or come to reflect a particular zeitgeist or mood. Some of these films may herald changes in the industry that only become visible after the full extent of the transformation becomes known. Others take on new life and relevance in fan and cult communities.

In contemporary scholarship, films like these are categorized as 'cult films'. They are non-mainstream productions that nevertheless take on alternative forms of cultural value, becoming so through a combination of consumption practices as well as factors that have to do with content and producer intentions (Mathijs & Sexton, 2011). Within this large general category sit the transnational Indonesian films from the 1970s to the 1990s, which has reached cult status due to a set of domestic factors linked to the production and content side, rather than to consumption.

Key to understanding how these films are perceived locally in Indonesia is to understand how they were valued under the New Order regime. Films like these were made by commercially oriented producers. Aimed at the popular market, they were replete with local color, violence, titillation, and crude jokes. For cultural critics, they were neither morally uplifting nor edifying, and they did not promote a sense of nationalism. Despite the popularity of these kinds of films, the opinion of cultural critics would define the cultural parameters of taste in a concept called *film nasional* or national film. By establishing this category of culturally valuable films, in contrast to the popular, critics established the parameters of "good" and "bad" films in which the transnational exploitation films considered here would emerge.

As Table 1 shows, two production companies were responsible for almost all of the Indonesian exploitation films. Both Parkit Film and Rapi Film were owned and run by Indonesian-born ethnic Indians. To critics during the New Order, and even now, being ethnic Indian meant to be commercially orientated, exploitative, and unpatriotic. Mochtar Lubis, for

**Table 1.**

Year	English Title	Indonesian Title	Production Company	Director	Writer	Star
1978	Primitives	Primitif	Rapi Films	Sisworo Gautama	Imam Tantowi	Barry Prima, enny Haryano, Johan Mardjono
1979	Queen of Black Magic	Ratu Ilmu Hitam	Rapi Films	Lilik Sudjio	Imam Tantowi, Subagio Santani	Suzzanna, W.D. Mochtar, Alan Nuary, Sofia W.D., Teddy Purba
1979	Special Silencers	Serbuan Halilintar	Parkit Films	Arizal	Djair, Deddy Armand	Barry Prima, Eva Arnaz, W.D. Mochtar, Dicky Zulkarnaen
1980	Five Deadly Angels	5 Cewek Jagoan	Tiga Cakra Film	Danu Umbara	Danu Umbara	Lydia kandou, Yatie Octavia, Debby Cynthia Dewi, Eva Arnaz, Dana Christina
1981	Mystics in Bali (Leak)	Mistik (Punahnya Rahasia Ilmu Iblis Leak)	Pusat Perusahaan Film, Video Tape Corp. (Sydney)	H. Tjut Djailil	Putra Mada, Jimmy Atmaja	Ilona Agathe Bastian, Yos Santo, Sofia WD
1981	The Warrior	Jaka Sembung	Rapi Films	Sisworo Gautama Putra	Imam Tantowi	Barry Prima, Eva Arnaz, W.D. Mochtar, Dana Christina
1982	Burn the Sun	Membakar Matahari	Parkit Film	Arizal	Deddy Armand,	Barry Prima, Eva Arnaz, George Rudyanto, Eddy Yonathan, Ruth Pellupessy
1982	Ferocious Female Freedom Fighters (The Fighters)	Perempuan Bergairah	Parkit Film	Jopi Burnama and Charles Kaufman	Deddy Armand	Barry Prima, Eva Arnaz, Ruth Pelupessi, Youstine Rais, Leily Sagita

Year	English Title	Indonesian Title	Production Company	Director	Writer	Star
1982	Satan's Slave	Pengabdil Setan	Rapi Films	Sisworo Gautama Putra	Siworo Gautama, Imam Tantowi, Naryono Prayitno, Subagio Sumtani	Ruth Peulpessy, Fachrul Rozy, WD Mochtar, Simon Cader.
1982	The Snake Queen	Nyi Blorong	Rapi Films	Ratno Timoer	Darto Joned	Suzzanna, Barry Prima, George Rudy
1983	Jungle Virgin Force	Perawan Rimba	Parkit Films	Wellson Danu Umbara	Raam Punjabi, Arifin C Noer	Harry Capri, Nena Rosier, Torro Margens, Lydia Kandow, Enny Beatrice, Piet Burnama, Nenna Rosier, Rita Zahara, Mintarsih Maulana, Mat Solar
1983	The Blazing Battle	Lebak Membara	Rapi Films	Imam Tantowi	Imam Tantowi, Djafir.	Minati Atmanegara, George Rudy, El Manik, Rachmat Hidayat, Dana Christina.
1983	The Warrior II (The Warrior and the Blind Swordsman)	Si Buta Lawan Jaka Sembung	Rapi Films	Dasri Yakob	Darto Joned	Barry Prima, Advent Bangun, Rukman Herman, Gino Makasufi, W.D. Mochtar, Moosdijk, Yos Santo, Zurmaini
1983	Escape from Hell Hole	Kawin Kontrak	Rapi Films	Maman Firmansyah	Pitrajaya Burnama	Gudhy Sintara, Dicky Zulkarnaen, Siska Widowaty, Ramli Ivar, Laily Sagita, Yustine Rais,
1983	War Victims	Kamp Tawanan Wanita	Parkit Films	Jopi Burnama	Pitrajaya Burnama	Marissa Haque, Boy Tirayoh, Avent Christie, Mangara Siahaan, Jeffry Sani, Djoko Warok, Anen Wijaya, Usman Effendy, Simon PS, Farida Yassmin, Waty Siregar, Nina Anwar

