

## **The Other Side of Indonesia: New Order's Indonesian Exploitation Cinema as Cult Films<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Introduction**

This article explores how the Indonesian film industry employed subversive and exploitative techniques to struggle against a dominant order. In particular, it discusses how the Indonesian exploitation films produced under the New Order Regime positioned their villains and criminals as symbols of the Suharto government, and how local and international fan activity and targeted DVD distribution has subsequently attained cult classification for many of these films. The films under consideration were produced and released in Indonesian cinemas during Suharto's New Order Regime (1966-1998). During this time nobody dared to voice their differences or criticize the government, without fear of being silenced or "disappearing." Nowadays the Indonesian people have more freedom to express their opinion although it may be different from, or even against, the government.<sup>2</sup> The strongest period for this genre was approximately twenty years before the Reform Movement<sup>3</sup> which led to the downfall of the Suharto government. These films were neglected and abandoned, and many of them vanished. They are largely considered marginal or "bad" movies in Indonesia, however there are some local and devoted fans that still find and watch these films. This topic will be discussed later in this paper.

Indonesian exploitation films from the 1980s (and a few from late 1970s and early 1990s) are now distributed internationally and attract a huge number of fans from around the world. The biggest distributor is England's Mondomacabro DVD, and there have also been a few films marketed by USA's Troma Entertainment. According to information received from Pete Tombs representing Mondomacabro DVD<sup>4</sup> his company sells such films mostly to the US market, but also to the UK. The distribution covers The Netherlands, Germany, Italy and France, and is effected by his company and other companies as well. According to Tombs, their sales numbers range from 2000 to 8,000, depending on the title. In his email interview with the author Tombs has written that "...some titles, *Virgins from Hell*, for example have sold well because of the subject matter (sexy girls on motorbikes!)." Tombs highlights that the target market consists of fans of horror and exploitation movies, and also people who like martial arts and action films. "There is a small but "niche" audience for films that are different from the mainstream Hollywood product and this is where we try to market our movies, stressing their exotic, extreme or unusual content," he says.

Some examples of the films in question are: *The Queen of Black Magic* (Ratu Ilmu Hitam, Lilik Sudjio, 1981), *Lady Terminator* (Pembalasan Ratu Laut Selatan, Tjut Djalil, 1988), *Virgins From Hell* (Perawan di Sarang Sindikat, Fred Wardy Pilliang, 1986), which DVD also includes an interesting documentary on Exploitation Indonesian Cinema as the bonus feature.<sup>5</sup> This long list may be continued and we may add other titles including *Tales of Voodoo, Vol. 1: Jungle Virgin Force* (Perawan Rimba, Danu Umbara, 1982), *The Devil's Sword* (Golok Setan, Ratno Timoer, 1983, 1984), *Stabilizer* (Arizal, 1984), *Mystic in Bali* (Leak, Tjut Djalil, 1980), and *Dangerous Seductress* (Bercinta dengan Maut, Tjut Djalil, 1992). In addition to these, there are DVDs which contain examples of Indonesian cult cinema along with other cinema, for instance *Tales of Voodoo, Vol. 2: Ghost Ninja / Primitives* (Primitif, Sisworo Gautama, 1978), and *Eastern Horror: Satan's Slave* (Pengabdian Setan, Sisworo Gautama, 1980)/*Corpse Master*<sup>6</sup>. Other titles include *The Warrior* (Jaka Sembung Sang Penakluk, Sisworo Gautama Putra, 1981), *The Warrior against the Blind Swordsman* (Jaka Sembung vs. Si Buta, Dasri Jacob, 1983), *Daredevil Commando* (Komando Sember Nyawa, Eddy G Bakker, 1985), *Rambu: Prince of Universe* (Pembalasan Rambu, Jopi Burnama, 1985), *5 Deadly Angels* (Cewek Jagoan, Danu Umbara, 1980), *Jungle Virgin Force* (Perawan Rimba, Danu Umbara, 1982), and *Snake Queen* (Nyi Blorong, Sisworo Gautama Putra, 1982).

The theme and genre of these films vary: there are Zombie films (Sa-

*tan's Slave*), cannibalism films (*Primitive*), women in prison films (*Virgin from Hell*), "Womensploitation" films (*Ferocious Female Freedom Fighters*), and mystical/supernatural films (*Mystic in Bali*, *Queen of Black Magic*). There are also some genres that are specific to Indonesian culture, such as the so-called 'Kumpeni', represented by such films as *The Warrior* and 'Legenda' found in such films as *Snake Queen* and *Lady Terminator* which will be discussed later in a section below.

