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# FIGURES OF INDONESIAN MODERNITY<sup>1</sup>

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with Tom Boellstorff, Chris Brown,  
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This multi-authored essay focuses on a series of figures, or cast of characters, that are pervasive in contemporary Indonesia. These are not particular individuals but rather figures whose significance can be understood against the changing social, political, and cultural life of this increasingly frenetic and fast-paced modern island nation. A decade after the fall of Suharto and the end of the New Order regime, we bring together thirteen anthropologists and one geographer to describe a series of characters—some novel, others more enduring—that in important ways illuminate the current post-authoritarian moment. We understand these and others to be “key

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<sup>1</sup> All the sections of this essay, except those by Carla Jones and Rachel Silvey, were first presented on November 19, 2008, at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in San Francisco, CA. Rosalind Morris was the discussant for the panel, and we thank her for her illuminating commentary. We are also grateful to the journal’s reviewer for very helpful comments.

figures” in much the same way that Raymond Williams identified “keywords” as particular sites that allow access to ideological formations and their contestations.<sup>2</sup> As such, these figures offer us a particular kind of ethnographic method for considering Indonesian modernity.



Photo by Chris Brown, with permission

The authors of this essay are concerned with a variety of figures: the *pakar telematika*, or information and communications technology expert, who illuminates the shifting tensions between media and credibility (Strassler); the *tele-dai*, the Muslim television preacher who inhabits the intersections between religion, media, and capitalism (Hoesterey); the *pelatih spiritual*, or spiritual trainer, who mediates between the worlds of faith and commerce (Rudnycky); the ODHA (*orang dengan HIV/AIDS*), the person with HIV/AIDS, who incites moral geographies of epidemics and sexualities (Boellstorff); the *aktivis* (activist) who takes to the streets to protest authoritarianism (Lee); the *mantan kombatan GAM*, the ex-GAM combatant (GAM stands for Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, or Acehnese Independence Movement), who moves easily into new economic relationships after the recent peace accord (Grayman); the *orang LSM*, or NGO worker, who brokers deals between foreign donors and local communities (Danusiri); the TKW, or overseas female labor migrant, who embodies the contradictions of class and gender mobility (Silvey); the *petugas lapangan*, or field agent,

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

who functions as an informal labor recruiter for transnational migrants (Lindquist); the *pedagang kaki lima*, or street vendor, who labors in the shadows of expanding shopping malls (Gibbings); the *anak jalanan*, or street kid, who plies the intersections of Indonesian cities and towns (Brown); *Pak Haji*, or Mr. Hajj, who wears the white cap that proclaims he has made the pilgrimage to Mecca (Darmadi); the *orang kaya*, or rich person, who serves as a focal point for gossip among lower-class neighbors and employees (Barker); and the *wanita karir*, or career woman, who is firmly positioned in Jakarta's landscape of consumption and fantasy (Jones).

We seek to make sense of these figures much like Walter Benjamin made sense of the *flâneur* against the backdrop of nineteenth-century Paris.<sup>3</sup> We recognize them as creatively constituted subject positions that embody, manifest, and, to some degree, comment upon a particular historical moment in the complex articulation of large-scale processes that are not always easy to grasp in concrete terms—processes of commodification, class formation, globalization, religious change, and political conflict. Our aim is not to compare twenty-first-century Indonesia to nineteenth-century Paris, but to focus on the decline, persistence, and emergence of particular social figures, which like the *flâneur* serve to evoke both underlying historical processes and the “structures of feeling”<sup>4</sup> of a particular time and place. This concern with marking historical shifts through a focus on figures is evident in many of the modern classics of Indonesian and Southeast Asian studies. In Benedict Anderson's work on nationalism, the Philippine novelist José Rizal was described as a figure whose work signified a shift towards a new form of temporality, as the experience of “meanwhile” came to define the possibilities of imagining the nation; in James Siegel's *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*, figures such as Mas Marco and Tan Malaka—and their engagement with the Indonesian *lingua franca*—came to stand in for broader transformations, and historical paths not taken, as the subject of Indonesia emerged in a matter of decades; in Rudolf Mrázek's history of technology and nationalism, the Indonesian dandy was seen to be the equivalent of Benjamin's *flâneur*, slowly losing his place as capitalism took shape and placed new demands on its subjects; and in Vicente Rafael's work, the “persistent figurality” of the criminal helped to excite broad socio-cultural effects, such as the production of a social geography of fear.<sup>5</sup>

Whereas Benjamin's project was fragmented in its form and his *flâneur* stood as an isolated figure in the Parisian urban swirl, the figures that emerge in the coming pages often overlap and intersect with one another. These intersections were not planned. Each of the contributing authors was asked to choose a figure that she or he had encountered during her or his ongoing fieldwork. The figure chosen might be an individual, but it should also be someone who in Indonesia is recognizable within

<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Williams *The Long Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1961).

<sup>5</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); James Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Rudolf Mrázek, *Engineers of Happyland: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Vicente Rafael, “Criminality and Its Others,” in *Figures of Criminality in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Colonial Vietnam*, ed. Vicente Rafael (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1999), pp. 9–22.

discourses that focus on social types.<sup>6</sup> What emerged was a series of figures that are clearly symptoms of broader transformations in Indonesia. The initially fragmentary nature of the project was thus transformed into a revealing composite form.

The interstitial figures discussed here speak to something more recent than the postcolonial moment. We have called them “figures of Indonesian modernity,” but we might also have called them figures of Indonesian postmodernity. We are concerned with the loss of grand narratives, an opening to the foreign, a blurring of old status/class distinctions, an embracing and intensification of capitalism and mass media, and a reworking of the politics of connection.<sup>7</sup> In making concrete the contemporary, these various figures help us to sort out exactly what is at stake in Indonesia today. For this reason, the term *modernity* in our title should be read not as a reference to the moment that so fascinated Benjamin but as a temporary place holder for the constellation of forces that define the contemporary moment in at least one corner of the world.<sup>8</sup> As will be clear, this moment is characterized by the pervasive effects of capitalism and commodification, a deep ambivalence about older figures of authority, and the emergence of new claims to authority grounded in new media. What is also clear is the continuing objectification of various marginalized people across the social field.

### ***Pakar Telematika dan Multimedia, Telecommunications and Multimedia Expert***

In March 1999, a tape recording was leaked to the press of a phone conversation between a “voice like that of” President Habibie and a “voice like that of” Attorney General Andi Ghalib. The conversation between Habibie and Ghalib about the latter’s investigation of ex-president Suharto revealed the judiciary’s lack of independence and the government’s insincerity in responding to popular calls to bring Suharto to justice. When Ghalib denied that the voice was his own, a relatively unknown lecturer at Gadjah Mada University, Roy Suryo, offered his analysis of the recording. Using a digital “spectrum analyzer,” the workings of which he explained in detail in interviews with the press, he asserted that the recording was indeed *asli* (authentic). His findings were widely hailed, and Roy Suryo proceeded to position himself as a similarly pivotal figure in a number of ensuing scandals. Shrewdly parlaying his self-proclaimed expertise into celebrity status, he became a regular pundit on the news circuit, writing columns in major newspapers and hosting his own television show (“e-lifestyle” on Metro TV).

Press reports likened Roy Suryo to a “detective on the film stage,” and there was indeed a highly theatrical quality to his performances of technical mastery. Accounts of his activities are peppered with terms that sound to most Indonesian ears like an esoteric, foreign code: “sound processor,” “win-amp,” “audio compositor,”

<sup>6</sup> On social types in Indonesia, see James Siegel, *A New Criminal Type in Jakarta: Counter-Revolution Today* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> On “connection,” see Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*, p. 44. See also Rosalind Morris, “Legacies of Derrida: Anthropology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 36 (2007): 355–89.

<sup>8</sup> Patricia Spyer, *The Memory of Trade: Modernity’s Entanglements on an Eastern Indonesian Island* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

“frekuensi,” “metadata,” and so forth. As central to his public persona as the incongruous moustache overlaid on his chubby baby face are the ubiquitous “*benda pusaka*” (spiritually powerful objects) he carries at all times: “three cell phones, a *handy talkie* [a hand-held radio transceiver], and a laptop.”<sup>9</sup>

Roy Suryo thus carved a niche in the post-Suharto political and media landscape for the “*pakar telematika dan multimedia*,” who uses sophisticated technology to gauge the authenticity of various kinds of evidence at the heart of a wide range of scandals. Despite the politically sensitive nature of many of the cases to which he lent his expertise, Roy Suryo insisted that his goal was a disinterested one: that he was motivated to seek truth through “pure science.”<sup>10</sup> Asserting, in September 2000, that photographs allegedly showing then-President Gus Dur with a mistress were authentic, he disavowed any political motive (“I am moved by feelings of a desire to know”).<sup>11</sup> Technology in the right hands might offer unalloyed, impartial truths, but it could also be used to mislead a gullible public. Observing that “manipulation by technical means is now so advanced ... that people’s perceptions are easily confused (read: tricked),” he cast as a public service his analysis of internet-circulated, cell-phone photographs of two celebrities engaged in intimate acts. He argued that experts “who are truly competent” serve “as expert witnesses who can give an assessment that is more objective rather than just an emotional opinion.”<sup>12</sup> Although no one else has achieved his household-name status, a quick scan of news reports reveals a number of such experts who are routinely tapped to weigh in on various technology-related scandals.<sup>13</sup>

The *pakar telematika dan multimedia* is symptomatic of Indonesia’s post-authoritarian political imaginary, which is haunted by questions of authority, legitimacy, and authenticity. Skepticism about the truth claims of “evidence” is not new; scholars have long noted that conspiracy theorizing pervades Indonesian political discourse and practice. Documents of uncertain authenticity and origin—what Nils Bubandt has recently called “hard copy rumors”—have often played a role in political crises.<sup>14</sup> The ubiquity of the *aspal (asli palsu)*—the authentic but false document—attests, moreover, to the endemic corruption that generates widespread distrust of documentary evidence.<sup>15</sup> These long-standing anxieties and doubts were exacerbated in the post-

<sup>9</sup> Zidane, “Roy Suryo, Punya Hobi Baca Buku Dikamar Mandi,” 2006. [http://www.lampunginteraktif.com/depan/cetak\\_berita.php?kode=477](http://www.lampunginteraktif.com/depan/cetak_berita.php?kode=477), accessed October 7, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> “Lokasinya Hotel Mulia, Kursinya Leter L: Mengungkap Skandal Rekaman Suara Mirip Baramuli-Setya Novanto,” *Jateng Pos*, August 24, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Sigit Widodo, “Teliti dari Klise Asli ‘Gus Dur-Aryanti,’ Roy: Foto Bukan Hasil Rekayasa,” *Detik*, September 2, 2000. See <http://www.library.ohiou.edu/indopubs/2000/09/02/0071.html>, accessed October 7, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Roy Suryo, “Fotografi, Teknologi dan Pornografi,” *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, July 15, 1999. See also: “Beda, Foto Sensual dan Porno: Analisis RM Roy Suryo,” *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, July 13, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> See for example, Dani Mamdani and Astari Yanuarti, “Seratus Kurang Satu Persen,” *Gatra* 15, February 20, 2004. <http://www.gatra.com/2004-03-08/versicetak.php?id=34327>, accessed August 24, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Nils Bubandt, “Rumors, Pamphlets, and the Politics of Paranoia in Indonesia,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 67,3 (2007): 789–817. See also Karen Strassler, “Material Resources of the Historical Imagination: Documents and the Future of the Past in Post-Suharto Indonesia,” in *Timely Assets: Resources and their Temporalities*, ed. Elizabeth Ferry and Mandana Limbert (Santa Fe, NM: SAR Press, 2008), pp. 217–44.

<sup>15</sup> Siegel, *A New Criminal Type*.

Suharto era, as the evacuation of the authoritarian center yielded a search for sources of authority and anchors for truth divorced from political power. As “reform” became hitched to the promise of “transparency,” a new sense of urgency and possibility impelled the search for “authentic evidence” that would adequately ground truth claims, even as the more polyphonic public sphere multiplied political agencies and narratives, making “transparency” all the more elusive.

The crisis of credibility that gives rise to the *pakar telematika dan multimedia* is also clearly tied to the proliferation of media outlets that followed the post-Suharto relaxation of press controls. Highly competitive news media with an insatiable appetite for scandal—political or otherwise—provide the *pakar* with an audience, blurring the lines between politics and celebrity. Meanwhile, the explosion of decentralized, consumer-oriented media technologies—personal computers, the internet, vcds, digital photography, cell phones—contributes to a climate of confusion and suspicion about what constitutes a credible account and how truth claims are to be verified. The *pakar telematika dan multimedia* reveals the simultaneously competitive and symbiotic relationship between the conventional mass media and these new media forms; he operates from within the mainstream electronic and print media to comment on, assess, and regulate the new media. (Roy Suryo participated in the formation of the Department of Telematics, which replaced the New Order’s Department of Information,<sup>16</sup> and helped draft an internet pornography law that passed in March 2008.) Ultimately he works to shore up the “traditional” authority of the electronic and print media—and the state—as arbiters of truth against the dangerous rumors that circulate via alternative media circuits.