Year	English Title	Indonesian Title	Production Company	Director	Writer	Star
1983	Lady Exterminator (I Want to Get Even)	Barang Terlarang	Rapi Films	Maman Firmansyah	Pitrajaya Burnama, Subagio S.	Eva Arnaz, Cliff Sangra, Godfried Sancho, Dicky Zulkarnaen
1984	No Time to Die (Danger - keine Zeit zum Sterben)	Menentang Maut	Rapi Film, Rapid Film GMBH (Munich)	Helmut Ashley, E.G. Bakker, Hasmanan	Tim Rapid Film	Barry Prima, Chris Mitchum, John Philip Law, WD Mochtar, Zainal Abidin, Winfred Gateader, Dyalag Mayer Graznya
1984	Revenge of Ninja	Gadis Berwajah Seribu	Rapi Films	Ratno Timoer	Darto Joned	Barry Prima, Dana Christina, Advent Bangun
1984	The Devil's Sword	Golok Setan	Rapi Films	Ratno Timoer	Imam Tantowi, Man S.	Barry Prima, Advent Bangun, Enny Christina, Gudhi Sintara, Kandar Sinyo
1985	Bloody Vengeance	Darah Perjaka	PT Dara Mega Film	Ackyl Anwary	Ackyl Anwari, Tindra Rengat	Barry Prima, Advent Bangun, Wieke Widowati, Yenny Farida.
1985	Blind Warrior	Si Buta Dari Gua Hantu (Neraka Perut Bumi)	Rapi Films	Ratno Timoer	Darto Joned, Djair.	Chintami Atmanegara, Rico Tampatty, Marissa Haque, Ade Irawan, Nani Widjaja, Rima Melati, Pitrajaya Burnama
1985	Daredevil Commandos	Komando Sambar Nyawa	Rapi Films	Eddy G. Bakker	Imam Tantowi	Barry Prima, Advent Bangun, Harry Capri, Kaharudin Sjah, Johan Saimina, Dicky Zulkarnaen, Yenny Farida
1985	Hell Raiders	Pasukan Berani Mati	Rapi Films	Imam Tantowi	Imam Tantowi, Subagio Samtani.	Roy Marten, Barry Prima, Dana Christina, Eva Arnaz, WD Mochtar, El Manik, Dicky Zulkarnaen.

Year	English Title	Indonesian Title	Production Company	Director	Writer	Star
1985	The Warrior and the Ninja	Jaka Sembung & Bergola Ijo	Rapi Films	H. Tjut Djallil	Alim Bachtiar, Djair.	Barry Prima, El Manik, Rita Zahara, Syamsuri Kaempuan, Tizar Purbaya, Piet Pagau, Terry, Zurmainy, Fatima Maria, H. Syamsudoin Syafei, H. Kosim Betawi, Hassan Dollar, Djair, Andi Maragau, Donny Sabelle, Metty, Alex Kalangi
1986	Final Score	Dendam Membara	Rapi Films	Arizal	Deddy Armand	Chris Mitchum, Mike Abbott, Ida Iasha, Dicky Zulkarnaen, Zainal Abidin,
1986	Satan's Bed	Ranjang Setan	Soraya Intercine, Nafia Film	H. Tjut Djallil	Djoko S Koesdiman	Chintami Atmanegara, Mariane Wolf, Richie Ricardo, Linda Husein, Gusti Randa, A Hadi, Sofia, Doddy Sukma.
1986	The Intruder	Pembalasan Rambu	Parkit Films	Jopi Burnama	Deddy Armand	Peter O'Brian, Craig Gavin, Dana Christina, Lia Warokka, Jenny Farida
1986	The Stabilizer	Segitiga Emas	Parkit Films	Arizal	John Rust, Deddy Armand	Peter O'Brian, Craig Gavin, Gillie Beanz
1986	The Terrorists	Menumpas Teroris	PT Kanta Indah Film	Iman Tantowi	Eddy SS, Imam Tantowi, H. Alim Bachtiar	Barry Prima, Dana Christina, Advent Bangun, El Manik, Deddy Mizwar, Yos Cano, Belqez Rahman, Elyzabeth Yvonne
1987	Hungry Snake Woman	Petualangan Cinta Nyi Blorong	Soraya Intercine	Sisworo Gautama Putra	Naryono Prayitno, S. Gatra	Suzzanna, Advent Bangun, Nina Anwar, George Rudy
1987	Virgins from Hell	Perawan Disarang Sindikat	Rapi Films	Ackyl Anwari	Fred Wardy Pilliang	Enny Beatrice, Yenny Farida, Harry Capri, Dicky Zulkarnaen
1988	Empire on Fire	Permainan Dibalik Tirai	Rapi Films	Manman Firmansjah	Darto Joned	Mike Abbott, Baron Hermanto, Atut Agustianto, Alba Fuad, Nina Anwar