### Western spectators, international distribution

There are a number of blogs, websites and fanzines in the Western world (USA, Europe, and Australia) which celebrate Indonesian exploitation cinema as a type of cult cinema. World Weird Cinema<sup>7</sup>, Monsters at Play<sup>8</sup>, DVD Drive-in<sup>9</sup>, DVD Maniacs<sup>10</sup>, Mitglied<sup>11</sup>, Schlock Treatment<sup>12</sup>, Greek's The Cinehound Database<sup>13</sup> (especially in Asian Room), and Eccentric Cinema<sup>14</sup> are some examples. "Cult fan-boys" even participate in online forums, such as AV Maniacs<sup>15</sup>, to discuss and share their experiences of Indonesian cinema and their collections. These moves have been drawing attention to organizations of a more general character such as the Cult Movies Forum.<sup>16</sup> Some DVD rental stores also provide Indonesian exploitation films, for example Europe's Trash Online,<sup>17</sup> which has special corner called "Indonesian Horror and Action" and "Australia's Trash Video."<sup>18</sup> Many people have been contributing to the dissemination of such films. Andrew Leavold is a filmmaker, film collector, PhD student in Filipino genre cinema at Griffith University and co-owner and manager of Trash Video. His Brisbane-based rental video store, Trash Video, publishes the Schlock Treatment catalog, which includes Indonesian exploitation.

I was provided with a list of Indonesian titles that Leavold has collected. Some of these can not be found in either Mondomacabro DVD or Troma Entertainment: *The Blind Warrior* (Neraka Perut Bumi; Ratno Timoer, 1987); *Day Of The Escape* (aka *War Victims*, Kamp Tawanan Wanita, Jopi Burnama, 1983); *Hell Hole* (aka *Escape From Hell Hole*, Maman Firmansyah, 1983); *Hungry Snake Woman* (aka *Petualangan Cinta Nyi Blorong*, Sisworo Gautama Putra, 1986); *Lady Exterminator* (Barang Terlarang, the alternative titles are: *I Want to Get Even*, *Commando Wild Cat*, and *Violent Assassin*, Maman Firmansyah, 1987); *The Terrorists* (Menumpas Teroris, Imam Tantowi, 1986); and *White Crocodile Queen* (Ratu Buaya Putih, H. Tjut Djailil, 1988).<sup>19</sup> Leavold gives me the following explanation for the reasons why he rents out Indonesian films:

My decision to make these films available to our customers is from my own interest in Indonesian genre; many of our customers have never heard of or considered watching Indonesian genre films, as it is an area not covered in detail outside of Mondo Macabro and specialist chat groups, and therefore I needed to create a demand for the films rather than tap into an existing market. Most of the titles we make available were only ever available on VHS in the eighties, and are only available on the collector's grey market, usually sourced by tape collectors and traded from one collector to another.

Leavold explains that there was a period during the early VHS boom in the 1980s when Indonesian genre titles were sold to video companies around the world:

International demand for product was at an all-time high; both the major labels such as Warner and Columbia and smaller VHS companies needed a cost-effective way of obtaining “filler” titles. Purchasing older titles was one method; raiding the lower-budgeted fare from Europe and Asia was another. Put yourself in the shoes of a Greek VHS distributor – you have a choice between purchasing the rights to an A-grade American action film for \$30,000, or an Indonesian knock-off for \$5,000. It makes no difference to a Greek-speaking action fan if the film is poorly dubbed or not. And, in the genre market, consumer expectations are somewhat lower than those of the arthouse or quality drama crowd. As long as there are the requisite numbers of explosions or disembowelings, you're bound to have one happy renter.<sup>20</sup>

Leavold explains that Indonesian companies either sold their films directly at Cannes or on the American Film Market, or set up associations with overseas distributors (West Germany's Atlas Films, for example). He says: “There were two Indonesian films released to Australian VHS during this period: “Primitives” and “Hell Raiders”, both starring Barry Prima”. At that time these movies, according to Leavold, were anonymous genre titles that could have been made in any Asian or South American country.

Similarly, Pete Tombs writes that those kinds of movies—specifically the women-in-prison, war, action, and horror movies—were widely exported in 1980s. “Indonesia government's film promotion body found that those were the only sort of production that foreign buyers were interested in.”<sup>21</sup>

### Exploitation cinema and cult films

As stated above, Western distributors, viewers, as well as the Post-New Order local devoted audiences, consider examples of the 1980s Indonesian exploitation cinema to be cult films.

This paper adopts the definition of Exploitation Cinema as "...low-budget, sensational movies of various stripes that revel in sex, nudity, vice, and violence..."<sup>22</sup> The films also contain drug usage, freaks, gore, monsters, destruction, rebellion, and mayhem. I will argue that these films fit the definition of cult cinema, especially midnight movies, but with some modifications which I will discuss in the "Political Economy" section. The present section will elaborate on the theories of cult cinema and will apply the theories to arrive at close readings of the films.