In post-Suharto Indonesia, a more diversified and unregulated media ecology combines with political freedoms to generate a public sphere plagued by persistent doubts about the authority and credibility of various kinds of truth claims and concerns about how to control information flows that escape conventional forms of regulation. The *pakar telematika dan multimedia* emerges as a new figure of authority in this environment. Yet his authority has not gone uncontested. In the Indonesian blogosphere, Roy Suryo is widely reviled and ridiculed as a sensation-hunting<sup>17</sup> “charlatan” ignorant of the very technical matters over which he claims mastery.<sup>18</sup> A video posted on YouTube in July 2008, titled “Boy Suryo: Pakar Multimedia dan Telematika,” features a spoof in which a Roy Suryo look-alike—complete with fake moustache—describes his methods to an earnest television talk-show host.<sup>19</sup> Boy Suryo dramatically explains absurdly basic things about the computer such as how to “click” and how to identify how recently a file has been modified, concluding improbably

<sup>16</sup> See “RM Roy Suryo: Belajar Secara Otodidak,” August 9, 2004. [http://news.indosiar.com/news\\_read?id=24469](http://news.indosiar.com/news_read?id=24469), accessed August 24, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> See Rhadon Dhelika, “Menyelami 68% Dunia Blog Indoneisa,” August 19, 2006. <http://selembarkertas.blogspot.com/2006/08/menyelami-68-dunia-blog-indonesia.html>, accessed June 10, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Ryan Koesuma, “Indonesia Raya, YouTube, Roy Suryo, and the whole Government Bandwagon,” August 7, 2007, see <http://commonroom.info/2007/indonesia-raya-youtube-roy-suryo-and-the-whole-government-bandwagon/>, accessed June 10, 2008. On the antagonism between bloggers and Roy Suryo, see for example, Jarar Siahaan, “Roy Suryo vs Blogger Indonesia,” March 29 2008, <http://blogberita.net/2008/03/29/roy-suryo-vs-blogger-indonesia/>, accessed June 10, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> “Boy Surya, Pakar Multimedia dan Telematika,” Sidewalk Studio, 2008, posted by Hadiprojo. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0gsuEYx3A4>, accessed November 8, 2008.

with the assertion that photos of a parliamentarian in compromising poses with a singer are “1,000 percent *asli*.” Poking fun at the *pakar* and the televisual spectacle that surrounds him, the video—a false recording that nevertheless reveals a certain truth—not only challenges the authority of the old media but mocks the very search for authenticity upon which the *pakar telematika* feeds.

Karen Strassler

### **Tele-Dai, the Muslim Television Preacher**

Abdullah Gymnastiar, the charismatic television preacher known popularly as “Aa Gym,” captured the hearts of Indonesians with his humorous sermons and self-help message of *Manajemen Qolbu* (MQ, “Heart Management”). Between 2002 and 2006, millions of viewers watched his television shows, stadium crowds gathered for his sermons, and hundreds of thousands made pilgrimages to his Islamic school and *Manajemen Qolbu* training complex, Daarut Tauhiid. One particular morning, MQ trainees and “spiritual tourists” gathered in the courtyard behind Gymnastiar’s house, where he and his wife, Ninih, sat on an elevated stage, flanked on all sides by a huge backdrop displaying the logos of his twenty-three companies, along with motivational banners, a kiosk selling his books and sermons, a promotional sign for his television drama “The Smiling Family,” and a framed portrait of Gymnastiar, Ninih, and their seven smiling children. Together, trainees, tourists, and Gymnastiar and his wife watched Gymnastiar’s video autobiography—what he calls his *qolbugrafi*. During the Q&A session that followed, someone asked, “What’s the secret to your success?” Gymnastiar replied, “The three M’s: *Mulai* [begin] with yourself; *mulai* with small things; *mulai* right now. Success in business requires courage.” Then, gazing deep into his wife’s eyes, Gymnastiar continued, “and success at home requires love, compassion, and two-way communication.” A group of women began to clamor, and one chimed in loudly, “Are you men listening? Love and compassion!”

“This is not real Islam. It’s about the economy, stupid,” one Indonesian intellectual remarked when I asked his opinion about Aa Gym and *Manajemen Qolbu*. I admired the witty turn of phrase and understand when academics chuckle at the smoke and mirrors of Islamic television and the self-help slogans of Aa Gym; yet our amusement alone does nothing to explain why Indonesians are watching *tele-dai* programs, buying their books, and paying for their text messages. Dorothea Schulz, writing about the celebrity preacher Cherif Haidara of Mali, urges scholars to explore “the ways in which material objects, consumption practices, and certain forms of media engagements are constitutive of religious experience, authority, and legitimacy.”<sup>20</sup> In this essay, I consider how the preacher-disciple relationship is configured within the marketplace of Islamic modernity.

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<sup>20</sup> Dorothea Schulz, “Promises of (Im)mediate Salvation: Islam, Broadcast Media, and the Re-making of Religious Experience in Mali,” *American Ethnologist* 33,2 (2006): 210–29, quote is from p. 223. See also Greg Fealy, “Consuming Islam: Commodified Religion and Aspirational Pietism in Contemporary Indonesia,” in *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*, ed. Greg Fealy and Sally White (Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), pp. 15–39; and Gregory Starrett, “The Political Economy of Religious Commodities in Cairo,” *American Anthropologist* 97,1 (1995): 51–68.

Muslim television preachers worldwide are popular in their respective countries and occasionally across national borders (for example, Amr Khaled of Egypt broadcasts on pan-Arab television, and his books are translated into Indonesian). In contemporary Indonesia, *tele-dai* are among the most iconic figures of public piety. The word *dai* (“one who invites people to Islamic life”) has entered the everyday lexicon, due in part to the popularity of *tele-dai* contests modeled after “American Idol” and featuring popular *tele-dai* as jurors. In this sense, *tele-dai* have become a “new celebrity type” in Indonesia.<sup>21</sup>

The figure of the popular preacher in Indonesia, however, is not exactly new. Gymnastiar’s predecessors include national figures such as HAMKA (of *Tasauf Modern* fame) and Zaenuddin MZ, the “preacher of a million followers” who attained widespread popularity in the 1980s with his Sundanese humor, cassette sermons, and film and television roles, in which he figured as the moral protagonist.<sup>22</sup> The privatization and proliferation of television media in the last decade, along with the increased popularity of Islamic programming, also enabled the figure of *tele-dai* to gain social, economic, and even political traction.

These preachers, collectively, make up a cast of characters who must be considered individually, for each crafts a particular persona and targets specific markets. As one television executive explained, “Aa Gym’s specialty is ‘Heart Management’ and is popular with women, Arifin does *dzikir* [remembrance of God] recitation, and Yusuf does *sedekah* [alms-giving].” Arifin Ilham leads “*Dzikir Nasional*” recitations in Indonesia’s largest mosques (alongside politicians like Hidayat Nur Wahid), and his followers can subscribe to *Al-Qur’an Seluler* to receive inspirational text messages. Yusuf Mansur rose to fame with his autobiographical story about his struggles in jail, where he found God, repented, and developed seminars about the “Power of Giving.” Jefri al-Buchori, a.k.a. *Ustad Gaul* (hip preacher), popular among youth for his self-professed “funky” style of propagation, helped lead the “million Muslim march” in 2006 that demanded the passage of a controversial anti-pornography bill. Popular *muslimah* figures like Zaskia Mecca and Inneke Koeshrawati have branded themselves as icons of feminine piety.

In addition to considering these historical antecedents and contemporary comparisons, we should note an equally important phenomenon: how *tele-dai* promote themselves within the market niche of the burgeoning self-help industry. Through television shows, newspaper advice columns, and training seminars, *tele-dai* often cast themselves as self-help gurus to whom followers turn for counsel on personal problems; in short, they do not choose to function conventionally as orthodox preachers from whom Muslims seek rulings on Islamic law. One revealing example of this general tendency to adopt a new role was the \$250-per-person seminar, “Mars and Venus at Home and in the Workplace,” featuring Gymnastiar, American psychologist John Gray, and Indonesian get-rich-quick guru, Tung Desem Waringin. Through training seminars and televised sermons, Gymnastiar marketed himself as the embodiment of piety and prosperity, as loving husband and successful entrepreneur.

<sup>21</sup> Compare with Siegel, *A New Criminal Type*.

<sup>22</sup> C. W. Watson, “A Popular Indonesian Preacher: The Significance of Aa Gymnastiar,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 11,4 (2005): 773–92.

He transformed his life story into a brand narrative that cemented affective and economic exchange relationships with his consuming devotees. Gymnastiar promoted this narrative in the marketplace of a psycho-religious modernity.<sup>23</sup>

Those awestruck “spiritual tourists” at Daarut Tauhiid did not have a relationship with Gymnastiar; they had a relationship with the idea—the brand narrative—of Aa Gym as the perfect and financially successful husband of a happy family. When Gymnastiar took a second wife in 2006, the brand narrative collapsed, former admirers were furious, and his business empire crumbled.<sup>24</sup> As the story of the rise and fall of Aa Gym suggests, brand narratives mediate the affective and economic relationships between preacher–producers and consumer–disciples. Within the marketized preacher–disciple relationship, devotees play an important role in shaping the public meanings and economic value of religious brands. The economic viability and religious authority of *tele-dai* depend, in part, on the consumption of (or refusal to consume) these meta-narratives about popular preachers who market themselves as the embodiment of “modern” Islam. The phenomenon of *tele-dai* certainly is about the economy, but it is also about a very real, lived Islam.

*James Hoesterey*

### *Pelatih Spiritual, Spiritual Trainer*

As we sat at a roadside restaurant in Cilegon, Banten on a pitch black evening, Haidar expressed increasing frustration that, as he saw it, employees of state-owned companies lacked the motivation to work hard. He had formerly worked for a major multinational corporation in Jakarta and was now a human-resources trainer contracted by Krakatau Steel, a massive state-owned enterprise in western Java. Haidar became increasingly agitated when describing the work ethics of employees at state-owned companies. He was annoyed that he had heard employees joking that KS (the acronym for Krakatau Steel by which the company was known across Indonesia) actually stood for “*kerja santai*” or “relaxed work.” He was likewise unimpressed by the lackadaisical manner of Krakatau Steel employees arriving at work. “They show no embarrassment at showing up 10, 15, 20 minutes late! And they do it over and over! They have no shame about it!” Haidar was becoming increasingly convinced that what he saw as a set of moral failings could only be resolved by merging the principles drawn from American business management primers with Islamic history, Qur’anic injunctions, and examples from the life of the prophet Muhammad. Several months later, he became an employee of the Emotional and Spiritual Quotient (ESQ) Leadership Center, a rapidly growing company in contemporary Indonesia that has trademarked a spiritual training program that seeks to enhance both the economic productivity and religious discipline of Indonesian workers by enhancing their Islamic practice.

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<sup>23</sup> Mara Einstein, *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008); Eva Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> James Hoesterey, “Marketing Morality: The Rise, Fall, and Re-branding of Aa Gym,” in *Expressing Islam*, pp. 95–112.

Haidar was one of a number of spiritual trainers, or *pelatih spiritual*, whom the ESQ Leadership Center had hired to reproduce spiritual training on a mass scale to audiences across Indonesia and beyond. While *pelatih* originally referred to a coach, Indonesians increasingly use the word also to refer to the growing number of business consultants who serve as workplace trainers. These trainers dispense principles drawn from a variety of global sources concerning how people can become effective, productive employees of modern corporations. Spiritual trainers are significant because these figures provide a compelling example of how the nation's legacy of national development has become an existential problem. This is an existential problem inasmuch as the intensification of individual Islamic practice is seen by a new generation of young, well-educated, middle-class Indonesians as the remedy to the ills and excesses that are taken to be symptomatic of Suharto-era developmentalism.<sup>25</sup> Spiritual trainers claim that the New Order was characterized by corruption, cronyism, and patronage, traits succinctly captured in the abbreviation "KKN" (*korupsi, kolusi dan nepotisme*). They seek to change the course of Indonesian development by enhancing the Islamic ethics of middle-class Indonesians.<sup>26</sup> They see what they have termed "spiritual reform" as a remedy to a political and economic crisis that they have conceived of as a moral crisis.<sup>27</sup> The "crisis" they cite was the tumultuous period that beset the country in the period immediately following the end of the Suharto regime, characterized by a dramatically declining currency, the flight of investment capital, and a period of political instability in which five different presidents held office over a span of six years.

