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Dissertation Title:

**Discourse on Indonesian Comics:  
Manifestation of National Identity  
in Comics Exhibition in Indonesia  
circa 2005–2011**

Submitted on January 20, 2016  
to the Department of Human-Social Information Sciences  
in partial fulfilment for the requirements of the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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## EXPLANATORY NOTE

1. I use the EYD (*Ejaan Yang Disempurnakan*, Perfected Spelling System), the spelling system adopted in Indonesia in 1972–73. Exceptions are individuals and terminologies that are better known by their pre-EYD spellings (e.g., Pramoedya Ananta Toer) and quotations.
2. I use the modified Hepburn style of romanization for Japanese words.
3. I order names by putting the first name before the surname. However, Japanese names are arranged according to the norm in Japanese: the surname before the first name.
4. Persons with English and Japanese names will be addressed by their family name. Due to the absence of family names in Indonesia, persons without a family name will be addressed by first name. If two persons have the same family name (such as Hikmat Darmawan and Ade Darmawan), each will be addressed by their first name.
5. All English translations of quoted Indonesian texts are mine, unless otherwise mentioned.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

This thesis discusses (1) the discourse of Indonesian comics after the 1990s, i.e., after the entrance of translated Japanese comics to Indonesia, and (2) the process of making meaning of “Indonesian comics” through exhibitions held by state actors, industry actors, and the comics communities in Indonesia, i.e., groups of like-minded cartoonists, comics writers, and critics that gather to execute projects and activities together.

The popularity of translated Japanese comics (manga) in Indonesia has revitalized the general condition of comics in Indonesia. The production of Indonesian comics came close to a halt in the late 1970s, when Indonesia’s publishing companies stopped publishing them.<sup>1</sup> In the 1980s, the Indonesian comics market was filled with imports of translated American and European comics, reprints of successful comics classics (e.g., *Panji Tengkorak*<sup>2</sup>), and satirical newspaper cartoon series (e.g., *Oom Pasikom*). The popularity of these comics was limited either to people of older generations who had read the comics in their childhood or to people who were politically

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<sup>1</sup> There is no agreement on the exact year and cause for the demise of Indonesian comics in this period. Ahmad et al. (2006, 73) write that the cause was internal conflict and publishing policy (Ahmad wrote “*godaan penerbit*,” publishing’s temptation), which started in the 1960s. Berman (1998, 20–21) states that the government’s disapproval in the 1960s was a factor. Putranto and Purwanti (2012) conclude that the Indonesian comic industry was bankrupt in the end of the 1970s because of the lack of artistic innovation and competition from foreign comics. Putranto and Purwanti’s conclusion agrees with Bonneff’s (1996, 52) description of the difficulties the Indonesian comic artists faced during the period. Hence, I will use the end of the 1970s as the mark for the demise of Indonesian comics. This will be further discussed in the third section of this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> *Panji Tengkorak* (Skeleton Banner), written by Hans Jaladara. The story tells about the antihero Panji Tengkorak in the realm of *silat* (fighting world), who is trapped inside a paradox of defending right and fighting against evil. The comic has been remade two times (original: 1968; 1985; 1996) and was adapted to a movie in 1971 and a 26-episode TV series in 1997.

literate enough to enjoy the cartoons. In contrast, translated Japanese manga, introduced in the early 1990s, attracted younger readers. Regular publications of manga from various genres became available. Between 1985 and 1994, *Elex Media Komputindo* (EMK), the most prolific comics publisher, published 1,500 titles, 606 of which were children's comics and 90% of which were Japanese comics (Hill and Sen 2007, 30). In 1995, translated Japanese comics sold as many as 85,000 copies per volume (Sujatmaka and Hartono 1995), almost twice the sales of the most popular novel at that time. By 2003, translated manga reigned in the top five on the book sales chart in Indonesia.<sup>3</sup> These translated Japanese comics in Indonesia enjoy a print run five times higher (15,000 copies per title)<sup>4</sup> than any other books (3,000 copies per title)<sup>5</sup> in Indonesia. The sales of a single translated manga reached 32,000 copies,<sup>6</sup> a number that general Indonesian fiction (including novels) could not achieve. Meanwhile, younger comics readers have become more proficient in manga's visual and verbal literacy. In addition, young Indonesian artists have begun to refer to this way of expression when creating their own narratives. The latter are eventually branded "manga-style" Indonesian comics. The term manga has made headlines of national newspapers (e.g., the headline of *Kompas*, November 26, 2007: "Masih dalam Dekapan 'Manga'") and has become common in Indonesia.

However, the new manga-style comics reawakened debates on what constitutes specifically "Indonesian comics." For the 20 years before the entrance of manga, criticism

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<sup>3</sup> The data were taken from the chart of Popular Books Pustaloka Kompas (*Buku Laris Pustaloka Kompas*), cited by Kuslum and Umi (November 26, 2007), "Masih dalam Dekapan 'Manga,'" *Kompas*.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Reported in 2012, "Dunia Perbukuan Indonesia Di Ujung Tanduk" (<http://www.itoday.co.id/pendidikan/dunia-perbukuan-indonesia-di-ujung-tanduk>). The same number (3,000 copies) was noted by the Bekasi Blogger Community (<http://bloggerbekasi.com/2010/10/13/nasib-penulis-buku-di-indonesia-2.html>) and in a *Kompas* article (September 5, 2010) on writer and critic Jakob Sumardjo, who almost never received royalties from the books he created.

<sup>6</sup> Kuslum, loc. cit.

of Indonesian comics centered on their negative influence on children.<sup>7</sup> Now, however, the presence of manga-style Indonesian comics has raised cultural concerns: in particular, the authenticity of Indonesian culture and its identity in comics. People who only have heard of (but have not read) Indonesian comics classics<sup>8</sup> (art and culture critics, journalists, and academics)<sup>9</sup> participate in disapproving of the presence of Japanese manga style in comics. In extension of the presence of manga in locally produced comics, they also bring up the subject of other countries' comics "style": two of the most mentioned being American superheroes and European adventure comics such as *Tintin* and the *Asterix* series (Ahmad et al. 2005, 2006; Giftanina 2012).

The issue of "Indonesian comics" raises the question of "Indonesian" identity in comics. Indonesian comics communities,<sup>10</sup> such as Akademi Samali<sup>11</sup> and MKI,<sup>12</sup> express their concern over Indonesian comics' being cornered by foreign comics. They organize numerous events, workshops, and exhibitions to which they invite comics artists and readers for discussions moderated by comics critics. However, the discussions often involve comparisons of comics of different "types" and purposes, showing an inclination to promote a type that is suitable to the apparently political agenda of the observers. The

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<sup>7</sup> Because of their exposure of violence, sadism, and vulgarity (Ajidarma 2011, 3).

<sup>8</sup> Ahmad et al. (2006, 44–47) illustrates the regular civilians who complain about how manga-styled Indonesian comics neglect the tradition of Indonesian classic comics.

<sup>9</sup> Such as cartoonist, journalist and comic activist Hikmat Darmawan, humanist and comic editor Surjorimba Suroto, chief of the Jakarta Art Committee Ade Darmawan, and other examples that will be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>10</sup> The word *community* is taken from the Indonesian word *komunitas*. A comics community is a gathering of cartoonists, writers, and critics. Their presence has become vital during the past two decades, and they appear often in media reportage. This will be discussed further in the third section of this chapter and the second chapter of this thesis.

<sup>11</sup> Akademi Samali is a Jakarta-based comics community founded in 2005 by comics artist Beng Rahadian, comics critic Hikmat Darmawan, and comics artist Zarki. Akademi Samali is active in organizing workshops and exhibitions with foreign cultural centers such as IFI (Institut Français in Indonesia) and the Goethe-Institut.

<sup>12</sup> Acronym for *Masyarakat Komik Indonesia* (Indonesian Comic Society), founded in 1997 by students who gathered at the University of Indonesia to promote Indonesian comics.

comics community becomes a vital player in contributing to discourse about comics, for the events are often funded by cultural elites (such as the art community and foreign cultural centers) and broadcasted nationwide through mass media reportage.

By the 2000s, ten years after the initial entrance of Japanese comics, the public tended to criticize the negative influence of foreign styles on Indonesian comics. However, art and media scholars Ahmad et al. (2006) pointed out that these criticizing voices came mostly from people who were not readers or observers of comics and leaned on secondary sources (47). Here, media and public spaces provide the key sources. Events in public spaces, such as activities by comics communities, cartoonists, and fine artists, play a very vital role as social actors in the construction and reconstruction of the “identity” of Indonesian comics. They are sites of communication where dialogue happens and the sources of broadcasts on comics. Mass media such as newspapers then cover these discussions and disseminate their contrasting points and views about Indonesian comics to a wider audience.

Here, I will give an example of how these public-space events generate the value of comics identity. This is the partial record of a discussion on Indonesian comics at the venue of the independent comics exhibition *DI:Y (Daerah Istimewa: Yourself, Special Region of Yourself)* held in 2007.<sup>13</sup> This event was covered in numerous national newspapers, including the largest national newspaper, *Kompas*. The two statements below show the condemnation of manga style, which is accused of destroying creativity and

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<sup>13</sup> The exhibition was held March 3–11, 2007, in Galeri Cipta II Taman Ismail Marzuki, a center of art and cultural activities in Jakarta. This exhibition showcased 11 comics artists from different independent comics communities. The exhibition itself will be discussed in the fifth chapter of this thesis.

comics as an art. The art status of comics is manifested by the characteristics of those works exhibited in the DI:Y.

*Dalam pengamatan Ade, komikus masa kini sangat terpengaruh oleh gaya komik Jepang. Dari segi visual, tak ada pencapaian baru yang ditunjukkan. “Padahal, kalau menggali lebih jeli, mereka bisa menemukan gaya khas senidri,” komentarnya. (Dwinanda, Republika, 2007)*

According to [Chief of the Jakarta Art Committee] Ade’s observation, the current generation’s comics artists are heavily influenced by Japanese comics style. Visually, there is no new achievement. “If they’d been more observant, they could have found their own unique styles,” Ade commented. (Translation and brackets are mine.)

*Keunikan identitas mereka, kata Hikmat, akhirnya menawarkan daerah kemungkinan yang lebih luas lagi bagi medium komik. Mereka telah mentransformasikan etos dan modus DI:Y menjadi penciptaan sebuah Daerah Istimewa, tempat berbagai kemungkinan narasi visual terbuka ke segala arah. (AHS, Suara Pembaruan, 2007)*

Their [the comic artists in DI:Y] unique identity, said Hikmat [cartoonist and comics critic], finally provides an even wider territory for the comics medium. They have transformed the ethos and mode of DI:Y into a Special State, where all possibilities of visual narratives are open [on hand]. (Translation and brackets are mine.)

From the excerpt above it is evident that the critics made a comparison between “bad” [gratuitous, unwanted] comics and “good” [preferable, favored] comics. Hikmat

argued that the exhibited alternative comics had higher value because they had a cultural identity [territory]. Ade, too, related value to identity evident in style. However, he never brought up specifically what makes comics more Indonesian than Japanese popular manga. To do this, I deem it important in these discussions to also look at the concept of the style used.

In Indonesian comics discourse, Indonesian “identity” is the most discussed issue. Definitions of comics focus on the proliferation of foreign comics and their harmful “influence” on the development of Indonesian comics.<sup>14</sup> When manga-style Indonesian comics entered the discourse, the previously assimilated American and European comics styles were dragged into the discussion as well. This tendency led to the categorization of comics by their “graphic style.”<sup>15</sup> Examples are the Western style represented by muscled superhero drawings and European styles represented by the *Asterix* and *Tintin* series.

During the past 20 years, artists of similar styles and purposes have come to pool together, forming groups. Examples are the 7 Blue Artland Studio, composed of manga-style cartoonists (such as Rie and Gita) who also branched to less mangaesque cartoons, and *Curhat Anak Bangsa*, a self-proclaimed European-style indie publisher that pioneered autobiographical comics in Indonesia. Each group has different views and activities pertaining to comics.

In addition to these artist groups, there are comics communities that play an important role in bringing people of different purposes together in various discussions. It is one of the findings of this thesis that even if the artist groups disperse, the wider comics

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<sup>14</sup> The concept of foreign comics as an ill influence on Indonesia has been present since the Old Order (Berman 1998, 20; Ferdianto 2012). This will be discussed in the third section of this chapter.

<sup>15</sup> This tendency of categorization, which can be seen in Ahmad et al. (2005, 2006), Darmawan (2005), Gifanina (2012), and many more, will be discussed in the second and third chapters.



communities allow them to continue to communicate with one another about Indonesian comics.

In national print media such as newspapers and magazines, comics communities that actively pursue a unique national identity are favored by the public, which has imbibed the previous government's dogmatic concept of culture: symbolizing unification by use of (mainly Javanese) tradition.<sup>16</sup> This involved a rejection of foreign cultures in the name of cultural imperialism, and it is by this very same (and in times of globalization, already anachronistic) concept that newcomers of manga-style Indonesian comics receive rebuffs.<sup>17</sup> In the process, the discourse creates the image of manga-style Indonesian comics as different, an "other," from the Indonesian comics.<sup>18</sup> Through discussions of comics in Indonesian media, the comics communities have established concepts to verify and position their comics, and themselves as comics artists, by means of emphasizing that they have the same aim as the journalists and the politicians, i.e., pursuing an Indonesian comics identity.

"Style" is one important key to discussing the ambiguity of stylistic criteria for cultural comparison, or how Indonesian comics should be compared to foreign ones. There is another critical element in the discussion of dismissing the foreign style: the characterization of popular comics as the "other" and artistic comics as "genuine

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<sup>16</sup> One of the *Pancasila* (Five State Ideologies) chapters is the Unity of Indonesia. The New Order government practiced this by promoting a single voice of "national culture" (Hill & Sen 2007, 12)—which is actually Javanese like one third of the Indonesian population (Frederick 2011, 128). More of this will be discussed in the next section.

<sup>17</sup> The first Indonesian president, Sukarno, strongly opposed "cultural imperialism," i.e., the adaptation of foreign popular culture by Indonesia. His critique of foreign cultures stimulated searches for "indigenous culture" in contemporary media (Hill and Sen 2007, 166). This will be discussed in the next section. A similar concept under the terminology of "modern imperialism" is used by Ahmad et al. (2006, 21).

<sup>18</sup> Aside from the previous example, the image of manga style as the new "other" will be discussed in chapter two.

Indonesian.” Henceforth, in claiming Indonesian comics, two categories come into play: (a) cultural as geopolitical (between nations) and (b) cultural as artistic status (within the same Indonesian nation). As seen in the aforementioned example, critics often confuse the artistic with the popular (or in other words, “high culture” with “low culture”). There are also differences in regard to where comics communities and authors publish their works. The authors of 7 Blue Artland Studio work with publishers that engage with translated Japanese comics,<sup>19</sup> while the *Curhat Anak Bangsa* authors find their works on different shelves than the translated comics (i.e., the travel shelf). The latter can also find themselves on alternative comics exhibitions such as DI:Y, as mentioned earlier.

Comparisons between different kinds of Indonesian comics center on the topic of “identity.” However, the lack of definitions of terms in the discourse results in blurred and tangled lines. The terms prevalent in Indonesian comics debates need to be clarified: what is “identity” supposed to signify, and what do Indonesian critics, scholars, cultural elites, and industry actors mean when they address “styles”?

This situation prompts an immediate need to analyze the debates on Indonesian comics of the 1990s, especially after the entrance of Japanese comics. However, the study of Indonesian comics is still very limited. The first representative study of Indonesian comics, *Komik Indonesia*, was published in Indonesia in 1998.<sup>20</sup> It was the Ph.D. thesis of French scholar Marcel Bonneff, initially written in 1972 and first published under the title *Les Bandes Dessinées Indonésiennes* in France in 1976. The 26-year gap until its Indonesian publication is indicative of the Indonesian public’s disinterest in comics

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<sup>19</sup> One of the examples is *Midnight Ride* by Rie, serialized in the *Splash* comics magazine, published by EMK.

<sup>20</sup> There were several articles and studies on Indonesian comics before the publication of *Komik Indonesia* (such as those by Tim Lindsay [1987] and Arswendo Atmowiloto [1980]), but none have had more impact or have been more widely read than *Komik Indonesia*.

before manga entered Indonesia. Bonneff's *Komik Indonesia* surveys the situation of Indonesian comics from their first appearance in 1932 until the publishing demise of comics in the 1970s. The book has become central to subsequent studies of Indonesian comics, such as *Martabak: Histeria! Komikita* (Ahmad et al. 2006), whose authors often cite and reference it. However, as stated before, Ahmad et al. focus on the problem of "style" fragmentation and cultural imperialism without critically looking at how the notion of "style" has changed the direction of comics discussions in Indonesia. Seno Gumara Ajidarma's Ph.D. thesis, *Panji Tengkorak: Kebudayaan dalam Perbincangan* (2011), also critically pursues the impact of foreign comics by examining a single comics series and its recreations throughout three decades. Ajidarma's dissertation is the first study that addresses the impact of popular foreign comics through different visual narrative incorporations in three remakes. However, he did not touch on the general public discourse of "styles" and "national identity," probably because of this discourse's elusive nature. This problem must be addressed, and it is time we study and critically analyze "national identity" and the problematic terminology surrounding it.

To summarize, this analysis of Indonesian comics discourse will ultimately serve the following purpose:

To map various incarnations of Indonesian comics, trace "Indonesia" in debates on the cultural identity of Indonesian comics historically, and redefine problematic terminologies in the comics discourse of the past 20 years in order to avoid disconnections (of high and low culture and politicization of styles) within the current discussion of Indonesian comics.

This study aims to fulfill these purposes by analyzing the discourse from all those involved in Indonesian comics, with a special focus on comics exhibitions—the public

spaces where social actors (readers, cartoonists, comics writers, critics, and editors) gather and discuss comics. The results of comics exhibitions, broadcast throughout the country through media, are the messages eventually consumed by the public and become the discourse of the comics representatives of the time.

The comics medium is not indigenous to Indonesia. It is a medium produced and consumed simultaneously in many places around the world. Indonesia has previously accepted the importation of popular comics produced outside the country, such as the aforementioned European comics and superhero American comics. However, like manga's presence, which has created a conflict between the local and the national, other comics have created a similar situation at their inception. The discourse has viewed this process as "cultural imperialism" (i.e., attempts by one country's culture to imperialize another country through cultural means), which undermines political concerns. However, I need to determine if a transnational medium is a political manifestation in its dissemination throughout the world. As my guide to examining problems such as the process of one country's affecting another and the role of the actors involved in the discussion of identity, I will refer to the theories discussed in following section.

#### *Theoretical Framework: Globalization, Popular Culture, and National Identity*

This dissertation aims to explore the discursive notions of "Indonesia" in "Indonesian comics" discourse after the 1990s. At the turn of the decade (the end of the 1980s to the early 1990s), the popularity of Japanese comics reinitiated comics production and reignited discussions on comics discourse. However, the main issue has been identity in comics: the question of "Indonesia" and "Indonesia-ness" vis-à-vis the popular manga

products imported from foreign Japan. A clash happened when the foreign product started to take roots in a new space related to globalization.

Globalization is a multilayered phenomenon. It includes the emergence of a multinational economy involving a new system of production, finance, consumption, and worldwide economic integration; the introduction of new transnational or global cultural patterns, practices, and flows; global political processes and transnational institutions; transnational transmigration; and the rise of new social hierarchies (Robinson 2008, 125). Sociologist William I. Robinson studied the multiple theories of globalization<sup>21</sup> and noted a lack of consensus regarding the meaning of “globalization.”<sup>22</sup> However, there are two points where all theories of globalization meet: (1) the quickened pace of social change worldwide in the latter decades of the 20th century and (2) an increase of connectivity among people and countries worldwide (objective dimension), as well as the awareness thereof (subjective dimension) (Robinson 2008, 126–127).

Connectivity is a cause of concern in Indonesia, and precisely this concern is triggered by the consumption of Japanese manga and the production of inspired products in Indonesia because they mark the birth of transnational comics in Indonesia. This has led to awareness in the nation that certain communities connect more with products created by a foreign popular culture, an awareness linked to sociologist Martin Albrow’s

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<sup>21</sup> William Robinson, in his paper “Theories of Globalization” (2008), reviewed multiple key theories of globalization as a heuristic tool in social science disciplines and the humanities. The theories Robinson highlighted include Arjun Appadurai’s theories of global cultural economy and space, place, and globalization; Saskia Sassen’s theories of space, place, and globalization and transnationality and transnationalism; Martin Albrow’s theory of modernity, postmodernity, and globalization; and Nederveen Pieterse’s cultural theories of globalization. Benedict Anderson’s view of a centralized high culture, through the example of Indonesia, will be addressed in chapter two.

<sup>22</sup> Robinson stated that the definition of *globalization* varies greatly, but the most important issues come from ontological issues (e.g., a timeline of the start of globalization) and causal determination (e.g., core motives and purposes; Robinson 2008, 127).

statement that the consumption of global culture ignites the fear that individuals will make global communities their reference point instead of national ones.<sup>23</sup> This logic hints at the extinction of national culture or the ideology of nationalism in the face of globalization. Hence, globalization becomes a threat to nationalism in how local people relate to each other. Taking the “global” in a traditional “international” sense, concern has also been voiced in Indonesia that comics can become a tool of cultural imperialism by making readers obsessed with Japanese tradition and culture (Ahmad et al. 2006, 21–24). However, popular culture is never forced onto consumers. Especially in the case of cultural industries, a supply of major translated comics cannot become popular without any initial demand from the readers, although in the case of Indonesian manga, the initial demand from readers preceded domestic industrial supply. In the case of initial demand in Indonesia, EMK’s managing editor Ratna Sari stated in a 2014 interview<sup>24</sup> that the trend was initiated because of the company’s need to increase revenue; the effort was successful and later became the revenue driver for the company. Furthermore, it deserves consideration that an imported popular-cultural product can only be effective if it includes something Indonesian with which consumers can connect.

Media and cultural studies scholar Iwabuchi Kōichi (2002a, 2002b, 2010) has questioned the “Japaneseness” of globally circulating Japanese popular-cultural products including video games, animations, and of course, comics. He has suggested the term

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<sup>23</sup> “In Albrow’s Weberian construct, the quintessence of the modern age was the nation-state, which was the primary source of authority, the centralized means of violence, and of identity among individuals, and hence the locus of social action. However, the contradictions of modern age has resulted in the decentering of the nation-state, so that under globalization both individuals and institutional actors such as corporations relate directly to the globe, rendering the nation-state largely redundant. As the nation-state is replaced by the globe, the logic of the modern age becomes replaced by a new logic in which the globe becomes the primary source of identity and arena of social action” (Robinson 2008, 140).

<sup>24</sup> Interview with chief editor of Elex Media Komputindo, Sari. November 24, 2014, at PT. Elex Media Komputindo, Gramedia, South Jakarta, Indonesia.

*culturally odorless* (*mukokuseki*, i.e., “racially, ethnically, and culturally unembedded and/or erasing national/cultural characteristics; Iwabuchi 2002b, 455) to describe this type of cultural globalization. Iwabuchi criticizes Japan’s state and cultural elites for having thoughts of utilizing the “soft” power of popular culture for nationalist aims. This “soft” nationalism points to the “narcissistic” discourse<sup>25</sup> that celebrates the transnational dissemination of Japanese popular culture to enhance understanding of the now “liberated” and “humane” nation of Japan (Iwabuchi 2002b, 448). Believers in soft power and commentators on Japanese supremacy are convinced by the worldwide popularity of Japanese animation, comics, and video games (Iwabuchi 2002b, 448). This has prompted the catchphrase “Cool Japan” (Japanese popular culture as cool) in the hope that Japan will rise as a global cultural superpower. The Japanese state has also supported this notion so that its pop culture capital can lead to global profits. In 2011, the Japanese government invested the large sum of 237 million USD into the “cool Japan” project in the hope of creating a profit of 6.9 trillion USD by 2020 (Mackay 2010). However, Iwabuchi debates that “Japaneseness” never existed in “cool Japan” commodities (especially if the narcissistic Japanese refer to an exotic ethnic Japaneseness like the one constructed by the Western gaze).<sup>26</sup> He states that the perceived image of “cool” Japan in other countries

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<sup>25</sup> Iwabuchi, in his paper “Japanese Popular Culture Goes Global” (2002b), aimed to explore Japan’s nationalist attempt to use soft power. As he stated, “This paper has examined the ways in which the complexities and contradictions imbricated [*sic*] in transnational cultural flows are discounted in Japan’s soft nationalism and narcissism, the project of articulating a distinct Japanese cultural excellence in the transnational consumption of Japanese popular culture. Japanese narcissistic discourses attempt to newly articulate the nationally delineated desire and imagination out of transnational cultural flows by suppressing the ambivalence and uneasiness that are entrenched in the act of making them ‘national’” (Iwabuchi 2002b, 465).