There are certain criteria for a film to be considered cult cinema. Bruce Kawin has described cult films as "any picture that is seen repeatedly by a devoted audience; as a deviant or radically different picture, embraced by a deviant audience."<sup>23</sup> Timothy Corrigan adds that cult films are marginalized, eccentric, and peculiar.<sup>24</sup> The Cultographies website mentions more details on this topic. It gives a comprehensive characteristic of the notion by stating that:

A cult film is defined through a variety of combinations that include four major elements:

- Anatomy: the film itself – its features (content, style, format, and generic modes).
- Consumption: the ways it is being received – the audience reactions, fan celebrations, and critical receptions.
- Political Economy: the financial and physical conditions of the presence of the film – its ownerships, intentions, promotions, channels of presentation, and the spaces and times of its exhibition.
- Cultural status: the way in which a cult film fits a time or region – how it comments on its surroundings by complying, exploiting, critiquing, or offending.

We do not propose that all of these elements need to be fulfilled together. But we do suggest that each of them is of high significance in what makes a film cult.<sup>25</sup>

I will now elaborate on these four defining characteristics of cult film in terms of the Indonesian exploitation Cinema.

### The anatomy

In this part I will discuss innovation of Indonesian exploitation films, the “badness” of the films aesthetically and morally, transgression, genre, and intertextuality. I will provide examples of each subgenre of cult Indonesian cinema, specifically the genres that only exist in the Indonesian film industry, such as Karl Heider’s ‘Kumpeni’ and ‘Legend’ genres<sup>26</sup>.

‘Kumpeni’ genre represents stories about heroes — usually with supernatural powers— such as *Jaka Sembung* and *Jaka Gledak*, who fought against the Dutch Colonial forces (17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Century). The ‘Legend’ genre, however, dramatizes traditional legends or folktales and includes such films as *The Queen of the Southern Sea (Nyi Roro Kidul)* and *Snake Queen (Nyi Blorong)*. Black magic, supernatural powers and eastern mysticism sometimes appear in films of this genre as well.<sup>27</sup>

Pete Tombs, the director of *Mondomacabro* DVD and author of *Mondomacabro: Weird and Wonderful Cinema around the World*, states:

Again, to us in the West, the mythology they explored (*South Sea Queen*, *Sundel Bolong* etc) was new and very “exotic”... There was also something interesting in seeing western exploitation staples, such as the women in prison movie or the monster movie, being filtered through Indonesian eyes... Finally, I suppose for us there was a feeling that things like supernatural horror and black magic were maybe taken a bit more seriously by audiences in Indonesia than they were in the West, for cultural/historical reasons, so the films weren’t so self conscious or “camp” as UK or US productions.<sup>28</sup>

Tombs states that he does not really sell these films any differently from other films in their line. “But people in the US (at least in the “cult” market) now have a view of what “Indonesian exploitation movies are” says Tombs. When Tombs was asked by email why he chose Indonesian cinema of the 1980s to be distributed by his label instead of recent films, he replied that the Indonesian cinema of that period fits easier into his label’s identity, and that these films had an agenda to entertain: “Hence fast moving stories, simple plots, good versus bad (with good usually winning). They were also influenced by Japanese cinema (widescreen filming) and Hong Kong (martial arts style) and so seemed very cinematic to us in the West.” He goes on to state that: “... in general, Indonesian exploitation cinema was less predictable, at least to us in the West, and a lot more exotic than the stuff we were used to seeing from Japan or HK. The story telling was also very solid. They were not trying to be clever or “postmodern.” They just wanted to entertain.”<sup>29</sup>

I argue that “exoticism” and “otherness” are keywords in this genre.

### The consumption

An alternative canon of cinema will be analyzed in this section. This includes a cinema which involves active celebration, a sense of communion, commitment and a rebellious attitude. Here I make a distinction here between two kinds of viewers — Indonesian and non-Indonesian. This section will focus only on Western viewers, where the cult fan-boys — obsessive, Western fans of the genre represents an interesting phenomenon. Firstly I will discuss the genre and the nature of exploitation/cult/fantasy spectators who Mark Jancovich once compared to Benedict Anderson's "imagined community": "Rather than simply spontaneous, self-organizing subcultures, cult movie audiences are themselves brought together, and a sense of "imagined community" is produced and maintained, *through* the media."<sup>30</sup>

As has been mentioned above, a cult film is a film that is seen repeatedly by a devoted audience. As Corrigan stated, "With cult movies, as opposed to most other films, audiences seek out not only the unfamiliar in character and story, but the unfamiliar style, frame, and imagistic texture."<sup>31</sup>

Cult spectators celebrate the marginal, that is "the unwatchable and /or unobtainable" and considered as "un-pleasurable or inaccessible" to most viewers<sup>32</sup> and "...tend to construct a microcosmic community of admirers."<sup>33</sup> In short, cult audiences love "...such differences, for to them (the movies-e.g.) they suggest something unusual, noteworthy, and valuable..." As Telotte writes, "[I]t crosses boundaries of time, custom, form, and — many might add — good taste."<sup>34</sup>