Haidar, the spiritual trainer with whom I became best acquainted, is in some ways unique, but in other ways broadly representative of this figure. He is unique insofar as he had spent quite a bit of time overseas. He had studied in Malaysia, but also had spent a year abroad in the United States as an exchange student during high school and had obtained a master's degree from a European university. Furthermore, prior to beginning work as a human-resources trainer, he had held a job at a prestigious multinational corporation in Jakarta. However, in other ways he is representative of the cohort hired by the ESQ Leadership Center and other programs in contemporary Indonesia that combine Islamic ethics with management knowledge.<sup>28</sup> These men were in their twenties or early thirties. They were all relatively well-educated, with undergraduate and sometimes graduate degrees. Most of them had been educated at universities that sought to merge the tradition of Islamic study with scientific disciplines considered "modern" in Indonesia. They saw enhanced Islamic practice as a means to achieve the high standards of living that they understood as characteristic of developed nations, not as something that was in opposition to the United States or the West. However, what I found most striking about these young men was that they

<sup>25</sup> Ariel Heryanto, "The 'Development' of Development," *Indonesia* 46 (October 1988): 1–24.

<sup>26</sup> For more on these programs, see Daromir Rudnykyj, "Spiritual Economies: Islam and Neoliberalism in Contemporary Indonesia," *Cultural Anthropology* 24,1 (2009): 104–41.

<sup>27</sup> Linda Connor and Adrian Vickers, "Crisis, Citizenship, and Cosmopolitanism: Living in a Local and Global Risk Society in Bali," *Indonesia* 75 (April 2003): 153–80.

<sup>28</sup> Nigel Thrift refers to business success theories, leadership coaching, and self-help principles as management knowledge. See his "The Rise of Soft Capitalism," in *An Unruly World?: Globalisation, Governance, and Geography*, ed. Andrew Herod, Gearóid Ó Tuathail, and Susan M. Roberts (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 25–71.

were completely convinced by the message of spiritual reform. That is to say, they had absolutely no doubt that Islam held the key to a better life, for themselves, other citizens, and the nation at large.<sup>29</sup> It was absolutely inconceivable to them that ESQ did not offer a remedy for Indonesia's crisis. Their confidence was revealed by their refusal to accept the possibility that the principles of ESQ were grounded in anything less than absolute scientific and religious truth.

In their complete conviction, spiritual trainers like Haidar evoke another ideal type—the pious Protestants that Max Weber identified as the progenitors of what he called “the spirit of capitalism.”<sup>30</sup> Weber persuasively demonstrated that the only way that Calvinists could live with the doctrine of predestination was by convincing themselves of their salvation in spite of the overwhelmingly unlikely odds that any specific individual would, in fact, be admitted to the kingdom of heaven. Self-confidence came to occupy a central place in the pantheon of values that constitutes contemporary capitalism. Thus, Weber provided an insight that has perhaps gone under-recognized in the century of polemics that his work has incited: that faith lies at the core of capitalism as a way of life. And we continue to be told that the resolution to any crisis of confidence is complete faith, in the market, in freedom, and in the invisible hand. Thus, spiritual trainers in Indonesia make visible the centrality of faith in holding together the global economic and political orders in which they and others are enmeshed.

*Daromir Rudnyckyj*

### **ODHA (*Orang Dengan HIV/AIDS*), Person With HIV/AIDS**

The Pathway Foundation is an NGO involved in HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. It is located in Makassar, the capital of South Sulawesi province; with about one and a quarter million inhabitants, Makassar is the sixth-largest city in Indonesia. I have a long history with the Pathway Foundation; its *gay* founders named it in July 1993 while meeting in the room I was renting at the time. The Pathway Foundation has since become a respected NGO, with *gay* men, *warias* (male transvestites), and *lesbi* women as staff and clients, while it serves also “normal” society, providing support for people living with AIDS, the Indonesian acronym for which is ODHA.

On March 25, 2007, I was visiting Rizal with Ayu, a *waria* staff member of the Pathway Foundation known as a talented advocate. Like many ODHA who had been injecting drug users,<sup>31</sup> Rizal also had hepatitis C and tuberculosis. When we had visited Rizal a month before, he was already thin and frequently nauseous from his illnesses,

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<sup>29</sup> The confidence exhibited by the figure of the spiritual trainer resembles that displayed by another figure of Indonesian modernity: the engineer. However, whereas the engineers described by Joshua Barker view technology as capable of resolving differences across a fractured archipelago, spiritual trainers perceive the amalgamation of Islamic ethics and popular business practices as the remedy to the economic and political crises understood to afflict the nation. See Joshua Barker, “Engineers and Political Dreams: Indonesia in the Satellite Age,” *Current Anthropology* 46,5 (2005): 703–27.

<sup>30</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

<sup>31</sup> “Injecting Drug User,” or “IDU,” is by now a common term in HIV/AIDS discourse and in much of Indonesian public culture as well. Heroin is the most common drug so injected in Indonesia.

despite taking anti-tuberculosis and HIV antiretroviral drugs. Rizal's mother had called Ayu the day before in tears: Rizal had stopped eating, but resisted going to the hospital and had weakly slapped his mother in anger at the suggestion.

When Ayu and I arrived, Rizal's mother led us to the room where he lay on a small bed. He was having difficulty breathing; his eyes, yellow from hepatitis, were fixed on the ceiling. Ayu asked Rizal why he did not want to go to the hospital, and he said it would make things hard for his mother. Ayu replied, "Staying in this bedroom, not eating, is also making things hard on her. If you regain your strength, that's what will make your mother happy." Rizal's bone-thin chest started to jerk in and out; tears fell from his yellowed eyes. Ayu asked, "If Tom and I come with you to the hospital, will you go?" Rizal agreed. We told Rizal's mother, and she started making preparations. She brought rice with broth, and Rizal ate some of it with his pills, but after a minute vomited it all back up. It was hard to watch someone so thin vomiting away precious nutrition and medication.

Eventually Rizal's insides calmed down; his mother got him dressed, and we eased him into a taxi. Thirty minutes later we were at the only hospital in Makassar with an AIDS ward. Ayu's talents were evident as she chatted up the staff: a check-in procedure that often took three hours was over in fifteen minutes. Rizal was now on a gurney, not yet in the AIDS ward but waiting in the main hall, where gurneys were lined up as far as you could see, filled with patients suffering from many diseases, none knowing Rizal had AIDS. And there was Rizal with an IV feeding nutrition into his body, even as his eyes still searched the ceiling, as if seeking a higher truth.

In discussing Rizal, I have chosen a story of the ODHA as someone who is not a heroic figure of *gay/waria/lesbi* resistance advocating reform of the nation's healthcare system, but someone who is sick and dependent on others, and whose frustrations are shaped by dynamics of disclosure. As elsewhere in the world, for most Indonesians HIV/AIDS is not the ticket to stable employment in a health advocacy organization, but a cataclysm of illness and ostracism. The ODHA is a symptomatic figure of Indonesian modernity, "symptomatic" in senses that emically deconstruct frontiers of the metaphorical and literal. "ODHA" stands for *Orang Dengan HIV/AIDS*, "Person With HIV/AIDS," and the first Indonesian to identify openly as such was Suzanna Murni, who in 1995 learned she was infected and worked to support other ODHAs before dying in 2002.

Many persons with HIV/AIDS in Indonesia cannot gain access to testing or treatment, and they die without a definitive diagnosis. But now that antiretroviral drugs are more affordable and accessible, some ODHAs can live nearly asymptomatic lives. Most keep silent: a few disclose their condition to select family and friends, and fewer still live openly as ODHA, working to dispel myths about HIV/AIDS. The "ODHA" is emerging as a category of Indonesian personhood, but one invisible to much of Indonesian society. The invisibility of most ODHAs means that they are an absent presence, a situation that recalls how unseen persons and "shapeless organizations" have long been considered threats to the nation. Anthropologists such as Leslie Butt and Karen Kroeger have observed a tight association in Indonesian public discourse between HIV/AIDS and conspiracy, which is a kind of illicit

recognition of those afflicted.<sup>32</sup> James Siegel has noted how the modernist history by which such recognition became “centered in the Indonesian nation” is “indissociable from the history of ‘communication.’”<sup>33</sup> As a “communicable” disease that does not leave an immediate mark on the bearer and is primarily transmitted through stigmatized practices of sex and drug use—themselves seen to be symptomatic of modernity—HIV/AIDS now informs these dynamics of recognition, misrecognition, and non-recognition. HIV/AIDS remains an “absent presence” for most Indonesians, but this does not mean it has no social impact. By attending both to representations of “the ODHA” and the life experiences of actual ODHAs, we can learn how conceptions of disease and selfhood shape dynamics of belonging in the archipelago.

Just fifteen days before my meeting with Rizal, I spent a day at the Pathway Foundation with Susanti, a *waria* staff member known as a talented educator. Only other staff knew that Susanti was also an ODHA. On this day, a group of *gay* men and *warias* was meeting with Susanti and me to learn about HIV/AIDS. But they had, of course, been “learning” all their lives, so it was not a complete surprise when one young *waria* said, “Well if I found out I was an ODHA, I’d drink poison.” There was nervous laughter from the group; Susanti, in the midst of the laughter, just sat quietly, with a smile somewhere between unease and fear. Then she said, “There could be an ODHA right here with us: how would they feel?” Virtualizing her feeling self into the room, Susanti named the ODHA as a space of potential empathy and recognition. She and Rizal represent differing modalities of the ODHA as absent presence, but their linked struggles compel us toward a politics of inclusion. Since the late 1990s, HIV/AIDS activist discourse has drawn from the vision that called for “access to treatment” a parallel vision concerned with “access to prevention.” Given the experiences of ODHAs like Susanti and Rizal, it appears that we may be now seeing the emergence of a debate regarding “access to hope” that seeks to foster national belonging built upon commitments to compassion, recognition, and health.

Tom Boellstorff

### *Aktivis, Activist*

An activist and a self-styled “communist,” Iwan was the brunt of many a joke. Officially, he belonged to the FPPI (Front Perjuangan Pemuda Indonesia, Indonesian Youth Struggle Front), a collection of earnest young men and a few women in their late teens to early thirties, many whom had migrated to the capital city of Jakarta from the provinces. The founding members of the youth organization had attended university in the central Javanese city of Yogyakarta, and several of them hailed from *pesantren*, Islamic boarding schools. Their religious background did not prepare me for the constant stream of their jokes. No subject was deemed taboo. The FPPI defied expectations in yet other ways. Despite their religious education, FPPI activists were secular, populist, and left-leaning, and their conversation reflected this mix. They were

<sup>32</sup> Leslie Butt, “‘Lipstick Girls’ and ‘Fallen Women’: AIDS and Conspiratorial Thinking in Papua, Indonesia,” *Cultural Anthropology* 20,3 (2005): 412–42; and Karen Kroeger, “AIDS Rumors, Imaginary Enemies, and the Body Politic in Indonesia” *American Ethnologist* 30,2 (2003): 243–57.

<sup>33</sup> Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*, p. 7.

as likely to discuss liberal Islamic scholars and religious leaders such as Abdurrahman Wahid, a former president of Indonesia, as they were to talk about the leaders of political parties and Che Guevara. The FPPI was known for leaving a particular graffiti symbol—the encircled initial “R”—everywhere in the wake of their demonstrations; ® stood for *Rakyat*, the people. Like many other activist groups in Jakarta embedded within the complex networks of NGOs, international funding agencies, and generational links among university alumni, the FPPI had, at its core, activists who had been politicized in student movement actions in the late 1990s. When we assembled in the living room of their rented secretariat quarters, the senior members would begin to tell stories of the glory days of 1998, when they had succeeded in toppling the dictator Suharto.

When Iwan arrived, the tone of these gatherings would abruptly change. Iwan’s personality provided rich fodder for satire. In Iwan, the tropes that were thought to separate activists from the rest of conventional, mainstream society—youthful idealism, concern for the people, and a utilitarian Marxism—were indeed present, but faulty. Iwan was a Jakarta-chapter member who had grown up in the city and prided himself on his original Betawi roots. While the other FPPI members looked stylish with their long hair and tight t-shirts, there was something awkward and sweet about Iwan. With his longish, limp hair and tucked-in shirts, Iwan was hopelessly out of fashion. He lived in a self-cultivated atmosphere of being under constant surveillance. But his bubble was often punctured with a swift jab by his comrades’ jokes. One example: as proof of his political radicalism, Iwan kept offering me secret manifestos and transcripts of the most recent (and illegal) Indonesian Communist Party (PKI, Partai Komunis Indonesia) gathering. The PKI had recently held a congress in an outer island, he said. He claimed to have ties to this shadowy group, a nascent force that would soon make a triumphant return to Indonesian politics. Proud of his secret, Iwan offered it to me, foreign researcher-at-large. Hearing this offer, his comrade Savic mocked him and laughingly shrieked, “*Alaaaaah!* I’ve had that document for years! Someone gave me a photocopy.” The secret document was never produced, but the mere claim that it had already been copied and disseminated to other activists diminished Iwan’s gesture, along with his pretensions to involvement in underground politics and unique access to valuable documentary evidence. In his dismissal, Savic meant to say Iwan was just an ordinary activist. What could he show me, apart from what I had already learned in my dutiful research of the 1998 Student Movement?