<sup>26</sup> Iwabuchi explains that “Japanese discourse on national identity has been deeply complicit with Western discourses essentializing Japanese” (1994; 2002b, 460), giving examples such as the exoticization of Western orientalizing icons including geisha and samurai. He also emphasizes that “Japan takes this self-Orientalism one step further, where the concern with the international consumption of Japanese culture is championed by Japan’s increasing international cultural exports and influence. Here, a narcissistic view is manifest in the claim of Japanese global cultural power through the observation of international (mainly Western) (mis)appropriation of Japanese culture”

was initiated by “cool” cultural products unrelated to Japanese nationalistic ideas, like in the case of Pokémon.<sup>27</sup> Most highly popular commodities, in the end, will be localized in each country. Alongside prominent cultural critics Ōtsuka Eiji and Ueno Toshiya, Iwabuchi has criticized the idea that Japanese nationalism can be pushed through Japanese “cool” products such as manga, as stated by animation critic Okada Toshio.<sup>28</sup> He has promoted the notion that Japanese cultural commodities have succeeded because of their culturally odorless quality and because of the Western media industry. Popular Japanese products such as video games and animation including manga initially came from a medium brought in from outside of the country. Iwabuchi states,

*Japanese animation and video game industry was only able to become a global player with the help of the power of Western media industries. The inroads of Japanese animation into the global market reflect the ever-growing global integration of markets and media industries. The expansive force of globalization has intensified the merger and cooperation of transnational corporations that originate in different countries, so that transnational corporations can simultaneously enter various markets such as the global, supra-national, regional, national, and local. This promotes the “decentering of capitalism from the West” (Tomlinson 1997, 140–43) through increasing integration, networking and cooperation among worldwide transnational cultural industries, including non-Western ones. (Iwabuchi 2002b, 457)*

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(2002b, 461).

<sup>27</sup> “One thing to observe that Japanese animation and video games are influencing children’s play and behavior in many parts of the world and that these children perceive Japan to be a cool nation because it creates cool cultural products such as Pokémon. However it is quite another to say that this cultural influence and this perception of coolness are closely associated with a tangible, realistic appreciation of ‘Japanese’ lifestyles or ideas [...]” (Iwabuchi 2002b, 456).

<sup>28</sup> Ōtsuka Eiji and Ueno Toshiya are prominent cultural critics and academics who share Iwabuchi’s critical view against “proclaiming ‘Japaneseness’” in animation and video games, not only because such a discourse risks articulating Japanese culture in nationalist terms but also because the view of global “Japanization” is groundless (Iwabuchi 2002b, 435). Iwabuchi criticizes Okada Toshio, appointed “lecturer of cultural significance of Japanese otaku (‘nerds’ obsessed with comics, animation, and video games) since 1996” by the University of Tokyo (2002b, 453–454). Iwabuchi states that Okada assumes the mass-consumption of Japanese popular culture has created a wish to have been born in Japan, evoking “to a certain degree, a sense of Western yearning for ‘Japan’” (2002b, 454).



Iwabuchi notes that popular examples of Japanese commodities such as animation, video games, and comics already had a global market and distribution before reaching parts of the world that include Indonesia. Thus, Iwabuchi disagrees with notions that centralize the globalization process and ‘single out the absolute symbolic center’ to belong to a particular country or region—in particular, to Japan, which tries to make its culture national (Iwabuchi 2002b, 465). Iwabuchi has presented a decentralized view of Japanese manga, which is culturally odorless of any nationality.

The “odorless” nature of globalized culture goes hand in hand with the characteristics of “popular” culture as summarized by media scholar John Fiske. In *Understanding Popular Culture* (1989), Fiske stated that in order to be popular, cultural commodities must fulfill the following contradictory needs:

1. Homogenizing needs. Popular culture needs to reach as many consumers as possible in order to gain greater economic return. Therefore, popular-cultural commodities need to deny social difference.
2. Cultural needs. These transform popular commodities into cultural resources in order to pluralize meanings and pleasures, fracturing their homogeneity and coherence. This process is conducted beyond the control of producers of the financial economy (Fiske 1989, 28).

Pluralization that answers the cultural needs of the consumers shows that popular culture is open for interpretation. Fiske also points out that while our society is diverse and its diversity is maintained by pluralization that answers the cultural needs of different individuals, it is resisting homogenization by the capitalistic system (1989, 29). This double movement of containment and resistance is the key to popular culture. The two complement each other: the homogenizing factor makes popular culture reachable to

everyone, but too much homogenizing will limit people's pleasure and also their demand. Popular culture is fluid because of people's ability to produce meanings and interpretations as they see fit (Fiske 1989, 32). Fiske notes popular culture's homogenizing traits in reaching as many people as possible and also its pluralizing traits in its fluidity.

Fiske states that popular culture is an elusive subject. In order to understand it, he describes the position of the analyst in researching a popular-culture text:

*The role of the critic-analyst, then, is not to reveal the true or hidden meanings of the text, or even to trace the readings that people make of it; rather, it is to trace the play of power in the social formation, a power game within which all texts are implicated and within which popular culture is always on the side of the subordinate.*

*If a reading must not be essentialized, neither must it be equated directly within a reader [...] Popular readings are always contradictory; they must encompass both that which is to be resisted and the immediate resistance to it. (Fiske 1989, 45)*

In this statement, Fiske states that neither the popular culture commodities nor the readers should be essentialized, because he believes in the power play implicated within the text. In order to avoid essentializing meanings, a cultural analyst should never take the text or the people out of the cultural-historical moments of specific productions (Fiske 1989, 45). Here, historicization and contextualization of popular media become the keys.

This thesis agrees with the point of view that popular-culture text, including manga, should not be essentialized. This thesis also agrees that the key to popular culture lies in the dialogue (instead of the power play) between social actors in popular culture. Henceforth, this thesis will focus on Indonesian comics discourse since the 1990s and the definition of *Indonesia* therein, as well as the interactions between the involved actors

rather than the text itself. I take this approach in order to demonstrate that “style,” a recurring problem in Indonesian comics discourse, is a form of essentializing the meaning of popular culture—in this case, comics. The context of the medium and its meaning are not generated by the comics texts themselves but through the interplay of state actors, industry actors, and cultural elites on one hand and artists, editors, and readers (i.e., insiders/members of the comics community) on the other.

However, this raises the question of how appropriate it is to see popular culture as a site of “power play” between two sides (especially with respect to so-called power-blocs—in particular, the one allegedly formed by state actors). For example, in the case of studying Indonesian comics, the matter of Indonesian identity is brought forward by concerned groups of cultural elites. “Identity,” claimed in the name of “style,” has also penetrated the industry and the creators and critics themselves, as there is a “self-categorization” in reference to manga or “European style.” Against this backdrop, it is not indicated to completely adopt Iwabuchi’s stance that the global Japanese product is culturally odorless, at least not without pursuing how Japanese comics have been positioned in Indonesia since the 1990s.

The next task is to examine how “national identity” should be analyzed in popular culture. Cultural geography scholar Tim Edensor shares his concern about this subject in his book *Popular Culture, Everyday Life, and the Matrix of National Identity* (2003). Edensor analyzes and compiles various theories of nationalism and national identity (such as by Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, Anthony Smith, and John Hutchinson) and finds distortion in “their consideration of ‘high’, ‘official’ and ‘traditional’ culture to the exclusion of popular” and “that their conception of culture is rather undynamic” (Edensor 2003, 2). He traces this back to the “undynamic conception

of culture” in all the examined theories. The five authors under scrutiny pay importance to “high,” “official,” and “traditional” culture, excluding the role of popular culture in the creation of national identity. Because national identity only relates to “high,” “official,” and “traditional” culture conceptions, they disregard contemporary articulation and propose mostly a top-down view.

*Culture* is a fluid term that suggests an overlapping meaning of being “cultured” (i.e., a collective adjective to describe an “artistic and intellectual endeavour hierarchically”; Edensor 2003, 12). Cultural studies then emerged “as a discipline to counter class-ridden assumptions that what was worthy of study was ‘high culture’ or ‘study of perfection’ ” (Edensor 2003, 12).<sup>29</sup> Edensor also points out the necessity of studying popular culture in cultural studies because of the harm it has brought. British literary critic F. R. Leavis was one of the pioneers of this notion. He tried “studying ‘mass’, ‘popular’ culture in order to ascertain the harm he believed it was doing to the British nation” (Edensor 2003, 13). Edensor concludes the following from Leavis’ theory of popular culture:

*[...] in another formulation especially pertinent to the construction of national identity, popular has been considered to be that culture which is prevalent amongst the ‘people’. Prominent here is the nostalgic celebration of folk cultures – a more valorized, seemingly ‘authentic’ collection of cultural forms and practices which are being erased by modern mass culture. Whether such ideas emanate from a conservative or radical milieu, the argument is laid down that such rooted, traditional culture reflects the nature of the national or regional context in which it is set; it grows out of area and reflects the cultural mores of this people, and is located firmly ‘in place’. The idea of uncommercial ritualized and time-honoured folk practices, as argued above, is largely*

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<sup>29</sup> For the definition of “high-culture” itself, Edensor quoted English cultural critic Mathew Arnold: “to make the best that has been known and thought in the world current everywhere” (Edensor 2003, 12).

*mythical and fails to recognize the dynamism and syncretic nature of culture.*  
(Edensor 2003, 14)

In this statement, Edensor points out that in the beginning of cultural studies history, popular culture was considered harmful in the construction of national identity. He also elaborates on the paradox between high culture and popular culture in cultural studies from Leavis' point of view:

*[...] the notion of popular culture has attracted a range of meanings – from that which is 'widely favoured or well liked by many people' (Storey, 1993:7), to those inferior cultural forms and practices which are left over after 'high' culture has been identified, reinforcing Leavisite boundary between 'good' and 'bad'. It has also been vilified as 'mass culture', invariably commercial and homogenous, and carrying suggestions of the harmful hypnotic, addictive qualities identified by Leavis [...] Furthermore, this mass culture further subdues the spirit and intelligence of the 'people' by the ideological messages it transmits, shaped around values which assert the benefits of materialism, glamour, and individuals [...] [it] is devised to pacify the masses and accommodate them to needs of capital.* (Edensor 2003, 14)

We can summarize that at one point in the history of cultural studies, there was a dichotomy in the construction of national identity and its connection to culture:

1. High culture (relating to “folk,” “traditional,” and “official” cultures), which has the characteristics of authentic cultural forms and practices that are significant in the construction of national identity.
2. Popular culture (relating to the “mass” culture, also considered “low” culture), which is subdued, has hypnotizing characteristics that are harmful to people, and erases the authenticity of cultural forms and practices of folk culture.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> We have to be aware that Edensor also mentioned that traits of popular culture are nostalgic to folk culture. Henceforth, the position of “folk” culture in this dichotomy has to be examined with more scrutiny: “... in another formulation especially pertinent to the construction of national identity, popular has been considered to be that culture which is prevalent amongst the ‘people’”. Prominent

Edensor also refers to the “mass culture” of American culture and the “Americanization” that is displacing folk culture (2003, 14). He borrows British sociologist Richard Hoggart’s description of mass culture as “colonializing” to explain its penetrating power over the working-class culture (Edensor 2003, 14). Meanwhile, while national elites, governments, and patricians disapprove of popular culture and pursue “‘high culture’ as something that nation has to be associated with” (Edensor 2003, 14), they cannot deny the power of popular culture’s achievements (e.g., the success of a TV program outside of a country) in representing a nation. Edensor also mentions sociologist Mike Featherstone’s findings on the rising number of middle class citizens who possess knowledge of and claim status for popular culture:

*... In fact, as Featherstone (1991) has written, the values expressed by the old cultural guardians have been challenged by what he terms the ‘new cultural intermediaries’, a contemporary fraction of the middle class who possess knowledge of pop music, film, and other manifestations of popular culture, and claim status on the basis of this expertise. Thus the national-cultural terrain is now characterized by a plethora of interest groups, ‘experts’ and aficionados who champion a bewildering range of cultural forms and practices. (Edensor 2003, 15)*

As popular culture gains more literacy among consumers, it also gains more values. However, the dichotomy of “high” and “low” culture is by no means gone, because there are still battles within popular culture itself to “achieve hierarchical status” (e.g., to measure “quality” within drama and soap opera works based on their enthusiasts), while “at the level of the nation... a nationalist can bring together different regional and ethnic differences by identifying national high cultural points as common denominators” that rank within the cultural forms themselves (Edensor 2003, 16). Therefore, for cultural

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here is the nostalgic celebration of folk cultures – a more valorised, seemingly ‘authentic’ collection of cultural forms and practices which are being erased by modern mass culture” (Edensor 2003, 14).

elites, the high or low (in regard to funding) is determined by the elitists and their intended purposes.

We can conclude that while Edensor points out the dichotomy, he does not reinforce it (Edensor 2003, 17). He dismisses the centralization of “high culture” and emphasizes the fluidity of culture and its ongoing construction of meaning. He questions the position of nationalists, the government, and other cultural elites over their cultural guardianship and identifies the dialogue regarding culture. He states, “The power of such symbols lies not in any fixed meaning they may carry but in the fact that they are widely shared” (2003, 16). Thus, Edensor recognizes the fluidity of popular culture and separates it from a nationalist’s agenda of pushing a national canon, but we still have to question the role of popular culture in disseminating national identity.

We have briefly mentioned “Americanization” as a potential colonializing power to a nation–state. Americanization is also used by Japanese state actors (one being Okada Toshio), as stated by Iwabuchi, who have power to influence Westerners in favor of a Japanese utopia. While Edensor mentions that the dichotomic view of popular and high culture in cultural studies has shifted, the notion is still present in Indonesia, where there is an assumption that recently produced Japanese manga–styled comics have the potential to be modern-imperialism tools. Global consumerism has created transnational practices that draw attention to national identity in relation to the “low,” “shallow,” “unimportant” popular culture. Moreover, the allegedly insignificant popular culture has become more prevalent than the nostalgic celebration of folk culture, and the previously valorized “authentic” culture has vanished from the “folk” and “traditional” culture. The formerly “high” and “traditional” culture that supposedly represented the “authentic” national culture has been cast aside by popular culture. However, when connecting the above

theories of national identity to the actual situation in Indonesia, one may wonder if “national identity” really suffered losses because of popular culture.

Juxtaposing the dichotomy of “high-culture,” being the stronghold of national identity, with popular culture allegedly endangers “national” and high-cultural (national) creations. With respect to discussions of transnational culture, sociologist Victor Roudometof advises people to conceptualize a cosmopolitan-local continuum; such a continuum allows identification of parts that are more open to the transnational (namely the global and the popular) and of those that are not. Roudometof regards cosmopolitans as more open towards transnationalism and locals as rather defensive or closed towards the advances of global culture (2005, 121–125). This contrasts with Fiske, who rejects the polarized stereotype of “power-bloc and people” when investigating the power play (Fiske 1989, 46). However, the correlation Roudometof proposes is not aimed at polarization but rather at gradations measured against either end of the continuum (Roudometof 2005, 125).

Consequently, this thesis conceives the power play between the main social actors related to Indonesian comics since the 1990s as the aftereffect of the globalization of Japanese comics. The actors can be divided into two groups: those who are concerned with the contribution of Indonesian comics to national identity and those who are engaged in transnational comics. I do not focus on the readers, who have the freedom of their personal interpretation, nor on the texts themselves, as they are not generating the “national identity.” This thesis analyzes the involved social actors and their attitude towards transnational manga in relation to the formation of national identity. It uses comics exhibitions as its main example and employs a discourse-analytical approach to



analyze the interrelation between the relevant social actors within the public sphere, as manifested in print media. The methodology shall be outlined in the next section.

### *Critical Discourse Analysis*

This dissertation aims to examine how print media—in particular, newspapers—have constructed “Indonesian comics” in Indonesian society since the 1990s. This section explicates the methodology used to analyze Indonesian comics discourse.

*Discourse* means not only “passages of connected writing and speech” but also a “production of knowledge through language” (Hall 2001, 72). This approach originates from Michel Foucault’s understanding of discourse to construct meaning to regulate which topics can be discussed and analyzed.<sup>31</sup>

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is one method of analyzing discourse. Linguists Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, two contributors to this methodology, state that CDA observes language as a social practice that is determined and stabilized by the social culture (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 7). CDA posits that powerful institutions have control in communicating an ideology in order to maintain their dominance in society. From another point of view, for CDA, texts—be they newspaper articles or speeches by powerful social actors—have the power to construct meaning in society as a result of hegemony. This thesis uses CDA to examine how various texts and institutions have

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<sup>31</sup> “A discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment... Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language... But... since all social practices entail *meaning* and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect” (Hall 2001, 72).

shaped and shifted the meaning of Indonesian comics—in short, how the understanding of “Indonesian comics” is constructed socially.

CDA was originally based on the approach of critical linguistics,<sup>32</sup> which pays attention to context and its socio-historical meaning. Wodak, whose work contributed to developing CDA alongside the work of other linguists from the same Lancaster school, such as Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk, writes that CDA combines different levels of analysis (Wodak and Busch 2004, 127) and theories (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 5) that seem appropriate for the data. Studies of media, such as van Dijk’s comparison of news reports in different countries, combine content analysis with text-linguistic and discourse-analytical approaches (Wodak and Busch 2004, 127).

The data for CDA are usually accumulated after concept finding and categorization. The accumulated data are then used to re-examine the original question. This brings us to another question: how a problem-oriented approach with unspecific data gathering could be valid as a scientific study. The answer lies in the nature of discourse analysis itself.

CDA provides a flexible method for the study of Indonesian comics discourse, a subject that is by nature blatantly affected by the social actors and opinion makers who strongly correlate with the changing national policies within different regimes. More importantly, the study of Indonesian comics does not have a particular theory that strongly anchors it; this thesis is the first attempt to problematize and discuss the definition of

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<sup>32</sup> Critical linguistics is an approach that emphasizes “the importance of context, the social and historical situativity of the text, and the intertextual/interdiscursive dimension” (Wodak and Busch 2004, 108).

Indonesian comics. However, this thesis does not present a single definitive conclusion for Indonesian comics; rather, it presents a discussion of meaning itself.

Discourse analysis is not an approach that intends to present a single conclusive answer of what something is or what it should be. It takes a reflexive stance on the production of meaning. It does not take texts for granted but instead challenges them. In presenting a critical take on meaning construction by an enunciator, CDA analysts are keen to take an active sociopolitical stance. However, CDA is fair insofar as it keeps a neutral stance in exploring problems from different angles, using the Dialectical-Relational Approach that will be discussed in the next section. CDA is a means to examine a text in a critical manner and open it up for a challenge, not accepting a straightforward and easy claim for meaning.

Thus, this study of Indonesian discourse challenges the *meaning* of “Indonesian comics” within the context of Indonesian society, history, and particularly, the current generation of readers.

#### *Dialectical–Relational Approach as an Operational of CDA*

The dialectical–relational approach (DRA) is a CDA method that analyzes the social conflict in the linguistic manifestation of discourse, specifically related to three elements of discourse: dominance, difference, and resistance (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 27). Like discourse analysis in general, the DRA presupposes the discourse’s dialectical active role in constructing social identities and cultural values, which means that texts and language are responsible for the construction of meanings (Wodak and Meyer 2009).

In the context of this thesis, text on Indonesian comics means that there is a construction of meaning for Indonesian comics, especially in what is identified as “Indonesian” in the term *Indonesian comics*. However, the construction of Indonesian comics is built on conflict, which may result in rejecting other types of comics (especially imported comics in Indonesia). As this study analyzes various concepts of Indonesian comics put forward in newspapers throughout Indonesian history, it also must consider rejected definitions in order to produce concepts of Indonesian comics that can be accepted by the elites. This study tries to view the definition of Indonesian comics critically based on the assumption that the discourse has created inherent differences between the Indonesian comics’ “whats and whatnots,” putting the latter in an inferior position.

The DRA follows four stages of propositions in the approach. The first is focusing on the specific social problem and its semiotic aspect and going beyond the text to identify it. The second is identifying the dominant discourses constituting this semiotic aspect. The third is considering the diversity of the discourses within the dominant discourse, and the last is identifying resistance against the dominant discourse.

The DRA approach provides a path to social, cultural, and historical aspects of comics and at the same time allows for consideration of comics themselves. The DRA also hints at the presence of a non-indigenous power inside the actors of the discourse. While it risks giving an impression of scattered research, it highlights the context of the specific discursive subject—in this case, Indonesian comics. The DRA will select factors significant in the construction of meaning of Indonesian comics without dwelling too deeply in their social, historical, and cultural backgrounds.

This thesis presumes that attributes of comics (such as “Indonesian or “local” and “national”) have put the authenticity of Indonesian-made comics on the agenda. The term *Indonesian comics* denotatively refers to comics created by Indonesians, published by Indonesian publishers, published in Indonesia, and/or read by Indonesians. However, as discussed in the previous section, in some cases even types of comics that meet all those conditions are not said to be “Indonesian” comics. This raises the question of what the notion of “Indonesian” in *Indonesian comics* really means. The CDA-DRA appears to be most appropriate in that regard.

The first stage of this approach calls for exploring how “Indonesian-ness” is constructed historically and culturally. The second stage demands that *all* genres, styles, and terms related to the assumption of “Indonesian comics” be identified. The later stages consider this range as a base for analyzing Indonesian comics before discussing how the assumption of Indonesian comics is processed in the discourse.

CDA is rooted in linguistics and focuses on different language patterns. Associations and variations in establishing arguments are a starting point (e.g., in our case, association of a foreign style with cultural imperialism, or variations that show inconsistency in the term *influence*).<sup>33</sup> There are also nominalizations in characterizing agency and causality (e.g., suggesting an “attack” on the Indonesian comics market) as well as emphasis and silence with regard to identifying bias in the discourse (e.g., the presumed lack of Indonesian representatives in mainstream comics in the discourse).

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<sup>33</sup> At this stage, examples such as foreign-style association with cultural imperialism and inconsistency in the term are still in the hypothesis stage. The analysis of these terms will be discussed in chapter three.

Among the various texts that represent the Indonesian comics discourse after the proliferation of Japanese comics, this thesis selects various written texts—in particular, comics exhibitions and discussion pamphlets and newspaper articles—that were drafted within the context of Indonesian comics exhibitions. Exhibitions are one of the most prominent activities organized by comics communities; various comics critics, artists, and editors are involved, and they eventually become the social actors in constituting the discourse of Indonesian comics.

### *Structure of the Thesis and Summary*

This thesis examines the discourse of Indonesian comics after the entrance of translated Japanese manga. To fulfill this objective, it is divided into six chapters.

Chapter One (Introduction) provides the aim and background of the study, which is to analyze the discourse of “Indonesian comics” in a particular period—i.e., after the 1990s, when Japanese comics entered Indonesia—in order to discover a new potential for the discussion of Indonesian comics, such as overcoming the alienation of manga-styled Indonesian comics based on the accusations of a lack of Indonesian identity. This eventually invites questions about the definition of Indonesian comics constructed in the same time frame. This chapter also introduces the theoretical framework (popular culture, globalization, and national identity) as well as the methodology (critical discourse analysis) that can help with a critical examination of problematic discursive constructs.

Chapter Two (Indonesia: Politics, Media, and Culture) surveys information regarding the Indonesian nation–state, identifying conditions that have potentially shaped the thoughts of the social actors and their discussion. Understanding national history is

significant in order to understand the concept of “Indonesian” from a cultural and media perspective. The investigations in this chapter reveal the importance of unity in Indonesian political, social, and cultural discourse. I will also demonstrate the significance of “traditional Indonesian ethnic culture” (especially Javanese) as a primary representation of “Indonesian identity” in modern mass media (i.e., radio, print, television, cinema, music, etc.) and the reluctance to experiment aesthetically (particularly salient in cinema) in favor of enunciating social and political visions. This chapter also shows how the strict regulation of media culture has oppressed the creativity of local products, causing the flourishing of imported foreign cultural products in Indonesia.

The first half of Chapter Three (Indonesian Comics: History and Problems) describes the condition of comics in Indonesia comprehensively throughout history. Here, leaning mainly on Bonneff (1998) and Ahmad et al. (2005), the timeline of Indonesian comics is divided into three generations. This separation is based on numerous factors including the emergence of new genres in the 1960s. I will pay the most importance to the discussion of the third generation, the period in which new Indonesian comics appear after the major production slump and the entrance of Japanese comics. The second half of the chapter is devoted to a description of the third generation of Indonesian comics. This thesis identifies and positions different genres and statuses as well as their roles in the Indonesian comics discourse. Based on this analysis, I will point out social actors who are crucial to defining the concept of Indonesian comics: first and foremost, comics-community members who are engaged in organizing comics exhibitions and other events and who compose the cultural elites (journalists, cultural observers, and critics). I will also discuss the definition of popular and alternative comics, which indirectly represent “popular” and “high” culture in the comics commodity.