Different terms are used to describe cult film viewers, including 'cult fan-boys' (Oliver Dew), 'nearly worshipful audience' (Telotte), and 'devoted audience' (Kawin). Cult cinema is surely a fan based genre — sometimes with a militant attitude — and has the purpose of seeking what is marginal, other, exotic and peculiar in films. I experienced this phenomenon when I visited 'The Night of Terror' ritual at 2007 Amsterdam Fantastic Film Festival and have also witnessed the 'birth of Jakarta cult fan-boys' while attending the 2<sup>nd</sup> Indonesia International Fantasy Film Festival. These fans also want to be different from mainstream moviegoers or even movie buffs — as if they wanted to prove that they have a different taste, and are able to enjoy 'unusual' movies — as Jancovich writes:

Cult movie fandom was, therefore, not developed in opposition to either the commercial or the academic but grew out of a series of economic and intellectual developments in the post-war period, a process which created selective film markets that were defined by a

sense of distinction from ‘mainstream, commercial cinema.’<sup>35</sup>

Independent distributors like Mondomacabro DVD have succeeded in part by building a brand or ‘habit’ of film watching that incorporates those titles with less potential for stand-alone, cross-over, appeal. This creates “a community of people who are just interested in, for instance Optimum Asia, Asia Extreme, or Eastern Cult” where, as further explains: “...The key audience aggregate that such brands target is the intersection between foreign-language film and ‘cult’ genre film...”<sup>36</sup>

I argue that both labels mentioned above (and other labels that distribute Indonesian cinema) are quite similar to Tartan’s Asia Extreme. Thus, I do not agree with all points stressed in Dew’s article, “Asia Extreme: Japanese Cinema and British Hype.” Dew mentions two important aspects of Indonesian exploitation cinema which attract the Western audience: the ‘Otherness’ (including exotic scenes), and the ‘Unknown/Mystery.’ In the case of Japanese movies, Dew writes that extreme violence and horror are an integral part of modern Japanese cinema but are rare in other countries. Quoting Rayns, Dew underlines that “...these brands merely ‘replicate’ a level of depravity in Japanese popular culture beyond anything known here.”<sup>37</sup>

In short, the marketing strategies of the distributors play an important role and should work well for the DVDs to be sold. According to Dew, “Supply alone cannot explain Asia Extreme: these brands are not merely a passive expression of Japanese cinematic culture, but are in part constructed by traditions of marketing and watching foreign language films in Anglophone territories.”<sup>38</sup>

How Mondomacabro DVD can be seen in this context? I believe that from the very beginning both the Indonesian producers and international distributors structured and chose the movies in order to fit them into Western spectators’ tastes and emotions. For instance, the motto of Mondomacabro DVD is “The Wild Side of World Cinema.” The stories of the DVDs are taken from Indonesian legends and myths such as *Nyi Roro Kidul* (*The Queen of South Sea*), *Nyi Blorong* (*The Snake Queen*), and *Leak* (*Balinese black magic*). The film *The Warrior* includes an Eastern magic charm called ‘Pancasona’ which leads to immortality in people as long they keep her or his organ touching the earth.<sup>39</sup> The Western spectators find such eastern mystical stories to be exotic, unfamiliar and consider the movies as representing “otherness.” I asked Tombs why the Western spectators want to watch and buy Indonesian cult cinema and he only gave a sentence in reply: “for something different.” As a distributor, Tombs realises that the spectators expect something fast moving, a bit crazy, but very cinematic with proper widescreen framing and lots of action and exotic behavior.<sup>40</sup> New



Order exploitation cinemas fit the label better than the post-New Order Indonesian movies. In this context, *Virgins from Hell* has become the best selling Indonesian title, the second being *Lady Terminator*.

The marketing strategies of Mondomacabro DVD that distributes Indonesian cinema (along with other bizarre films from all around the world) fits with Telotte's argument that "...many seem to become cult works largely because their audience — their potential lovers — cannot be accurately assessed through conventional wisdom, much less segmented and targeted." <sup>41</sup> To complement the characteristics he then further adds: "Rather than trying "to make all of the films for all of the people, producers and exhibitors realised that they must appeal to very special tastes." <sup>42</sup>

I would like to elaborate on some gimmicks from this label. Firstly, we should focus on the unique features that distinguish this kind of films. As it is stated in the promotional material of the film *Mystics in Bali*:

This is the film that introduced a new kind of monster to the world's cinema screens. A sensation on its initial release in Asia, *Mystics in Bali* was deemed too bizarre and shocking to be screened in the West. Until now... This is the first time the film has been released in the US and is completely uncut and digitally remastered from the rare original negative.