Year	English Title	Indonesian Title	Production Company	Director	Writer	Star
1988	Forceful Impact	Jaringan Terlarang	Parkit Films	Ackyl Anwaray	Deddy Armand	Warren Fleming, Peter O'Brian, Cindy Lee Duck, Hengky Tornado, Leonard Urso Jr, Muni Cader, Dicky Zulkarnaen
1988	Jakarta (Triangle Invasion)	Peluru dan Wanita	Parkit Films	Charles Kaufman, E.G. Bakker	Deddy Armand, Charles Kaufman	Christopher North, Sue Francis Pay/Fai, Zoraya Perucha, Frans Tambuan.
1988	Java Burn (Diamond Run)	Harga Sebuah Kejujuran	Parkit Films, Novacom International	Henky Solaiman, Robert Chappell	Deddy Armand, Robert Chappell	Ayu Azhari, Ava Lazar, William Bell Sullivan, Christopher Noth, David Tronton, Mike Abbott, Peter Fox, Frans Tambuan, Henky Solaiman
1988	Jungle Heat	Rimba Panas	Rapi Films	Ratno Timoer	Deddy Armand	Peter O'Brian, Advent Bangun, Debbie Young, Charles Kaufman, Piet Burnama
1988	Lady Terminator	Pembalasan Ratu Laut Selatan	Soraya Intercine	H. Tjut Djailil	Djoko Wilkarno, Tim Soraya Film	Yurike Prastica, Barbara Anne Constable, Anna Sylviana, Christopher Hart, HIM Damsjik.
1988	Lethal Hunter (American Hunter)	Pemburu Berdarah Dingin	Rapi Film	Arizal	Deddy Armand	Mike Abbott, Christopher Mitchum, Bill "Superfoot" Wallace, Peter O'Brian, Roy Marten, Ida Iasha,
1988	White Crocodile Queen	Ratu Buaya Putih	Soraya Intercine	H. Tjut Djailil	Naryono Prayitno, Tim Soraya Film	Suzzanna, Vera Magdalena, HIM Damsjik
1990	Double Crosser / Crocodile Cage	Membakar Lingkaran Api	Rapi Films	Arizal	Deddy Armand, Tim Rapi Film	Peter O'Brian, Priscilla Patsy (Presilla Lisa Maria), Kiki Amir, Ricky Hosada, Didier Hamel

Year	English Title	Indonesian Title	Production Company	Director	Writer	Star
1990	Angel of Fury (Triple Cross)	Pertempuran Segi Tiga	Rapi Films	David Worth, Ackyl Anwari	Clifford Mohr	Cynthia Rothrock, Zainal Abidin, Kiki Amir, August Melasz, Peter O'Brian, Chris Barnes, Billy Drago, Sam Jones, Greg Stuart, George Rudy, Bella Esperance
1992	Dangerous Seductress	Bercinta Dengan Maut	LA 20th Century Productions, Soraya Intercine	John Miller, H. Tjut Djailil	John Miller	Tonya Offer, Joseph Cassano, Amy Weber, Kristin Ann, John Waromi
1992	Lady Dragon 2	Bidadari Berambut Emas	Rapi Films	Ackyl Anwar	Melanie Umbara	Cynthia Rothrock, Billy Drago, Bella Esperance, George Rudy, Sam Jones, Adisoerya Aboy, Jajang Pamont Jak
1993	Rage & Honor 2 - Hostile Takeover	Membela Harga Diri	I.R.S. Media Inc, Rapi Films	Guy Leslie Norris	Louis Sun, Steven Reich	Cynthia Rothrock, Richard Norton, Frans Tumbuan
1992	Lady Dragon	Tiada Titik Balik	Rapi Films	David Worth, Ackyl Anwari	David Worth, Clifford Mohr	Cynthia Rothrock, Richard Norton, Robert Ginty, Bella Esperance, Hengky Tornado
1995	Without Mercy (Outraged Fugitive)	Pemburu Teroris	Rapi Films	Robert Anthony	Robert Anthony	Frank Zagarino, Ayu Azhari, Frans Tumbuan

example, writing in 1985, made the following comment about *non-pribumi* (non-native) producers:

Moreover most of the producers and brokers with significant capital are citizens of foreign descent who do not know national history, do not know national culture, and cannot fathom the struggle of the Indonesian people throughout the ages to create a life of dignity.<sup>1</sup> (1992, p. 201)

Commentary and opinion about their work as producers often made reference to their ethnicity as a problem. As a result, producers of non-native descent were constantly in a bind, trying to survive commercially but also fighting off criticism as to their motives and dedication to the nation.