Amongst senior activists like Savic, there was a strong sense of “Before 1998” and “After 1998,” a distinction that determined what could be openly said by activists about their past practices. Even though Indonesian society still responded with deep paranoia toward communism and its symbols, the renewed interest in the history of the Indonesian Communist Party on the part of leftist activist and civil-society groups provided a small measure of rehabilitation for leftist terminology and populist ideas. In the era of openness and transparency after 1998, Iwan’s utterance of the magically subversive word “communism” was no longer the act of defiance that it would have been in the thickly anticommunist time before 1998. Instead, it had become a pretension of Iwan’s that could easily be dismissed by his peers. During my fieldwork in 2003–05, activists remained committed to the form of politics they excelled at; they continued to demonstrate on the street and professed their ambition to foster alternatives to existing political and economic systems. They tended to talk less about

the romantic and dangerous activist realm where resistance politics were being organized in secret and more about their past contributions to radical history.

The place of the *aktivis* in history seems secure, but why should this be so? As a former political media celebrity, the *aktivis* is strangely prominent (as a feature of the Indonesian media's coverage of "new generations" of politicians, and in the continued coverage of street demonstrations, as well), but their changing demands and social origins remain under-theorized by scholars and journalists alike. National and international media attention has positioned the figure of the activist as a culturally significant, yet socially marginal, segment of Indonesian political society, a broker of democracy whose experience of state violence legitimizes his or her political identity. Popular notions about *aktivis* suggest that activists enable transformations. In the wake of their efforts, conditions are politicized, and politics are righted. Set against the political structures of Suharto's authoritarian New Order, activism in the late 1990s seemed new, a phenomenon that reflected the spread of global capital and resistance to associated forms of exploitation, as Indonesian activists took up the language of workers' rights, human rights, and democracy. But contemporary Indonesian activism is less startling if one considers it as the revival of a historical type and sees the *aktivis* as a descendant of the *pemuda*, the revolutionary male youth who populate nationalist historiography as the agents of change.<sup>34</sup> The revolutionary, then, becomes the prototype of future activists to come, ensuring an unbroken chain of political youth in Indonesian history. Activist youth, primarily university students involved in leftist and populist movements, represented and channeled the politics of the masses as the New Order collapsed to give meaning to a liminal stage in their own lives. As educated but unemployed, socially mobile but cash-poor, urban and itinerant individuals with few socioeconomic responsibilities toward home or family, activist youth had greater physical mobility, imagination, and access to technologies of information than did other groups in society. The nationalist language used by post-Suharto activists to represent their relationship to oppressed workers, farmers, and urban poor, and their signature style of dress, worked as powerful references to the iconic *pemuda*, creating a circuit of referentiality where History animated the present.

At present, the space for activism is expanding for other social and political movements in Indonesia, as some of the other writers in this essay suggest. Yet activism remains most deeply associated with urban male youth, like Iwan, whose defining characteristic is his proximity to the politics of 1998 and the politics of the people. One is dependent on the other.

Doreen Lee

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<sup>34</sup> See Benedict Anderson's important thesis on the origins and role of *pemuda* in the Indonesian Revolution, *Java in a Time of Revolution: Occupation and Resistance, 1944–1946* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972). For more recent work on the reemergence of youth in conceptions of Indonesian historiography, see Karen Strassler, "Photographs and the Making of Reformasi Memory," in *Beginning to Remember*, ed. Mary S. Zurbuchen (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2005), pp. 278–311; and Keith Foulcher, "Sumpah Pemuda: The Making and Meaning of a Symbol of Indonesian Nationhood," *Asian Studies Review* 24,3 (2000): 377–410.

***Mantan Kombatant GAM, The Ex-GAM Combatant***

In post-tsunami and post-conflict Aceh, the competition over reconstruction contract work plays out on an uneven playing field. Over the past three years, Alfi, my twenty-four-year-old part-time research assistant in Banda Aceh, has become increasingly preoccupied with taking over the family business from his father. He runs a well-known print shop in the old market area right behind the city's iconic Baiturrahman Mosque. Dozens of NGOs, government agencies, and, especially, the Aceh-Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency routinely farm out their print jobs for books, banners, and pamphlets in a theoretically transparent tendering process to Alfi's shop and the shops of his competitors, but Alfi has struck upon a formula for winning tenders more often than anyone else in his line of work. Alfi is not just young, he is also short and thin and could pass for a high-school student. It would be hard to take him seriously during the backroom negotiations among the *bapak* power brokers who award the contracts. So Alfi shows up at meetings like these with two men more formidable and much larger than he is, one at each side. They are ex-combatants from GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, the Free Aceh Movement), the guerrilla organization that fought for Aceh's independence from Indonesia for thirty years before finally signing a peace agreement with the Indonesian government in August 2005. Alfi typically does not need to introduce his business associates as ex-GAM because most people in Aceh recognize the skittish eyes and menacing expression of an ex-combatant. Furthermore, ex-GAM combatants have become the expected and winning participants of most contract-bidding processes in Aceh today. Alfi and his family have no formal connections to GAM, but Alfi wins a contract when his tender is packaged with the borrowed prestige and power that GAM offers to his business ... for a fee, of course.

The military and police forces sent by Jakarta to occupy Aceh during the conflict departed from the region in 2005, and the local security forces now stay largely in their barracks. GAM, whose very existence as a resistance movement was denied by the Indonesian government during the conflict years, lest it gain legitimacy, emerged as a legal signatory party of the peace agreement with equal status to the Indonesian government. After demobilization, GAM's command structure first transformed itself into a civilian organization at the beginning of 2006 (Komite Peralihan Aceh, or KPA, the Aceh Transition Committee) and more recently into a local political party (Partai Aceh) that will contest the provincial and district-level legislative elections in 2009. Once confined to a black-market economy to support itself while TNI (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, the Indonesian armed forces) and POLRI (Polisi Republik Indonesia, Police of the Indonesian Republic) dominated both the illegal and legal market economies during the conflict, GAM leaders now hold public office (including the governorship and many district headships) and have the opportunity to award lucrative government contracts to their former comrades in the struggle. Other non-GAM leaders and business owners are pressured under implicit threats of violence to do the same, in a cycle of exchange not unlike the patterns of corruption and nepotism that were developed and perfected during the New Order era.

Former GAM members thus now openly claim and enjoy a disproportionate amount of the sudden largesse from Aceh's legal economy. In this context, I like Alfi's story and consider it significant for two reasons. First, Alfi's associates are low-ranking

ex-combatants who furnish him with the credentials he needs to win relatively small contracts; they come from a village where Alfi has extended family, and he is doing them a favor almost equal to the benefits they are offering him. This example contrasts with the prevailing public face of post-conflict reintegration in Aceh, which largely features the high-ranking GAM commanders entering local politics and big business, leaving a lot of their rank-and-file cohorts behind feeling increasingly disgruntled and disillusioned.<sup>35</sup> The alternative typically chosen by ex-combatants feeling left out is to pursue petty *preman*-ism (thugism or gangsterism), and Alfi's story provides an example of this fairly innocuous new role for the ex-combatant.

The second reason I value Alfi's example is the playful and gutsy bluff that he deploys to beat his competitors. What matters is not specifically who Alfi's business associates from GAM are, nor whether Alfi himself has formal ties to the organization, but simply the projection of the image of GAM as a team of strongmen backing Alfi's business proposal. Alfi is perhaps one of the first businessmen in Aceh's small printing industry not only to recognize the reconfiguration of "big men" since the peace treaty, but also to maneuver tactically within the new parameters they have set. As Alfi navigated this flipped political economy, he introduced the strategy of including low-ranking ex-combatants in his proposal, to his own benefit and theirs. He found GAM before GAM's increasingly wide-reaching predatory practices on small businesses found him.

Another young man did not navigate this new terrain as well. Down the southwest coast of Aceh in his hometown of Blang Pidie, Afrizal tried to get in on a housing construction boom that was about to start up following receipt of a new tranche of government funding from Jakarta. His friends at the government office disbursing contracts encouraged Afrizal to submit a proposal, for which he had to include several million rupiah in administration and application "fees." Alas, the construction project was given to the contractor with GAM connections, and Afrizal lost his hefty investment. Since then, he has tried in vain to make the right connections within GAM networks, hoping to participate in their activities, but he is also repelled by their crass corruption, in this case on a scale much more consequential than any of Alfi's business adventures. Afrizal's voice joins a steadily growing chorus of criticism that combines frustration, jealousy, resignation, and even some admiration, directed at this emergent ex-combatant class that has come to dominate Aceh's new economic and political landscape. For the moment, GAM's open participation and assimilation into established patterns of political and criminal organization common throughout the archipelago is an ironic, and some say even durable, measure of their veterans' increasingly successful reintegration into Indonesian society.

*Jesse Grayman*

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<sup>35</sup> New research on the business dealings of ex-GAM members, particularly among the leadership and commanders, can be found in Edward Aspinall, "Combatants to Contractors: The Political Economy of Peace in Aceh," published in this issue.

### *Orang LSM, NGO Worker*

The atmosphere in Geunting Timur, located in the regency of Pidie in Aceh, was tense that morning. The village was one of the project sites of HAGENT (not the real name), an international nongovernmental organization involved in a reconstruction project initiated following the massive tsunami that struck the Acehese coast in December 2004. Together with the *Geuchik*, the village chief, HAGENT's team of Indonesian facilitators, Syamsul, Ridha, and Boni, was waiting for a group of supervisors from the main office in Banda Aceh, who were coming to assess the progress of the housing construction. The facilitators were anxious: on their previous visit, *orang Banda* (an indexical term for the expatriate and Indonesian high-level staff from the main office) found numerous constructions that were not "earthquake resistant"—the minimum safety standard determined by multinational donors and humanitarian communities for all post-tsunami building projects in Aceh.

The team of supervisors, consisting of two young British civil engineers and an Indian supervisor from the Pidie office, arrived in two imported SUVs. That morning, the facilitators had intended to keep the supervisors from revisiting an area with low-quality construction, but one of the supervising engineers quickly moved towards one of the housing projects located on the village's main street and proceeded to inspect the columns. He immediately started to complain about the inadequate size and quality of their construction. Syamsul tried to explain the situation: "We have instructed the workers, but they didn't listen because their payment didn't cover the costs ..." Before he could finish, one of the supervisors replied, "I am afraid it's going to have to be a carrot and stick approach. You're going to provide encouragement, support, advice, and training, but you can't approve something like this. Once you start rejecting this kind of work, believe me, they will listen." The facilitators' faces were lined with anxiety as they followed the supervisors, who moved on to inspect other houses. Months of hard work would have to be destroyed, and they could not imagine the effort it would take to rebuild the houses.

During the New Order, one of the most salient articulations of the NGO worker, the *orang LSM* (Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat<sup>36</sup>), was that of an activist who struggled for democracy and human rights in opposition to the Suharto regime. Despite the fact that many NGOs collaborated intimately with the government, the image of the NGO worker as radical was ubiquitous throughout Indonesia. Even today, a decade after the fall of the New Order, these particular moral connotations often overshadow the dramatic expansion and diversification of NGOs that have accompanied the relaxation of funding controls under the current regime. On a national scale, however, corruption cases involving well-known NGO figures have increasingly challenged these positive images. Furthermore, many local communities' decentralization policies have made *orang LSM* an increasingly important mediator for development projects funded by foreign donors, a situation that, in turn, has created employment opportunities for many young urban Indonesians with university degrees. In Aceh, where foreign aid

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<sup>36</sup> In English, "Self-Reliant Community Institution."

has reached unprecedented levels,<sup>37</sup> this process is especially pronounced, and Syamsul, Ridha, and Boni are just three examples of a professional class of *orang LSM*.

These men responded in different ways to the incident described above. Syamsul, the community facilitator, pointed his finger at the *Geuchik* and the laborers from the village, since they had not followed instructions. Boni, the architect, claimed that the “Earthquake Resistant House” was a standard that is impossible to implement on the site because the design is too sophisticated for the laborers. Ridha, another community facilitator, defended the village’s attempts to save money by hiring poorly trained local laborers and using inexpensive but adequate materials. He concluded rhetorically: “If we cannot serve the community’s needs and demands, what does ‘community-driven approach’ actually mean?”

When the men decided to join HAGENT, they had not expected that working with local communities would be so complex. For instance, Boni, from West Sumatra, who had made prototype housing projects the subject of his undergraduate thesis, joined HAGENT hoping to conduct “a real project” and design “a small beautiful house” for Achenese villagers. Yet unexpected difficulties emerged from the discrepancy between the community’s preferences for simple houses and NGO standards. Syamsul, an Acehnese, who graduated from the Islamic State University in Banda Aceh with a major in education, found out the hard way that “facilitating” was more complex than teaching students in class. Ridha had been a student activist in Banda Aceh and joined HAGENT with big dreams about working as a grassroots organizer, building democracy from the ground up. But he quickly discovered that his role was not explicitly political, but required him, rather, to ensure that the NGO’s agenda would match the preferences of the community. These new NGO workers thus became brokers or middlemen in the spaces of “friction” between the politics of foreign aid and the demands of local communities.<sup>38</sup> These figures thus remind us that Indonesian modernity depends on the capability of its members to transform the intersections of global and local realms in productive ways.