An analogous statement can be found on the front cover describing the film as the "holy grail of cult Asian cinema." Other examples of the promotional statements include: "Devil's Sword: Sex, Savagery, and Mystical Arts" and "An Astounding Voyage into the Unknown."

Secondly, we might point out that the mystic and supernatural is always highlighted in such productions. This may be illustrated by the trailer of the film *The Warrior* (which can be seen in the 'Coming Soon' folder on the Mondomacabro DVD website) where we read these salacious descriptions: "duel of art of Eastern mystic", "a mutilated body becomes a whole when touches the ground" (or Rawarontek charm), and "supernatural action adventure".

Thirdly, there is a visible tendency to adapt some Eastern features, making them more acceptable to Western taste. In the trailer of *The Warrior* the spiritual Islamic elements are erased. For example, while the father tries to calm Surti down, he says, "I think you underestimate Jaka Sembung, Surti." However in the original version the father says, "please *tawakal*, put trust in God, Surti..." In another case, while Jaka Sembung is arrested and tries to escape, in original film he mentions God's name as a charm to strengthen his body power — similar to Samson — but in the English dubbed version no such thing appears. Indeed, a so-called secu-

larization process that takes place when the films are dubbed into English for Western consumers.

And finally, some of the films use Western actors / actresses even though they might be not professional (*Mystic in Bali*, *Rambu*, *Dangerous Seductress*, *Lady Terminator*.) They apply techniques from Hollywood movies by using English titles, and sometimes Japanese and Finnish subtitles. We can also come across some similarities with Western stories (for example: in *Jaka Sembung/ The Warrior* there are scenes similar to the crucifixion of Jesus, the tragedy of Samson and Delilah and others).

Next I will discuss the local devoted viewers of Indonesian exploitation cinema.

### Political economy

This section will discuss the production of legends and accidents, cult stardom, promotion (specialist events and limited access) and reception.

The first issue I will address has to do with Post-New Order Indonesian cult-fan boys. It is obvious that the motifs for the appearance of such cult-fan boys are not exactly the same as those in the Western audience, which are exoticism and otherness.

Definitely, those New Order exploitation films I mentioned above were popular at the time of their release. In Barry Grant's term these films have become "mass cult" cinema,<sup>43</sup> they were very popular and even became box office hits in their time, but they also "...tend to construct a microcosmic community of admirers" — just like *Star Wars* or *E.T.*

However, in the Reform Era, as stated in the introduction, these kinds of films considered to be of low quality, and they are marginalized as "bad" and only for the working class.<sup>44</sup> These late 1970s — early 1990s movies are no longer popular, and their style has been mostly abandoned. Thus, these movies are very difficult to find and watch. So, why does the Post-New Order admirers search, watch, and collect these films? I would like to advance some hypotheses.

Firstly, I think that the younger generation is interested in the Indonesian cult stars of the past — for example, Suzanna and Barry Prima — because now the country lacks such cult figures. Secondly, local cult-fan boys find pleasure not only in watching the films but in finding or "discovering" them, and treating them as "collector's items."<sup>45</sup> The film critic Eric Sasono highlights that there are middle class people in Post-New Order Indonesia who adore every pop culture curio from the past and are attempting to redefine it. Those middle class fans have fallen in love with movies starring Suzanna or the comedian trio Dono-Kasino-Indro (in short: exploi-

tation cinema films), even though the movies' target market actually was lower class ('low brow') audiences. Sasono states that the movies are now enjoyed and celebrated in totally different ways from the purposes of the filmmakers.<sup>46</sup> One additional consideration is the scarcity of the movies, which is one of the important factors of production of cult cinema or stardom. Since there are no cinemas or drive-in cinemas to play midnight movies in Indonesia, the local militant viewers have very limited access to the films.

As mentioned above, this section includes an analysis of promotion (specialist events and limited access) and reception. I have some preliminary assumptions about three different kinds of access to such films for Indonesian cult spectators. These channels would include 'Layar Tancap' (mobile cinema), Film Festivals, and cheap-limited VCD.

Firstly, the fans come mostly from the lower class and working class society who recently enjoyed the film toward '*Layar Tancap*' (literally this is a stick screen, mobile cinema show, or outdoor cinema, similar to the Open Air Cinema which usually begins at 9 pm and goes until dawn). It is also known as 'Bioskop Keliling' (mobile / moving-around-cinema) or 'Gerimis Bubar / Misbar' (which literally means "if the rain comes, the show ends", the outdoor cinema). 'Layar Tancap' is considered older than indoor cinema. When first indoor cinema opened and a documentary was screened in Cinema at Tanahabang, Kebonjae, Jakarta (whose name was Batavia then) viewers compared it with 'Layar Tancap' run by Talbot, in Lapangan Pasar Gambir (Gambir Market Field) and Lokasari (Manggabesar.)<sup>47</sup>