Whilst *film nasional* continued to be used to define the parameters of valuable film, by the 1970s, the political economy of the Indonesian film industry was beginning to change with the entry of the Suharto crony Sudwikatmono. Sudwikatmono's first foray in the industry was as producer of Karya's *Ranjang Pengantin* (a.k.a. *The Wedding*, 1974) through his company PT Sugar Indah, but he was soon in business with the Tan Brothers who were importers of Chinese films. Together, they established Suptan Film and through Sudwikatmono's connections to the President, came to monopolize all film imports in Indonesia by the end of the 1970s. Importers-producers such as Raam Punjabi (Parkit Film) and Gope Samtani (Rapi Film) found their income from imports under threat. In response to Sudwikatmono's encroachment and out of fear of losing their business, they chose to collaborate with Sudwikatmono but actively sought opportunities in other areas, in particular, in producing films for export.

As Sudwikatmono's empire expanded into exhibition under the 21 Group in the 1980s, local producers were squeezed even further. Sudwikatmono established the Subentra Company which then began building modern Cineplexes in Jakarta and other major cities. Existing strategic cinemas in Jakarta and other cities were brought into the 21 Group, such that by the end of the 1980s, the 21 Group controlled all of the first-run cinemas in the country. Coupled with a policy of no longer screening locally made films and favoring Hollywood films instead, local film producers lost even more market.

At the same time, the late 1970s and 1980s saw the global film industry undergoing changes in how consumers accessed and watched films. Home videos (VHS and beta) were becoming consumer items in many households in Indonesia, with a 1987 survey showing that 36% of households in Jakarta already owned a VCR player (McDaniel, 1994). Hollywood similarly moved

into producing more blockbusters with high investment costs, following the success of films such as Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975) and Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977). To cut cost, producers started going overseas to find cheaper locations, cheaper crews, and fewer restrictions. It was in this global context that Indonesian exploitation films began to develop, gain exposure overseas, and find both buyers and partners. In exploring the history and status of transnational Indonesian productions, it becomes necessary to contrast how the films were perceived locally at the time of their initial release and the emerging cult status the films now enjoy more broadly.

### **Exploitation as Business Strategy**

Seeing the move to go transnational as a business strategy on the part of Indonesian producers, it becomes apparent why Indonesian exploitation films developed the way that they did. Much of the developments were led by producers wanting to sell films via the international film markets in Berlin, Cannes, Milano, and Manila. These producers used a range of strategies besides selling Indonesian films in film markets: reproducing globally popular genres; using locally sourced "white" actors and actresses; co-producing with foreign producers and directors; and finally, hiring foreign talent from Hong Kong and the United States. Each of these strategies allowed Indonesian producers to make films that emulate the film language, conventions, and genres of Hollywood and to give them access to the global film market.

Producers utilized exploitation tropes and content to appeal to audiences unfamiliar with Indonesia. Clark (2013) categorized exploitation films as being cheaply made, not mainstream, made for financial return, but most importantly, full of sex, violence and lurid elements. Clark went on to say that "the term [exploitation] derives from the fact that promoters of such films exploit the contents by using advertising that plays up the sexual or violent aspects of the films" (p. 4). Writing earlier, Cook (1976) defined exploitation films as those which

"exploit" the success of other films playing the themes, star-stereotypes, and genres of more lavish, up-market productions. They are made with specific markets in mind, hence the development of "sexploitation" and "blaxploitation" categories referring to the capture of the soft-core pornography audience and black youth audience respectively. (p. 122)

Indonesian exploitation films began with Sisworo's *Primitif* (1978), a film that was easily linked to the cannibal-themed films that became

famous worldwide in the 1970s. Italian directors developed this genre beginning with Lenzi's *Man from Deep River* a.k.a. *Deep River Savages* (1972), with Deodato's 1980 film *Cannibal Holocaust* often named as the most controversial and best known of the genre. Cannibal films exploited stereotypes of barbaric, primitive tribes located deep in the jungle, whose savage customs and rituals are exposed by outsiders (photographers, anthropologists, adventurers) who become their victims. *Primitif*, which adopted many of the same tropes—exotic jungle locations, gore and graphic violence, animal cruelty—entered the film markets just as the cannibal genre was taking off.

*Primitif* (Samtani & Gautama, 1978) offered little in the way of an original plot: a group of three anthropology students venturing out to find a secret, primitive tribe deep in the jungle. Their guide abandoned them halfway, and the three were split up, with the bespectacled Tommy the first to be taken captive, followed soon after by Amri (Barry Prima) and Rika (Enny Haryono). All three were reunited as prisoners, and witnessed some of the savage rituals, including a crocodile being disemboweled and a woman branded on her thigh with a hot knife. All three managed to escape their captors, and during their escape, Tommy was speared through the chest. Amri and Rika left him as he dies on a riverbank, escaping in a makeshift raft down the river as the whole tribe yelled at them from the opposite bank.