Chapter Four (A Critical Study of the Problems “Influence” and “Style”) scrutinizes two problematic terms that have repeatedly surfaced in previous studies of comics and Indonesian comics: the interrelated terms *influence* and *style*. I argue that these two terms have contributed to the discourse of Indonesian comics of the third generation. The term *influence* is problematic because of its sporadic use referring to various conditions in Indonesian comics criticism but mainly to the supposedly negative impact of foreign cultures. The term *influence* implies the existence of an interfering “other” in comics, which manifests itself in “style.” This thesis argues that “foreign style” in locally-made comics is regarded as disturbing the “Indonesian” identity, and as such, is excludable from the “domain of Indonesian comics.”

Chapter Five (Third-Generation Indonesian Comics Discussion: Analysis) analyzes the texts that constitute “Indonesian comics” for the third generation. Comics communities organize comics exhibitions, workshops, and speaking events. These activities are important because, among other things, they are picked up by the mass media and communicated to the general Indonesian public. From studying newspaper articles and pamphlets related to the construction of “Indonesian comics,” it becomes apparent that the actors in the Indonesian comics industry have different perspectives toward “Indonesian comics.” State actors, as represented by the DI:Y Exhibition, foster alternative perspectives, and artistic comics, as truly “Indonesian,” seek to isolate Indonesian comics from creations by Indonesians modeled on popular conventional foreign comics such as Japanese manga. Industry actors, as represented by the Bara Betina Exhibition, have never objected that “foreign styles” washed away the Indonesian comics. On the contrary, they have viewed imports as something that enriches the comics medium and believe its aesthetics standard should not be validated by geopolitical boundaries, i.e.,



the foreign style it adopted. In contrast, the comics community, represented by the Indonesian Comics History Exhibition, is not as systematic as the state and the industry in defining *Indonesian* in “Indonesian comics.” For members of the comics community, “Indonesian-ness” has been a matter of national pride that fits their agenda, which is directed against media imports from Japan.

Chapter Six (Discussion and Conclusion) highlights the interconnectivity of the other chapters in order to determine the phenomenon of Indonesian identity in comics. This chapter concludes that in the history of Indonesian comics in Indonesia, only industry actors have been concerned about the comics medium, while other actors—i.e., the state and communities—have placed importance mainly on the political aspects within comics (i.e., their “Indonesian” identity). This tendency was set in Old Order Indonesia (1945–1965) with the formulation of a decidedly national cultural policy. However, the acknowledgement of “Indonesian identity” in comics has shifted after the fragmentation of “style,” i.e., the diversification typical of the late 1990s and the 2000s. Before the entrance of Japanese comics, “appropriating traditional ethnic motifs and themes” into comics was enough to admit “Indonesian-ness.” However, this effect has been neutralized since the 1990s because of a new discourse that regarded “style” (i.e., conventional generic comics drawing on aesthetics adapted from foreign comics) as a representation of “foreign identity.” A manga book still looks Japanese even after the appropriation of ethnic motifs. Appropriation of foreign “styles” in popular comics pushes state actors and cultural elites to advocate “alternative” comics as the solution to the issue of “Indonesian comics.” They promote alternative comics as “high culture” and separate them from the popular transnational comics. This again reinforces the bipolarization of actors in Indonesian comics.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Indonesia: Politics, Media, and Culture**

While this thesis investigates exhibitions and print media in particular, this chapter discusses the cultural, social, historical, and political backgrounds of multiple types of media in Indonesia, from print to electronic. The results will contribute to the analysis of how Indonesian comics have been discussed for the past twenty years.

According to Indonesian media critics David T. Hill and Krishna Sen (2007), media and culture are two separate subjects politically. The content of television, cinema, radio, magazines, and the internet has often been identified with the modernized, popular culture and is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Communication and Information Technology (Kementrian Komunikasi dan Informatika). Books, art, music, and literature are under the authority of the Department of Education and Culture (Kementrian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan). Comics, as printed matter, belong under the umbrella of the latter. However, anthropologist Shiraishi Saya, who has researched Japanese popular culture, writes that Japanese manga has also gained popularity in Indonesia, piggybacking on the animation series, often at the same time (Shiraishi 2013, 63). Because of the typical media convergence (media mix), the content of Japanese media in Indonesia falls between two cracks and thus has been regulated by both departments.

Every form of media and cultural publicity, especially under the New Order (1966–1998), has been a vehicle for the uncontested “national culture” policy of the state. Half of the history of modern comics in Indonesia is bound to the dogma of the Older and

New Order governments. This can be seen in present discourse still inheriting the spirit of national (read: Javanese—the dominant ethnicity in Indonesia) culture that the state spooned to the nation. The praise of wayang comics<sup>34</sup> in present discourse is an example.

Wayang comics (see Fig. 1 for an example) is a popular Indonesian comics genre that the current Indonesian discourse glorifies as having represented Indonesia's Golden Age of comics in the 1970s. Tim Lindsay, in his research on wayang comics, wrote in *Ramayana* in 1987 that when wayang comics were first created in the 1970s, they were originally criticized as “irrelevant junk that is destroying the essence of Javanese traditional wayang art (Lindsay 1987, 41; see Fig. 2). However, since the 1990s and against the backdrop of manga imports and the rise of transnational comics (i.e., inspired foreign comics—for example, transnational Japanese manga—created by locals), wayang comics have become the role model for the successful assimilation of national culture into comics (Ajidarma 2011, 8). At the same time, the present discourse of wayang comics also shows how persistent the past spirit of the anti-Western Old Order and the authoritarian New Order is, especially in its refusal of “foreign” culture and its insistence on one centralized “traditional national culture.” This look at the current discourse on wayang comics indicates that the Indonesian comics discourse is not initially determined. State actors and cultural elites might have established a completely different discourse after the rise of transnational comics!

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<sup>34</sup> Wayang (shadow puppet) is a traditional Javanese shadow puppet theater that originated in 930. There are various types of this theater (such as performances by flat puppets and by human actors). The stories are mostly based on the classics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, as well as on derivative works inspired by them. Wayang art was registered as a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2003. Wayang comics date back to Kosasih, the father of Indonesian comics. See the third section of this chapter.

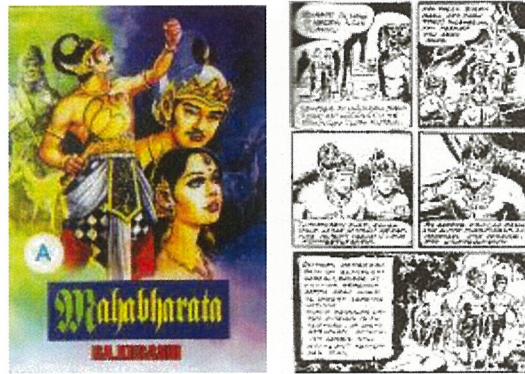


Fig. 1 Wayang comics example. *Mahabharata*, by R. A. Kosasih (1975; 2010)

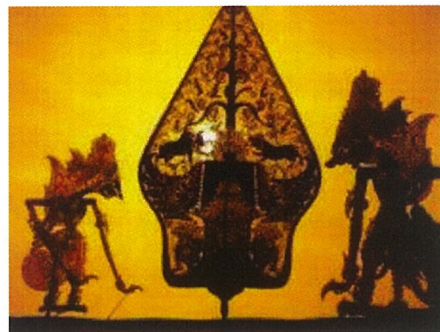


Fig. 2 Wayang (Javanese shadow puppet) theater

The fundamentally undetermined (i.e., fluid) state of any identity fails to be acknowledged in the present discourse on Indonesian comics. All parties involved in constructing Indonesian comics discourse are extremely critical of the present state of Indonesian comics but have never considered how the comics have been evaluated through history. They need to scrutinize the situational backgrounds that create the discourse. Hence, an analysis of the present discourse of Indonesian comics needs to look back in time and trace the political and social history of the state as well as the various policies affecting the related media and culture.

### *Indonesia and the Ideology of Cultural Unity*

Indonesia's territory consists of 17,508 islands inhabited by 237.6 million people with a median age of 27.6 years (28% of the population is 14 years old or younger). The territory of 1,904,569 square kilometers is home to 350 ethnolinguistic groups, and parts of it historically have been occupied by at least ten pre-historical kingdoms and ten Muslim states.<sup>35</sup> This multi-state territory was unified under the Portuguese (1512–1850) and Dutch (under the Dutch East India Company from 1602–1800 and the Dutch East Indies from 1800–1942) jurisdictions. Indonesia was also occupied by the Japanese for three years (1942–1945) before declaring its independence on August 17, 1945. Since then, Indonesia has been ruled by seven presidents. Two of them—the populist Sukarno, who led the Old Order regime (1945–1966), and the authoritarian Suharto, whose regime is well known as the New Order (1967–1998)—were especially influential, based on the length of political term and absolutism,<sup>36</sup> in shaping Indonesia's culture.

However, the Dutch colonial state had a vital role in creating the current Indonesian state. The Dutch colonial government united all states in *Nusantara*—the Indonesian archipelago—under a single organization, and it also created the Indonesian language. Between 1865 and 1930, approximately 90% of the colonial civil service in the Dutch East Indies consisted of natives (Anderson 1990, 98; Anderson 1999, 5), and communication in the state was a mixture of various local and European languages (Hill and Sen 2007, 22). In 1908, the Dutch colonial government established the publisher *Balai Pustaka* to “create a Modern Malay language and equally new and modern literature”

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<sup>35</sup> Statistics from Frederick and Worden (2011, xxxii, 107–109).

<sup>36</sup> The absolutism here is connected to the position of a leader in Javanese culture. This will be discussed later in the section.

(Hill and Sen 2007, 22) meant especially for the emerging indigenous elites of that time. The *Balai Pustaka* project was considered successful in creating a canon of early Indonesian language and literature, which now has become the mother of all Indonesian modern literature and publishing houses.

This thesis considers colonialism in four different phases: (1) Dutch Colonialism (1602–1942); (2) the Old Order (1945–1966); (3) the New Order (1967–1998); and (4) the Post-New Order regime (1998–now), the second and the third being important in the timeline of the construction of Indonesian comics discourse that will be discussed later.

The New Order is especially important for comics culture because it conceptualized and embedded practices of national ideology—in political, social, economic, and cultural apparatuses—that are still exercised now. This thesis focuses on the New Order also because it was during this regime that Indonesian comics went through three different waves of transitions that shaped their history.<sup>37</sup>

The New Order government was set into motion after a coup known as G30S (*Gerakan 30 September*, or the 30th of September Movement)—supposedly headed by Lieutenant-Colonel Untung, who assassinated six prominent Indonesian generals and one army officer. The coup was suppressed by then Major-General Suharto. There have been many controversies surrounding the coup, but the consensus for the past 50 years emphasizes the involvement of the PKI (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, Indonesian Communist Party).<sup>38</sup> The coup served as a means to make communism a threat to the

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<sup>37</sup> This will be discussed in the next section.

<sup>38</sup> Any account of the coup that contradicts the version created by the New Order has been banned in Indonesia, even now. One of the most famous studies on the coup was performed by Benedict Anderson in 1966 (Anderson 1990, 7). Notoriously known as the “Cornell Paper,” it suggested that the coup was planned by Suharto himself. Anderson provided evidence such as autopsy reports that contradict the New Order version of the G30S coup (Anderson 1999, 12). In 2007, all texts that



nation. It led to the immediate genocide of at least half a million citizens, the torture of millions, and discrimination against people who were presumably connected to the Communist Party.<sup>39</sup> In March 1966, Sukarno—who was a leftist himself—passed all interim power to Suharto. The latter assumed the role of acting president in March 1967 and eventually full president in 1968, and he remained untouched for 30 years.

Regardless of the truth about the G30S, the New Order established communism (and related subjects including Marxism and Leninism) as a threat and justified its repressions under the assumption of “latent danger” (*bahaya laten*).<sup>40</sup> Armed with the respective regulation, the Indonesian military assumed a major role in exterminating possible remaining lefts. The New Order’s dual-function (*dwi fungsi*) doctrine gave the Army an important role not only in defense and security but also in government and society (Anderson 1990, 115; Crouch 2010, 23, 129–130). Officers who potentially disagreed with the ideas of the New Order were immediately removed from key positions. After the coup, military figures were pictured as “objects of people’s admiration” and described as heroes who saved the country from terrorism and soldiers who were constantly aware of the latent danger of communism (Crouch 2010, 131). Police also had the power to censor cultural products such as comics, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

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challenged the New Order version were confiscated and burned by then President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (Thompson 2007), and Anderson was banned from entering Indonesia.

<sup>39</sup> The numbers are unrecorded, but according to Hill and Sen (2007, 3–4), at least half a million Indonesians were massacred and another half million were tortured. Indonesian expert Robert Cribb writes that the numbers may be as high as 2 million (Cribb 2002, 557), while Anderson suggests that the death toll was 3 million people (2008).

<sup>40</sup> Potential danger. *Latent danger* is a term Suharto repeatedly used in the media (Hill and Sen 2007, 4) to imply that G30S can be repeated. Nowadays, the term *latent danger* is used in Indonesian media to state a potential repeat of a tragedy. A post-Suharto regime article in the national newspaper *Kompas* listed 10 latent dangers in Indonesia, including communism, capitalism, and liberalism (Rahmawan 2009).

Besides the military backing, Suharto's regime also received prominent economic backing. In contrast to Sukarno's anti-foreign imperialism policy,<sup>41</sup> Suharto opened Indonesia to foreign investors.<sup>42</sup> Under Suharto, Indonesia enjoyed vast economic growth and international recognition and was predicted to become one of "the top five leading economies in the Pacific Rim" (Budianta 2007, 510). Domestically, Suharto gained the nickname *Bapak Pembangunan* (Father of Development), while the economy was primarily under the control of his relatives and Chinese tycoons befriending his family (Budianta 2007).

Suharto was fitted to the figure of "father"—an absolute Javanese ruler. His loyal family and aides obeyed him and oppressed any opposition or critiques in order to maintain power for three decades. This practice has made Indonesia the most surveyed country in studies of neo-patrimonialism.<sup>43</sup> Suharto's administration—as described by many Indonesian studies scholars (Anderson 1990; Budianta 2007; Clark 2001; Sarsito 2006; Hill & Sen 2007)—also implemented the supremacy of Javanese ideology in the Indonesian state.

The Javanese ideology, representing the dominant ethnicity<sup>44</sup> in Indonesia, was problematic in a country that, according to its laws, was supposed to practice democracy.

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<sup>41</sup> Sukarno addressed this in his independence address on August 17, 1959, infamous for its name, *Manifestasi Politik* (Political Manifesto). This will be discussed in the latter half of this section.

<sup>42</sup> Indonesian cultural studies scholar Melani Budianta writes that Suharto received full support from international funding agencies such as the World Bank, the IMF, and their influential nation-state members because of his "politically correct" anti-communist stand (Budianta 2007, 509).

<sup>43</sup> The case of neo-patrimonialism in Indonesia has been studied by political science scholar Daniel Brown (1994). Patrimonialism is the concept of personal authority's exercising power by traditional status, where staff members are personal retainers. Due to modernization and increased mobility in society, the traditional privileged class should have diminished, and patrimonialism was expected to erode. However, in "modernized" Third World countries, Western values lack legitimacy, and democracy has become a façade. The Indonesian government maintained the same patron-client relationship as the one practiced in patrimonialism (Brown 1994, 114–117).

<sup>44</sup> Forty-one percent of Indonesia's population is Javanese (Frederick 2011, xxxii).



According to Benedict Anderson, the four concepts of power established in Javanese tradition—concrete, homogenous, constant, and unquestioned legitimacy—were deeply integrated in the regime’s policies and regulations (1990, 21–22). Under a centralized and single authority, they were exercised through both “kasar” (crude, rough) and “halus” (smooth, civilized) methods.<sup>45</sup> As if obeying the Javanese principles, pluralism was not advised in practice. Suharto gently (halus) advised people of different tribes in the government to adopt Javanese principles (Sarsito 2006, 453–454). His rough method was applied when excluding his opponents from elections, accusing them—as stated by government officials—of showing an “attempt to shake and threaten the national stability and unity.”<sup>46</sup>

However, this idea of “unity” had been a constant political theme in Indonesia since before its independence. Many attempts were made to articulate the need to unite diverse ethnicities and religions in Indonesia under one state. During the Indonesian nationalist congress in the Dutch East Indies in 1928, the Oath of Youth (Sumpah Pemuda; Anderson 1990, 36) focused on the proclamation of one motherland, one nation, and one language of Indonesia to identify it as distinct from the colonial Dutch. Unity is inscribed in the national emblem of the ancient bird Garuda in ancient Javanese: “Bhineka Tunggal Ika” (Unity in Diversity). The idea is also present in the Indonesian national ideology “Pancasila” (Five Principles), initially laid down by Sukarno in 1945.

Under the New Order, Pancasila became a sacred and monumentally significant doctrine in Indonesia. Its five principles are “belief in the one and only God; just and

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<sup>45</sup> Absorption involves diplomatic pressure, *kasar* involves subduing opposition in destructive power, and *halus* involves recognition of superiority; op cit. (44–45). Examples of how the New Order used this in various government practices and policies will be discussed in this section.

<sup>46</sup> [*Sic*] The statement was delivered by Military General Widodo on behalf of the president in the case of Ali Sadikin’s being excluded as a presidential candidate (Liddle 1978, 183).

civilized humanity; the unity of Indonesia; democracy guided by the inner wisdom of deliberations of representatives; and social justice for all Indonesian people.”<sup>47</sup> Under the New Order regime, Pancasila has become compulsory at all levels of education and for all public servants, including those who work for state television and radio stations (Hill & Sen 2007, 11–12). Moreover, Pancasila has also been made the symbol of victory against the evil communists (G30S coup) by the establishment of Pancasila Sanctity Day (Hari Kesaktian Pancasila) as a national holiday observed on October 1 and the Sacred Pancasila Monument (Monumen Pancasila Sakti) in front of the murder site of the seven army officers in the coup. Questioning the principles of Pancasila—including unity—suggests a threat to national security.

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While state politics adopted Javanese principles, in cultural practice, Javanese forms of culture have created the foundation for uniting the Indonesian nation. The New Order government has constituted Javanese culture as “national culture” (Budianta 2007, 512; Hill & Sen 2007, 16). Historian Jean Gelman Taylor writes that under the Old Order, Sukarno commissioned the Javanese traditional cloth batik to be worn by all ethnic groups in Indonesia (Taylor 2008, 12). This was remarkable, considering the exclusivity of the patterns for elite classes in the original Javanese practice. However, Suharto was the one promoting it as “national” dress and formal evening wear (Taylor 2008, 12). Under his regime, batik became the uniforms for businesses, government offices, political parties, and educational institutes (Taylor 2008, 12). In contrast to making the Javanese batik the incarnation of “national” culture, Suharto pitted the ethnicities against each other, as seen

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<sup>47</sup> Translation of the Pancasila by Hill and Sen (2007, 11).

in the suggestions for their respective traditional clothing (Taylor 2008, 12) that, it was implicitly specified, could only be worn by one ethnicity. One example was the suggestion of clothes to be worn at school in the celebration of Kartini Day, women's emancipation day in Indonesia. The diversity that the New Order celebrated was limited to the rituals and accessories of traditional ethnicities. Ethnic props have become a mask to create an illusion of diversity—the freedom of being different—in Indonesia, while the regime is still practicing authoritarianism in the state,<sup>48</sup> including strict regulations on and bans of magazines and newspapers that criticize the government and the imprisonment of oppositionists.<sup>49</sup>

In the context of Indonesian political discourse, it becomes evident that culture is of course also a political construct. Indonesian culture rests on ethnic songs taught in elementary education, traditional clothes worn every April 21st,<sup>50</sup> the “national” Javanese batik worn formally, or Javanese shadow puppet theater art. When the global “other” entered the field, the government further promoted this oriental Indonesia as national culture. This can be deduced from the promotion of wayang against Mickey Mouse in the national newspaper *Kompas* in 1996, which advertised ethnic culture to discourage the worship of global cultures.<sup>51</sup> The newspaper headline promoted the wayang to replace Mickey Mouse as a cultural commodity.

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<sup>48</sup> Indonesian history scholar Jean Gelman Taylor states it better in an article on Indonesian dress: “Sukarno defined Indonesians against the world; Suharto defined them against each other” (2008, 13).

<sup>49</sup> The media regulations and censorship will be discussed further in the latter half of this section.

<sup>50</sup> April 21 marks Kartini Day in Indonesia. This day celebrates Kartini as a pioneer of women's rights in Indonesia. In the Old Order, Sukarno established this as a national holiday to be a model for progressive women. However, in the New Order, Suharto reinvented Kartini as the portrait of a traditional and obedient wife and daughter (Yulianto 2010). In celebrating the latter image, women, girls, and female students are obliged to wear traditional clothing on this day.

<sup>51</sup> This and other examples of cultural identity are explained by Melani Budianta in her study of cultural identity (2007).

Based on her examination of Indonesian cultural discourses, Indonesian sociology scholar Melani Budianta divided the traits of cultural discourse in Indonesia into two categories: arts and culture as the glorification of cultural heritage (based on an archeological past that must be preserved normatively) and arts and culture as commodity (Budianta 2007, 512). Culture, in Indonesia, is a political tool that is supposed to be accepted as representing tradition and commodity, often interrelatedly.

However, the political acceptance of traditional culture has provided authors with a “safe way” to criticize the government—for example, through forms of Javanese art like wayang. Prominent literary writers of the new era, such as Seno Gumira Ajidarma and Putu Wijaya, have used *wayang* to “mask the criticism of the government,”<sup>52</sup> ironically offering metaphors of authoritarianism in the government’s cultural policy.

The authoritarian regime of the New Order may have opened Indonesia to the international economy and modernized the country, resulting in national pride, but it also has created a stratification of classes between people who are closer to centralized power and those who are not, the rich and the poor, and national (Javanese) and other locals. It has created an illusion of unity that now dissolves under continuous economic and political crises, creating a collapsing momentum for the New Order. Against the global forces that provide financial aid to the falling country, Indonesia has lost her national pride. The economic collapse has given Indonesia the freedom to reflect on the mistakes of the New Order and question its centralized policy. In a situation where the country has

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<sup>52</sup> Southeast Asian politics and culture scholar Marshall Clark writes about “shadow boxing” between the Indonesian writers and the New Order regime. The New Order writers use wayang tropes to write about social subjects by modernizing and humanizing the wayang characters (Clark, 2001).



to rely on global aid, Indonesia has started to rebuild its national identity against the global “other,” which becomes an ever more immediate matter in Indonesia.<sup>53</sup>

The New Order’s political and cultural policies have increased sectarianism<sup>54</sup> in Indonesia. After the fall of Suharto’s regime, the state decentralized its authority and celebrated democracy (although Indonesia has supposedly been a democratic nation since its early independence) in its first free election.<sup>55</sup> The military’s authority started to decline and bans on mass media were lifted.<sup>56</sup> This new freedom allowed for the emergence of groups and organizations—whether by ethnicity, religion, ideologies, or interests—and for their voices to be heard. Budianta explains the phenomenon through the eruption of new political parties and organizations borne by ethnic, gender, racial, and religious groups, such as the women’s party, the Chinese party, and various Muslim parties (Budianta 2007, 514). The new fragmentation created restlessness in a society that had been indoctrinated with a strong national unity.<sup>57</sup>

The fall of the New Order provided momentum for the freedom of media and cultural discourse. In 1999, former president Abdurrahman Wahid ordered the dissolution of mass media control by the Department of Information and the release of political

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<sup>53</sup> By no means was the nationalism of the third generation completely different than in the previous regime. The distrust that existed after the fall of the New Order regime has created more awareness regarding national identity and unity.

<sup>54</sup> For a more specific study on New Regime policies in creating sectarianism in Indonesia, see Melani Budianta’s paper, “Discourse of Cultural Identity in Indonesia during the 1997–1998 Monetary Crisis” (2007).

<sup>55</sup> On the New Order, “Suharto’s electoral system had guaranteed overwhelming majorities for the government party, Golkar, in every general election” (Crouch 2010, 8). In 1973, the other political parties were forcefully amalgamated into two: the Partai Demokrasi Indonesia (PDI, Indonesian Democratic Party) and Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP, United Development Party) and blocked from any press (Hill & Sen 2007, 53).

<sup>56</sup> Abdurrahman Wahid eliminated the ban on materials formerly deemed sensitive (e.g., Marxism and Leninism) in 2000.

<sup>57</sup> Ironically, after the fall of the New Order, the people realized that *centralized* “unity in diversity” (Indonesia’s national slogan is Unity and Diversity) had been masked by the broadcast of multiple ethnic/traditional cultures in Indonesia.

prisoners. However, freedom did not last long. There are minimal personnel changes within government institutions. Older officers in media who inherited the New Order ideologies maintained their offices. Also, Indonesia, which is not an Islamic country, is facing radical Islam movements that instigate violent reactions and mass rallies in response to any violations of Muslim values. The continued censorship and bans on Indonesian books—including second-opinion texts regarding the G30S coup (Farid 2010) as well as “self-censorship” in the form of book burnings<sup>58</sup> and attacks on publishing companies by radical religious groups<sup>59</sup>—are signs that control over media still remained.