The journalist Putu Setia writes that in the 1950s, the outdoor cinemas were attended by lower class society and some of them were not for free (but they were very cheap). Instead of using the term "theatre" after the cinema's name, they used "park", for example, "Luxor Park" and "Luna Park." These cinemas commonly featured two different shows together in one package, such as an orchestra or a 'toneel' (theatre show). The event was also used by traders to sell food, toys, cigarettes, etc..<sup>48</sup> A well-known film journalist J.B. Kristanto writes that these kinds of cinemas showed sex films of low quality, because of the spectators' demand.<sup>49</sup> The phenomenon broadened and in 1977 the owners of *Bioskop Keliling* established a union called *Perfiki* (*Persatuan Perusahaan Pertunjukan Film Keliling Indonesia* — The Union of Indonesian Mobile Cinema Show.)<sup>50</sup> Recently the name of 'Layar Tancap' has been used for an Indonesian Youtube website ([www.layartancap.com](http://www.layartancap.com)) which has gathered together nearly 7000 videos only in two months.<sup>51</sup>

In early March 2009 I interviewed Pudjiasmanto, director of Tito Films, a 'layar tancap' company. Pudji said that he bought the film copies and

their rights directly from the producers. He owns only classical 1980s-1990s Indonesian cinema, "Tito Films cannot afford to buy copies of recent films," Pudji states. Most of these films are exploitation cinema, and he only has films in 16mm,

Secondly, people from middle and higher classes have access to international distributions, as I've mentioned earlier, and also to the internet (Youtube, etc). Additionally, since 2007 the Screamefest or Indonesian International Fantasy Film Festival, organized by Blitz Megaplex, introduced an alternative luxurious cinema and have some classical Indonesian cinema on their lineup. Rusli Eddy, the festival director, told me that unfortunately it is more difficult for them to get 35mm print of such kind of movies, so there has not been any single New Order's exploitation film shown for the last two years. The other access points are alternative public spaces like Jakarta Art Council's Kineforum. This may become both a "temple" or ritual place (to use Bruce Kawin's term in *After Midnight*<sup>52</sup>) and public space for them.

Thirdly, both kinds of spectators can find these films just by buying cheap limited VCD of Indonesian cult / exploitation cinema in Glodok (Jakarta's Chinatown) or other markets in Jakarta, such as Pasar Festival. By doing so, they can watch the movies at home videos or in their own private spaces.

There are at least two distributors who sell exploitation cinema: Navirindo Audio Visual and Karyamas Vision. Both companies sell these VCD cheaper than those of recent films. For local cult-fan boys it is not so difficult to find the stores or places that sell such cheap VCD, for example at Glodok (Jakarta's Chinatown) or Pasar Festival and Blok M Plaza. When I interviewed the secretary of Navirindo, Bertha, she mentioned that her company bought the rights from the owners/producers, transferred from Betacam to VCD. "We have a particular department to release classical films," she says.<sup>53</sup> The images in the VCD are mostly cut on the right and left sides, because the wide screen format does not fit the television screen.

### **Cultural status**

This section is about cinema as an object of curiosity, cultural sensitivity and films with a politically dangerous or subversive content. The films in question were produced and distributed in the 1980s under Suharto's oppressive New Order Regime (1966-1998). In the documentary Imam Tan-towi, a scriptwriter and director of some Indonesian exploitation films, mentions that filmmakers in that period did not have the freedom to express

their creativity, so instead they sat quietly and fought against the repressive system through their films. The evils and criminals destroyed in the films can be seen as symbolic of the New Order government. Among them are some Legend films such as *The Warrior* and *Devil's Sword*.

Indonesian 'sexploitation' films are indicative of cultural sensitivities. We are aware of this because Indonesia is a country with the largest Muslim population in the world. This genre started with the film *Bernapas dalam Lumpur* (*Breathing in Mud*, Turino Djunaidi, 1970, starring Suzanna). This was the first film to accentuate sex, rape, and dirty dialogues. It was then followed by *Bumi Makin Panas* (*The World is Getting Hotter*, Ali Shahab, 1973, also starred by Suzanna) which has a similar topic, and was once banned in Cianjur (West Java) and Malaysia.

In 1983 another sexploitation film, *Bumi Bulat Bundar* (*The World is Round*, Pitrajaya Burnama, 1983, starring Eva Arnaz, Yeni Farida, and Wieke Widowati) was produced. The genre increased in popularity rapidly in the late 1980s and by the 1990s dominated the film industry. The most controversial film was *Pembalasan Ratu Laut Selatan* (literally meaning *Revenge of the South Sea Queen*, aka *Lady Terminator*, Tjut Jalil, 1988, starring Yurike Prastica) which was withdrawn from cinemas due to its erotic scenes.<sup>54</sup> The same thing happened to *Akibat Terlalu Genit* (*The Result of Too Flirtatious*, Hadi Poernono, 1988, starring Yurike Prastica) and *Ketika Musim Semi Tiba* (*When the Spring Comes*, Bobby Sandy 1986, starring by Meriam Bellina). Thus we see that the attitude to cinema reflected the general situation in the country, both political and moral.