What made *Primitif* (Samtani & Gautama, 1978) unusual was the twist that an Indonesian-made cannibal film brought to the genre. It was set in Indonesia, a setting never before seen in the cannibal genre. Typically the cannibal films relied on a Westerner-primitive dichotomy, usually set in the jungles of South America. In *Primitif*, however, the story followed three Indonesian anthropology students going into the deep jungles of Indonesia. For fans of exploitation films, this made *Primitif* unique, as the film offered a different take on the cannibal genre. Moreover, it showed new locations.

*Primitif* could be read, as Sen (1994) did, as a critique of New Order developmentalism in the same way that other cannibal films have been seen as indictments of Western neo-imperialism. Sen was right in her analysis when she pointed out how the undeveloped, uncivilized Other within Indonesia were presented as savages who were more animal than human. In one scene, Rika and Amri were imprisoned in a cage, and Rika had woven a grass skirt which she showed to the “primitive” women saying *tutup* (cover up) and *sopan* (polite) as if this would civilize the primitive women. The irony was of course that the women were already clothed—due to prevailing censorship policies—but that Rika's clothes had been strategically torn to reveal her ample cleavage.

In 1981, an Indonesian delegation attended the Manila International Film Festival, hoping to sell films to foreign buyers. The junket was supported by the newly formed Working Party to Promote and Market Indonesian Films Overseas (Kelompok Kerja Tetap Promosi dan Pemasaran Film Indonesia di Luar Negeri, POKJATAP PROSAR), an official body tasked with assisting Indonesian producers at international film market such as MIFED (Milano), Cannes, and Berlin. Rather than taking with them nationalist films, the group instead promoted a range of commercial films to foreign buyers. Representatives from POKJATAP PROSAR also attended Cannes Film Festival in May 1983 and Berlin Film Festival in February 1984 (Anwar, 1999). POKJATAP PROSAR operated until early 1984 after the Minister of Information Ali Moertopo was replaced by Harmoko who wanted to focus on the domestic market and industry.

Films on offer in Manila in 1981 included: Sudjio's *Ratu Ilmu Hitam* (a.k.a. *Queen of Black Magic*, 1981) and Sisworo's *Srigala* (a.k.a. *Jackal*, 1981) and *Primitif*, all from Rapi Film; Burnama's *Lembah Duka* (a.k.a. *Valley of Grief*, 1981) and Umbara's *Lima Cewek Jagoan* (a.k.a. *Five Deadly Angels*, 1980,) and *Cewek Jagoan Beraksi Kembali* (a.k.a. *Deadly Angels Strike Back*, 1981,) from Parkit Film; Karya's *Usia 18* (a.k.a. *18 Years Old*, 1980,), Soebardjo's *Perempuan Dalam Pasungan* (a.k.a. *Women in Stocks*, 1980,), Djarot's *Semerah Bibirnya Seputih Hatinya* (a.k.a. *As Red of Lips as the Heart is White*, 1980,), and Sirait's *Gadis Penakluk* (a.k.a. *Girl Conqueror*, 1980,), all from Garuda Film; Sjumandjaya's *Bukan Sandiwara* (a.k.a. *Not an Act*, 1980,) from Bola Dunia Film; and Surawidjaja's *Janur Kuning* (a.k.a. *Yellow Coconut*, 1979), a nationalist war film from Metro 77.

Not all of the films sold at Manila, but those that did showed the direction made-for-export Indonesian films would move in. In Manila, *Ratu Ilmu Hitam* was sold to an Italian distributor who was to invest US\$20,000 (about US\$54,000 in 2014) in negatives and dubbing into English (*Ratu Ilmu*, 1982). *Cewek Jagoan Beraksi Kembali* was in negotiations to be sold for US\$18,000 (about US\$48,500 in 2014) for each pair of copies made (Punjabi & Umbara, 1981). What emerged from this festival was a clear preference for mystic and action films with sex appeal (Anwar, 1999). It was these kinds of films that would dominate local production in the 1980s.

Set in Bali, Djalil's *Mystics in Bali* (a.k.a. *Leak*, 1981), a film about black magic called *leak*, displayed many of the characteristics that would shape Indonesian films throughout the 1980s. These included exploiting local forms of black magic using gruesome special effects such as a levitating disembodied head with spine still attached. The filmmakers hired German tourist Ilona Agathe Bastian to play the role of the American anthropologist who sought knowledge about *leak* magic. And the film was made with

Australian company Video Tape Corp. A news article from 1981 expressed surprise at the success of *Leak* locally but noted that the poster made it seem like an imported film, and it even had a screening in the prestigious Djakarta Theatre in central Jakarta (“Diluar Dugaan,” 1981). Making films that seemed more Western was also a means of appealing to prevailing audience tastes which were increasingly shaped by Hollywood (Endah, 2005). Nevertheless, the writer noted that the film marked a new phase for local films.