*Aryo Danusiri*

### **TKW (*Tenaga Kerja Wanita*), the Overseas Female Labor Migrant**

Immigration officials and airport police have a game they like to play in the airport’s arrival terminal that is reserved for processing the overseas labor migrants returning to Jakarta. As they watch the TKW walk into the terminal, they take great pleasure in guessing the country in which each migrant worker was most recently employed. One day, a terminal guard listed the clues he used to make his guesses. He

<sup>37</sup> The World Bank reported that 83 percent of the \$7.8 billion of funds committed to Aceh for tsunami-related reconstruction had been distributed to aid projects. This makes Aceh one of the largest reconstruction endeavors in the developing world. See “Aceh Tsunami Reconstruction Expenditure Tracking Update,” April 2008, at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTINDONESIA/Resources/226271-1176706430507/3681211-1194602678235/Aceh.Reconstruction.Finance.Update.Dec2007.pdf>, last accessed March 9, 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Anna Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connections* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

laughed as he pointed his chin in the direction of particular women: “If her cellphone is very fancy [*canggih*], and she walks with a swing in her hips [*berjalan goyang-goyang*], you know for sure she is back from Hong Kong. Usually the ones coming back from Saudi are covered in black and wear sunglasses, and the ones who have been in the UAE wear colorful headscarves with matching handbags. Those ones coming now with their hair dyed orange, you know they have been working in Taiwan. You can always tell from their style [*gaya*].” Then, much more seriously, he added, “It’s all very dangerous and chaotic. There are so many problems for these women. We can’t control it. Yeah, ... this is what Indonesia is like [*Indonesia beginilah*].”

Indonesian women’s overseas labor migration began on a large scale when the government started promoting such migration as a development strategy in the early 1980s. Since then, “labor export” has grown into a major source of income throughout the country; migrant recruitment has taken on industrial proportions in rural areas; and it seems that, now, every family in Java and in many other areas across the country knows at least one TKW or former TKW. Internationally, Indonesia is now second only to the Philippines in the numbers of women it sends abroad as caregivers and domestic workers. More than two-thirds of the registered migrants are women, and more than 80 percent of the women work as domestic servants.<sup>39</sup> Most TKW come from rural areas and have only elementary-school educations. While abroad, TKW can earn between five and fifteen times the wage levels that would be available to them as domestic workers or factory workers within Indonesia. Their remittances have become a vital source of income for Indonesia; the total of their earnings nationally was predicted by journalists to reach 40 trillion rupiah in 2008, while activists estimate an even higher sum—60 trillion. Given either of these estimates, the revenues from this “industry” would be second only to gas and oil as an overall income generator for the nation.<sup>40</sup> Yet in order to earn money to send home, TKW are required to leave their families behind for two to three years at a stretch, and, while abroad, they risk extreme overwork, non-payment of wages, harassment, and rape. They have become iconic subjects of the feminization of global migration,<sup>41</sup> as well as key figures in public debates about national identity, cultural propriety, and the future of economic development in Indonesia.

The debates surrounding the TKW reflect the gendered tensions of modernity. The TKW is a “woman out of place,” a figure whose transnational mobility, and associated *gaya*, both threatens the national order and promises a way forward. Popular representations of the TKW as WTS (*wanita tuna susila*, women without morals, prostitutes) cast them as dangerous and shameful women who have forsaken their

<sup>39</sup> BNP2TKI (Badan Nasional Penempatan dan Perlindungan Tenaga Kerja Indonesia, The National Placement and Protection Body for the Indonesian Labor Force), “Penempatan TKI Menurut Negara Tujuan dan tempat Bekerja, Tahun 1994–2006 (TKI Placement According to Country of Destination and Place of Work, 1994–2006), 2009, at <http://www.bnptki.go.id/content/view/90/87/>, last accessed February 1, 2009.

<sup>40</sup> “Uang Kiriman TKI Mencapai Rp40 Triliun” (Remittances of Indonesian [Overseas] Workers Reach 40 Trillion Rupiah), *Antara News*, at <http://www.antara.co.id/arc/2008/9/23/uang-kiriman-tki-mencapai-rp40-triliun>, last accessed February 1, 2009.

<sup>41</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Hochschild, *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2003).

families and their nation in order to satisfy their own selfish, consumeristic desires.<sup>42</sup> Alternatively, the state portrays the TKW as *pahlawan devisa* (heroes of foreign exchange), respectable workers whose income is necessary for the national economy, and who provide valuable, self-sacrificing service to their communities and families through the remittances they send home. NGOs focused on migrants' rights emphasize the personal stories from the TKW that portray them as victims of exploitation, abuse, violence, and neglect, problems that activists attribute to greedy middlemen, inhumane employers, and state actors who cannot be bothered (*tidak mau ambil pusing*) to provide protection or support for the women. In contrast, a forthcoming popular film, titled "Hong Kong Rhapsody," celebrates the "success stories" of the TKW in Hong Kong, women who, like "global Cinderellas," earn small fortunes and enjoy almost middle-class lifestyles.<sup>43</sup> The desires and fears that circulate around the subject of the TKW—regarding her consumption patterns, styles of dress, sexuality, obligations, and rights—reflect more general Indonesian hopes and anxieties about how globalization may be tied to transformations in the gendered social order.

One day, a village leader took me and a migrant-rights advocate on a walk around his community in Sukabumi, West Java. He pointed to the houses with shiny new tiled porches and satellite dishes: "That's the Hong Kong style of renovation. That one over there, that's the Korean style. This one here doesn't have a TKW overseas yet, so it hasn't been renovated yet," and he pointed to a bamboo structure with a dirt floor. "Our development depends on the incomes of the TKW. Without them, we have nothing," said the village leader. "But," countered the rights advocate, citing a story of a woman who had been tortured by her former overseas employer, "this kind of development all comes at such a cost. The injuries to the TKW are the injuries to our nation." The TKW is caught somewhere between grinding poverty and potential cashflow, the allure of new styles of consumption and the threat of abuse, rural unemployment and international mobility, and gossip about good mothers and rich whores. She lives in the thick of these extreme possibilities that revolve around her while she stands as a gendered symbol of the nation's place in the transnational sphere.

Rachel Silvey

### ***Petugas Lapangan, Field Agent***

It is almost *maghrib*, the time for the Muslim evening prayer, as we make our way along the one-lane highway that connects eastern and western Lombok, an island of 3.5 million inhabitants just east of Bali. Ibrahim, the manager of Nusa, a labor recruitment agency that sends migrants to Malaysian palm oil plantations, and Adi, his assistant, are in the front of the SUV smoking clove cigarettes and listening to Jakarta pop music,

<sup>42</sup> Katharine Gibson, Lisa Law, and Deirdre McKay, "Beyond Heroes and Victims: Filipina Contract Migrants, Economic Activism, and Class Transformations," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 3,3 (2001): 365–86; and Michele Ford, "Beyond the Femina Fantasy: The Working-Class Woman in Indonesian Discourses of Women's Work," *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 37,2 (2003): 83–113.

<sup>43</sup> Pei-Chia Lan, *Global Cinderellas: Migrant Domesticity and Newly Rich Employers in Taiwan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

which expresses their unspoken lament. Both have been sent from the main office in the capital, and neither speaks the local Sasak language. I am in the back seat with Pak Haji Ismael, a local elementary school teacher in religion who moonlights as a *petugas lapangan*, or “field agent,”<sup>44</sup> and handles the actual recruitment of migrants for Nusa and other agencies. We are returning from a meeting held at the house of Pak Haji’s son-in-law, a police officer in East Lombok who used his local connections to organize a meeting for twenty potential migrants. At the event, Pak Haji acted as the host and led the opening prayer before introducing the guests from Nusa, who handed out brochures and talked about the company and the various job contracts that they were currently offering in Malaysia. Back in the car, Pak Haji is satisfied—I can tell from the way he strokes his string of beads—and he tells us he plans to visit each of the local men the following week. As we move along slowly behind a line of cattle trucks, he suddenly tells Adi to pull over. It is time to pray. We stop at the side of road, and the three men get out of the car, leaving me behind to contemplate the day’s events.

The *petugas lapangan*, or PL for short, has become a critical figure in Indonesian transnational labor recruitment in recent years and should most broadly be considered in relation to the historical prevalence of various forms of brokers (*calo*) in Indonesia since the colonial era. As documented labor recruitment has become increasingly decentralized during the last decade as the Suharto-era monopolies have collapsed, PL like Pak Haji Ismael have become key interstitial brokers in historically specific environments at the boundaries between formal recruitment agencies like Nusa, state bureaucracies, and the villages, where relations of trust, power, and debt that organize village life throughout Indonesia are in play and must be taken into account.<sup>45</sup>

Since the end of the New Order, there has been an increasing formalization of labor migration from Indonesia to Saudi Arabia and Malaysia, in particular, where over a million Indonesians work on palm-oil plantations, construction sites, and as domestic servants. The era of undocumented migration has rapidly been replaced by one in which passports and visas are the norm. A number of political and economic factors have impelled the labor-export trade to become more formal and well-documented; these factors include an intensifying revolving-door regime of migrant importation and deportation from Malaysia, the Asian economic crisis of 1997 and the ensuing collapse of the Indonesian rupiah, and the deregulation of the Indonesian labor recruitment industry. The shift to a documented labor-recruitment industry is particularly obvious on Lombok, which during the 1980s and 1990s was infamous as a source of undocumented male migration to Malaysia. This was the era of the *taikong* (sometimes spelled *tekong*), the smuggler, who beginning in the 1970s transported migrants by boat directly to Malaysia and, in later years, overland through a network of middlemen via the multiple harbors and beaches along the East Sumatran coast and the Riau

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<sup>44</sup> *Petugas* literally means “a subordinate who is given an order or task,” while *lapangan* means “field.” Although “field agent” is not an ideal translation, arguably it is preferable to “field operative” or “field worker,” since the word “agent” highlights to a greater degree the form of brokering that the *petugas lapangan* engages in.

<sup>45</sup> Wolf’s classic article on the shifting position of brokers in colonial and postcolonial Mexico offers an important comparative starting point. See Eric Wolf, “Aspects of Group Relations in a Complex Society: Mexico,” *American Anthropologist* 58,6 (1956): 1065–78.

Archipelago before crossing the Straits of Malacca to Singapore or Peninsular Malaysia.

In the last decade, however, the *petugas lapangan* has come to replace the *taikong* as the figure that mediates processes of migration. The PL provides workers not to other informal brokers or directly to the employer abroad, but rather to local recruitment companies—most with main offices in Jakarta and other major cities—that on Lombok alone have come to number more than 150. These PJTKI (Perusahaan Jasa Tenaga Kerja Indonesia, Indonesian Labor Provider Company) have exploded in number as labor export has become a major and diverse legal industry. PJTKI vary broadly in terms of professionalism, size, and sustainability, but all are dependant on large numbers of PL in the actual recruitment process. PLs have no written contracts and are paid according to each migrant they deliver or according to how much they can extract from each recruit. For a female domestic worker, the going rate is approximately one million rupiah, or about US\$100, while for a male plantation or construction worker it is approximately Rp.300.000, or about US\$30 dollars—comparable to the monthly salary for a day laborer or even an office worker on Lombok. These high fees and the dramatic increase in PJTKI and transnational migrants—currently over 50,000 per year from Lombok alone—have led growing numbers of people to become PL. Reminiscent of the bazaar economy Clifford Geertz described more than forty years ago, the migrant labor economy is characterized by *ad hoc* transactions and a rhizomatic quality, as men in many shapes and sizes roam the island on motorcycles in search of potential migrants.<sup>46</sup>

But while the *taikong* has generally been perceived as a thuggish figure, a kind of *preman*, the PL suggests one who is associated with a *kantor*, an office, and follows procedures. Indeed, this is precisely what people like Pak Haji Ismael spend much of their time doing. He wears button-down shirts and handles all the paperwork that is demanded in the manufacture of legality—including a birth certificate, an identity card, a medical certificate, various government letters, and, finally, a passport for the recruit. He understands how much money must be handed out along the way and deals with the process that the migrant cannot navigate on his or her own. But he also knows how to speak to migrants in their language and engage them in an economy of trust. Although there are certainly *taikong* who have become PL, elementary-school teachers and other low-level bureaucrats such as Pak Haji Ismael are the rule, not the exception, in the contemporary regime of transnational migration. They are poorly paid, well-educated workers who work short hours, are well-known to be reliable, and are used to speaking in public and approaching officials. In the current moment, the PL embodies qualities and a character that convince villagers to become migrants. He is, strictly speaking, the right person in the right place at the right time.