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Under the New Order, the meaning of Indonesian culture has become the commodified traditional culture. The totalitarian government has established Javanese culture as the “national” culture. Indonesia itself is a diverse country, but the understanding of diversity remains limited to the “commodity” level; the diversity of opinions has been suppressed in the name of sacred unity for more than 30 years. The economic crisis in 1998 created a newfound awareness of different classes, culture, and beliefs in the country. While Indonesians struggle to create, place, and identify different groups within the new diversified Indonesia, they are also still driven by the inherited

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<sup>58</sup> One prominent example is the burning of the book *Lima Kota Paling Berpengaruh di Dunia* (Five Cities that Ruled the World) by U.S. theologian Douglas Wilson (2009), printed by Indonesia’s biggest publisher, Gramedia. The burning was initiated by protests of *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI, Islamic Defender’s Front) because the book contains one statement about the Prophet Muhammad’s being a pirate and a murderer (*The Jakarta Post*, June 14, 2012).

<sup>59</sup> While Indonesia is not a Muslim country, the majority of Indonesians are Muslims. The government has attempted to establish regulations “to appease mainstream and Islamic groups” (Clark 2008, 40). One example was the *Rancangan Undang-Undang Anti Pornografi dan Pornoaksi* (RUU APP, the Anti-Pornography and Pornoaction Bill; *ibid.*). The FPI is the most fundamentalist and vocal Islamic group in Indonesia. A *Kompas* article reported that the FPI was engaged in 34 cases of violence in Indonesia from 2010 to 2011 (Hitipeuw 2012).

desire to create a concept of unity that can defend the country now against the global “other.”

### *Indonesian National Media and Culture*

This section will discuss media regulation in Indonesia and the distinction between media and culture in a political context.

*Media* here refers to any form of mass media that has a nationwide reach. Any particular medium, such as television or radio, has specific cultural functions. However, in Indonesia, there are distinctions between types of media that have functions beyond the initial expectation that they reach a mass number of people. This concept is reflected in the political separation of media and culture in Indonesia. The media in the New Order are under the control of the Department of Information (now the Ministry of Communication and Information), which oversees the press, television, radio, film, and the Internet. Book publishing and musical recordings, meanwhile, were initially under the control of the then Department of Education and Culture, now separated into the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy. The first ministry falls under the jurisdiction of the Coordinating Ministry of Politics and Security (now the Coordinating Ministry of Politics, Law, and Security), while the latter falls under the Coordinating Ministry of People’s Welfare. It is important to keep in mind that book publishing, in particular, *is not considered media* in the New Order (Hill & Send 2007, 7). The treatments of media and culture differ in their political restriction and regulation. In Indonesia, media hold a vital role for continuous reproduction and multiplication of aural, written, and visual texts and their widespread and simultaneous reach. Media, or



mass media in this case, are more restricted because they fulfill the government's role in disseminating the national cultural dogma.

The content and the broadcast of mass media are regulated from the capital Jakarta in the form of an obligatory monopoly on news relay.<sup>60</sup> Radio stations—which were a vital method of information broadcast before television—are not allowed to provide news independently but must relay information from the central *Radio Republik Indonesia* (Republic of Indonesia Radio, or RRI). Organizations or political parties are not allowed to own or be aligned with any radio stations. Despite the strict regulations, local radio and television stations are freely permitted to create local content to relate to their audiences; however, none of their news or local interpretations may reach the national level.

Among the regulated media in the New Order, television is the most crucial because it is consumed by the majority of citizens. The proportion of television viewers grew from 84.94% of the population in 2003 to 91.68% in 2012, compared to a decline in radio consumers (50.29% of the population in 2003 versus 18.57% in 2012) and readers of newspapers and magazines (25.45% of the population in 2003 to 17.66% in 2012).<sup>61</sup> Television was introduced in 1962, but its wide-range consumption began rather late, in 1983, after the launch of the Indonesian satellite *Palapa*. Government regulation of television started the same year: all programs for both national and local stations are determined in Jakarta by the national television station. Initially, all stations had to relay an obligatory three hours of news from *Televisi Republik Indonesia* (Republic of

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<sup>60</sup> News is the most directly controlled program and is modeled according to regulation of private radio stations. All television stations must relay the national television station, TVRI, at the same time during the prime times (7 p.m. for national news and 9 p.m. for international news). Local stations can relay local news, but the local news is not relayed on other channels (Hill & Sen 2007, 125–126).

<sup>61</sup> Data from the *Badan Pusat Statistik* (Statistics Center) of Indonesia [http://www.bps.go.id/tab\\_sub/view.php?kat=1&tabel=1&daftar=1&id\\_subyek=27&notab=36](http://www.bps.go.id/tab_sub/view.php?kat=1&tabel=1&daftar=1&id_subyek=27&notab=36)



Indonesia Television, or TVRI), whose motto is *menjalin persatuan dan kesatuan* (TVRI weaves together our unity and union; Hill & Sen 2007, 108). Private television stations, which emerged in the 1990s and were owned by Suharto's family members and close circles, were not exempted from those regulations. When the first private station, *Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia* (Hawk Indonesian Television, or RCTI) began to broadcast, the Minister of Information released Decree No. 111 to set rules for the new institutions (Hill & Sen 2007, 119), stating that programs had to "support the 1945 Constitution, and ideology of state Pancasila," that information was "arranged with full regard and good manners and in *Indonesian language that is true and correct*," and also that private stations "avoid all possibility of becoming a channel for the spread of foreign ideology or culture which could weaken the national character and national defense" (Hill & Sen 2007, 119). However, the decree stated no specific requirement for the domestic content. RCTI, and later, five emerging private TV stations in the New Order had only 35–40% of their content domestically produced. TVRI was the only station that aired a majority (80%) of domestically produced programs (Hill & Sen 2007, 121). However, the figures of Survey Research Indonesia (SRI) show that after the entrance of private TV stations, TVRI broadcasts in the peak hours reached only 6% of the population (Hill & Sen 2007, 121). This number implies that foreign content has been dominating Indonesian television since the 1990s and that audiences favor foreign programs more than domestic ones.

Hill and Sen (2007) performed a study on media regulation and discourse, including phenomena such as the swarm of foreign content. They concluded that the New Order has created a national culture in order to "quarantine" regional and local allegiances to their own locales by a mainly centralized broadcast of media. In this effort, global

imports and foreign images have been considered lesser threats than local images (Hill & Sen 2007, 219), which may create cracks in unity. This contrasts with the Old Order policies, in which Sukarno scorned Western popular culture as a product of cultural imperialism and pushed for a search for an indigenous national form.

In his Independence Day celebration speech in 1959, Sukarno outlined *Manipol* (*Manifesto Politik*; Political Manifesto),<sup>62</sup> in which he specifically addressed an Indonesian identity in opposition to the cultures of Western powers he called *nekolim* (*Neo-Colonialist* and *Imperialist*). In the speech, he specifically criticized “rock n’ roll” and young men and women who “make crazy mixed-up noises [*ngakngik-ngek*] called music.”<sup>63</sup> Sukarno banned particular forms of Western music on the national radio station RRI—the only radio at the time—and rock music records were gathered and publicly burned (Hill & Sen 2007, 95, 166). Sukarno’s policy was followed by a search for “indigenous Indonesian forms” that could fit young people’s way of life. One example Hill and Sen cite is the remixing of the old *keroncong*<sup>64</sup> standard “Bengawan Solo” with a rock style. The ban on Western music was lifted when the Old Order power declined after 1965.

In contrast to television content, Indonesian music dominated the domestic music market throughout the New Order, even after the music ban was lifted. In 1995,

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<sup>62</sup> In his Independence Day address on August 17, 1959, Sukarno concluded that the Western democracy system did not fit the Indonesian system; thus, he created Guided Democracy, in which government works like a traditional village system that encourages cooperation consensus. He also purposed *Nasakom* (*Nasionalisme–Agama–Komunisme*, or *Nationalism–Religion–Communism*) politics (Anderson 1990, 29–30) to appease the three majority groups in Indonesia (military, Islamic, and communist).

<sup>63</sup> Quoted from the translation of Hill & Sen (2007, 166).

<sup>64</sup> *Keroncong* is an onomatopoeic word for the sound *chrong-chrong-chrong* and came from the ukulele-like instrument used in this music. *Keroncong* consists of an ensemble of string instruments (guitar, violin, cello, and bass, both in pizzicato style), flute, and a female or male singer; it has strong Portuguese influences that date to the sixteenth century (Hill & Sen 2007, 186).

the *Asosiasi Industri Rekaman Indonesia* (Sound Recording Industry Association of Indonesia, or ASIRI) released statistics that only approximately 80% of legal recordings were domestic music; 45% were “Western style music,” 35% were *dangdut*<sup>65</sup> music, and 15% were “ethnic music” (Hill & Sen 2007, 169–170). In contrast to the previously mentioned industries (i.e., television and radio), as “culture,” music was free from direct government censorship, “not restricted from foreign investments; and has little investment by the conglomerates” (Hill & Sen 2007, 170). Today, music still has a vital role in political activities.

Dangdut—the people’s music, popular among the working classes because its lyrics reflect the real life of middle- and lower-class Indonesians—is used to attract people in political campaigns and major national celebrations. Dangdut is valorized in the New Order as the authentic music of the Indonesian people. Rhoma Irama, a popular *dangdut* singer, once defined this genre as “a national foil to Western Music and regional musical genres” (Hill & Sen 2007, 175). The music’s less constricting nature also helps singers, especially in underground movements, to express political and cultural critiques that are often blurred in English lyrics and the fast rap style, in the case of *Boomerang*,<sup>66</sup> *Slank*,<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *Dangdut* is an onomatopoeic word of the beat of the music *dang* and *dut*. Sen and Hill describe this as a transformed older style of *orkes Melayu* (Malay orchestra) in combination with the rhythm of Bollywood songs (Hill and Sen 2007, 174).

<sup>66</sup> An underground rock band from Eastern Java’s capital, Surabaya, that was absorbed into mainstream media. The band opened live during a private TV-station concert without censoring its lyrics (Hill & Sen 2007, 177–178).

<sup>67</sup> One of the most popular rock bands among young adults in the country, with a string of bestselling-album awards (Hill & Sen 2007, 178–179). The band’s lyrics reflect various topics from sentimentalism to social and political criticism.

and *Iwa-K*.<sup>68</sup> Indonesian music media, in this regard, is more developed than other types of media.<sup>69</sup>

Unlike music, cinema is strictly regulated by the state. The *Algerneen Nederlandsch Indisch Film* (ANIF), which produced documentaries and features during the Dutch colonization era, was taken over by the Old Order's *Perusahaan Film Negara* (State Film Company, or PFN). Aside from the PFN, which produced films for Sukarno's policies at the time, there was the *Badan Sensor Film* (Board of Film Censorship, or BSN), established in the Old Order to be the "gatekeeper that keeps away the political and sexual excess of Hollywood cinema" (Hill & Sen 2007, 138). In the New Order, the BSF changed its name to the LSF (*Lembaga Sensor Film*, Institute of Film Censorship), with a duty to monitor all films, excluding those aired on television and live broadcast. The political switch from the Old Order to the New Order was also marked by the entrance of Hollywood and Chinese films. Domestically produced films decayed because of scrutinizing state regulations. Film production needed the permission of the Directorate of Film of the Department of Information; before filming, scenarios had to be approved by the government, and unedited negatives of the film had to be submitted to the BSF. Films later received editing guidance from the government. The BSF regulations required films to be responsive to popular issues and sensitive to the social and cultural situations of Indonesia, avoiding national conflict and emphasizing National Unity.

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<sup>68</sup> A pioneering hip hop artist and celebrated musician in Indonesia. His rap lyrics contained elements of protest, challenging then Minister of Research and Technology B. J. Habibie's disapproval of rap among the Indonesian people (Bodden 2005). For more information, read Asian music scholar Michael Bodden's study on rap in Indonesia (2008).

<sup>69</sup> In 1995, Indonesia's music industry was about 3% of the size of Japan's (Hill & Sen 2007, 169), but compared to other musical industry in Southeast Asia, Indonesian music is well-developed. The musical industry in the Philippines is 16% the size of Indonesia's, whereas Singapore's is 31%, Malaysia's is 50%, and Thailand's is 65% (Hill & Sen 2007, 169).



National cinema declined; Indonesian media scholar Marshall Clark mentioned that it “virtually died” (2008, 43). Cinema-production staffs later were absorbed by the television industry.

After the fall of the New Order, the film industry experienced freedom in expression. Uncensored films with controversial themes emerged, covering sensitive topics of sexuality and undermining sociopolitical criticism, and new generations and communities of independent filmmakers started emerging (Clark 2008, 43). However, haunted by the shadows of the old dogma censorship and regulation, Indonesian artists have a tendency to create films regarding social issues in Indonesia. Clark reemphasizes the statement of the editors of *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia* in his study on Indonesian films: “Many of Indonesia’s artists feel that their art is only of value if it expresses the feelings of society and communicates with it” (2008, 43). This statement has been echoed in reviews of filmmaking in Indonesia. Reviewers of Indonesian films note the lack of cinematic standards and claim they are thus unable to call topical films such as *Ketika* (2005) good films.<sup>70</sup>

Journalism did not escape the shadows of restrictions of the New Order either, even after the regime fell in 1998. In the New Order, the Ministry of Information created a government-authorized *Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia* (Indonesian Journalists Association, or PWI), led by serving or retired military officers and senior members affiliated with the government. Joining PWI is an obligation for journalists.<sup>71</sup> One of the

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<sup>70</sup> Quoted by Clark (2008, 43) from Indonesian film reviewer Dodi Mahendra on the popular Indonesian film-critique website Sinema-Indonesia (<http://sinema-indonesia.com>). *Ketika* (2005) is a comedic satire imagined in a futuristic Indonesia after law conquers crime and corrupt officers go bankrupt. The protagonist of the story, former conglomerate Tajir Saldono, is played by renowned Indonesian actor Deddy Mizwar.

<sup>71</sup> In 1995, the Department of Information reported that only two-thirds of journalists were registered (Hill & Sen 2007, 55). Under this practice, only registered journalist could become editors in their

New Order practices in journalism involves bribing journalists to write coverage favorable to the commissioner. Indonesian journalism scholar Ross Tapsell writes that this practice, called “envelope journalism,” continued even in the post-Suharto regime (2012, 230). In addition, the government also executed a “telephone culture,” defined by telephone calls of “instruction” from the Department of Information, the Military, and the Department of Foreign Affairs, if journalists wrote about topics that were even slightly controversial. Self-censorship became a well-known term during the New Order, when newspapers editors learned to write “between the lines” to avoid getting into trouble such as being banned,<sup>72</sup> kidnapped, or killed (Hill & Sen 2007, 233).

The practice of self-censorship continues today. Tapsell—in a study that included field interviews with journalists in post-New Order Indonesia—confirmed that current journalists still practice the old self-censorship. Tapsell met with young journalists working under the editors in the self-censorship era (Sen & Hill 2007, 231), and they said they were taught not to write about controversial topics. Self-censorship made a stronger comeback after the 2000s because of the emergence of radical Muslim groups that became violent toward the press for writing about any topic sensitive to them. In this case, the press justified its actions in order to avoid creating conflict in society.

At the end of the New Order, the new media—the Internet—took the government by surprise. Use of the Internet in Indonesia began in the 1990s as an initiative of then Minister of Research and Technology B. J. Habibie. Internet users increased from 15,000

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respective news stations.

<sup>72</sup> Cases of bans on the press include *Tempo*, *Detik*, and *Editor*, banned in 1994 because of challenging the Minister of Information’s authority to impose the ban (Hill & Sen 2007, 6). However, the early New Order imposed earlier bans on 163 newspapers in 1965 after the coup, 12 in 1974 after the Malari riot that began after protests of foreign investments in Indonesia, and 14 in 1978 for sympathetic coverage of student protests against the New Order (Hill & Sen 2007, 53).

in 1995 (Sen & Hill 2007, 196) to over half of the current Indonesian population by 2011.<sup>73</sup> In the early years of its proliferation, the Internet was used to find political information and academic research, which were mostly inaccessible during the New Order regulations (Sen & Hill 2007, 196). The Internet presented details and pictures of political incidents censored by the government. This included regional (local) information that could not reach other areas—most importantly, the national level—such as coverage of the riots caused by minority discontent in Situbondo.<sup>74</sup> The Internet also has given users and journalists an alternative for more vocal journalism; for instance, *Tempo* magazine, banned in 1994, began to be distributed in online form in 1996 and gained 10,000 readers (out of the 15,000 total Internet users at the time). The Internet has provided an opportunity for citizens to openly discuss political and local (regional) incidents and to become “the reminder of absence of openness and freedom in other media” (Hill & Sen 2007, 210). The New Order government, before its collapse in 1998, was caught off guard and did not have time to regulate this new form of media. Internet regulation began much later in 2008 by the renewed Ministry of Communication and Information. The regulation consists of restrictions on pornography and extremism. However, even before the regulation, the government sent a letter to Facebook to close accounts that mocked the Islamic prophet Muhammad.<sup>75</sup> This showed that religion, again,

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<sup>73</sup> Nielsen reports that 48% of Indonesian citizens access the Internet via mobile phone, while 66% have Internet access via Internet Café (Mim 2011).

<sup>74</sup> The Situbondo riots started from local Muslims’ discontent over the growing number of Chinese and Christian immigrants to Eastern Java, a city with a nationwide reputation as a site of Islamic piety and learning. The riot was triggered by the trial of a Muslim gardener, Saleh, for insulting his own religion. The crowds who watched the trial demanded Saleh’s death and burned a neighboring church. The riots continued with attacks and the demolishing and burning of 25 churches, two Christian schools, and several residences used by preachers for services in the downtown area (Sidel 2007, 77–82).

<sup>75</sup> In May 2010, a Facebook account created a competition to draw the prophet Muhammad. This invited anger from Islamic groups, urging the government to ban Facebook. The government responded by sending a letter to Facebook urging closure of the account and asked all ISPs to limit access to account link (Freedom House, 2011).



was a determining factor in censorship in Indonesia. The Internet, especially its social media aspect, has become a concern to the government, with the current Minister of Communication and Information, Tifatul Sembiring, stating the need to regulate social media to avoid uprisings against the government such as those in Tunisia and Libya, which were prompted by Facebook.<sup>76</sup> As of 2012, Indonesia had 42 million Facebook users and 19 million Twitter accounts, respectively the fourth and fifth largest user groups globally. Through social media, users openly criticize political activities, ironically even those of government officials directly, as in the case of Tifatul himself, whose official Twitter account was swarmed with sarcastic remarks<sup>77</sup> after he urged the government to control social and online media. The Internet and social media in Indonesia have become venues for open discussion and even criticism of politics with freedom Indonesians never experienced in the New Order.

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This chapter has examined the history of the media in Indonesia. The state politically divides types of media assigned to certain cultural functions, such as musical recordings and books, as well as nodes such as radio, television, and the Internet. Media that are not ascribed to cultural functions are freed from the demand to be traditional and ritual, but as a means of information, they are in turn regulated strictly by the centralized authority. Music does not receive such treatment, but it represents a more traditional Indonesia, as in the case of keroncong music. I must point out that studies of political discourse about regulation of (“non-cultural”) media in Indonesia have focused on the

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<sup>76</sup> *The Jakarta Globe* (2011).

<sup>77</sup> As one example, a Tweet sent by a citizen via Twitter read, “Pak Tif, uprisings didn’t happen because of social media but there is something wrong with the government and it had to be criticized and improved” (*The Jakarta Globe* 2011; the translation is mine).



New Order period, while studies of discourse about culture have focused on the Old Order. In short, the Old Order was more concerned with “culture,” and the New Order is more concerned with “media.” With centralized information, content control, and blockages of local media commodities (in the name of unity), the New Order considers it easier to control the global content that enters through the media. Hence, the global media product seems to be less threatening than local media products to this government. Suharto addresses foreign policy in a completely different way than Sukarno. Just as the media apparatus inherited old policy because of the existing old players in the game, Suharto’s lack of regulation of media with a cultural function has led the New Order cultural policy to simply inherit Suharto’s direction on what culture is supposed to be: uniquely traditional and different than global culture.

In this section, we have also seen how centralized regulation and censorship in the New Order have dimmed creativity within locally produced media commodities. However, imported global products, which (in the case of television) have 60% to 65% of the mass media share, have easily compensated for the lack of attractive domestic media content. This has been one reason for the reduced local production and promotion of global products during New Order Indonesia from 1965 to the 1998.

### *Reading Culture and Book Publishing in Indonesia*

In Indonesia, books, as printed matter, are designated as having a cultural function in politics. Comics are published in newspapers and magazines (and recently on the Internet), but the majority of comics are eventually published in the form of a “book.” Books are often the finalized form of newspaper or Internet comics. Publishing companies are centralized in the capital island; half are located in Jakarta and 42% elsewhere in Java, with rare commercial publication in regional languages.<sup>78</sup>

Books, along with musical recordings, are considered “culture” by the New Order government. There is no organization that strictly regulates publishing companies and the content of books, unlike the aforementioned mass media forms. The book publishing industry is also significantly ignored by the state (Hill & Sen 2007, 25). However, the New Order still enacted strict bans and censorship regarding criticism of government and politics. After Suharto rose to power, the New Order created a new spelling for the Indonesian language (EYD) to separate Old Order published books from recent ones and eradicate them. Materials regarding communism, Marxism, and Leninism are banned, along with academic studies regarding the New Order (and the rise of its power). Also among the list to be censored are books with obscenity; pornography; anti-religious themes; subject matter that might create tension between ethnic, religious, and social groups; or materials that impede national stability, unity, and development (Hill & Sen 2007, 38). When Suharto stepped down from power, the book publishing industry, like the press, enjoyed the freedom of expression. However, like the journalism industry, publishing companies now perform a method of self-censorship by retracting and burning

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<sup>78</sup> Numbers from the early 1990s are from *Ikatan Penerbit Indonesia* (Indonesian Publishers Association, or IKAPI), quoted from Hill and Sen (2007, 25–26).

books they have published if they receive threats and criticism from radical Muslim organizations.

Another problem related to the book publishing industry is the reading culture in Indonesia. The habit of reading, while encouraged by the government, was not followed up with concrete support from the Department of Education and Culture, even throughout the post-Suharto era. Indonesia's reading rate has been ranked the lowest in Southeast Asia.<sup>79</sup> *Badan Pusat Statistik* (Statistics Indonesia, or BPS) statistics show that 17.66% of Indonesians read newspapers and magazines, compared to the 91.68% who watch television. In 1972, Indonesia's per capita paper consumption is one of the lowest in the world.<sup>80</sup> Around the same time, university students read, on average, two (1.8) books in their undergraduate days. In 2002, only 5% of schools (from elementary school to high school) had libraries, and the so-called libraries that did exist were sometimes as small as a single cupboard that school officials locked away from the children.

The only solution for the lack of sufficient reading materials was the book loan shop, called "taman bacaan" (TB), or "reading garden." TB, a form of rental library that provides access to books in poor and rural communities, was established during the Dutch Indies era. TB boomed in the New Order because of the low purchasing power<sup>81</sup> and few recreational options at that time. However, TB declined during the 1990s monetary crisis, with 5,500 of the 7,000 registered shops closing down. Because of recent concern about

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<sup>79</sup> Stian Håklev, who performed a field examination and study of taman bacaan in Indonesia (2008), concluded from *Kompas* article coverage and the International Evaluation of Education in 1992 that Indonesia ranked 29th of 30 countries whose reading skills were measured. Another report Håklev cited was the World Bank report in 1998 that showed the reading skills of Indonesia's elementary school students were the lowest among all Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries (Håklev 2008).

<sup>80</sup> As Indonesian comics scholar Marcel Bonneff quoted from *Tempo* magazine reportage (July 13, 1972) in his study of Indonesian comics (Bonneff 1998, 83).

<sup>81</sup> The price will be elaborated later in chapter three.

reading habits in Indonesia, the government, foreign companies, foundations, small communities, and individuals have started rebuilding hundreds of TB in Indonesia.<sup>82</sup> TB takes the form of a small kiosk or van that may offer as many as 2,500 book titles. *Comics* and *novels* are the words most often used to describe what a TB is lending. A TB has the same function as a library, although it is often associated with poor areas and thus implies a mission to spread reading to citizens and regions of lower economic class. Meanwhile, members of the upper middle class buy their reading materials in book stores, more than 70% of which are centralized on the capital island of Java.

Another important note on the book-publishing industry is the problem of unauthorized publications, or *bacaan liar* (wild readings, i.e., books that include censored topics such as communism, pornography, and social realism). Although the New Order did not strictly regulate publishing companies as being under the government's controlled organization, books with dangerous content still faced censorship and bans. This gave rise to various unauthorized publishers. Indonesia has a significant number of unauthorized publishing companies that produce "high literature" such as the works of Pramoedya Ananta Toer.<sup>83</sup> The importance of unauthorized publishing is always considered in studies of Indonesian literature.