By 1983, Indonesian filmmakers had identified a clear market overseas for their films in Europe and Asia (Danu Umbara, 1983). Exporting overseas was seen as a sign of success, a source of pride, and an endorsement of the quality of Indonesian filmmaking. Filmmakers were now explicitly making their films for this overseas market, in some cases releasing them overseas before they were censored at home for the local market (“Dicky Zulkarnaen,” 1989). Actor Dicky Zulkarnaen, who acted in many of the co-productions, saw this as having the potential to give a bad impression of Indonesia overseas.<sup>2</sup> This was because films made for the overseas market played up sex, nudity, and violence as a means to attract audiences.

Not all of the local critics and broader members of the film industry were happy with the direction producers such as Raam Punjabi and Gope Samtani were taking. The practice of changing the names of actors and the director to sound more Western, such as using Sam Gardner for director Sisworo Gautama Putra, WD Manner for W.D Mochtar, and Dicky Alexandriaia for Dicky Zulkarnaen in *Jaka Sembung* (a.k.a. *The Warrior*, 1982), was criticized for “belittling the struggle of the Indonesian people” (“Matinya Jenderal,” 1982, p. 6).<sup>3</sup> Others criticized *Jaka Sembung* for being simply an “export commodity” (komoditi ekspor), of the same ilk as *Primitifs*, with little cultural worth (“Jaka Sembung,” 1982). *Jaka Sembung* raised these sensitivities because of its anti-colonial content which is somewhat sacred in Indonesian history.

Like *The Queen of Black Magic*, *Jaka Sembung* was retitled into English as *The Warrior* (Samtani & Gautama, 1982) was an Indonesian story with Indonesian actors gaining sales and viewers overseas. What the film brought to audiences was a special mix of action and martial arts, coupled with special effects that included a flying head and a hero, blinded at one point, but whose sight was restored by a good magic practitioner. These were never-before-seen scenes that distinguished Indonesian films from those of other countries (Tombs, 1998).

Throughout the 1980s, Indonesian filmmakers developed new ‘tricks’ in their filmmaking to enhance the spectacle of their films. These included

the use of various forms of special effects, camera tricks, and prosthetics. Special effects maestro El Badrun (b. 1950) would come to play a leading role in supplying these prosthetics to Indonesian filmmakers. Directors Sisworo Gautama Putra and Ratno Timoer displayed the techniques they learned from him in their films, *Jaka Sembung* and *Nyi Blorong* (a.k.a. *The Snake Queen*, 1982), respectively (“Ratu Ilmu”, 1982, p. 26). Both films sold overseas after being retitled and dubbed in English, with seven transactions recorded for *The Warrior* (“Matinya Jenderal,” 1982).

With the aim of selling films to an even larger international market, producers saw the need to include white Euro-American actors and actresses to internationalize their productions, but in effect, obscuring the Indonesian origin of their films. Raam Punjabi recalled being told that this was necessary to increase sales (Endah, 2005). This was in keeping with the practice of US-based filmmakers who were shooting B-grade action films in places like the Philippines, using a majority of Filipino actors as extras and crews, but reserving the lead roles to white, English-speaking actors. In some productions, white non-actors were employed in the lead roles, with Ilona Agathe Bastian in *Mystics in Bali* and later Peter O’Brian in Burnama’s *The Intruder* (1986) as notable examples. Both Bastian and O’Brian were simply tourists in Indonesia who were approached by film companies to become actors. Ashley’s *Menentang Maut* (*No Time to Die*, 1984), a co-production between Rapi Film and German company Rapid Film GMBH, starred American actor Chris Mitchum.<sup>4</sup>

One of the high points came in 1989 with Djalil’s *Pembalasan Ratu Laut Selatan* (*The Revenge of the South Sea Queen*), released overseas as *Lady Terminator*. Soraya Intercine (Ram Soraya) was a late entry into the genre of export titles, but it produced perhaps one of the most iconic of the exploitation films of this period. Taking elements from James Cameron’s *The Terminator* (1984) and combining them with the local legend of the South Sea Queen (*Ratu Laut Selatan* a.k.a. *Nyi Roro Kidul*), the film showed a vengeful South Sea Queen possessing the body of a young American anthropology student (played by Barbara Anne Constable) to hunt and kill the granddaughter of the man who defeated her a hundred years earlier. The granddaughter, a pop singer, was under the protection of Max, a policeman played by Christopher Hart.