Johan Lindquist

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<sup>46</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Peddlers and Princes: Social Development and Economic Change in Two Indonesian Towns* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

### *Pedagang Kaki Lima, Street Vendor*

The Indonesian variant of the street vendor is the *Pedagang Kaki Lima* or PKL: the five-legged seller. The phrase “five legs” refers to a three-wheeled cart in combination with the seller’s two legs. In 2007, during my fieldwork in Yogyakarta, Central Java, I observed a period of escalated tensions among PKL. Vendors were forced to take a side either for or against a government plan to relocate them to a newly renovated marketplace. From the “against” side, flyers were circulated in an attempt to convince vendors that the government’s plan was unclear and lacked transparency, and that their livelihoods would be destroyed, as they had been in so many other failed relocation projects. Those opposed to the plan held demonstrations and received frequent news coverage. Organizers of the “for” side were more subtle in their campaign. They met with street vendors individually, and often secretly, to convince them of the benefits of relocating.

The “for” and “against” sides were composed of different kinds of PKL. Those opposed to the relocation plan earned, on average, ten to fifteen times more than those who were in favor of it. While the former were characterized as rich and greedy non-Javanese outsiders who sold new and expensive products, and should be grateful that the government was providing them with an alternative location, the latter were characterized as poor Javanese who were struggling to survive while selling mostly second-hand goods.

The differences between the two groups map onto two already existing images of PKL, one old and the other relatively new. What caught the imagination of the public was the new type, the capital-owning PKL masquerading as the *rakyat kecil*, or little people. In the older view, PKL are seen as poor, usually from Java, uneducated, simply dressed, humble, and overly respectful to shop owners and government officials. But starting in the 1980s, the category of PKL moved from being relatively undifferentiated to being more diverse and socio-economically stratified. It was in this context that the new figure of a capital-owning impostor, who merely masquerades as a PKL of the poor and humble type, became possible. While the differentiating of PKL into these two types is still not widely recognized, discourses circulating about PKL among the public, the government, and the street vendors themselves can be understood more clearly if one is aware of these distinctions. In certain moments, such as during the relocation of street vendors, the difference between the two images becomes quite pronounced. During the relocation I observed, some new capital-owning PKL tried to hide behind the representation of the old PKL, posing as the *rakyat kecil* in order to avoid the negative connotations associated with the new image.

In the early 1960s, as the Indonesian economy crashed, PKL were mainly people from lower classes. Largely ignored by the government, PKL sought protection—or were sought out to be protected—from *preman* or gangsters. Through the first two decades of the New Order, however, the figure of the PKL slowly changed, as migrants poured into urban areas such Yogyakarta from villages around Indonesia.<sup>47</sup> In this context, military personnel, police, and government workers also increasingly became

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<sup>47</sup> Hildred Geertz, *Indonesian Cultures and Communities: A Study Guide* (New Haven, CT: HRAF Press, 1963).

PKL in order to supplement their meager pensions or incomes. As the number of PKL increased, the government sought to regulate their mobility and labor. In the late 1990s, another wave of PKL emerged with the Asian economic crisis. Workers from various sectors—such as university-educated youth—became street vendors because of the greater freedom (fewer taxes) and higher income the job offered, compared with office work. Thus PKL as a group became even more diverse.

The evolution of the perceived figure of the PKL has coincided with an ever-increasing desire for modernity and development in Indonesian society at large. These images of modernity have been projected by urban planners onto the street through the promotion of fantasies picturing clean and green pedestrian streets, resembling those in Europe. In this process, PKL came to be regarded—much like the *becak* in Jakarta—as a hindrance to the developer's vision, in that they were viewed as dirty (*kotor, kumuh*), chaotic (*semrawut*), unorganized (*tidak diatur*), and likely to cause traffic jams (*kemacetan*).<sup>48</sup>

One of the vendors opposed to the relocation was Pak Agus. But Pak Agus did not see himself as “dirty” and opposed to the vision of a modern city. In fact, he saw himself as someone who had willingly climbed on the development bandwagon, since he was working towards economic self-improvement without requesting help from the government. Responding to the critique of PKL as “dirty,” he exclaimed: “I realize the sidewalks were created by the government for walking and not for selling goods, but I feel that it's the government's fault! First, the government can't give jobs to its citizens. Second, if PKL start selling on the street, the government should stop them right away and not wait until there are too many. Third, dishonest government officials [*oknum pemerintah*] often give permits to street vendors for money.” Thus, according to Pak Agus, the failure to achieve modernity was the government's fault, a result of government corruption and lack of capacity. But Pak Agus then shifted to another available interpellation: one that cited the *rakyat kecil*. He explained to me, “In reality, PKL don't have rights to use the sidewalk because they disturb public interests, but it happens because they have to feed their families.” Thus, Pak Agus adopted the old discourse on PKL and positioned himself as *rakyat kecil*.

Yet Pak Agus is often categorized by others as representative of the new type of PKL—perceived typically as capital-owning, well-connected, educated, non-Javanese vendors who make a living selling the same goods as those available in stores—because he has multiple selling locations and earns an income greater than many government officials. Such PKL are generally viewed as being ungrateful and are frowned upon for claiming the *right* to occupy the sidewalks without permission. They are said to act as if every problem could be solved with money. If his purported membership in the fraternity of *rakyat kecil* were challenged, Pak Agus would counter the attack by asserting he is merely trying to feed his family, but in fact he is clearly a successful trader and man of means, relative to the poorer vendors and many other residents of Yogyakarta. Just as the *preman berdasi* (thug in a suit) was a street figure

<sup>48</sup> Abidin Kusno, *Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space, and Political Cultures in Indonesia* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000).

who improperly became a capital owner—a kind of imposter in the ruling class—in this situation, the new PKL figure appears as an imposter of the *rakyat kecil*.<sup>49</sup>

Most of my interactions with Pak Agus had been at his small street location, so when I ran into him selling hundreds of shoes from one of the largest stands at a street market, I was taken aback. I had no idea he had the capacity to sell at this capital-intensive level. Upon seeing me, he appeared embarrassed and began to explain that he needed to sell here because his other locations were doing poorly. He emphasized that he “borrowed” money and simply hoped to support his family and maintain their survival. Finally, he deferred to God: “If Allah permits that there is livelihood, we will find it anywhere. In the end we want to work hard, and to sell in line with Allah, and if we do that we will definitely receive.” In his peculiar status navigating between these two tropes of “rich” and “poor” PKL, Pak Agus treads carefully, downplaying his wealth and attributing it to the will of Allah.

Sheri Gibbings

### **Anak Jalanan, Street Kid(s)**

At a busy downtown Surabaya intersection, kids—about eleven boys and seven girls on this day in 2004—wandered up the irregular lines of cars, minibuses, and motorbikes looking for money. Some simply held out their hand, and in certain cases managed to do so while clutching a baby in the other arm. Others ran long feather dusters perfunctorily over the vehicles before asking for payment. A few offered magazines or newspapers for sale to drivers. Older teenagers favored more elaborate schemes, which involved circulating through streetside foodstalls with a guitar or set of improvised drums, or maybe a battery-powered portable amplifier and microphone. But most of the time the kids just shook a flattened bottle-cap rattle (*ecek-ecek*) to accompany their droning, barely intelligible song, which ceased the instant coins were produced.

Strictly speaking, *anak jalanan*, or *anjak* for short, make a living not so much “on the margins” as right in the midst of things. The first provision of their survival is agility; theirs is not a predicament of being stuck in out-of-the-way places; it is an art of repeatedly dodging just barely out of the way, while remaining close enough to eke out a profit from everyone they brush up against. The increasing speed of traffic, especially as traffic lights are eliminated in a deliberate attempt to eradicate *anjak* by denying them habitat, demands ever-increasing mobility and daring. In their own words, “our only asset/capital is our audacity” (in Indonesian, *modal kami hanya berani*; in Javanese, *bandha nekad*, shortened to *bonek*).

Present-day Indonesian sources frequently place the genesis of the *anjak* at the watershed of contemporary Indonesian history: the financial crisis and political turmoil that appeared in 1997. According to this story, the “child of the street” materialized precisely at a time when the future of Indonesia suddenly seemed to be unfolding in those same streets. One could argue that young people have roamed the streets since streets were made, but the subject at issue here is less a demographic

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<sup>49</sup> Siegel, *New Criminal Type*.

group than a discursive figure. Rather than attempt to “correct” an apparently ahistorical lapse in the discourse by identifying historical antecedents to or anticipations of *anjral*, I focus on how, for many Indonesian reporters, researchers, and social activists, *anjral* plausibly seem to be “a new social phenomenon popping up like weeds,”<sup>50</sup> described as “parasitic plants spreading wildly through the cultural boulevards of our lives.”<sup>51</sup> It is notable, for instance, that even today the very phrase “*anak jalanan*” is often defined in parentheses for the reader when it occurs in news stories and NGO reports.



Photo by Chris Brown, with permission

Back in downtown Surabaya, when a van from the Social Agency pulls up, kids young and old scatter, flitting over the walls and fences of private compounds and then, as if reaching home base in a game of hide-and-seek, turning to watch with open curiosity. (Their very presence on streets is deemed illegal.) One of the agency men cajoles them not to run. He offers a ride to a dedication ceremony for one of the agency’s new buildings. He throws in the enticement of a free buffet. The offer is plausible; street kids are routinely sought by event organizers looking to fill out

<sup>50</sup> Quoted from Sri Santuti Hariadi and Bagong Suyanto, *Anak Jalanan di Jawa Timur* (Surabaya: Airlangga University Press, 1999), p. xvii, my translation.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in I. Sandyawan Sumardi, *Perjuangan Anak Pinggiran* (Jakarta: Institut Sosial Jakarta, 1997), p. iii, my translation.

attendance and demonstrate charity at their affairs. A few kids are tempted, but more taunt the civil servants mercilessly and refuse to budge. The officials give up and cruise to another intersection. Eventually, they hit a pocket of kids who have had a hard day. Yielding to persuasion, the children climb aboard the van, boisterous at first, then increasingly taciturn as the vehicle eventually leaves the city behind.

After the kids have been deposited inside an isolated, gated compound, the expedition leader gathers them in a somewhat decrepit building and gets them to start a game that involves passing a soccer ball around a circle and repeating each other's names, an icebreaking and identity exercise. It seems rather bizarre, considering that the only people who don't already know these kids' names are the officials. But from the point of view of the agency, these kids have no identity (specifically, no *identitas*, that is, identity documents), a situation the bureaucrats set about remedying. While the group builds solidarity, one by one the kids are drawn aside by uniformed social agents and "data-ed" (in Indonesian, *didata*), a process that requires each child to provide information for one of the officers to enter into the blanks of a file form. To fill in the space for "place of origin," children are not permitted to answer "Surabaya"; the agents question them until they provide the name of a village, any village. Data-ing concludes with fingerprinting. Finally, the group gets boxes of disappointingly poor food (bad enough that only one of the social agents bothers to consume his portion). But hardly have the kids begun to eat when a uniformed police officer—described as a high-ranking officer—enters and demands attention. Playing the role of Bad Cop as if it were second nature, he informs the kids that, if it were up to him, they would all be tossed in jail. He somehow takes up another half an hour elaborating on his promise that, next time, if they get caught begging again, they won't have any social agency coddling them; instead, they'll be handed over to the police, held in jail, then shipped off directly to their village of origin. Browbeating concluded, he leaves, and the kids are loaded back into the van. Picked up before noon, it will be dark before they are back near the center of town.

At first glance, the significance of the *anak jalanan* appears to be similar to that of the criminal, a figure that many modern social critiques interpret as exposing the essential slavery of bourgeois discipline. Foucault has described how Fourierists celebrated the negation of civilization and discipline by liberty, "the life of a savage, living from day to day and with no tomorrow."<sup>52</sup> The Indonesian word for this savage liberty is *bebas*, "to be free from constraints," and it is a term that comes up repeatedly in talk concerning *anjak*. But it is not just street kids who are said to exemplify this freedom; all young children are described as constitutionally *bebas*. *Anak jalanan* are only distinguished from other children by their refusal to relinquish this attractive liberty; they indefinitely defer the moment of deferring their immediate desires. On Java, the deferral of immediate desires is precisely the move that makes children into people. Children are characteristically described as "not yet people/Javanese" until they begin to subject themselves to a variety of constraints, first and foremost the registers of formal, respectful Javanese—registers that *anjak* may not even learn, and never use.<sup>53</sup> The bureaucratic efforts to confer an identity through the process of data-

<sup>52</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1979), pp. 292 et passim.

<sup>53</sup> Hildred Geertz, *The Javanese Family* (New York, NY: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961).

fictionation and, if necessary, compulsory return to one's original home, essentially constitute an attempt to circumvent the futility of making *anjak* defer their freedom<sup>54</sup> by imposing an apparatus of state personhood (*identitas*) in place of the more proper self-effacement of a Javanese subject.