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<sup>82</sup> The motives of *taman bacaan* establishments are questionable because they have become a symbol of "vision and mission of a specific community" (Septiana 2007).

<sup>83</sup> Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1925–2006) was a prominent author during the struggle for independence. He was imprisoned by every political regime he lived under: the Dutch for participating in the anti-colonial struggle, Sukarno for writing a book sympathetic to Indonesian Chinese, and Suharto because he was an office bearer in the left-wing cultural organization Lekra (Hill & Sen 2007, 40). Toer wrote four volumes of historical novels during his detention, published by the unauthorized publisher Hasta Mitra. The books (*This Earth of Mankind*; *Child of All Nations*; *Footsteps*; and *House of Glass*) explore the emergence of Indonesian nationalism in the early 20th century. Although translated into many languages, they remain banned in Indonesia for adopting Marxist–Leninist ideas (Hill & Sen 2007, 41). Pramoedya won 12 awards internationally, including the 1995 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism, Literature, and Creative Communication Arts; the 2000 Fukuoka Asian Culture Prize; and the 2005 Global Intellectuals Poll.



In a 1988 study of literature in the New Order, Indonesian studies scholar Ariel Heryanto defined four categories of publication in Indonesia that were historically established by Indonesian cultural institutions: (1) “high literature” books approved by the avant-garde literary magazine *Horison* and the state; (2) publications banned by the government but not lacking in literary merit; (3) most popular forms of fiction in Indonesia that are disdained by literary aesthetics, consisting mainly of pop novels and comics accepted by the government for economic reasons; (4) publications not in the “Indonesian” literature frame, such as any literature in a regional language and non-literary (e.g., nonfiction) books. It is important to consider that unauthorized and underground publications have the same impact in Indonesia as official publications do and that, again, the regional is excluded from the national level.

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This section has explained the situation of book publishing and reading habits in Indonesia. Although books publishers are not subject to a strict organization that regulates their content as other media are, the government is not open-minded toward numerous themes, making it impossible for authors to explore Indonesia’s diversity and experiment on topics outside government borders. In addition to the lack of creative space provided by the government for publishing books, the general lack of interest in reading is another reason why book publishing is not thriving in Indonesia.<sup>84</sup> Unauthorized publications thrive in lands neglected by the state. These works are renowned outside of Indonesia, making it impossible for any study of Indonesian literature to ignore unauthorized publishing companies.

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<sup>84</sup> Because investment is overlooked by capitalists.

## *Conclusion*

This chapter has examined three topics important to understanding the discourse on Indonesian comics. The first section discussed how the concept of unity is significant in Indonesian political discourse. It also explored how the concept of culture as a traditional commodity has expanded in Indonesia and how Indonesian culture eventually came to be represented by the Javanese. The second section of the chapter exposed the political separation of media that have a cultural mission (music and books) and those that do not (radio, television, and the Internet). The latter are heavily regulated in the New Order by the Department of Information, whereas the former, falling under the Department of Education and Culture, inherited the concepts of the Old Order. There are also the matters of the death of creativity resulting from heavy censorship and regulation and of Indonesians' reliance on global products in order to find attractive commodities. The third section of the chapter focused on book publishing and reading habits in Indonesia. Book publishing is an industry that exists below the radar of investors because of the lack of enthusiasm for reading and because of strict government regulations on too many topics declared potentially dangerous to the New Order. This has led unauthorized publishers to publish books that eventually gain recognition domestically and internationally.

This chapter mainly has outlined the political and cultural discourse of Indonesia throughout four regimes. The concept of Indonesia was inherited from the Dutch colonial state. However, the Old Order and especially the New Order had the most prominent roles in creating the identity of the Republic of Indonesia. The Old and New Order altogether also have inherently created *the notion of the traditional as national*. In the Old Order,

“Indonesian” was positioned spatially vis-à-vis foreign cultures. The Old Order promoted the concept of traditional Indonesian as Indonesian identity, and this urged a quest to create new arts by referencing traditional arts remixed with Western works. However, the next regime reinterpreted this concept of “national identity” and promoted Javanese culture as national while still paying respect to other traditional minorities. Any productions of mass media and reinterpretations of other local culture were kept local. These policies, facilitated by censorship, were implemented to keep power centralized at the capital and prevent opposition against the government. Western culture was not considered as opposition, because it is already filtered and relayed through centralized broadcasting. The suppression of minorities in the New Order created dissatisfaction, which culminated in 1998 because of the monetary crisis. The fall of the New Order invited the creation of different groups, political parties, organizations, and communities; all are distinctively defining their own “identities.”

The newfound freedom after the New Order is not embraced by every community. On one hand, citizens are free to discuss politically and socially sensitive topics, and artists have the chance to create films and illustrations that were originally banned for religious reasons. On the other hand, religious groups, who have never experienced manifestations of blasphemy against their religion, feel that their rights are being trampled by others under the name of “freedom of expression.” Some of these groups, in particular Muslim militant groups, are keen on censoring and invite the New Order practice of self-censorship in journalism and publishing companies back into the currently ruling government. Also inherited from the New Order are inherent urges among artists to speak about social and cultural problems while giving little care to aesthetics and technicality in their works, as seen in case of Indonesian films. The lack of exploration of the inherent

beauty, technique, and entertainment quality of cinema is hypothetically the reason why foreign cinema still reigns in domestic theaters.

Among various political, social, and cultural upheavals in the state, Indonesian comics were nurtured. Like other media forms, books, the format in which comics are commonly produced in Indonesia, also experienced bans and strict government regulation. Comics were considered very popular among other book materials that were underdeveloped in Indonesia until the New Order. However, the entrance of Japanese comics created an unimaginable situation in an industry that was previously ignored by capitalists. Sales of imported material are five times greater than of normal popular publications in Indonesia, as mentioned in chapter one. Japanese comics have created a significant concern about the whereabouts of missing “Indonesian comics” of this era. This is another reason why the discussion of Indonesian comics is important.



## Chapter Three

### Indonesian Comics: History and Problems

This chapter provides a historical background of Indonesian comics and Indonesian comics discourse. It introduces key words in the discourse of Indonesian comics as well as the social actors who play major roles in enunciating discussions and concepts of Indonesian comics. The chapter also provides a foundation for assumptions about how Marcel Bonneff's work has contributed to the problem of Indonesian identity in Indonesian comics discourse, as will be discussed further in the next section.

Following the entrance of imported Japanese comics in Indonesia, comics have thrived as the highest-selling reading materials in the book publishing business, getting the publishing industry's attention. The majority (80%) of comics being translated are Japanese titles, and this has concerned Indonesian society, which in the mid-1990s started questioning the whereabouts of indigenous comics among foreign books.<sup>85</sup> In the heat of the debates, the first study of Indonesian comics, *Komik Indonesia*, was published in the Indonesian language in 1998.<sup>86</sup> *Komik Indonesia* is a doctoral dissertation written by French scholar Marcel Bonneff in 1972 and published under the title *Les Bandes Dessinées Indonésiennes* in France in 1976. The 26-year gap before its publication in Indonesia proved the Indonesian public's disinterest in comics. The book became the only

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<sup>85</sup> "What constantly does appear in the media now is a lament for the death of the national comic along with an admission that anything local quite simply is not as good as the foreign variety. Yet, one still wonders why this hugely popular medium was destroyed" (Berman 2001, 21).

<sup>86</sup> There were several articles and studies on Indonesian comics before the publication of *Komik Indonesia*, such as those by Tim Lindsay (1987) and Arswendo Atmowiloto (1980), but none has had more impact—because of the momentum in the mid-1990s—or readability than Bonneff's *Komik Indonesia*.

point of departure of Indonesian comics studies in Indonesia. Bonneff's *Komik Indonesia* provides many details about Indonesian comics from their alleged first appearance in 1930s until the publishing problems that contributed to their demise in 1970s. The historical timeline Bonneff proposes in his book has become the foundation of Indonesian comics history commonly referenced today,<sup>87</sup> as will be discussed in the next chapter. This dissertation will use Bonneff's dissertation as the reference for its historical timeline of early Indonesian comics. The history of comics after the 1970s will reference multiple cited sources, as there is yet no academic publication that provides a timeline of this period.

### *Early Indonesian Comics*

Modern Indonesian comics<sup>88</sup> supposedly originate from *Put On*, drawn by an Indonesian cartoonist of Chinese descent, Kho Wan Gie. This humorous comic strip about the life of a Chinese descendent in Jakarta was serialized in *Sin Po* newspaper for 30 years beginning in 1931.<sup>89</sup> Afterwards, other titles with humorous premises, such as *Si Tolol* (*The Fool*) by Keng Po, were featured in various newspapers and weekly magazines.<sup>90</sup> Bonneff positioned *Put On* as the first "Eastern comics"<sup>91</sup> published in Indonesia as a

<sup>87</sup> A similar timeline was later proposed by Hafiz Ahmad, Alvanov Zpalanzani, and Beni Maulana, three scholars from the Bandung Institute of Technology, in their book *Histeria! Komikita* (2006). This will be further discussed later in this section.

<sup>88</sup> Similar to the case of Japanese manga's being traced to a more classic form of picture and text, such as the ancient Japanese picture scroll *Chōjū Giga* (12th century) by Schodt (1983, 28); Bonneff makes a connection between Indonesian comics and the juxtaposed bas-reliefs of 9th-century Candi Borobudur (1998, 16). According to Bonneff (ibid.) and Ahmad et al (2006, 61), the bas-reliefs and shadow-puppet theater are examples of prehistorical Indonesian comics.

<sup>89</sup> *Put On* was serialized in another newspaper, *Warta Bhakti*, after the *Sin Po* newspaper was forcefully closed down (Bonneff 1996, 21).

<sup>90</sup> *Si Tolol* was serialized in *Star Magazine* (Bonneff 1996, 21).

<sup>91</sup> "Komik timur" (Eastern comics). Bonneff used this term to refer to the term *strip jang berdjiwa Timur* (East-spirited strip) from his article source (*Pantja Warna nomor khusus*, October 1, 1957;

Dutch Indies state. This was due to the fact that other comics published in Indonesia before independence were imports such as Netherlander Clinge Doorenbos' *Flippie Flink* and a translation of *Flash Gordon*, both published in newspapers. After independence in 1945, Indonesia still imported subtitled<sup>92</sup> American comics such as *Tarzan* and *Rip Kirby* until Keng Po started publishing Chinese comics<sup>93</sup> such as the Chinese adventure series *Sie Djin Koei* to counterbalance the number of Western comics (Bonneff 1998, 22). Apparently, this title inspired a whole generation of martial arts (silat) comics in Indonesia (Bonneff 1998, 22).

Another significant point happened after Indonesian independence: the publication of *Sri Asih* (1954) by R. A. Kosasih, later regarded as the “father of Indonesian comics.” Kosasih was the first indigenous comic artist who advanced from press publication (newspapers and magazines) to the comic-book (booklet) format. Kosasih created over 100 comic book titles of various genres such as superhero, folklore, science fiction, and adventure.<sup>94</sup> He is renowned especially as the pioneer of the *wayang* comics genre (Ahmad et al. 2006, 68), the stories of which are based on the tales used for traditional Javanese shadow puppet shows. The genre had become the largest in comics production in Indonesia at the time Bonneff wrote his thesis in the 1970s (Bonneff 1998, 29). Present comics discourse also appraises Kosasih as the model author who truly displayed the identity of Indonesian comics (Ajidarma 2009, 7; Ferdianto 2010).

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Bonneff 1998, 19, 214).

<sup>92</sup> American comics are published in their original language (English) with Indonesian translations beneath the panels. One example can be seen in *Komik Indonesia* (Bonneff 1998, 22).

<sup>93</sup> Bonneff uses the terms *Eastern comics*, *Hong Kong comics*, and *Chinese martial art stories* to refer to comics that inspired the birth of martial arts comics in Indonesia. The terms Bonneff uses in his dissertation are up for debate. However, in this discussion, I will paraphrase Bonneff's term *Chinese comics* to refer to the Chinese-language comics imported to Indonesia before the 1980s.

<sup>94</sup> Ferdianto (2012), <http://www.tempo.co/read/news/2012/07/29/109419925/RA-Kosasih-Legend-Bapak-Komik-Indonesia>



National identity became important especially after Sukarno's 1959 *Manipol* cultural policy. The timing coincided with the emergence of indigenous comics alongside translated Western comics in the press. President Sukarno himself disapproved of comics, accusing them of being "garbage and a medium of Western-induced poison" (Berman 2001, 20). This was echoed by other government institutions such as Lekra (*Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat*; Institute of People's Culture)—a cultural organization associated with the then-reigning Indonesian Communist Party—which also condemned comics as a medium heavily influenced by Western cultures (Ferdianto 2010). Current Indonesian comics critics Ahmad et al. (2006, 67) and Putranto and Purwanti (2012) express similar concern over the "influence" of foreign comics on the local comics of the past. No doubt, they refer to Bonneff's discussion of "Western and Chinese Comics Influences" in Indonesia (Bonneff 1998, 18–27). Bonneff emphasized local imitations of Western comics such as *Kapten Komet* (Captain Comet) that referenced *Flash Gordon* and *Garuda Putih* (White Hawk) that leaned on *Superman* (Bonneff 1998, 24–25). However, Bonneff's choice of words such as *influence of* and *inspired by*, echoed in most books on Indonesian comics history, calls for reconsideration.

Bonneff's validation of wayang comics as a specifically Indonesian comics genre, independent (*mandiri*) of foreign influence,<sup>95</sup> became a turning point for Indonesian comics. Following Kosasih, new comics genres emerged, such as those employing local folklore (e.g., *Medan*<sup>96</sup> comics) and traditional martial arts (*silat* comics)

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<sup>95</sup> Ajidarma also made a statement about wayang comics as independent Indonesian comics (Ajidarma 2011, 8). However, in Ajidarma's concern, wayang comics are a successful example of appropriating Western form to Indonesian cultural context.

<sup>96</sup> Medan is the capital of North Sumatran province in Indonesia. The genre was called such because publishers of this genre of comics are based in Medan. (Bonneff 1996) Presumably because of the regulations of distributions in New Order, regional comics are difficult to gain popularity outside its region.

in their stories. Later discussions by a trio of comics scholars from the Institut Teknologi Bandung (Bandung Institute of Technology, or IBT; Ahmad et al. 2006), categorize this period of newly emerging genres as the second generation of Indonesian comics (1960–1970), in contrast to the first generation of Indonesian comics (1930–1954) and its “imitating” (Ahmad et al. 2006, 64–72).

Entering the second generation, comics were already published in various forms of media: in newspapers (e.g., Sibarani’s<sup>97</sup> editorial cartoons in *Bintang Timur* daily), in entertainment and children magazines (e.g., *Tjaraka* by Delsy Sjamsumar), and even in comics magazines (e.g., *Eres*)<sup>98</sup> that become common at that time.

Indonesian comics also reached a consensus in comic book format. Bonneff confirms this uniformity of the format for all genres, which began as early as 1967. By then, most comic books were 13 by 18 cm in size, consisted of 64 to 94 pages, and had full-color covers and monochrome pages inside. Comic books consisted of one-shot collections or continuing series.<sup>99</sup> There were also anthologies containing several stories originally published separately. The books were priced Rp. 35 by publishers. After the distribution process, the retail price increased to Rp. 50 to Rp. 60 per volume in big cities and Rp. 80 in regional areas. The retail price of comics at that time, as reported by Håklev, was as much as a pair of jeans (Håklev 2008). Comics were distributed through agents in

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<sup>97</sup> Sibarani is an editorial cartoonist for left-wing newspaper *Bintang Timur* in the 1950s and 1960s. His works are satirical using foreign imagery to criticize the government. A study on Sibarani’s cartoon can be read in Benedict Anderson’s *Language and Power* (1990, 156–173).

<sup>98</sup> Bonneff records various types of magazines that serialized comics. Some of the examples are: avant-garde comic magazine such as *Eres* that lasted for only two years (1969–1971); entertainment magazines (for teenagers, women, or family; each serialized different types of comics: horror, legends, romans, or humors; and children’s magazines that often contain Indonesian legends, Andersen’s fairy tales or educational comics with subsidy from the government). (Bonneff 1998, 53–67)

<sup>99</sup> Series that separated into several volumes is a tradition that is started by Malay-Chinese literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (Bonneff 1998, 49)

main cities in Java and retailed in newspaper and book kiosks on the streets of the most crowded places in Jakarta, which signifies that comics were lower-class reading material. Because of the hefty prices, buyers were mainly owners of *taman bacaan* (TB), where most readers obtained comics to read. Fees to register for membership in the TB system varied from Rp. 10 to Rp. 100, but comic book rentals cost between Rp. 2.5 and Rp. 10, depending on the TB and the popularity of the comic book. The number of active comic readers in a single TB was between 10 and 300 individuals in the 1970s, with students (ranging in age from 15 to 25 years old) as the majority (Bonneff 1998, 48–50).

The second generation of Indonesian comics is usually also called “‘The Golden Age’ of Indonesian comics” (Bonneff 1998; Giftanina 2012, 2; Putranto & Purwanti 2012). Reasons for this designation are various. Indonesian scholars such as Sugathi Putranto and Nita Purwanti (2012) stress the popularity of indigenous titles by local artists such as Kosasih, Ganes TH,<sup>100</sup> and Wid NS<sup>101</sup> during that period. Bonneff highlights the aesthetic contributions of new genres such as the Medan comics in comics history. Another significant point of this generation is the previously mentioned unified publication format.

The format of Medan comics was significantly different than that of comics normally circulated in Java and on which most publishing was concentrated. Medan comics, started by publishing companies based on Sumatra Island, were recreations of Sumatran folklore. Medan comics had parallel vertical panels that created a long

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<sup>100</sup> Ganes TH (1935–1995) was one of the most renowned Indonesian comics artists in the 1960s and 1970s. Ganes TH is famous for the iconic *silat* (martial arts) comics series *Si Buta Dari Goa Hantu* (The Blind of the Phantom Cave), which was adapted to cinema and television drama series.

<sup>101</sup> Wid NS (1938–2003) was the creator of the famous Indonesian superhero comics series *Godam*. He also created *silat* comics, horror comics, and propaganda comics and was well versed in various traditional arts such as painting, theater, and sculpture.



horizontal layout, in contrast to the long vertical layout used in comics from the main island of Java. Medan comics were regarded highly in terms of aesthetics because of the careful drawing, intimate details, and use of screen tones (manual by hand), which never existed in any comics previously published in Indonesia. The example of this aesthetic contribution (Bonneff 1998, 34) can be seen in Zam Nuldyn's *Dewi Krakatau* (Goddess Krakatau; Fig. 3).

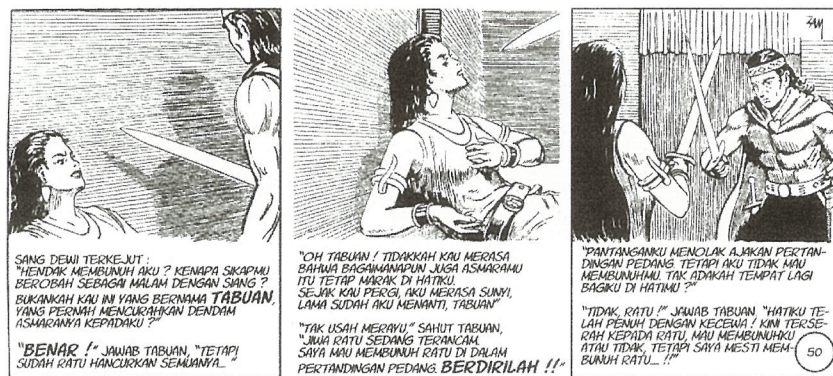


Fig 3. *Dewi Krakatau* by Zam Nuldyn

Various new genres also emerged during this period. Besides the aforementioned silat<sup>102</sup> comics (traditional martial arts comics), there were other popular genres such as romans (melodramatic comics) and propaganda comics. Propaganda comics, in particular, appeared mainly in the early 1960s after Sukarno's ManiPol address and consisted mainly of epics of Indonesian struggles for independence against the Dutch colonials. Entering the New Order, the publications of similar themes of Indonesian revolutionary

<sup>102</sup> *Silat* is a traditional martial art that developed in Southeast Asia. *Silat* comics are a type of action comics in which the characters fight each other using this method of martial arts. This genre emerged in the 1960s. Bonneff believes it was inspired by Chinese adventure comics popular in the 1930s and 1940s that involved their own indigenous kung-fu movements (Bonneff 1998, 22).

movements did not cease.<sup>103</sup> There were also examples of comics covering the G30S incident.

In comparison, romans did not have the political or ideological agendas of the propaganda comics. Instead, roman stories consisted of moral advice. The stories of this genre varied from daily life adventures of a young man and his struggle to be a model citizen (*Ilham dan Crossboy; Ilham and Crossboy*) to a teacher's adventure as an immigrant in a Borneo forest (*Amelia perintis di Rimba Kalimantan; Amelia the Borneo Forest Pioneer*) to the hedonistic life of youngsters in the capital until they reverted back to a "morally right path" (*Rambut Sasak; Hairbun*).<sup>104</sup> However, romans contained eroticism and violence, which became a main source of criticism against comics in that era. There was a common concern about the negative impacts of comics on children's education (Bonneff 1998, 41), which gained momentum from the proliferation of comics until the peak of criticism during the 1965 coup.

Post-coup government, which at that time had a mission to demolish literature containing Old Order propaganda, gave authority to the police to confiscate books that violated *Pancasila*. Alongside books on communism, comics were considered wild reading that defiled the five principles (Bonneff 1998, 42). To save their "source of income,"<sup>105</sup> comic writers gathered under the organizational flag of Ikasti (*Ikatan Seniman Cergamis Indonesia*, the Association of *Cergamist* (Comics Authors) and Artists

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<sup>103</sup> One was *Merebut Kota Perjuangan* (*Serangan Umum 1 Maret 1949*; Rescuing the City of Heroes [March 1, 1949, attack]), a historical event in which the Indonesian state took control of Jogjakarta city from the Dutch colonial. Suharto was one of the commandants of the operation. The former president wrote forewords for the comic version, drawn by Indonesian comic writers known for drawing Marvel/DC-styled local superheroes such as Wid NS, Hasmi, and Djoni Andrean.

<sup>104</sup> Bonneff (1998, 40–41); translation is mine. *Morally right path* is translated literally from Bonneff's "*jalan yang benar*," which refers to a lifestyle that is right according to Indonesian law (and universal religion).

<sup>105</sup> As quoted by Bonneff (1998: 42) in his interview with renowned *silat* comic artist Ganes TH.



in Indonesia). Along with publishing companies, they urged the government to find a solution for comics publishing (Bonneff 1998, 42). Responding to this request, the government created *Seksi Bina Budaya* (the Cultural Building Section) under the jurisdiction of *Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia* (Indonesian National Police, or POLRI), with members from student organizations, Parliament, the Department of Law, and the Department of Information. The *Seksi Bina Budaya* created regulation for comics: a “comics manuscript” had to be checked before publication, and only approved manuscripts received a publishing license (*surat izin terbit*; Bonneff 1998, 42–43). The police also raided book kiosks and TB to search for books that were inappropriate for the Pancasila. Pancasila became the basis for the censorship process.<sup>106</sup> According to Bonneff, censorship did not last long, as there was an internal clash in Ikasti (Bonneff 1998, 68, 73). The authors tried to group themselves according to their “style” (*gaya*), which artists achieved by copying the styles of earlier comics artists such as Ganes Th. and Jan Mintaraga. This eventually led to copyright disputes. As mentioned by Bonneff (1998, 73), Ikasti closed after trying to solve every problem in Indonesian comics, and the efforts and cooperation with POLRI to regulate problematic materials in comics went down the drain.

Publishing companies took the liberty of watching over the contents of the comics after the failure of Ikasti’s regulation. The production of comics stabilized without government restriction. New investments in the comics publishing market pushed comics to the top of the publishing industry at that time.<sup>107</sup> During the Golden Age, the industry had prospects of selling out initial print runs of 1,500 to 2,000 copies for unknown authors

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<sup>106</sup> Especially because this censorship is progressed in aftermath of the G30S coup. If the contents violated any of the five principles; the book will not be accepted.

<sup>107</sup> Indonesian comics ranked first in publication at that time (Bonneff 1998, 85).

and 6,000 to 12,000 copies for big names.<sup>108</sup> However, it faced new competitors in 1969 from the cinema, which had been invaded by Western films, and also from new comics using the genres popular in the film medium (such as espionage from James Bond movies; Bonneff 1998, 44). Indonesian comics publishing was not only crowded with many new genres—including the ever-popular American superhero comics inspired by local heroes<sup>109</sup>—but it also faced the import of translated foreign comic books sold in book stores, closer to the reach of people economically able to buy them.<sup>110</sup> However, competition was not the only problem. Publishing companies were faced with management problems such as comic artists with creativity.