*Pembalasan Ratu Laut Selatan* faced trouble upon its release. Released in cinemas in the United States and distributed in at least five countries, the film sparked controversy at home in Indonesia. After playing in local cinemas for eleven days with 500,000 tickets sold, the film was withdrawn from circulation following protests against its sexual content and nudity (Pudyastuti, Muryadi, & Indrawan, 1994). Two versions of the film now

exist—one for the Indonesian market and one for export overseas. It still stands as one of the most excessive and crazy films ever to be produced in Indonesia during this period.

The 1990s saw Indonesian producers actively recruiting B-grade talent from Hong Kong, including Mike Abbott and Cynthia Rothrock. Both were working in the Hong Kong film industry, playing roles in martial arts and action films. Abbott, with his sinister looks and muscular physique, was featured in a number of low-budget Hong Kong action films, often as the bad guy (Abbott, n.d.). Cynthia Rothrock, because of her proficiency in martial arts, had built a career as the alternative Jean Claude van Damme. She came to Indonesia and starred in five films, including Worth and Anwari's *Lady Dragon* (1992) and *Angel of Fury* (1991).

Indonesian producers at the time were trying to move beyond Indonesia and into international markets for better financial returns and for the realization of their aspirations. These films did not enjoy mainstream release but were sold in film markets to regional or national distributors. The films were then released in second-run cinemas, on VHS, or in other alternative circuits. It was in these venues that these films enjoyed a second life and, in the process, became 'cult'.

## **Becoming Cult**

The transnational Indonesian films of the 1970s-1990s are interesting objects of study because of their content and how they were circulated and consumed, and have undergone a process of cultural recovery, thereby becoming iconic and valuable in new ways. In contrast to domestic factors, once these films entered global circulation, they entered quite different circuits of cultural value and came to be categorized in quite different ways. To be sure, Indonesian films remained on the periphery of the global film economy, outside both the mainstream cinemas and film festivals; nevertheless, they still found distributors and audiences. Today, fitting Indonesia's transnational films into prevailing categories is part of the process of bringing Indonesian films into global film studies. By doing so, Indonesian transnational films can be analyzed using established concepts within global film studies, using the concept of cult as articulated by Mathijs & Mendik (2008), taking note of anatomy, consumption, political economy, and cultural status.

Indonesian films have become canonized within cult communities, many of them interacting online (Imanjaya, 2009). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Indonesian films circulated on VHS cassettes in markets in Europe, Australia, Middle East, and the Americas. Part of the challenge for Indonesian cult fans now is to identify which films originated from

Indonesia, given the incomplete record of Indonesian productions, their eclectic distribution, and the variety in their packaging and titles.<sup>5</sup> Indonesian films then often lacked stable distribution overseas, that is, some films were only available in certain territories and not others. These peculiarities heighten the pleasures involved in the pursuit, consumption, collection, and discussion of Indonesian cult films. These communities have been aided recently by the Internet and digital technologies, making the sharing of films, trailers, information, and paraphernalia easier.

Over time, and especially after 2000, these Indonesian films have found relevance both at home and abroad. At present, the cult status of these films at home is still in the development stage. But for the growing number of local fans, these films are part of a proud cinematic history that has helped Indonesian films go global. At the same time, the films come from an era that tapped into people's memories of their childhood and evoked in them a sense of nostalgia. Through that process of looking back to the past, these films have gained a form of cultural status, being reappraised and repositioned as objects of new cultural worth even if they remain within small fan communities.

Given the current trend in scholarship, the tendency would be to categorize these films as 'cult'. However, 'cult' does not capture the perspective from inside Indonesia itself about what Indonesian producers and filmmakers were trying to do, the context from which these films emerged, and the reactions of Indonesians towards them. This other side of the story gives a different picture of what was happening in Indonesia in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s that pushed local filmmakers to go global.

### **Bodies on Display**

Indonesian films of the 1980s were often seen as an era of the "sex film" with the increase in the number of scenes with sex, partial nudity, and bodily display. Much of the attention focused on actresses whose sexual appeal was a key commodity for producers. Films such as Burnama's *Kamp Tawanan Wanita* (a.k.a. *Women's Prison Camp* or *War Victims*, 1983) and Timoer's *Rimba Panas* (a.k.a. *Jungle Heat*, 1988) centered around partially clothed women as lead characters. The display of the female body caused consternation amongst observers and critics who saw this as evidence of a decline in standards and the use of sex to sell films. A review for Umbara's *Perawan Rimba* (a.k.a. *Jungle Virgin Force*, 1983) proclaimed that it "only provokes sexual stimulation" (Haryono, 1983, p. 1), and another review for *Kamp Tawanan Wanita* described it as "film that displays the bodies of beautiful actresses to chase profits" ("*Kamp Tawanan*," 1984, p. 6). Although

a means to attract audiences both locally and overseas, the use of women's bodies in Indonesian films remained modest by international exploitation standards.