Thus, the newly-salient presence of *anak jalanan* at the end of Indonesia's twentieth century did not represent a novelty just because children took to the streets to try to make a living. Venturing forth to look for one's fortune (*merantau*) is a venerable practice. Nor is it the spurious and fluid criminality of *anjak* that sets them against the grain of the social; on the contrary, Indonesian figures of criminality are commonly imagined to embody positive codes, structures, and disciplines of their own, rather than figuring the absence or rejection of any such structures.<sup>55</sup> Instead, *anjak* exemplify a thriving medium permeating the gaps and holes in social structures, identities, and hierarchies, a medium that does not aim to coalesce or colonize, to occupy or to build its own structures, but merely sustains itself, dodging and weaving, by sheer act of will (that is, *bonek*, the asset of audacity). In urban Java, where criminals threaten to supplant the state and the power of the social, it is the *anjaks'* freedom, their escape, and their refusal to defer that negates such orders. In doing so, street kids also demonstrate the superfluity of giving up freedom in order to make a living. And this, more than cautionary fear, may be what makes them so disconcerting to other Javanese.

Chris Brown

### **Pak Haji, Mr. Hajj**

Pak Haji Rosyid, a well-built Sundanese man in his sixties, dressed in a white sweatshirt and trousers, sits alone on a bare floor in a mosque locally known as Masjid Baitul Ikhlas, "the House of Fidelity." On this chilly morning, with his head wrapped in a Saudi-style red and white turban, he has just returned from a jogging session at the nearby Giri Mekar public park in southern Bandung, a state-funded park that he and his contractors had built, transforming a polluted commercial district into an urban oasis. *Pak Haji*, or Mr. Pilgrim, like many of his Indonesian peers, usually wears the white cap and robes known as *baju haji*, or hajj clothing, in daily life. For Pak Haji Rosyid, they symbolize his Hajj status, which he has enjoyed for nearly three decades, a distinguished length of time. Yet he is no longer so exceptionally distinguished by his white cap and robes as he was during the New Order. With the booming hajj industry that has developed in Indonesia during the last decade, increasing numbers of Indonesians have visited Mecca, and hajjis and hajjahs have begun to exert a powerful

<sup>54</sup> The state is not invested in reformatories for *anjak*, and *anjak* are commonly expected to (and frequently do) run away from religious and NGO-sponsored programs established to keep them off the streets. A widely invoked example is the story of an Indonesian actress who took several kids into her home after they appeared together in a movie (*Daun di atas Bantal*); despite their elevation into the lap of luxury, the kids shortly ran away to live on the streets again.

<sup>55</sup> See Onghokham, "The Jago in Colonial Java, Ambivalent Champion of the People," in *History and Peasant Consciousness in South East Asia*, ed. Andrew Turnton and Shigeru Tanabe (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnography, 1984); Siegel, *A New Criminal Type*; Rafael, *Figures of Criminality*.

impact on social customs, halting and reversing Western fashions and habits, and changing the way many Indonesians dress and behave.

Having worked as a successful businessman for many years, Pak Haji Rosyid is a skillful trader and contractor; he is perhaps the most powerful Muslim figure in the area. But success did not come easily. In the late 1950s, the young Rosyid, born to a wealthy Muslim family in Garut, was devastated upon learning that his family wealth had been depleted following a series of attacks by *Gorombolan*, a Sundanese term for a group of Darul Islam guerrillas who sought to set up a rival government as Indonesia's modern state-building process was just getting underway. Rosyid fled Garut and moved to Bandung to seek his fortune as a street vendor. After years of struggle, he became the owner of a successful motorbike dealership and rental agency. His dealings in modern means of transport brought him in contact with a young and energetic middle-level military officer who offered him his first contractor's job. During the 1960s and 1970s, as the military and its businesses expanded in the wake of anti-communist campaigns, the military built bases and installation units throughout the area. For nearly two decades, Pak Rosyid was a devout government partner, a military loyalist, and, for many local people, a trusted businessman. He lived in a wealthy and close-knit extended family of nearly twenty people spanning three generations. His neighbors did not regard him as a socially aware and active neighbor and citizen. In fact, his quick success led to rumors that he, as a usurer, lent money at 50 percent interest, while his polygamous lifestyle sparked furor from his family.

But Pak Rosyid's spiritual journey to Mecca in 1980 changed everything, as his new hajj title won him broader social recognition. His contacts with fellow hajjis during the pilgrimage, and especially his new association with local *kiyais*, Islamic leaders, provided social support that came to play a significant role later in his life. Although the hajj ritual emphasizes solidarity and egalitarianism, regardless of wealth or status, in Indonesia the title of *Haji* is conferred to recognize social standing. Pak Rosyid, of course, was not the first to experience this transformation. Oma Irama, dubbed the King of Dangdut music, went to Mecca to perform the hajj, and shortly afterwards, in 1973, changed his name to Rhoma Irama, and adopted a new nickname, "Bang Haji," that gave him two decades of success in music and films.

In 1988, a year after his second hajj, Pak Haji Rosyid turned the courtyard of his home into an open-air playground, attracting many young children every afternoon. These children later became known as students of Baitul Ikhlas Madrasah, named after the mosque Pak Haji Rosyid had built in honor of his deceased mother. As his personal wealth grew, Pak Haji used it not only to build his own housing complex and to buy luxury cars for his family, but also to expand his private *madrasah* to include elementary to high-school levels. His schools, funded mostly from his company's profits, offered a place for children who could not afford state schools. Pak Haji Rosyid never gives speeches or teaches pupils in class, but his new religious commitment has brought him closer to religious elites in neighboring villages. In the everyday life of Giri Mekar villagers, participating in Islamic gatherings at Pak Haji Rosyid's mosque has become a means to develop a new kind of personal piety and civic engagement, one that stands in contrast to state-sponsored social activities. At these gatherings, Pak Haji Rosyid speaks often of his strong opposition to both Islamic militancy and communism—a clear indication of his moderate religious and political views. He has

applauded the *Reformasi*, but, at the same time, lamented that the movement has not brought economic recovery to the people when they need it.

Like other Hajjis in Indonesian history, such as those who initiated the Banten Revolt in the 1880s or incited other anticolonial movements in various parts of Java and Sumatra, the contemporary *Pak Haji* is typically a figure able to craft messages with widespread popular appeal, who acts as a force to mobilize supporters and create organizations with a strong social base and coherent strategies for change. Today, Baitul Ikhlas is a vital institution in Giri Mekar not only for its religious activities but also for its social and educational system. It provides an orphanage, housing for the elderly, and collects alms from Muslims in the area. Pak Haji Rosyid describes himself as a Muslim who understands his commitments to be *kaffah*, comprehensive and totalizing. His polygamous marriages remain under wraps, but his renewed faith following the hajj has led him to make serious attempts to ameliorate poverty and economic hardship. His reborn Muslim faith, found and developed during the New Order, has also led him to question the democratization process and to advocate for a strong system of government like that which prevailed under Suharto's authoritarian regime.

Pak Haji Rosyid's status as Haji provides him with a public image of piety, economic power, and authority. As a "cultural broker," Pak Haji Rosyid functions as an intermediary between national politics and local politics, a position that has benefited him and his organization.<sup>56</sup> By adjusting to changing circumstances, he has played a critical role in conceptualizing and responding to moments of uncertainty in modern Indonesia. His efforts to elevate poverty reduction to the top of his operational priorities and to provide alternative forms of education to groups unable to attend state schools has made him an important local figure. Pak Haji Rosyid and others like him play an increasingly vital role in local understandings of what it means to lead a virtuous Muslim life in Indonesia.

*Dadi Darmadi*

### ***Orang Kaya, Rich Person***

Yanto is a man in motion. Sometimes he hopscoches around the archipelago, from Bandung to Jakarta to Bali to Surabaya to Aceh, all in one week; at other times, he circulates in Jakarta, going from golf course to upscale restaurant to government office to five-star hotel lobby, all in one day. Born into poverty in central Java, he moved to the city of Bandung in his twenties and worked his way up from being an office boy at a state-owned industry to being the President Director of a company that sells and rents in-house telecommunications systems for banks, oil companies, and government departments, many of which have locations spread out across the Indonesian archipelago. Now in his mid-forties, he lives with his wife and two sons in a one-story mansion in a middle-class neighborhood in Bandung. His wife is Sundanese and comes from a family that was once quite well off, but which has been in decline for

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<sup>56</sup> Clifford Geertz, "The Javanese Kijaji: The Changing Role of a Cultural Broker," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2,2 (1960): 228–49.

many years. In 1995, Yanto was one of only maybe a half dozen people in Bandung who owned a coveted Mercedes (“Baby”) Benz. Now he owns four Mercedes and two other cars, as well as numerous properties around Bandung. His business outgrew the second-tier city some years ago, so he makes a weekly toll-road commute to his new office and a second house in Jakarta.

Among relatives, friends, neighbors, and employees in Bandung today, Yanto and his family are known as “rich people” (*orang kaya*).<sup>57</sup> The figure of the rich person is a peculiar one in Bandung, for it simultaneously evokes a sense of distance and a sense of intimacy. The sense of intimacy is lacking in other figures used to describe the capital-owning classes, such as *konglomerat*, which applies to those who have attained celebrity status by virtue of their extreme wealth, or *Chinese*, which has sometimes been used to situate capitalists on the other side of an ethnic divide. The nondescript *orang kaya* stands in contrast to these figures, since he or she is a figure who is still within reach, and, in many cases, is quite local. Indeed, the locality of the *orang kaya* is one of the things that has sometimes made urban Indonesia seem quite unusual: the fact that *orang kaya* and their opposites, the heavily stigmatized *orang miskin* (the poor) and the less stigmatized *orang biasa* (ordinary people), live in such close proximity to one another, often under the very same roof.

Early incarnations of Bandung’s *orang kaya* figure overlapped with a more negative connotation of the *Pak Haji* (described in the previous section) as a landowner rich enough to go on the hajj but despised by his poorer neighbors for his greed and bad behavior. In the 1950s and 1960s, the figure of *Pak Haji*-the-rich-person was joined by a new kind of *orang kaya*, the local self-made urban entrepreneur (*pengusaha*). Because Bandung was mainly a government and university town, and had only limited manufacturing industry, these new *orang kaya* very often made their money in construction, building the houses, streets, and institutional buildings of the rapidly growing city. Both *Pak Haji* and the urban entrepreneur used their wealth to acquire land, but whereas *Pak Haji* was thoroughly rooted among his neighbors and used the trappings of religion as a means to bring his social status in line with his class, urban entrepreneurs circulated within the city and the province and had close ties to government, relationships that sometimes gave them a quasi-aristocratic (*menak*) aura. Urban entrepreneurs had ties to the lower classes mainly through their employees, who might include tradespeople and day laborers, as well as domestic servants. Many of these workers—especially the domestic ones—would be brought to the city from the entrepreneur’s home village and would stay with him for decades. Thus, although *Pak Haji* and the urban entrepreneur both played the intimate role of patron to many poor families, *Pak Haji* did so locally, while the urban entrepreneur did so through his company and through relations stretching back to the village. People who exemplify these figures still exist in Bandung today, but more often than not they are referred to as “*orang kaya* of the old days” (*orang kaya dulu*), and the stories that circulate about them focus mainly on their decline at the hands of their immoral children, and, for the lucky ones, on their reputation for generosity.

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<sup>57</sup> In the 1990s, Yanto and his ilk were sometimes referred to as *orang kaya baru*, or *nouveau riche*, a type that was evident mostly in cities, but also in rural areas. See Hans Antlöv, “The New Rich and Cultural Tensions in Rural Indonesia,” in *Culture and Privilege in Capitalist Asia*, ed. Michael Pinches (London: Routledge, 1999).

Yanto represents an innovation on the old entrepreneur type, but one that is already beginning to seem somewhat outdated. He is the head of a household that is, in most respects, the idealized product of Suharto's New Order era: a two-child *pribumi* (non-Chinese) family based on an alliance between old status and new money.<sup>58</sup> His wealth comes from riding the economic wave of a massive investment in national and corporate infrastructure, led first by the government and later by the private sector. His business activities have taken him all over Indonesia, rather than being confined to Bandung. Yet he is not cosmopolitan. Even though his business has been deeply affected by globalization, he has remained resolutely uninterested in—and perhaps somewhat fearful of—spending time abroad or learning English. This resistance does not mean he embraces everything Indonesian. Over the past decade, he has increasingly sought to cocoon himself and his family apart from contacts with ordinary people. He has long lived in a lightly gated housing complex, and five years ago he moved his family to a new house behind high walls. As he has few ties to his neighbors, it is mostly through relatives and domestic employees, like his servants, his driver, and his nanny, that he and his wife are connected into the world of the lower classes. In this connection, communication is almost entirely one-way: very intimate gossip and stories about the *orang kaya* get relayed into the slum and the village, but very little information flows the other way.<sup>59</sup>

Economic forces tighten the cocoon. Yanto complains that it is becoming more and more difficult to find domestic workers, since many villagers now choose factory work or higher paying domestic jobs abroad in Saudi Arabia or Malaysia. In his household, only the driver has worked there for many years; the others come and go on a regular basis. Domestic labor is becoming more formalized and more flexible. With urban real estate values climbing upward, homes in newly built housing developments are retaining less and less space for domestic workers.