Comics artists in the 1960s and 1970s were young, with the exception of several veterans from previous decades who were still actively creating comics. According to Bonneff, most comics artists were in their 20s and lacked skills in their comics, despite their talents (1998, 69). Most of these artists drew by “imitating” (meniru) existing comics artists, either their predecessors or creators of foreign comics (Bonneff 1998, 70). They also desired acknowledgment from the public for creating something that was socially and culturally aware of the surroundings rather than merely for creating interesting comics (Bonneff 1998, 95). Bonneff pointed out this tendency with sarcasm about the pretentious nature of the young artists (1998, 73). The resulting comic books were boring and too didactic for young readers. Comics artists also lacked guidance from publishing

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<sup>108</sup> Ganes TH's comics sold with initial printings of 10,000 to 12,000 copies, while Zaldy and Jan Mintaraga's sold with initial printings of 6,000 to 7,000 copies (Bonneff 1998, 80).

<sup>109</sup> Indonesian superhero comics had already emerged in the 1950s (e.g., Johnlo's *Garuda Putih*), but they are seen by Bonneff as imitations of Western superhero comics. Those that emerged in the 1960s, such as Wid N.S.' *Godam* (1969) and Hasmi's *Gundala* (1969), are more valorized because they showcased Indonesian people as superheroes in the Indonesian environment.

<sup>110</sup> This issue will be discussed in the latter part of this section.

companies at the time, which were unable to stabilize their business, much less expand the talent of young artists (Bonneff 1998, 65).

Comic book publishing companies in the second generation of Indonesian comics—with the exception of several publishers with a longer history<sup>111</sup>—were mostly small and started with a minimal investment of Rp. 100,000.<sup>112</sup> Lacking commercial ambitions and business principles, they tended to avoid risks and profit uncertainty by commissioning artists to write only genres that were currently popular. These left the market as fast as they popped into it; small publishers also jumped genres as fast as consumer tastes changed, paying less attention to the artists' creative adventure (Bonneff 1998, 52, 67, 78) and more to gaining profit. Bigger comics publishers also faced competition from comics distributed in big bookstore chains. Comics publishers in general distributed their books through street kiosks and hawkers as well as low-class-associated TB. Translated foreign comics, on the other hand, were published by large publishers and distributed in big book stores and shops that were easier to visit for the middle class and those who had buying power.

Several years after the completion of Bonneff's dissertation in the 1970s, Indonesian comics production was deteriorating and became unavailable for potential readers in the 1980s. The exact cause was unclear, but Bonneff outlined contributing factors internal to Indonesian comics that may have caused their demise: the lack of exploration of young comic artists' talents, the creation of uninteresting didactic content,

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<sup>111</sup> Bonneff named Keng Po, the originator of translated Chinese comics and indigenous *silat* comics; Melodi, which published Kosasih's works; and Casso and Haris, which published Medan comics (Bonneff 1998, 78).

<sup>112</sup> The honorarium for normal comics artists was Rp. 10,000, while the better known ones were commissioned for Rp. 60,000. Payment for producing one comic book was around Rp. 56,250 for printing 1,500 copies (Bonneff 1998, 80).

and the accumulation of unstable publishing companies as well as a weak distributing system.

### *The Phenomenon of Indonesian Comics in the 1990s and Beyond*

After the 1970s, the publication of comics declined, thus ushering in the end of the Golden Era. However, Indonesian comics were not gone, nor were they dead.<sup>113</sup> True, there was almost no publication of new Indonesian comics titles in book form, but serializations of editorial cartoons and comic strips in magazines and newspapers<sup>114</sup> did not cease, and republished bundles of second-generation Indonesian comics were still circulated in obscure TBs and old-fashioned book kiosks at that time. Local graphic narratives were washed away by translated foreign comics entering through the modernized market. Following the waves of previously disseminated Western and Chinese comics were translated Japanese manga, which leaned on the popularity of Japanese TV dramas and cartoons that aired in Indonesia and were available in video rental shops. A new wave of indigenous comics was induced by manga and came to be called the Third Generation of Indonesian comics (1990 to present; Ahmad et al. 2006, 74).

Publication began at the start of the 1990s, and by 1995, the first translated Japanese comics in Indonesia—*Kung Fu Boy* (*Tekken Chinmi*) and *Candy Candy*—had sold 85,000 copies per volume. The numbers were significantly high compared to the sales of the most popular translated foreign author in Indonesia, Agatha Christie, who

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<sup>113</sup> Comics scholar Laine Berman told the Indonesian teen magazine *Hai* in the 1995 article “*Si Sarmun ke New York*” (“Sarmun Goes to New York”) that “national comics was dead” (Berman 2001, 22).

<sup>114</sup> Children’s magazines such as *Bobo* were still serializing children’s comics such as *Bona*.



sold a total of 965,000 copies of her 71 translated novels. In the case of domestic authors, Marga T. and Mira W. sold a total of 784,000 and 529,000 copies, respectively. Translated foreign comics—in particular, Japanese comics—became more popular and trendy among young readers. In a 2008 survey of 3,458 high school students conducted by Bogor Agricultural University graduate Ibnu Akbar, 2,215 students reported reading translated manga an average of one to two hours every day (Akbar 2008, 25, 39). Comics became more available to middle-class youths (the price of Rp. 3,000 in the early 1990s rose to Rp. 15,000 in 2008), who were able to buy them within their monthly allowance (on average Rp. 360,000<sup>115</sup>). This trend is supported by sales in modern bookstore chains throughout the country. Members of the lower class could also access foreign comic books because of their availability in streetside kiosks and TBs. Readers consisted of males and females in comparable numbers. Translated comics occupied a significant space in book shops, but new Indonesian comics that bore no resemblance to predecessors sparked a new awareness of Indonesian comics (without the buyers realizing that there had been prejudice against the old Indonesian comics back in the 1970s!).

Following the popularity of translated foreign comics in the Indonesian market, the production of Indonesian comics reemerged. The new wave of comics that came after the import was the third generation (Ahmad et. al 2006).

Comics readers of the 1990s grew up with tons of translated manga and were familiar with anime aired on television more or less concurrently.<sup>116</sup> These readers were unaware of earlier Indonesian comics, and when they started to create their own comics,

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<sup>115</sup> The average allowance number is taken from Ibnu Akbar's investigation of high school manga readers by sampling 3,458 high school students in 2008 (Akbar 2008, 42).

<sup>116</sup> Private television stations aired various Japanese anime such as *Candy Candy* (TVRI, 1970s; RCTI, 1994), *Dragon Ball* (Indosiar, starting in 1995), and *Sailor Moon* (At Indosiar, starting in 1995).

they referred to foreign comics such as manga rather than established local conventions of expression. When they created their own comics, they referred to the familiar foreign formats and not the unknown wayang comics, silat comics, romans, or other genres of domestically produced comics. In the early 1990s, most of these readers were attracted to only one specific type of foreign comics (Japanese, American, or European), mainly because of the differences of semantics in respective foreign comics. That is to say, most of them were unable to comprehend comics with which they were not familiar. Thus, reading and creating comics in Indonesia became fragmented.

The fragmented situation refers to the separation of Indonesian comics readership and authorship. Ahmad et al. (2006, 83–100) tried to explain the segregation of comics readers from different age groups who read different comics. For instance, readers born before and during the 1970s read the second generation of Indonesian comics. Those born in the 1980s mostly read translated comics from Europe, the U.S., or Japan, while readers born in the 1990s mainly consumed translated manga. Each age group became opinionated with respect to their tastes; they were not simply “comics” readers but rather readers of European, American, Japanese, or Indonesian comics.<sup>117</sup> With this in mind, it was suggested that each generation’s taste depended on the comics that dominated the market at the time and that the creation of comics was “influenced” (Ahmad et al. 2006, 94) by the respective comics of a certain period.

Nowadays, it is common in Indonesia to distinguish comics according to regional and geopolitical “style,” either as Japanese manga, European comics, American comics, or Indonesian comics. This includes the possibility of differentiating “Indonesian comics”

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<sup>117</sup> There are people who read many kinds of comic books, but their numbers are insignificant compared to the casual comic readers who read only specific comics.

from “other comics (those mimicking foreign style) made in Indonesia. But how did Indonesian comics readers become literate in this categorization according to “style”? How did the fragmentation of readers and comics styles affect Indonesian comics?

### *“Style” in Indonesian Comics*

Distinguishing readers’ comics identity is important in Indonesian comics publishing. This identity is represented by the term “style” (*gaya*). In the context of Indonesian comics, the term *style* specifically refers to a specific way of drawing comics visually, especially foreign comics. The term *style* is used very ambiguously in Indonesia and can refer to the way of drawing characters’ bodies (character design) as specified by Giftanina (2012) and Ahmad et al. (2005)—the lanky-bodied, big-eyed Japanese characters compared to the muscular American—or to the format of the book itself (i.e., the physical appearance of comics as a book), as implied in Ahmad et al. (2006). The next chapter will view critically the problems of the term *style*. This section instead exposes how the term came to have importance in Indonesia.

The first wave of the third generation of Indonesian comics emerged in response to the “Japanization” of the comics market in Indonesia (Ahmad et al. 2006, 77; Berman 2001, 22). Independently published comics were pioneered by the *Qomik Nasional* (QN) label, formed by a group of students from the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB). The QN label launched two titles: *Caroq* and *Kapten Bandung* (*Captain Bandung*) at the university’s art fest in 1995. Their size, format, and cover design were completely different from any previously published comics in Indonesia. *Caroq* was published in a format similar to American superhero comic books: B5-sized, 24 pages long, and printed



in full color. Meanwhile, *Captain Bandung*'s 32-page full-colored albums were reminiscent of *bande dessinée* such as *Tintin* or *Asterix*. In their drawings, paneling, character design, and theme, both comics also reflected the conventions of American superhero comics and *bande dessinée*'s adventure comics, respectively. They were accused of imitating foreign "styles" despite the QN's mission to challenge the predominance of foreign comics in Indonesia (Berman 2001, 22).

The second wave of comics creation in the third generation was created by female artists who began to publish comics under Japanese-like pseudonyms in the late 1990s. Female artists had been unusual in Indonesian comics, but now their numbers came to be almost equal to those of male creators.<sup>118</sup> Most female comics artists created pure-hearted romances in daily life situations, reminiscent of Japanese *shōjo* manga (such as *Magic of Love* by Anzu Hizawa and *Past Promise* by Callista Takarai, both published in 2001). Leaning on manga expression, these comics were composed of irregularly shaped panels, decorative screen tones, and big-eyed characters. They appeared in a book format similar to that of translated Japanese manga, with monochrome pages and full-color cover illustrations. They were released by the major publishing company EMK, which was known for translating manga. In bookstores, these comics were placed next to translated manga.

Japanese pseudonyms were also advised by EMK editors in order to market the books as Japanese,<sup>119</sup> as these comics had no followers at that time.

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<sup>118</sup> Art/design and comics scholar Alvanov Zpalanzani investigated the 253 Indonesian comics published from 1995 to 2008 and found that the ratio of individual male to female authors was 34% to 33% of the total subjects (Zpalanzani 2012, 80). The remaining authors are counted as a group.

<sup>119</sup> Interview with EMK head editorial, Mrs. Sari (November 26, 2014).

Thus, the comics industry in Indonesia resumed its revival by leaning on the conventions of foreign comics instead of domestic comics traditions.<sup>120</sup> There are even remakes of second-generation Indonesian comics according to Japanese manga expression and book formats, as seen in the case of Hans Jaladara's *Panji Tengkorak*. Contrary to the second generation of Indonesian comics, the products of the third generation appeared in major chain bookstores such as Gramedia, following the marketing strategy for the second wave of (manga-style) artists.

Comics (and cultural) critics, artists, and even publishers began to notice the separation of styles within Indonesian comics. By the next decade, as seen in popular essays by academics (e.g., Ahmad et al. 2005, 2006) and cultural observers and critics (Darmawan 2005) or purely academic papers (Giftanina, 2012), it was established that there were several styles (*gaya*) used in Indonesian comics. These styles were, in general, European, American (both sometimes categorized as one: Western—as in the case of Giftanina [2012]), and Japanese style.<sup>121</sup> Publishers and comics artists were fully conscious of this categorization. Publishing companies established the comics style in their submission guidelines—whether they accepted “all kinds of styles, such as online Indonesian comic publishing company *Makko Co.*,”<sup>122</sup> or excluded one “style” from publishing, such as *Terrant* (Darmawan 2005, 2611). “Style” also became a commonly known concept, so that indicating a style on the back cover of a book gave information

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<sup>120</sup> At the same time, there were republications of the work of popular second-generation authors, such as *Imperium Majapahit* (*Majapahit Imperial*, 1993) by Jan Mintaraga or *Panji Tengkorak* (*Skull banner*, 1996) by Hans Jaladara, in a translated Japanese-comics packaging and drawing style, but they were untouched by young readers.

<sup>121</sup> There are also mentions of Hong Kong *manhua* and Korean *manhwa* style by Martabak (2006) and in Makko Co. submission FAQ (<http://makko.co/submission>). However, by general mention and number of publications, this paper considers the three styles to be the most significant styles in the recent publication of Indonesian comics.

<sup>122</sup> Makko submission FAQ (<http://makko.co/submission>).

to readers on what to expect from that book. An example is the summary in *Mat Jangung: Kabut Manusia; Mat Jagung Human Fog* (2009), where it was blatantly written on the back cover that this comics was drawn in “European Style.”<sup>123</sup>

This “categorization” is practical in regard to relating the capabilities of artists with the demands and stylistic preferences of readers. However, in terms of cultural context,<sup>124</sup> the categorization is problematic because it politicizes comics. As if echoing Old Order views in cultural policy, Indonesian discourse on post-1990s comics dismisses these “style”-wise divided comics as inauthentic and imperialized by foreign powers. For Ahmad et al. (2006), cultural imperialism is shown by how the Japanese customs and way of thinking are normalized in Indonesia through manga reading (Ahmad 2006, 21). Thus, the appropriation of Japanese phrases as a result of manga exposure—such as “*itadakimasu*” to the Indonesian “*mari makan*” (“let’s eat!”)—may be regarded as cultural imperialism. However, Darmawan (2005) and Giftanina (2012) state that the real problem lies in aesthetics—that is, the fact that comics are drawn by Indonesians in a foreign “style.” Japanese manga and its style, which entered the market later than the already familiar Western and Chinese comics, face the fiercest criticism from comics observers. Manga-style comics are significantly more distinguishable than other comics—often described by the conspicuously big-eyed characters and lanky anatomy—which make them very easy for comics readers to recognize even at a glance. The influence of foreign comics calls into question the “Indonesian identity” in Indonesian comics (Darmawan

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<sup>123</sup> “Mat Jagung adalah ketelatenan yang patut dipuji. Komik strip antikorupsi bergaya komik Eropa ini berhasil menjawab pembaca setiap minggu...” (*Mat Jagung*, 2009, back cover). *Mat Jagung* is a role model worthy of praise. This anti-corruption-themed comic strip in the European comics style successfully piqued the interest of readers every week...” (translation is mine).

<sup>124</sup> This will be explained further at the end of the next chapter.

2005, 111; Giftanina 2012). The drawing style's potential authenticity is the main issue in the current Indonesian comics discourse in the next chapter.

### *Status of Indonesian Comics*

“Style” is one of the categories used in Indonesia to draw a line from one group of comics to another in this actually not unified but “fragmented” society. However, in Indonesia, other categories are used in differentiating one type of comics from another. The status of a comic as a more commercialized mainstream or more independent alternative one is significant because of the friction in Indonesian discourse, especially after the emergence of multiple artistic comics by comic studios and communities. In particular, alternative comics have been highly valorized by cultural elites<sup>125</sup> in comparison to the more commonly found mainstream popular comics.

This study treats the term *transnational comics*—foreign-styled Indonesian comics, both Japanese style and American and European style in their packaging (variants of foreign ones) and sold in retail riding the wave of global comics—as signifying the mainstream of Indonesian comics. These comics had more readership than the other types of comics in the Indonesian market, as explained in the next paragraph. Manga-style Indonesian comics themselves rode the wave of the most commercialized Japanese translated manga. ITB art lecturer and comic scholar Alvanov Zpalanzani performed a study of 253 Indonesian comics published between 1995 and 2008 and found that 57% were published by Gramedia Group (consisting of EMK and M&C!), which normally published translated Japanese comics with the visuals and format of Japanese comics.

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<sup>125</sup> Such as seen in the case of DI:Y, as mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation.



Similar to the Japanese-styled comics, recent American-styled Indonesian comics in bookstores are placed next to translated Japanese comics and distributed to large bookstore chains.

In addition to these mainstream comics, other forms and movements of Indonesian comics emerged at the same time as third-generation Indonesian comics. In 1997, the *Benny & Mice* series by veteran newspaper cartoonists Benny Rachmadi and Muhammad Misrad were serialized in the nation's biggest newspaper, *Kompas*. In the 2000s, the satiric comedy series gained popularity and acclaimed praise by cultural observers and academia as one of the comics truly representing Indonesia.<sup>126</sup> Later, in 2008, ITB art professor Tita Larasati created the self-proclaimed "alternative" publishing company Curhat Anak Bangsa (CAB), which published *Curhat Tita (Tita Confides, 2008)*, the first graphic diary in Indonesia, consisting of sketches of her daily life. Both *Benny & Mice* and *Curhat Tita* are positioned in a different way than both the mainstream comics (including the manga of the third generation) and the second-generation Indonesian comics. *Benny & Mice* comics are distributed throughout the major bookstore chain Gramedia, but they are placed in the popular literature or travel section, far from the mainstream comics shelves. Meanwhile, Tita's books are found in the more sporadic but more sophisticated Aksara bookstore chain, intentionally reaching a more adult and intellectually conscious readership. Hence, this study positions both books and their types—cartoons and graphic diaries—as alternatives to mainstream comics.

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<sup>126</sup> Benny Rachmadi (Benny) and Muhammad Misrad (Mice)'s own *Benny & Mice* series contains short strips and cartoons collected into almost 10 books. The first series, *Lagak Jakarta Edisi Koleksi Dekade 1: 1997-2007* (Jakarta in Action: 1st Decade Collection), consisted of the stories from 2007. Benny also works as a cartoonist in another tabloid (*Kontan*) and as an illustrator for an advertising agency, while Mice works as a T-shirt designer. Both are also lecturers at the *Institut Kesenian Jakarta* (Jakarta Arts Institute, or IKJ).

In the context of alternative comics, underground comics movements emerged from the same community as the aforementioned QN in Bandung, consisting of young university students. However, these movements have their own missions: either artistic—to challenge the borders between comics and art, such as *Apotik Komik*<sup>127</sup> or *Daging Tumbuh*<sup>128</sup>—or social, depicting the society near them, such as the works of Institut Seni Indonesia (Indonesian Art Institute) students in *Kampus to Kampung* (Campus to Village). These alternative comics are distributed in neither the manner of mainstream comics nor that of the aforementioned alternative comics. Some are not even intended to be mass-reproduced. One example is *Apotik Komik*'s self-proclaimed “comics” that incorporated stacked trash cans as the panels for comics and wall murals (see Fig. 4). The rest are simply unauthorized books without ISBNs, such as *Daging Tumbuh*, that are photocopied. In this study, to avoid confusion with the aforementioned alternative comics intended for larger circulation, this type of comics in the discourse will be referred to as underground comics.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> *Apotik Komik* is a group formed by students of Jogjakarta's Institute of Arts, with a two-way mission in creating artistic comics: to introduce Indonesians to art galleries and to ensure that comics receive the same treatment as other art forms (Putranto & Purwanti 2012).

<sup>128</sup> *Daging Tumbuh* is an anthology started by Jogjakartan artist Eko Nugroho in 2000. *Daging Tumbuh* teams accept comics submissions from anyone on a first-come, first-served basis. Their anthologies have limited print runs (50 copies for the first series, expanding to 100, 200, and so on). *Daging Tumbuh* teams also organize exhibitions for artwork, such as one in the ViaVia Travalers Café in Jogjakarta in 2012.

<sup>129</sup> In English comics discourse, “underground comics” are characterized by counter-cultural provocation; “alternative comics” are regarded as the replacement of underground comics from the 1980s onward (Hartfield 2005, location 19–398).



Fig. 4 *Under Estimate* (1999) by Apotik Komik

I categorize Indonesian comics as mainstream, alternative, or underground comics in view of the discussion of identity in comics. Mainstream, alternative, and underground comics differ not only in their modes/methods of distribution (bookstores against self-distributed), print run (mass production versus limited editions or unique items), and placement in bookstores (next to the popular and generic translated Japanese manga or other foreign comics or completely separated from them) but also in form (printed books or murals and installations) and purpose (pure entertainment versus social and artistic aspiration). The combination of the aforementioned categories also leads to differences in evaluation and status (as high culture or popular culture). Thus, juxtaposing comics within the same context for comparison—such as in the DI:Y exhibition in the first section <sup>130</sup>—complicates the discourse of Indonesian comics and is currently problematizing authenticity in the third generation of Indonesian comics.

This thesis regards the “fragmentation” of third-generation Indonesian comics through the “foreign styles” they adopted (Japanese, American, or European) and their

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<sup>130</sup> Pages 3–4 of this thesis.



status (mainstream, alternative, or underground) as crucial characteristics that must be considered in an analysis of Indonesian comics discourse.

### *Genres, Authors, and Communities*

Alvanov Zpalanzani, in his attempt to map Indonesian comics from 1995 to 2008, suggested subdividing Indonesian comics (at least those published in the form of books) into several genres, the most prominent ones being action comics (which also include sports comics) and the newly emerged “shōjo-manga,” or inspired romance comics. Action and romance comics, combined, account for more than 50% of the 253 comics in Zpalanzani’s investigation. Zpalanzani also mentions religious comics that contain Islamic history and education for youth and are produced by publishers of religious books, as well as educational comics on various topics such as science, society, and culture (Zpalanzani 2012, 77). Their quota is small, each accounting for 10% of the total number of Indonesian comics published from 1995 to 2008. Ahmad et al. stated that “no one” had ever mentioned these comics in Indonesian comics criticism (2006, 81). This is very interesting, because their content agrees with the ideal image of comics held by educators, the government, and parents. As the aim of this dissertation is to discuss Indonesian comics discourse, I will have to skip an analysis of educational comics, because they are not part of Indonesian comics discourse (yet).

Zpalanzani also mapped Indonesian comics regarding their number of authors: individuals and teams or studios. Creating comics individually has been common among comic artists—who, in majority, if not all, were male—since the emergence of Indonesian comics. However, the third generation welcomes female comics writers, whose numbers

now equal those of men. These female authors appeared because of the popularity of Japanese translated *shōjo manga*. The same ratio of male to female writers applies to groups, bearing the title “studio” (*studio*) or “team” (*tim*) in their names. Studios and teams do not bind their members to exclusive teamwork privileges. They may or may not admit more than one status or style. One example of a team demonstrating this plurality is *7 Blue Art Land Studio*, which consists of female comics artists who all graduated from Machiko Manga School.<sup>131</sup> Together, they have created cartoon strips such as *101 Peraturan Konyol* (101 Silly Rules), which is published in a humorous cartoon format and distributed on shelves separated from mainstream comics, similar to the *Benny and Mice* series. However, the members of *7 Blue Art Land Studio* also individually write in the Japanese manga style for EMK. In the latter case, their books are placed next to translated Japanese books.

Comics studios, consisting of comics writers working together, should not be confused with the comics community. This is a separate term that, during the past decade, has been presented in newspaper articles as the starting point of Indonesian comics resurrection.<sup>132</sup> In its coverage, such as in the *Tent@ng* (@bout) column in the national newspaper *Media Indonesia*,<sup>133</sup> studios are treated as a possible consequence of the “communities” that try to promote activities of Indonesian comics. However, this study must emphasize a separation between the purposes of comics studios and communities; comics studios are for writing comics, and comics communities organize public events

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<sup>131</sup> The Machiko Manga School is a school offering courses on comics creation and illustration, founded by Machiko Maeyama, a Japanese cartoonist living in Indonesia. Her pen name is Chaka Poko (茶花ぽこ). One series she created was *Gyaru no oku-sama* (ギャルな奥さま, 1995–1998).

<sup>132</sup> As mentioned by Ari Wowo in a February 20, 2008, *Media Indonesia* article, “Jika si Buta dari Goa Hantu Hidup Kembali” (If the Blind of the Phantom Cave Resurrects).