### Conclusion

Some Indonesian exploitation films have been celebrated both in the Western world and in Indonesia. The cult-fan boys are small in number, but they have their own methods, attitudes and style for celebrating the movies that appeal to them. The distributors sharpen the mutual interaction of Western cult-fan boys and Eastern mystical / "exotic" movies, through certain branding and marketing strategies that cult fan-boys cannot refuse. On the other hand, local devoted audiences use three methods to watch the movies: 'Layar Tancap', alternative festivals and cheap-limited VCD. The exploitation films from the New Order era are still being distributed, with limited access both in the Western countries and Indonesia.

NOTES

- 1 Deepest gratitude to Hivos for its financial support allowing me to attend the B for Bad Movies conference at Monash University, Melbourne, 15-17 April 2009. Also biggest thanks to Joko Anwar who introduced me to this “wild side of Indonesia.”
- 2 Ekky Imanjaya, “Who’s afraid of democracy? Politics of freedom in Indonesian films” *Cinemaya, the Asian Film Quarterly* (Volume 1 , 4), (Mumbai: Osian’s Connoisseurs of Art Private Limited, May, 2007) 8-11, 10
- 3 In political terms, the Reform demanded greater democracy, honesty and accountability in public life and policies that secured people’s welfare. For further information on the Reform movement and its effects on some aspects in the early years of post-Reform situation, see: Arief Budiman, (ed.). *Reformasi, Crisis and Change in Indonesia*. (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute: 1999)
- 4 Email interview with the author, 16 October 2009
- 5 Please see YouTube: Part 1: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbsZp6OR0E8>, Part 2: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ci6AIU16ZSI&feature=user>, Part 3: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9mcgX--qLo&feature=related>
- 6 For examples, please see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amIA6TOgJZQ>
- 7 Available at: <http://worldweirdcinema.blogspot.com/2006/12/primitives-world-of-indonesian-horror.html>. The blog took the article on Primitive from BRUTARIAN Magazine #33, back in 2001, written by Greg Goodsell. For another review, please see: <http://worldweirdcinema.blogspot.com/2007/04/movie-review-revenge-of-ninja.html>
- 8 For example of their reviews, see: <http://www.monstersatplay.com/review/dvd//ladyt.php>
- 9 Available at: <http://www.dvddrive-in.com/reviews/i-m/ladyterminator88.htm> for example of the review.
- 10 Available at: [http://www.dvdmaniacs.net/Reviews/A-D/dangerous\\_seductress.html](http://www.dvdmaniacs.net/Reviews/A-D/dangerous_seductress.html)
- 11 Available at: <http://mitglied.lycos.de/gollumslair/ninjas/warriorandtheninja/warriorandtheninja.htm>
- 12 Available at: <http://schlocktreatmentarchive.blogspot.com/2009/01/indonesian-cult-cinema.html>
- 13 Please see: [www.cinehound.com](http://www.cinehound.com)
- 14 For example, read: [http://www.eccentric-cinema.com/cult\\_movies/dangerous\\_seductress.htm](http://www.eccentric-cinema.com/cult_movies/dangerous_seductress.htm) for Dangerous Seductress review
- 15 The forum is interesting, with participants from various (Western) countries.