In Victorian England, the decline of live-in domestic work marked a watershed in relations between the classes. In the big cities, spatial segregation along class lines replaced the “upstairs/downstairs” culture of the old country manor. The figure of the local *orang kaya* in Bandung, sandwiched between an emerging middle-class, on the one hand, and an increasingly cosmopolitan capital-owning class, on the other, is only just beginning to look anachronistic. While comparable figures will undoubtedly remain in smaller towns and in more rural areas, in Bandung it is probably only a matter of time before this figure disappears. If and when it does, it, too, will mark a watershed in class relations.

Joshua Barker

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<sup>58</sup> See Saya Shiraishi, *Young Heroes: The Indonesian Family in Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1997); and Takashi Shiraishi, “Rewiring the Indonesian State,” in *Making Indonesia*, ed. Daniel Lev and Ruth McVey (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asian Program Publications, 1996), pp. 164–79.

<sup>59</sup> Carla Jones has written in some detail about the role domestic servants play in the emotional work that sustains the middle-class Javanese household. See “Whose Stress? Emotion Work in Middle-Class Javanese Homes,” *Ethnos* 69,4 (2004): 509–28.

### ***Wanita Karir, the Career Woman***

Over frappuccinos in a central Jakarta Starbucks, Santi and I talked about the misunderstandings her family and female superiors at work have about women like her, a young professional woman. Santi is thirty-three, a divorced mother of a seven-year-old son, and she loves her work at a well-known women's magazine. Yet, she is constantly aware of carrying a powerful label, "*wanita karir*," or career woman. As a figure whose priorities are questionable, a *wanita karir* is a problematic individual, a woman whose visibility, mobility, and desires are seen as linking improper femininity to social decay.

Santi's description of the tensions in her life is emblematic of the category, career woman. Although the stereotypical *wanita karir* is a young woman who has not married, the fact that Santi is divorced can be blamed on her enjoyment of her career, while her devotion to her son ameliorates blame and guilt about that enjoyment. Even her female superiors, women who themselves have achieved career success, perceive her generation of professional women to have misaligned moral compasses, as they seem to prefer work over family and personal consumption over domestic frugality. Santi explained that she had become a more pious Muslim—relying on Allah for emotional support of her life choices, choosing to wear a sheer headscarf, and attending *pengajian* (Islamic study groups) more frequently—in part to assuage the pain of being criticized as a *wanita karir*.

Images of Indonesian women who work in white-collar employment, service industries, and other office settings associated with recent economic progress in the country circulate differently than do representations of other kinds of female laborers. Although related discourses elaborate the social costs of different types of feminine work, such as migrant domestic labor, factory production, and sex work,<sup>60</sup> each of which has also contributed to Indonesian economic change, the figure of the *wanita karir* has a particular valence, in part because of her greater visibility. As office workers commute in and out of central Jakarta on public transportation, small groups of attractive women garbed in professional dress, carrying (often knockoff) designer accessories, and texting or calling on their handphones, become a human sign of the broader pride and worry that the city evokes. A *wanita karir* is thus a figure whose social space absorbs the thrills and ills of a society experiencing change. Studying representations of public intimacy in the late New Order, Suzanne Brenner has argued that middle-class women appeared to have choices about family and work which, when made, are not merely individual, but which "have a bearing on the very future of Indonesian society."<sup>61</sup> The same can be said for post-New Order *wanita karir*.

Santi's impressions of the criticism she senses all around her touch on the many ills that the *wanita karir* are seen to embody. As a figure of desire who cannot control her own desires, consumer and sexual, the *wanita karir* becomes both the subject and the object of social anxiety. As such, individual *wanita karir* are not only signs of social anxiety, but reflect consciously on it. First, just as individual women office workers

<sup>60</sup> See Ford, "Beyond the Femina Fantasy."

<sup>61</sup> Suzanne Brenner, "On the Public Intimacy of the New Order: Images of Women in the Popular Indonesian Print Media," *Indonesia* 67 (April 1999): 18.

tend to be mobile, the social type of the *wanita karir* circulates widely. Articles and television shows refer to and comment on the *wanita karir* with ease. She is positioned as the opposite of a competing stereotype, the housewife, or *Ibu Rumah Tangga*, who is self-sacrificing, domestic, static, middle-aged, and often dowdy. The *wanita karir* lives alone, or with other young women, in an apartment with little social surveillance, a situation that allows her not only to go to work, but potentially to move on to evening engagements with mixed-sex mingling, or even alcohol and drugs. As an antidote to the suspicions raised by this stereotypical portrait, Santi informs her colleagues, and especially her superiors, of her evening commitments, including her regular attendance at *pengajian*.

Second, income earned from office work appears simultaneously substantial yet unconnected to family. Because of the gleaming settings where white-collar work is carried out in Jakarta—skyscrapers set among five-star hotels and world-class malls—the productive labor of the *wanita karir* is closely linked to the temptations of consumption. Images of consumer modernity regularly use the bodies of beautiful, active women as brokers of desire, turning illusion into exchange. As Santi described it, she is hard pressed to get financial support for her son from her ex-husband and his family because they imagine her job to be well-paying and perceive her requests for support as proof that she uses her salary selfishly for individual consumption.

Third, when the *wanita karir* figure represents the inability to channel desire properly, this informs general anxieties about the feminization of consumption, and the pathologically disorienting effect of production and consumption on sexual desire. In addition to commodities, *wanita karir* are imagined to spend their salaries on perversions of love. This aspect of the stereotypical figure emerges in two related, fantasized characteristics of the *wanita karir*: her propensity to homosexuality and her ability to buy male companionship. Media reports frequently attribute a perceived increase in lesbian identity in contemporary Indonesia to the long periods of time *wanita karir* spend in the company of female co-workers, whose friendship can be perverted into a sexual relationship. The *Pria Idaman Lain* (PIL, literally a New Dream Man), the kept male lover secretly supported through a woman's salary, is a related character that similarly emerges as an example of social degeneration, a commercial form that appears to allow women to avoid domestic duty in exchange for the unentangled pleasures of commodified sex. Perhaps no example better captures the risks of desire gone awry than the case of a gay male serial killer whose discovery became a sensation in July and August of 2008. In his confessions to Jakarta police, Ryan described how his uncontrollable desire for luxury goods (handphones, a motorcycle, and a water dispenser) led him into sexual liaisons with other men, whom he then murdered and robbed. Extreme consumer desire is thus both feminizing and criminalizing.<sup>62</sup>

Santi thoroughly enjoys her job, yet struggles to define herself in an environment that has already determined what it means to be a *wanita karir*. As a woman who earns, yet whose earnings are not clearly tied to domestic reproduction, who visibly navigates city streets while wearing and using commodities, the *wanita karir* captures

<sup>62</sup> Sumbo Tinarbuko, "Konsumtivisme dan Kriminalitas," *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, August 13, 2008.

anxieties about the relationship between capitalism and social relations in contemporary Indonesia. While these anxieties are never resolved, they temporarily alight on the bodies of women who are associated with office work and consumption.

### Conclusion

The Indonesian cultural imaginary has long been populated by an array of compelling figures. Had we traveled back in time a few decades, we would have encountered a rather different array of personages than those we have evoked here. Some of these, such as the *pemuda* of the revolution, or the member of the PKI, would have been explicitly historical, like the ones we have written about. Others, such as Arjuna or Rahwana, characters from the *wayang*, would have been seen to be more enduring, even as they were being invested with deep contemporary significance. Students of Indonesia have long been drawn to these characters as a means to help them make sense of—and convey the sense of—contemporary Indonesian life at a given moment in time. Such figures are valuable starting points for considering contemporary life in part because they provide points of relative fixity where scholarly and everyday discourses may converge and become entangled. These points of fixity help to crystallize and make manifest the complex interplay between abstract historical processes and the subject formations and structures of feeling these processes help to engender. As such, these figures offer us a common methodological terrain on which we can communicate and collaborate.



Photo by Chris Brown, with permission

We decided to focus this essay on contemporary figures of Indonesian modernity because we were aware that the end of the New Order was the occasion for the emergence of a new set of figures on the Indonesian scene. The figures we discussed are thus all unequivocally historical. By drawing attention to them, we sought to highlight the variegated effects of Indonesia's political opening, its adjustments to the new global economy, and its greater envelopment within webs of mass mediation. By offering portraits of these figures, we aimed to provide a glimpse of some of the ways that Indonesians are recasting their cultural and social imaginaries as they mark off an era (*jaman*) as "post-1998," one that has yet to gain the kind of coherence and sense of future direction that many have come to expect.

The contributions to this essay highlight several important features of the contemporary moment. First, the character and effects of capitalism and commodification are everywhere evident, but they are far from uniform. In some places and in some sectors, old figures of economic importance are either fading in importance or are on the verge of disappearance: such as the *taikong* migrant smuggler in Lombok and the local capitalist in Bandung. Both are being replaced by figures that are more cosmopolitan and better schooled in bureaucratic rationality. Elsewhere, as in post-conflict Aceh and on Yogyakarta's streets, it is apparent how new figures of capitalist transformation, such as the capital-owning street vendor, the small-scale Acehnese capitalist, the street kid, the overseas worker, and the career woman, are being forced to adapt to older cultures in which only certain kinds of economic figures are considered to be socially or politically legitimate. In these examples, one can already begin to discern some of the ways in which the socially disruptive forces of capitalist transformation are being overcoded and constrained by discourses that serve to reinforce older hierarchies and patterns. At the same time, one can also see—in the *rumah Saudi* and in the gaits of women arriving in Jakarta's Airport Terminal 3—how new hierarchies and patterns are starting to reshape the social landscape.

Second, the contemporary moment is characterized by a notable ambivalence in regards to older figures who have traditionally represented societal power and political resistance. The activist, the ex-GAM, the NGO worker, and the street vendor are still very much present on the scene, but they remain as mere hollow shells of their former selves. Whereas under the New Order these figures were full of gravity and authenticity, they now seem strangely empty and eerily reproducible. The individuals who, for one reason or another, have found themselves to be giving flesh to these figures appear as uninspired but not quite ironic. While the discursive and structural grounds for their power have fallen away, the individuals who continue to embody these roles do their best to adjust to the new circumstances while refusing to give up their old livery altogether.

A third feature of this contemporary moment is the emergence of new figures who purport to speak with the kind of fullness and conviction that is lacking in figures of societal power and political resistance. These figures, including the *pelatih spiritual* and the *tele-dai*, seek to mediate among what they believe to be the new sources of power in Indonesian society today—Islam, technology, and capital. They position themselves not as leaders, but as experts, exemplars, and facilitators of a vast enterprise of self-improvement aimed at bringing individuals into line with a notion of what it means to be a good Muslim worker, manager, entrepreneur, and family member. Like the *pakar*

*telematika*, these figures claim the capacity to address the sources of anxiety and instability abroad in society. However, they, too, always run the risk of being recast as charlatans or hypocrites.

Fourth, the contemporary moment is characterized by the continued importance of people who are primarily produced as empty signifiers through the mass media, but who in their individual lives remain structurally invisible to—or are explicitly marginalized by—the current political and economic order. The ODHA, who emerged with the first Indonesian cases of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s, has, as in many other countries, come to inhabit a moralizing public discourse, while a diverse population of infected individuals must deal with both the personal risks of disclosure and the political economy of medication. The *anak jalanan*, whose conceptual appearance can be dated to the financial crisis of the 1990s, inhabits an equally ambiguous position as an innocent child who has not yet grown up and is, in fact, not yet a person, but whose attempt to survive on the street calls forth various forms of state intervention. Finally, the TKW is both a heroic figure of national development and a tragic figure of exploitation and abuse, bound up in a moral economy of debt. Taken together, these three figures illuminate the seemingly unresolvable contradictions that many Indonesians must certainly continue to face today and tomorrow.

While we have described in this essay a specific cast of key figures that pertain to Indonesia today, we have broader methodological goals. We believe that a focus on “key figures” can provide the basis for an illuminating comparative method that could span regions and times. Just as Georg Simmel’s analysis of the “stranger”—the “man who comes today and stays tomorrow”—has proven productive in analyzing critical processes of modernity, such as the Holocaust, and Max Weber’s ideal type of charismatic leader has provided ways to conceptualize and compare forms of leadership across cultures, so, too, do varying cultural imaginaries featuring the “street kid” and other figures provide ways of thinking both about the generality and the specificity of contemporary social formations around the world.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Georg Simmel, “The Stranger,” in *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. Donald Levine (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 143–49, quote from p. 143. Zygmunt Bauman uses Simmel’s essay to explore the Holocaust. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); Max Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 245–52. See also Benedict Anderson’s critique of Weber’s analysis of charismatic authority: “The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture,” in *Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, ed. Claire Holt (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972), pp. 1–69.