<sup>133</sup> *Media Indonesia*, February 20, 2008.

promoting Indonesian comics and conduct activities other than creating comics. Confusing comics studios and comics communities is easy, because both consist of multiple members who are sometimes the same people. Members of comics studios and of comics communities also mostly come from intellectual environments<sup>134</sup> and have—generally speaking—an active role in voicing opinions on comics. Most comics communities also have active comics artists as their members. However, comics communities are more involved in educational and cultural activities such as holding workshops that invite cultural observers to discuss Indonesian comics with future artists and collaborating with foreign cultural institutes (e.g., IFI and Goethe) and state actors / cultural elites (e.g., the Jakarta Art Council) to organize comics exhibitions. Two examples are *Pameran Komik Indonesia* (Indonesian Comic Exhibition) 2011 and Comiconnexions 2012,<sup>135</sup> organized by *Akademi Samali*.<sup>136</sup> Other prominent comic communities' activities involve collection and republication of past (mostly second-generation) Indonesian comics. One example is the republication of *Gundala*<sup>137</sup> by the KomikIndonesia.Com community. In addition, comics communities involve cultural observers and Indonesian comics connoisseurs—such as Hikmat Darmawan and Surjorimba Suroto, two prominent advocates of Indonesian comics in workshops,

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<sup>134</sup> Most comics studios and communities (e.g., QN, Apotik Komik, MKI—*Masyarakat Komik Indonesia*, and the Indonesian Comic Society) are pioneered by university students. Comics communities, discussed later, organize activities that pursue dialogue and exchange between the main actors in Indonesian comics.

<sup>135</sup> With IFI (Institut Français in Indonesia), Akademi Samali organized *Pameran Sejarah Komik Indonesia* (the Indonesian Comics History Exhibition) in 2011. With the Goethe Institut, IFI, ISI, and IKAPI, Akademi Samali organized ComiConnexions with the slogan “*Dialog Komik Antar Negara*” (Inter-Nations Comics Dialogue).

<sup>136</sup> Akademi Samali is a Jakarta-based comics community founded in 2005 by comics artist Beng Rahadian, comics observer Hikmat Darmawan, and comics artist Zarki. Akademi Samali is active in organizing workshops and exhibitions.

<sup>137</sup> *Gundala* is a superhero series created by comics author Hasmi and first published in 1969. Like another famous superhero series, *Godam*, created by Hasmi's friend Wid NS, *Gundala* is set in modern Indonesia.

exhibitions, and talk shows—or writers in newspapers, magazines, and Internet media in their activities.

Discourse on Indonesian comics is mainly facilitated by these communities, which invite comics artists from various genres and statuses and help them interact with one another under the moderation of cultural experts and academia. Their activities are covered by magazines and newspapers, both online and offline, and are later read about by the nation. Within this discourse, these activities help artists and the whole community (not just comics communities) to recognize differences in comics and construct them. Clearly, the “fragmentation” between different artists, readers, and communities in Indonesian comics has been facilitated by such cultural experts who are concerned with “identity” in Indonesian comics.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has explained the historical background of Indonesian comics and the situation of the current (third) generation of Indonesian comics. I highlighted the term *fragmentation*, which is lamented by cultural observers because of the alleged lack of authenticity (due to Indonesian comics’ being “influenced” by foreign styles). This mindset has been widespread in the third generation of comics in Indonesia. In the DI:Y exposition, as quoted in the first chapter, Jakarta Art Institute chief Ade Darmawan and cultural observer Hikmat Darmawan both criticized the lack of authenticity and the fragmentation of mainstream comics in order to promote the artistic and socially reflective works of alternative and underground comics authors and studios. This example suggests a clear separation of categories.



This chapter also presented the main actors in Indonesian comics and their roles in creating discourse. The first category of actors are comics readers, separated into several categories who read only their preferred type of comics (be it foreign or Indonesian) but who are literate in categorizing different styles, including those of mainstream Indonesian comics. The second category of actors are the Indonesian comics artists, who draw individually and/or in groups. Some are versed in switching “styles” and are also very communicative with one another. There are also publishers and comics communities. Furthermore, academics and cultural observers are proactive in moderating discussions of Indonesian comics. Their interaction and their activities are showcased by the Indonesian media, which provide information to bystanders and onlookers.

This chapter also exposed how “style” and “influence” have been significant keywords in Indonesian comics discourse for a long time but became more frequent after the entrance of Japanese comics. These have been the base keywords for group separations, and moreover, for the foundations for the constant issue of authenticity of Indonesian comics. However, every discussion of “style” and “influence” is ambiguous and random on what is referred to (e.g., the format of comic books, the character drawings, or something else). Instead of pursuing all these references, I find it more significant to focus on how these terms came into existence and achieved importance in Indonesian comics discourse and which intricacies they effected.

## Chapter Four

### A Critical Approach to “Influence” and “Style”

In Indonesian comics discourse, there are two problematic terms that should be regarded critically: *influence* and *style*. In discourses on Indonesian comics, such as those carried out by comics communities, both academia and media take for granted the use of the said terms as signifiers of cultural identity, as if there were a tacit agreement among the actors of the field of Indonesian comics. However, at this point, it should have become clear that defining *style* and *influence* as representations of a certain identity through a certain single illustration, a certain graphic narrative, a certain form, and a certain narrative content leads to a cliché argument. Therefore, this thesis refrains from engaging in the debate of what form (style) and what content (representation) are supposedly proper for “Indonesian” comics. Instead, this study presumes these terms to have multiple meanings depending on their use. Precisely this presumption of multiple perspectives is meant by the word *critical* here.

#### *The Problematic Term “Influence”*

The word *influence* (*pengaruh*) has been relentlessly repeated in the discourse of Indonesian comics since the first generation. The term can be traced to Marcel Bonneff’s *Komik Indonesia* (1976, 1998), in which he surmised that early Indonesian comics were influenced by American and Chinese comics.

According to the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (the Indonesian Language Dictionary),<sup>138</sup> the word *influence*—which is used in Bonneff’s *Komik Indonesia*—means a “force that changes someone’s character, belief, or actions.” This definition is accompanied by an example of parental influence (*pengaruh*) on their children,<sup>139</sup> and the key to the definition is “changing” the mentality or action of those who are influenced.

Bonneff uses the word *influence* (*pengaruh*) impulsively throughout different arguments that shall be discussed below.<sup>140</sup>

The term *influence* appeared for the first time in *Komik Indonesia* when Bonneff explained the proliferation of foreign comics right after Indonesia’s independence in his section “Western and Chinese Influences (1931–1954),” as follows:

*Berbagai upaya itu tidak berhasil menahan serbuan komik Amerika dalam media massa Indonesia. Sindikat besar distributor komik, seperti King Feature Syndicate tidak menyia-nyiakan pasar yang luas ini. Salah satunya, Tarzan hadir dalam Keng Po sejak 1947. Terutama sejak 1952, banyak keluarga Indonesia mulai mengenal tokoh-tokoh yang pernah lama sekali memukau masyarakat Amerika, seperti Rip Kirby, karya Alex Raymond [...] Untuk mengimbangi pengaruh [underline mine] Tarzan, atau mungkin juga untuk memuaskan selera pembaca, yang sebagian besar keturunan Cina, mingguan kelompok Keng Po, Star Weekly, menyajikan petualangan legendaria Sie Djin Koei. (Bonneff 1998, 22)*

<sup>138</sup> *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (the Indonesian Language Dictionary) is the dictionary published by the Indonesian Department of Education (<http://pusatbahasa.kemdiknas.go.id/kbbi>).

<sup>139</sup> “*Daya yg ada atau timbul dr sesuatu (orang, benda) yg ikut membentuk watak, kepercayaan, atau perbuatan seseorang*” (*Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* [KBBI] dalam jaringan, <http://kbbi.web.id/pengaruh>).

<sup>140</sup> I use the Indonesian version here because hypothetically, all comics critics in Indonesia refer to it. It presumably contains a translation error, but I am unable to confirm this since I was not able to retrieve Bonneff’s original French-language dissertation, *Les Bandes Desinées Indonésiennes*. Hence, the discussion will focus on only the Indonesian translation of Bonneff’s works.



The attempts [of publishing propaganda comics, explanation mine] failed to block the attack of American comics on Indonesian mass media. Large comic distributor syndicates, like King Feature Syndicate, did not waste this opportunity, and published foreign comics such as *Tarzan* in *Keng Po* since 1947. From 1952 onward, many Indonesian families started to get familiar with characters close to American society, such as Alex Raymond's *Rip Kirby* [...]. To balance the influence [underline mine] of *Tarzan*, and in response to the market's taste, that is, the taste of the Chinese community, within the *Keng Po* group, *Star Weekly* started serializing the legendary *Sie Djin Koei*.

"Influence," in Bonneff's argument above, is presented in a way that highlights the distribution of American comics and their negative effect on Indonesian society, especially when the word *attack* is used instead of *import* or *enter*. Bonneff shows how *Tarzan* and other characters of the Western comics canon have become familiar to Indonesian readers, but he does not explain how they changed readers' mentality. Literacy of foreign characters is not enough to justify the use of a term as strong as *influence*. Moreover, in Bonneff's book, "Tarzan's influence" provides the background for the emergence of *Sie Djin Koei*, which is regarded not only as a response to market demands for local comics but also as a challenge to American culture and politics. Precisely this makes the use of *influence* problematic.

Bonneff's wording is not accidental, as similar uses of *influence* throughout his text indicate. In the concluding paragraph of the same section, Bonneff again utilizes *influence* in the sense of "Western influence" (*Pengaruh Barat*) to describe a state of proliferation of Western comics books.<sup>141</sup> He goes on to raise examples of how Western

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<sup>141</sup> "*Pengaruh Barat lebih luas lagi*" (the Western influence is even wider; Bonneff 1998, 27).

historical stories like those of *Iskandar Agung* (Alexander the Great) and Marco Polo, Western fairy tales like Hans Christian Andersen's or *Alice in Wonderland*, or Western literary works such as William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* and Victor Hugo's *Si Bongkok Dari Notre Dame* (Hunchback of Notre-Dame de Paris) have become well known among Indonesian children (Bonneff 1998, 27). Again, *influence* is clearly not used to say *how* the receiving country's society has changed under the influence of the imported culture but merely to allude to the foreign culture's wide circulation among children, the main age group that reads comics. Moreover, *influence* is not analyzed aesthetically with regard to how exactly elements of imported comics reappear in domestic comics. Bonneff's use of the word *influence*—again—is inappropriate in this matter because he never explains how and to what extent the influence occurs, i.e., what impact it actually has had.

In Bonneff's argument, *influence* has a negative connotation (see its combination with *attack*, for example). It implies the same message of "cultural imperialism" as Sukarno's cultural policy *ManiPol*.

Under the Old Order government (1945–1965), Indonesian readers learned to associate the term *influence* with caution against foreign cultures,<sup>142</sup> as the cultural policy was antagonistic toward a foreign presence in cultural productions. It was supposed to encourage the young Indonesian nation—which was still struggling against Dutch attempts to reoccupy the state—to gain autonomy.

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<sup>142</sup> See chapter two, background two.

One example of the negative connotations of *influence* can be clearly seen in a quotation in Bonneff's study that describes the value of wayang comics by quoting a publisher's statement about a 1962 comic titled *Ramayana*:

*Tjerita ini disusun untuk mengarahkan pengaruh-pengaruh negatip dari djiwa muda terhadap pengaruh kebudjaan asing [...] Tjerita bergambar ini mendjadi tjambuk [...] jang berarti kita tidak perlu mengimport komik-komik dari luar jang kadang-kadang meratjuni djiwa bangsa kita atau setidaknya tidak tjotjok dengan kepribadian kita [...]"* (*Ramayana*, ed. Keluarga Soebarno, 1962; Bonneff 1998, 104)

This story is compiled to divert the negative influences of foreign culture in young people [...] This pictured story is the whip [...] that means we don't need to import foreign comics that poison our soul, or at least [*sic*] do not suit our particularities [...]

The meaning of *negative influence* constituted in comics, as mentioned in the quotation above, calls for scrutiny. As elsewhere in the world, comics in Indonesia do not escape society's negative accusations of being morally damaging for readers, who are mainly children.<sup>143</sup> At first, this argument may imply a similar accusation against foreign comics, but the development of the argument shows that morals or ethics in comics are not necessarily the problem. The statement clearly problematizes the foreign culture before the comics. An injection of wayang tradition into comics has come to be regarded

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<sup>143</sup> For further reading about anti-comics campaigns in the world, please refer to John A. Lent's article "The Comics Debates Internationally" (1999, 2009). In Indonesia, besides being accused of morally contaminating children, comics are criticized for having too many pictures and too few words. The writings are also condemned for not using grammatically correct Indonesian (Bonneff 1998, 101).

as a solution to the implicated moral problems with respect to a product that originated in a foreign country.

Wayang comics appropriate traditional Javanese shadow puppet theater stories and set decorations into the (until then i.e., 1960s) primarily “foreign medium” of comics. The intended process of hybridization can be compared to an earlier reaction in music production. Sukarno, in his 1959 *ManiPol* address, directly criticized loud Western rock music in Indonesia. His address eventually prompted the emergence of products mixing the indigenous musical genre of *keroncong*<sup>144</sup> with the rock style. Similarly, wayang comics are also considered a success in portraying “Indonesian-ness” through appropriation of traditional visual motifs. However, at the same time, praise of wayang comics speaks to an inherent negativity toward the influence of foreign comics.

The comments of *Ramayana*’s publisher reflect the Old Order’s cultural policy, which implies that the negative influences of foreign products are morally poisonous to citizens. However, the negative influence of foreign comics and how it has seeped into Indonesian comics through hybridization were never discussed in *Komik Indonesia*. It is as if the supposed moral problems in comics were solved once an appropriation of traditional elements occurred. This shows that the central problem of comics in Indonesian discourse, from the start, was assumed to be the lack of national (traditional) culture (symbols). When traditional or ethnic props are implemented, foreign influence as a threat to citizens’ morality is gone. Ostensibly, negative influence can be avoided through symbolization of national and/or traditional culture. Consequently, the hidden meaning of the concept of influence in comics discussion—rooted in an inherited early

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<sup>144</sup> Refer to chapter two.



cultural policy—is an understanding that foreign culture (foreign comics) is morally wrong, and national (traditional) culture is morally right.

Another problem with Bonneff's definition of *influence* is its lack of differentiation. The term *influence* hovers between two connotations: (1) “copying” and “imitating,” which imply something negative (e.g., stealing), and (2) “inspiring,” which implies a genealogical connection and is more neutral terminology.

In a problematic section of *Pengaruh Barat dan Cina* (Western and Chinese Influence, 1931–1945),<sup>145</sup> Bonneff refers to both. He uses the term *influence* in the title to imply copying or imitating (*menjiplak*) from another work when he analyzes *Garuda Putih*'s connection to Superman and *Kapten Komet*'s to *Flash Gordon*.<sup>146</sup> In the same section, Bonneff also explains the possible “genealogy” of comics by referring to the connection between Chinese comics such as *Sie Djin Koei* and *silat* (martial arts) comics (Bonneff 1998, 24). Later, on the exact same page, he applies the same terminology to the connection between American superheroes comics and *wayang* comics (Bonneff 1998, 24). Despite his intention to sound neutral, Bonneff implies the negative connotation of copying and imitating.

The lack of differentiation regarding the various definitions of *influence*—stretching from “imitating” to “genealogy”—has led to questioning the authenticity of Indonesian comics and Indonesian comics artists as such. In his pursuit of describing the

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<sup>145</sup> “*Western and Chinese Influence*” (Bonneff 1998, 19–27).

<sup>146</sup> “[...] di antara mereka ada yang mulai menjiplak komik-komik terbitan King Feature Syndicate [...] Kedigjayaan Puteri Bintang dan Garuda Putih itu serupa dengan Superman [...] Kemudian kisah kepahlawanan Kapten Komet [...] serupa dengan Flash Gordon [...]” (Among them [comic writers, translation mine] are comic artists that copy the comics published by King Feature Syndicate, [...] *Putri Bintang* and *Garuda Putih* is similar to Superman [...] and the epic *Kapten Komet* is similar to *Flash Gordon*).



“influence” of foreign media, Bonneff portrayed Indonesian comics as mere imitations without originality.

The development of the meaning of *influence* (*pengaruh*) eventually created a negative connotation in Indonesian comics that should have been discussed neutrally—such as the case of Indonesian comics genealogy. However, the implication of any discussion involving the “influence” of foreign media conveys the idea that Indonesian comics are imitations or mere copies. Thus, it will not fit Indonesia’s moral standard.

Bonneff’s discussion of the genealogies of Indonesian comics also creates a misunderstanding with respect to the Indonesian cultural context. Numerous times, he uses the word *influence* to explain the creation of groups as a consequence of their comics genealogies. One example is his examination of the environment of comics artists in Indonesia. The majority of Indonesian comics artists in the Golden Age were of Chinese descent. Bonneff stresses that they were “influenced” by Hong Kong comics and created a “modernist movement that deviates from the concept of national culture.” According to Bonneff, comics artists gathered based on their styles, which they had inherited from their direct mentors.<sup>147</sup>

The grouping phenomenon uncannily mirrors the current discourse of “fragmentation” in Indonesian comics. The argument itself is neutral. However, the grouping as the result of “influence” has created yet another negative nuance. As discussed in an earlier section, New Order cultural policy propagandized “unity,” which

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<sup>147</sup> “Para komikus senior membiarkan komikus muda untuk meminjam gaya dan tokoh cerita mereka, bahkan beberapa di antaranya mau mengarahkan para junior tersebut. Pada batas tertentu, mereka mencoba membentuk aliran gaya” (the senior comic artists let the younger comic artists borrow their style and stories, even some of them willing to guide the juniors. In some limit [*sic*], they tried to form movements [groups] of style); Bonneff 1998, 70).

made the idea of separation villainous.<sup>148</sup> National culture was the key to tying the country together. Consequently, the influence of another culture on Indonesian comics represented separatism and was, as such, to be rejected. Bonneff's use of the word *influence* in his argument implied separation of comics authors.

Bonneff failed to think about the term *influence* critically in his *Komik Indonesia*, but the erratic use of his terminology has become the foundation for Indonesian scholars and critics. To summarize, Bonneff's use of *influence* suggests multiple meanings: (1) proliferation, (2) imitation/copy, and (3) genealogical connection. It also implies (1) cultural imperialism, or the injection of foreign values deemed unfit to the nation; (2) the question of authenticity; and (3) separation from others of the same kind, or differentiation within the same (comics) culture. These implied meanings and their wide use by Indonesian critics have made it impossible for Indonesian readers to see any argument using the word *influence* in a positive light.

The present-day loose usage of *influence* in Indonesian discourse reflects the confusion of the term in Bonneff's *Komik Indonesia*. This is evident in the academic mapping of third-generation comics and in the focus on "style as identity," which set in after the introduction of Japanese comics. It also was reflected in the narrative I provided of DI:Y in the introduction, implying that the influence of foreign comics aesthetics in Indonesian comics is hazardous to Indonesian comics development. Similar cases will be discussed in the analysis section.

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<sup>148</sup> This was explained in the second chapter of this thesis.

### *The Problematic Term “Style”*

*Style (gaya)* is a vital yet problematic term in the discourse of Indonesian comics. In comics criticism, the verbal (words), the visual (pictures), and the sequential (panels) are regarded as the three most basic elements of comics.<sup>149</sup> Comics artist Will Eisner states that style points more to an artist’s individual expression (atmosphere) than to a learnable technique (Eisner 1996, 145; Harvey via Duncan and Smith 1996, 145). However, in Indonesia, *style* is not used to characterize the specific expression of a comic or of an individual artist or genre; rather, the term emphasizes visual elements derived from foreign comics.

Such a notion of “style” can be seen in Nanda Giftanina’s master’s paper (2012). He argues, among other things, that Indonesian comics collapsed because they lacked consistency in style as opposed to Japanese, American, and European comics. Furthermore, Giftanina links “style” primarily to character design: large-eyed manga characters, realistically emphasized heroes of American comics, and cartoonish characters from Europe.<sup>150</sup> A similar categorization according to foreign influence (as a

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<sup>149</sup> Two of the most common attributes incorporated in definitions of *comics* are the visual (pictures) and the verbal (words), which show the interrelation of words and images (Carrier 2000, 4; Eisner 1985, 3; Harvey 2009, 4; Natsume 2002, 4). The sequential is seen as well, through panels of comics that function to clarify the story (Eisner 1985, 5; McCloud 1993, 7, 97; Itō 2005, 150–151).

<sup>150</sup> “Jika kita meninjau gaya-gaya dan aliran komik yang tampaknya sedang sangat berjaya seperti manga dari Jepang misalnya, satu hal yang dapat kita temukan pertama kali adalah konsistensi gaya grafis dan penggambaran karakternya [...] Mulai dari wajah yang dibentuk imut-imut, rambut lurus, serta mata yang dibuat agak lebar, kesemuanya menjadi pakem yang hamper digunakan oleh semua komikus Jepang dalam membuat komiknya. [...] Begitu pula dengan gaya komik Amerika yang cenderung realis heroic atau gaya komik Eropa yang kartunis [*sic*]” (If we look to the styles and factions of comics that are successful today, like Japanese manga, we can see that they have consistency in their graphic style and character depiction [...] Starting with the cute face, straight hair, and big eyes, all have become conventions used by all Japanese comic authors in creating their comics [...] The same is true of realistically heroic American comics and cartoonish European comics; [translation mine]; Giftanina 2012, 11).

Unfortunately, in his paper, Nanda uses both *style* and *factions* to refer to what I have narrowed down as “style” in this thesis. Nanda uses both style and movement to refer to American, Japanese, and underground comics.

genealogical connection) is exhibited by Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) lecturers Hafiz Ahmad, Alvanov Zpalanzani, and Beny Maulana in their book *Histeria! Komikita* (2006). Although it was not published in an academic context, the book has become the main source of information regarding the phenomenon of Indonesian comics history and styles. The authors' application of style to the categorization of comics does not come from scratch. There were indeed previous publications that used the term *style*, and not only in Indonesia.

One significant example of comics culture categorization comes from comics artist and theorist Scott McCloud in his popular book *Understanding Comics* (1993), translated and published in Indonesia under the title *Memahami Komik* (2001). McCloud mentions separations of major comics cultures multiple times (1993, 42–44, 55–56, 74–81, 131, 210) and shows the differences of major comics cultures by means of panel transitions<sup>151</sup> and drawing techniques, the latter of which contribute to the conceptualization of the Indonesian term *style*. McCloud states that Japan's "national style" consists of a realistic background for the acting cartoony characters (1993, 43). This statement is related to the uniqueness of drawings, such as the *ligne claire* (clear line) of European culture in Herge's *Tintin* (McCloud 1993, 43). Prominent comics critics such as Will Eisner and Bart Beaty have treated American comics and European comics, respectively, in a similar manner. Eisner mentions the singularity of American superhero comics (Eisner 1996, 74), a notion also echoed by comics scholars Ryan Duncan and Matthew Smith (2009). They elaborate the uniqueness of American comics versus the

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<sup>151</sup> Comics scholar Neil Cohn has studied the difference between panel transitions of American and Japanese comics. See his paper "*A Different Kind of Cultural Frame: An Analysis of Panels in American Comics and Japanese Manga*" (2011, <http://ojs.arts.kuleuven.be/index.php/imagenarrative/article/view/128>).



superhero comics originated by Burne Hogarth and Jack Kirby's efforts to depict dynamic movements and action poses; masculine eroticism is also shown by skintight Spandex, bulging muscles, and colossal anatomies (Harvey & Duncan 2009, 221–245). Meanwhile, Beaty elaborates the European “clear line style” as the “hyper-stylized realism that favored flat coloring, the elimination of shading, and the suppression of extraneous detail” (2007, 22). This happened to be the “style” of comics authors such as Hergé, E. P. Jacobs, and Jacques Martin who, because of their popularity, eventually standardized visual aesthetics for comics in Eastern Europe (Beaty 2007, 22).

In the context of the “Japanese national style,” McCloud puts Tezuka Osamu on the map because of his “semioticized influence” (McCloud 1993, 43) on the Japanese comics culture. This can be related to Ōtsuka Eiji's notion of “semioticized body” (*kigōteki shintai*/記号の身体), developed by responding to Tezuka's own statement that his comics are semioticized or codified (*kigōteki*/記号的).<sup>152</sup> Being “semioticized” means that every expression is based not on realistic but on symbolic (simplified) drawing conventions to serve the purpose of representing emotions or movement. Rendered in a kind of “visual language,” Tezuka's comics call for interpretation (decoding) rather than watching (as in the case of realistic drawings). Ōtsuka sees the final stage of the evolution of Tezuka's “semioticized body” in *anime* images (*anime e*/アニメ絵; Ōtsuka 1994, 16), nowadays regarded as characteristic of Japanese manga.

The focus on cultural “stereotyping” based on “style”—especially of drawings—has become prominent in Indonesian comics discourse, as Ahmad et al. (2006) and Giftanina (2012) demonstrate.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Ōtsuka (1994, 5).

<sup>153</sup> Such cultural stereotyping enjoys popularity worldwide; see, for example, Bouissou (2006) and Itō



Apparently unintended, McCloud's cultural categorization (as well as the aforementioned studies and numerous others<sup>154</sup>) created a concept of "comics territories." However, the comics medium is not bound to a specific geopolitical territory. It has always traveled across countries and cultures and has a history of borrowing ideas and styles from other authors and media (Duncan & Smith 2009, 118). The term *cartoon* (an earlier term for *comics* in English) itself came from the Italian term for a design sketch and eventually was adopted by London's *Punch* magazine in 1843 to designate satirical drawings about the government.<sup>155</sup> America then launched its "imitation" (Harvey 2009, 28) of *Punch* in the mid-1880s, and it contained some of the earliest forms of cartoons and comics (Harvey 2009, 25–45).