- Please check: <http://avmaniacs.com/forums/showthread.php?t=32329>
- 16 Please see:  
<http://www.cultmovieforums.com/forum/forumdisplay.p?s=a5a62fcf610800cce5757aac7398b850&f=18>
- 17 Please see: <http://www.trash-online.com/dvd-INDONESIA.htm>
- 18 The website address is [www.trashvideo.com.au](http://www.trashvideo.com.au)
- 19 Some movies have different names. For example, *Perawan di Sarang Sindikat* (Arizal, 1988), under the sign *Other Third World Oddities*, has two titles, *American Hunter* and *Lethal Hunter*, respectively. Under *Asian Weirdness!!* there are *Daredevil Commandos* (*Komando Samber Nyawa*, EG Bakker, 1985) and *Triple Cross* (a.k.a. *Angel of Fury*, Ackyl Anwari, 1991). Other films with different name is *Lady Terminator* (aka *Nasty Hunter*, *The Revenge Of The South Seas Queen*, *Pembalasan Ratu Pantai Selatan*; Tjut Djalil, 1988). One interesting detail, the prolific directors' names, Tjut Djalil and Sisworo Gautama Putra were changed into *Jalil Jackson* and *Sam Gardner*, respectively (Tombs, *Mondomacabro*, 71, 74).
- 20 Written interview, 22 October 2009
- 21 Pete Tombs, *Mondomacabro: Weird and Wonderful Cinema around the World*, (London: Titan Books, 1997) 70
- 22 Eric Schaefer, "Exploitation films: teaching sin in the suburbs," *Cinema Journal* (47, 1) Fall 2007, 94-97
- 23 JP Telotte, (ed). *The Cult Film Experience, Beyond All Reason*, (Austin: University of Texass Press 1991) 18-19
- 24 Telotte, *The Cult Film Experience, Beyond All Reason* 26
- 25 <http://www.cultographies.com/definition.shtml>, date of access 28 October 2008.
- 26 Karl Heider, *Indonesian Cinema : National Culture on Screen*, (Honolulu : University of Hawaii, 1991)
- 27 See also: Tombs, *Mondomacabro*, 66.
- 28 Interview with the author via email, 9 October 2008
- 29 Interview with the author via email, 9 October 2008
- 30 Mark Jancovich, "Cult fictions: cult movies, sub-cultural capital and the production of cultural distinctions" in *Cultural Studies*, (Volume 16, 2), March 2002 , 306-322
- 31 JP Telotte, (ed). *The Cult Film Experience, Beyond All Reason*, (Austin: University of Texass Press 1991) 26
- 32 Oliver Dew, "'Asia Extreme': Japanese cinema and British hype," *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* (Volume V , 1), April 2007, 53-73, 60
- 33 Telotte, *The Cult Film Experience, Beyond All Reason* 123
- 34 Telotte, *The Cult Film Experience, Beyond All Reason* 6
- 35 Mark.Jancovich, "Cult fictions: cult movies, sub-cultural capital and the production of cultural distinctions" in *Cultural Studies*, (Volume 16, 2), March 2002 , 306-322, 306

- 36 Dew, "Asia Extreme': Japanese cinema and British hype," 54
- 37 Dew, "Asia Extreme': Japanese cinema and British hype," 55
- 38 Dew, "Asia Extreme': Japanese cinema and British hype," 56
- 39 Imam Tantowi, the scriptwriter, told me that in the original comic book, there is no such thing like Pancasona charm. Tantowi made it up to make the stories full of action, and the producer agreed with him.
- 40 Email interview with the author, 9 October 2008
- 41 Telotte, *The Cult Film Experience, Beyond All Reason* 7
- 42 Telotte, *The Cult Film Experience, Beyond All Reason* 8
- 43 Telotte, *The Cult Film Experience, Beyond All Reason* 123
- 44 On the connection of the movies and working class community, Tombs writes: "Indonesian audience was still mostly a working class one. To satisfy their demands, films had to be imitative of lower budget American movies and imported Hong Kong and Indian films. In other words, they had to have a bit of sex, lots of action, and oodles of violence. This combination exactly matched the requirement of the international video market. The export potential of these films was helped by having Western-looking, mixed race, or "Indo" actors in the lead actors." (Tombs, *Mondomacabro*, 71)
- 45 There is a group in Facebook created by filmmaker Joko Anwar called Exploitation Indonesian Cinema. It is a forum that unites local cult-fan boys in the internet. On introduction section, there is an announcement: "Calling all true fans of Indonesian Exploitation Cinema! Let's share information, exchange videos, anything. Open to all citizens of the world, and beyond! (Movies limited to those there were shot on film only)...This is a group for REAL fans. We are not emphasizing on the big number of members, but on true appreciation on the Indonesian Exploitation Cinema. So posers and wannabes please stay away." Available at: <http://www.facebook.com/search/?q=exploitation+cinema&init=quick#/group.php?gid=42069874745&ref=search&sid=635775494.3643398735.1>. Regarding the filmmaker Joko Anwar, Pete Tombs wrote via email on 16 October 2009: "You should also bear in mind that the recent "new wave" of Indonesian cinema, from Joko Anwar etc, has led to an increased discussion of and appreciation of older Indonesian cinema."
- 46 Misbach Yusa Biran, *Sejarah Film 1900-1950 (Bikin Film di Jawa)*, (Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu, 2009) xxii
- 47 Haris Jauhari, (ed). *Layar Perak, 90 Tahun Bioskop di Indonesia (Silver Screen, 90 Years of Cinema in Indonesia)*, (Jakarta: Penerbit PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama and Dewan Film Nasional, 1992) 2, 5
- 48 Jauhari, *Layar Perak* 60
- 49 Jauhari, *Layar Perak* 164
- 50 See:  
[http://pphui.or.id/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=47&Itemid=61](http://pphui.or.id/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=47&Itemid=61)
- 51 *Tempo Magazine*, 37/XXXVI/05 - 11 November 2007
- 52 Telotte, *The Cult Film Experience, Beyond All Reason* 18-25



53 Interview via email on 8 and 15 May 2009

54 Moch Jufri et al (eds.) , Indonesian Film Panorama, (Jakarta: Permanent Committee of the Indonesian Film Festival, 1992) 1