It is important to note that it was not just the women who were on display but increasingly the men as well. Before *Primitif*, the male body was not on display, but this was a new trend that developed in the 1980s. *Primitif* introduced audiences to Barry Prima (b. 1955) as Amri, one of the anthropology students who, through his martial arts ability, survived the jungle and its savage tribe. Prima spent most of the film shirtless, displaying his toned and sculpted chest and upper body. Prima would go on to be a staple in the action films of the 1980s and 1990s, in muscular roles displaying his martial arts skills as well as his toned body. In *Jaka Sembung*, for example, Prima lost his shirt as he underwent training from a master to display his newfound strength.

The emphasis on the muscular masculine body would similarly inform the decision to recruit New Zealand tourist Peter O'Brian to act in a number of films in the 1980s. O'Brian was described by costume designer Budiyanto as a "*bule Jalan Jaksa*" ("white/Caucasian from the tourist street," Manahara, 1989, p. 55), a tourist recruited from Jalan Jaksa in Jakarta known for its cheap backpacker accommodation. Reportedly, O'Brian worked as a window cleaner in New Zealand before coming to Indonesia. He was recruited because of his physical resemblance to Sylvester Stallone who was famous in the 1980s for the Rambo films (Endah, 2005). O'Brian's first film was Burnama's *Pembalasan Rambu* (a.k.a. *Rambo's Revenge*, 1986), a clear reference to the American Rambo films. The English version would be titled *The Intruder* following protest from the original producers (Endah, 2005). O'Brian would appear in a total of five films between 1986 and 1990.

The theme of the body peaked with the inclusion of white actors, not just imitations like O'Brian who had no acting experience, but real actors from Hong Kong and the US. Raam Punjabi recalled being told by overseas distributors that whilst Indonesian women were appreciated by audiences, male leads should be white (Endah, 2005). Their presence concealed even more the films' Indonesian origins whilst propelling Indonesian productions further into global circulation.

Caucasian actors appeared in *Leak* (1982), and the co-production *Menentang Maut* (1984) with US actor Chris Mitchum (son of actor Robert Mitchum). By the end of the 1980s, villain actor Mike Abbott (b. 1953) had acted in four Indonesian films as an aside to his roles in Hong Kong productions. Cynthia Rothrock (b. 1957) was similarly an actor specializing in B-grade martial arts roles, but would star in five Indonesian-made films between 1989 and 1993. One of the most notable actors who in fact got

his first lead role in Indonesia was Christopher Noth (b. 1954) who starred in Chappell and Solaiman's *Java Burn* (a.k.a. *Diamond Run*, 1988). Noth would return to the US and go on to play Detective Mike Logan in *Law & Order: Criminal Intent* (2005-2008) and Mr Big in the hit US TV series *Sex and the City* (1998-2004).

Thus, by the mid 1990s, these transnational exploitation films marked the integration of the Indonesian economy and the Indonesian film industry into the global, US-dominated, economic and cultural order. These productions would continue until 1995, just before the Asian Financial Crisis hit in 1997 and the New Order regime collapsed in 1998. Yet, the overseas success of these films would remain largely unknown to local audiences until after 1998 when the Internet facilitated the emergence of transnational fan communities, connecting people outside Indonesia to those inside.

### **Conclusion: Back to the Future**

In many respects, the transnational exploitation films of the 1970s-1990s leave an important legacy to the Indonesian film industry. Local producers had managed to not only put Indonesian films into global circulation, but also furthered the careers of actors such as Christopher Mitchum and Christopher Noth. It was a time when Indonesian producers had global commercial aspirations and worked towards them, in spite of limited opportunities and limited support at home.

Yet this part of film history is to some extent unknown within Indonesia. Whilst some of the films are known, being screened on television from time to time, the background and the history of how they were made are not. Moreover, these films remain unavowed within a more general history of Indonesian film because their content did not fit the ideals of *film nasional*. Thus, buried within the history of Indonesian cinema is Indonesia's entry into the global film economy.

At the time of their genesis and inception, these transnational exploitation films were conceived quite differently by those who made the films, by audiences and critics in Indonesia, and by audiences outside Indonesia. They had value as popular entertainment, but were also criticized as being problematic, trashy and rubbish, with content that was offensive, crass and cheap. Now, we see a process in which these films have taken on cult status.

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## Notes

- [1] The original reads: "Apalagi sebagian terbesar produser dan broker yang kuat modal adalah warga negara keturunan asing yang tidak kenal sejarah bangsa, tidak kenal budaya bangsa, tidak menghayati pergulatan manusia Indonesia sepanjang zaman untuk merebut kehidupan bermartabat manusiawi."
- [2] Original reads: "Artinya citra negara kitalah yang tidak baik" (It means that image of our country will be bad; "Dicky Zulkarnaen", 1989)
- [3] Original reads: "yang telah merendahkan perjuangan bangsa Indonesia dengan mengganti nama-nama pemain dan sutradara"
- [4] He is the son of US actor Robert Mitchum.
- [5] Here the thread 'Crazy Indonesia' on AVManiacs has been prominent. See <http://www.avmaniacs.com/forums/showthread.php?t=32329>

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