In his study on the genealogy of comics from the 19th to the early 20th century, cartoonist and comics critic Robert C. Harvey shows that comics came into being by constantly borrowing from previous works, either by recreating satires and gags or by expanding previous conventions, from single to successive panels or from captions to speech balloons.<sup>156</sup> *The Japan Punch* was launched in Japan in the 19th century, pioneered by Charles Wirgman, and the magazine later became one of the earliest forms of printed comics in Japan. In Harvey's contribution to comics genealogy, there has never

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(2010).

<sup>154</sup> There is no doubt that the stereotypes are being shared worldwide. Various studies have examined separations of comic cultures; two are Bouissou (2006) and Itō (2010). The establishment of three major comics cultures and their connection to each other and to other minor comic cultures prompted further discussion of comics' transculturality in globalization. This study implies such a case; however, this is not the major aim of the study. Thus, this only will be mentioned briefly in the conclusion.

<sup>155</sup> The word *cartoon* originates from the Italian *cartone* (card) that painters used to sketch their designs. It was also used by Raffaello in the Vatican. The term was eventually used to designate a sketch for a final work. The term was used in London to designate "cartoon" (sketch) submissions for patriotic murals that were to decorate the New Palace of Westminster. The magazine *Punch* used the term *cartoon submissions* during a competition of satirical drawings (Harvey 2009, 26–27).

<sup>156</sup> For more information regarding the genealogy of comics, read Robert C. Harvey's study *How Comics Came to Be* (2009, 25–45).

been talk about the design sketch of cartoons as solely referring to Italian style nor about satirical cartoons specifically belonging to the British. Comics came to be because of constant re-creation. Borrowing conventions has never been a problem in comics. However, constant reproduction in particular territories has created distinct comics conventions, which McCloud tried to categorize in *Understanding Comics* and which Will Eisner dubbed as “national style” (Eisner 1996, 174).

Differentiating comics conventions according to cultural territories no doubt contributes to comics studies, but it also invites stereotyping. Both McCloud and Eisner overlook other forms of comics outside of the major “styles.” They also forget to highlight the important fact that comics are still created by borrowing ideas from other artists regardless of cultural borders.

In contrast, many comics critics have been inclined to validate a territorial “style” of comics, often in relation to a “national” concept that creates an opportunity to politicize, define the authenticity of, or even represent identity in comics. But such territorialization also suggests that anything drawn outside of the major “style” of a specific territory is inauthentic. Recently, globalization has made such imagined geographic borders less important. This is the misunderstanding created by McCloud’s categorization.

McCloud, who is commonly read by comics observers and the comics community in Indonesia, and Eisner, who is often referred to in Indonesian comics research, have contributed to the categorization of styles used in Indonesia today. McCloud’s contribution was also used later by Indonesian author and journalist Seno Gumira Ajidarma in his doctoral thesis.

Ajidarma's dissertation, *Panji Tengkorak: Kebudayaan Dalam Perbincangan* (The Three Panji Tengkorak: A Talk on Culture, 2011), discusses Hans Jaladara's *Panji Tengkorak* (Skeleton Banner), which was remade twice in 1985, and 1996 (the original published in 1968); the first two versions showed "modes of realism based on likeness," and the latter one was remade according to "modes of cartoon based on equivalence" (Ajidarma 2011, xvix). For the sake of simplicity, based on the stereotyping above, the *Panji Tengkorak* was created according to the American/European style and the Japanese manga style, i.e., the dominant mainstream comics in each generation.<sup>157</sup> Leaning on McCloud's argument about reality representations, Ajidarma finds that the two earlier *Panji Tengkorak* versions use realistic drawing, or objectification that is close to real life, while the latest remake (1996), which occurred after the proliferation of Japanese comics, uses drawings based on codified means—that is, an inner reality created by comics, as opposed to traditional realism. Based on this, Ajidarma concludes that a shift of dominance occurred in comics culture, but instead of discussing "influences," he focuses on the creation of Indonesian culture through historically specific "hegemonies."

However, Ajidarma's highly neutral stance to cultural categorization is rather exceptional. In contrast, Giftanina expresses animosity toward foreign styles, regarding the "influence" of foreign styles as one of the main causes for the demise of the Indonesian comics tradition. He also believes that an authentic Indonesian comics style can contribute to global comics culture in a way similar to Japanese and American comics (Giftanina 2012). With his banal cultural categorization of "styles," facilitated by the problematic term *influence*, Giftanina introduces a political agenda into Indonesian comics discourse, deliberately misunderstanding McCloud's aesthetic discussion of major comics cultures.

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<sup>157</sup> Ajidarma never simplifies his findings into geopolitical "style" brackets in his thesis.

In this specific exchange, the “influence” of style connotes that foreign style has negative implications (foreign value injection, inauthenticity, and separation from the state) for Indonesia.

The categorization of comic culture—under any category, including “style”—in the studies mentioned in this section was never meant to be nationally political.<sup>158</sup> Comics themselves are constantly and massively reproduced because of their affiliation with other mass media such as newspapers; constantly borrowing ideas and expanding them were never seen as a problem in authenticity. However, various studies that insinuate the development of territorially limited artistic conventions and the conceptualization of a national style for each territory have created an illusion of comics-specific geopoliticization. Studies that group styles based on their production location have become the foundation of “stylistic” fragmentation in Indonesia. These studies have also provided a basis to argue that there are political interests in the distribution of foreign comics and the implementation of their styles.

The cultural (or geopolitical) categorization of “style” can be traced back to English-language publications of comics research, which have been translated into Indonesian because of the heightened concern about comics. However, in Indonesia, the term *style* is, first and foremost, linked to the understanding that Indonesian culture has been violated by appropriating foreign comics styles. Used in tandem with the term *influence*, another word with a strong negative implication for Indonesian readers and

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<sup>158</sup> One can question the use of the word *national* in McCloud’s (1993) and Eisner’s (1996) studies, because it can imply a national agenda. However, since neither author further pursued any political or ideological issues in his study, I conclude that they did not have any political intention in their arguments.



artists, *style* implies that the formal reference to foreign comics goes against Indonesian cultural policy.

### *Conclusion*

I have discussed the two most problematic terms in contemporary Indonesian comics discourse: *influence* and *style*. The term *influence* is very controversial because of its negative connotation of being morally destructive toward the object it influences. Bonneff's pioneering study gave the word different meanings: proliferation, imitation/copy, and genealogy. *Influence* in Indonesian also implies cultural imperialism, questionable authenticity, and separation from national culture. It has also been assumed that the (negative) influence of foreign comics can be thwarted by the implementation of recognizably traditional forms, one of the most prominent examples being the praise of wayang comics in Indonesian discourse.

*Style* has been redefined as a type of comics semiotics instead of an atmosphere or mood in comics. Used in tandem with the problematic word *influence*, *style* has also become political because of misinterpreted categorization of the comics culture. Such categorization and territorialization create a cage in which one major style is specific to one geographical area. The combination of the two terms has reinforced the conception that foreign style is a cultural force with the potential to harm Indonesian culture. At the same time, this also has led to efforts to create indigenous Indonesian comics, with a motivation similar to the hybridization of music genres and the creation of wayang comics decades ago: an effort based on a mission to bring Indonesian comics to supersede the supremacy of foreign comics. However, this aspiration for Indonesian comics leads to a



pursuit of traditional Indonesian culture in a medium identified with cultural imperialism. Moreover, Indonesian comics discourse still lacks, for the most part, theoretical premises and clear definitions. Aside from confusing comics with style, the discourse uses problematic terms that imply a political purpose, even if politicization may be unintended.

In *Komik Indonesia*, Bonneff voiced concern about Indonesian comics artists engaged in cultural missions to expand Indonesian comics in order for their comics to be put on the map of Indonesian comics instead of being foreign imitations.<sup>159</sup> As in the case of most Indonesian popular culture, as discussed in chapter two, the adventure of aesthetic experimentation is often sacrificed for the sake of this cause that is deemed more important. Bonneff pointed out the same problem in the Golden Age comics, but at best could only suggest that the artists looked at comics movements in the Western world (Bonneff 1998, 100). Positioning Indonesian comics against foreign counterparts—which will be discussed in the next section—is a popular trend among the third generation of Indonesian comics. Comics observers compare one form of comics to another—as in the case of DI:Y in the introduction—in order to grasp how Indonesian comics is valorized among other comics in the Indonesian market. How effective is this method specifically, however? Is comparing Indonesian comics to foreign comics as motivational as Bonneff implies, or does the comics community only use it as a foundation to pursue supremacy of Indonesian comics?

This section has traced two of the most problematic terms in the discourse of Indonesian comics and has provided grounds for the notion of Indonesian comics in

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<sup>159</sup> In Bonneff's text, the "cultural mission" refers to how "the comic artists polish their comics to be more artistic in order not to be attacked" (Bonneff 1998, 73). In my assumption, comics are attacked because of their status as low culture. As stated by Ajidarma (2011, 215), bringing them up to high culture (traditional culture), such as in the case of wayang comics, will show comics' value as a subject of discussion. This will be examined further in the last chapter.

Indonesia. Throughout history, the discourse in Indonesia has been adamant about pursuing a style or state of Indonesian comics that is unique to Indonesia and has looked at fragmentation based on style categorization as problematic. The pursuit of Indonesian comics means the pursuit of a traditionally cultural Indonesia in a medium identified by foreign imperialism. Moreover, discussions of Indonesian comics are established without any theoretical preamble or clarification of definition. Aside from confusing the status of comics and the categories of style, these discussions use problematic terms that imply a political purpose behind the meaning. This makes the discourse of Indonesian comics unintentionally political. The question of this analysis is how the discourse has been developed in the third generation of Indonesian comics and how this process potentially leads the development of comics in Indonesia. This will be discussed in the analysis of Indonesian comics discourse in the next chapter.

## Chapter Five

### Third-Generation Indonesian Comics Discussion: Analysis

This thesis aims to study the discourse on the third generation of “Indonesian comics” in Indonesia. The discussion in chapter three mentioned the actors that play crucial and active roles in producing the meaning of Indonesian comics. Comics exhibitions are occasions where actors in the Indonesian comics world can proactively discuss Indonesian comics with each other. Exhibitions are one of the higher profile activities of the comics community, along with comics workshops or comics launching events. Exhibitions involve interactive participation and exchange between comics artists, editors, critics, academia, and readers. They are events where meaning making and the power play of Indonesian comics can be observed. The print media record these summarizations of Indonesian comics, through which ideas are eventually spread to and accepted by the minds of a wider audience.

This section will look at three specific comics exhibitions potentially containing the definition of Indonesian comics. My analysis highlights the discourse mainly from:

1. DI:Y (Special Region: Yourself) Comic Exposition (*Eksposisi Komik DI:Y (Daerah Istimewa: Yourself) Exhibition*), convened at Cipta II Gallery Taman Ismail Marzuki, March 3–7, 2005
2. *Bara Betina* (Female Flame) Comics Exhibition (*Pameran Komik Bara Betina*), convened at Salihara Gallery, April 9–30, 2011
3. Indonesian Comics History Exhibition (*Pameran Sejarah Komik Indonesia*), convened at the IFI Gallery, October 18–31, 2011

With the exception of the pamphlet for the *Bara Betina* exhibition, statements are taken mainly from newspaper and magazine articles. The statements about the DI:Y and *Bara Betina* exhibitions are from newspaper articles regarding the exhibitions, while statements about the Indonesian Comic History exhibition are from the texts displayed as showpieces in the exhibition.<sup>160</sup>

These three exhibitions were selected because they highlight three different subjects in Indonesian comics. The DI:Y Exhibition highlighted alternative comics; the *Bara Betina* Exhibition exhibited the works of mainstream comics artists; and the Indonesian Comics History Exhibition focused on the history of Indonesian comics, showcasing printed articles considered to be representative of ideas of Indonesian comics throughout history (the artwork of any artists was absent from the exhibitions). This study will critically examine texts from the three exhibitions that conceptualize Indonesian comics.

The linguistic analysis performed on the texts of the exhibitions aims to identify and critically study the discourse of the third generation of Indonesian comics.

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<sup>160</sup>There are also recordings of discussions and interviews during the exhibitions, but I will focus on the print media.

### *DI:Y (Special Region: Yourself) Comics Exposition*

The DI:Y Exhibition convened in Taman Ismail Marzuki, the center of art activities in Indonesia's capital. The Jakarta Arts Council (*Dewan Kesenian Jakarta*) listed the exhibition under the category of Fine Arts.<sup>161</sup> Thus, the DI:Y Exhibition promoted comics as an artistic form. The event was directed by journalist and critic Hikmat Darmawan, who was also a pioneer of the *Akademi Samali* comics community in 2005. The event featured the work of eleven comics artists: Athonk, Bambang Toko, Beng Rahadian, Didoth, Eko Nugroho, Iwank, Oyas & Iput, Mail, Pras, and Tita Larasati. All were active artists in the alternative and underground comics communities.<sup>162</sup> The majority of the artists involved were or had been working in art/design schools as academics as well.<sup>163</sup> The collection of artists chosen to participate in the exhibition, the collaboration with the Jakarta Art Council, and the location of the exhibition dictated the effort to promote comics as an artistic medium.

This study regards this exhibition as one of the more prolific events because of its involvement with the state actor: the provincial state's art council. The exhibition was

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<sup>161</sup> [http://archives.dkj.or.id/art-classification/fine-arts?items\\_per\\_page=20&page=22](http://archives.dkj.or.id/art-classification/fine-arts?items_per_page=20&page=22)

<sup>162</sup> Athonk has been creating underground and alternative comics since the 1990s and has self-published surrealist-themed comics. Bambang Toko is one of the founders of the underground community *Apotik Komik*. Beng Rahadian, like Hikmat, is a prominent comics artist and also one of the founders of the *Akademi Samali* community. Didoth is a comic artist and also a member of *Masyarakat Komik Indonesia* (the Indonesian Comic Society community, or MKI). Iwank's book *Korncornc Chaos* tells about *keroncong* music and was published by the general literature division of Gramedia Pustaka Utama, as opposed to the more mainstream EMK and M&C! Tita Larasati is the pioneer of graphic-diary comics in Indonesia.

<sup>163</sup> Beng Rahadian's alma mater is *Institut Seni Indonesia* (Institute of Arts Indonesia, or ISI). Tita Larasati is currently a lecturer in design at ITB. Bambang Toko is a staff lecturer in design at ISI and is also the head of the ISI Gallery in Jogjakarta. Athonk was a student of ISI, but he was expelled. Eko Nugroho and Iwank are ISI graduates. Athonk's wife, Laine Berman, is an Indonesian comics scholar and one of the main references in this thesis.



covered by four highly prolific newspapers in Indonesia: *Tempo*, *Suara Pembaruan*, *Republika*, and *Seputar Indonesia*.<sup>164</sup>

This exhibition, in particular, tried to valorize Indonesian comic artists' aesthetic accomplishments. To do so, the exhibition created a short historical introduction of Indonesian comics. This can be seen in a statement by Ade Darmawan, the head of the Art Committee from the Jakarta Art Council, as quoted in a *Republika* article:

*Komik Indonesia pernah menjadi tuan rumah di negeri sendiri. ... RA Kosasih beserta Mahabharata-nya amat terkenal dalam tahun 1970-an. Begitu pula [sic], Hasmi dan karya fenomenalnya, serial Gundala Putra Petir. Nama lain yang sukar hilang dari ingatan pecinta komik lokal adalah Ganes TH, pencipta serial Si Buta dari Goa Hantu. Dalam tahun 1970-an, lanjut Ade, komik lokal kental sekali dengan nuansa Indonesia. Kalau bukan lantaran menangkat mitos tentu karena bahasa visualnya yang akrab. Cara komikus menggambarkan gerak-gerik tokoh-tokohnya patut diancungi jempol... Ade berpendapat komikus zaman dulu amat terasah. Mereka mampu menciptakan karya-karya orisinal. "Sayangnya, kemampuan itu tidak tertular pada generasi muda komikus," katanya. (Dwinanda, Republika, 2007)*

Indonesian comics once was the host in her own home ... RA Kosasih with his *Mahabharata* was so popular in the 1970s; as well as Hasmi and his phenomenal *Gundala Son of Lightning*. Another memorable name is Ganes TH, the creator of *The Blind of the Phantom Cave*. In the 1970s, continues Ade, local comics are very rich in local content. They

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<sup>164</sup> All four newspapers are mass-circulated nationwide. As of 2010 year-end data (Lim 2012), the national newspaper *Tempo* had a daily circulation of 240,000, *Suara Pembaruan* 350,000, and *Republika* 325,000. *Seputar Indonesia* self-proclaimed a daily circulation of 336,000. All four newspapers are owned by private media conglomerates. The newspaper with the largest circulation in Indonesia is *Kompas*, with a daily circulation of 600,000.

either depict the (local, my term) myth or familiar visuals. We have to give thumbs up on how the comic artists depicted their characters' movements.

Ade thinks that comics of the past were very competent. They created works that were original. "Unfortunately, their abilities did not transfer to the young generation of comic artists." (translation is mine)

The metaphor *host* (tuan rumah)—according to the Indonesian Language Dictionary KBBI—has three meanings: (1) the owner of a house, (2) the organizer of a celebration or party, and (3) the owner of a nation, or a native citizen, referring to the idiom "host of our own country." This word connotes "native comics" and implies a possibility that currently, Indonesian comics are not native. The paragraph also insinuates the establishment of past Indonesian comics as native.

DI:Y sets the Golden Age of Indonesian comics as the baseline, norm, or point of reference for Indonesian comics. Golden Age comics were described as popular, phenomenal, and memorable. However, Ade valorizes Indonesian comics (under the term *local comics*) through the emphasis on "richness in local content," because they appropriate Indonesian myths and visuals. These elements presumably refer to the Javanese myths and wayang visuals depicted in *Mahabharata*, and *movement* presumably points to the form of martial arts depicted in *silat* comics such as *The Blind of the Phantom Cave*. Ade's statement favoring the appropriation of the traditional as very competent connotes the originality of Golden Age comics. This statement gives the impression that original and authentic Indonesian comics, according to Ade, are achieved through the incorporation of traditional tropes and decorations.

Ade later created opposition for the situation of “the other” in Indonesian comics, which disturbed the flow of originality of the 1970s comics. This can be seen in a statement about the current (third-generation) Indonesian comics artists:

*Dalam pengamatan Ade, komikus masa kini sangat terpengaruh oleh gaya komik Jepang. Dari segi visual, tak ada pencapaian baru yang ditunjukkan. “Padahal, kalau menggali lebih jeli, mereka bisa menemukan gaya khas sendiri,” komentarnya. (Dwinanda, Republika 2007)*

According to Ade’s observation, the current generation’s comics artists are very influenced by Japanese comics style. Visually, there is no new achievement. “If they’d been more observant, they could have found their own unique styles,” he commented.

Ade used the problematic term *influence*, which implies a negative connotation for the Japanese style. Ade added to the negative impact of the sentence by stating that popular Indonesian comics lacked artistic achievement because they incorporated Japanese comics styles. To be fair, Ade’s enunciation of “new achievement” could have meant that mainstream comics were not “artistic” enough to be put in the same category as the artistic and cultured comics of the DI:Y Exhibition. However, Ade’s statement was never elaborated further in the article. Therefore, the statement can be read that Ade’s assessment of the third-generation mainstream comics contained a more negative connotation of the foreign-style appropriators as copies. This implies that these foreign-styled comics were not original at all.

Ade's statement creates a discourse that the inauthenticity of the works of younger generations of Indonesian comics lies in the appropriation of the Japanese style present in their comics. Also, the incorporation of *style* in Ade's texts contributes to the importance of the term *style* in the discourse. Indonesian comics, on the other hand, show authenticity through depictions of certain decorative elements. Doesn't this imply that the Indonesian style relies on their traditional decorations?

The foreign-styled Indonesian comics (transnational comics) in DI:Y were not the real "other" in the DI:Y Exhibition narrative. The Japanese-styled Indonesian comics were only an extension of the real "other": the Japanese and American comics. The media texts made the intention clear:

1. *Di tengah popularitas komik Jepang dan Amerika Serikat (AS), komik lokal hampir tak mendapat tempat di rak pajang toko buku. Kendati demikian, kondisi sebenarnya ternyata tidak terlalu mengenaskan. Setidaknya, komik lokal masih hidup dan dinikmati oleh penggemarnya. Ingin bukti? Tenggok saja cuplikan [...] Eksposisi Komik Daerah Istimewa Yourself (DI:Y). (Dwinanda, Republika, 2007)*

*Among the popularity of Japanese and American (U.S.) comics, local comics almost never find a place on bookstore shelves. Despite that, the real condition is not as bad. At least local comics are still alive and enjoyed by their fans. Want proof? Look at the excerpt of [...] the Special Region Yourself (DI:Y) Comics Exposition (translation is mine).*

2. *Komik lokal hampir tak berdaya menahan gempuran komik impor... Saat ini, pasar Indonesia dipenuhi oleh komik Jepang dan Amerika. Kondisi itu disebabkan keberpihakan para penerbit besar di jalur distribusinya. Secara langsung atau tidak, ketidakberagaman komik di pasar Indonesia mendikte*



*pembaca komik atau konsumen untuk memilih komik Jepang atau Amerika. Ditambahkan [sic], pameran komik DI:Y ini merupakan usaha awal untuk membaca perkembangan komik lokal saat ini. Di balik pasar yang didominasi komik Jepang dan Amerika, sejumlah komikus melakukan eksplorasi bahasa visual dan literatur.* (AHS, Suara Pembaruan, 2007)

Local comics are almost helpless in resisting the aggression of imported comics... Currently, the Indonesian market is flooded by Japanese and American comics. This is caused by giant publishing companies' favors in distribution. Directly or indirectly, the homogeneity of comics in the Indonesian market dictates that readers or consumers pick Japanese or American comics.

In addition to that [sic], the DI:Y comics exhibition is the starting effort to read the current local comics development. On the other side of the market dominated by Japanese and American comics, (Indonesian, my term) comics artists are exploring the visual and literature in comics (translation is mine).

3. *Karya yang ditampilkan dalam pameran memang bukan komik mainstream layaknya Tintin, Asterix, Superman, atau bahkan komik Jepang yang berjibun jumlahnya di pasar.* (Hidayat, Tempo Interaktif, 2007)

The works exhibited are not mainstream comics such as *Tintin*, *Asterix*, *Superman*, or even the mountains of Japanese comics that are already on the market (translation is mine).

The three statements above are excerpts from three different newspapers but have a similar narrative: the grave situation of local comics (depicted in blue), which are being outwashed by the popularity of Japanese, American, and European comics (highlighted in red). The works exhibited in DI:Y and their roles in this “tragedy” can be seen in green. This narrative of local comics—foreign comics—DI:Y comics shows a connection similar to a thesis, an antithesis, and a synthesis. Through this narrative established by the



DI:Y Exhibition, the underground and alternative comics come as saviors to solve the current problem Indonesian comics is facing.

Local comics are depicted as victims in the quoted narratives. They are “helpless in resisting,” “never finding a place” in the market against the popular foreign comics “attacking” them. Looking closely at the narratives, the binary opposition between local comics and foreign comics is straightforward. The association of local comics with the word *helpless* should ignite sympathy from Indonesian readers, and this automatically positions foreign comics as the antagonists. In the process of expanding the opposition, the popularity of foreign comics is established with a sense of entrapment by the foreign culture and the inability to be free. The narrative connotes that foreign comics are trapping Indonesian comics in the corner, again showing Indonesian comics as prey.

In the narrative progression in which local comics were presented as the bullied victim and foreign comics as the aggressor; DI:Y comics entered as heroes in the name of Indonesian comics. The underground local comics had the potential to liberate Indonesian comics from the foreign attack. While supposedly belonging to the same context in that they were made in Indonesia, the DI:Y comics were different because they refused the concept of the “foreign style” in mainstream Indonesian comics. The comics promoted by these exhibitions were different and alive because they made visual and artistic explorations. These metaphors of underground and alternative comics as being stronger Indonesian comics that could defend weak Indonesian comics against the strong foreign comics also established alternative and underground comics as being of a higher aesthetic quality.

Ade also stated that the quality of Indonesian comics relied on the desire to be different aesthetically, literally, and economically from the mainstream foreign comics to which they were compared. This can be seen from the following statement:

*“Sejumlah komikus kita melakukan eksplorasi bahasa visual dan literatur, menjajaki segala kemungkinan. Mereka juga berupaya menciptakan modus produksi dan estetika yang lebih mandiri di luar modus produksi dan estetika industry komik utama,” tutur Ade. Maka tujuan pameran ini, jelasnya, untuk membuka kesempatan komik Indonesia bertemu dengan khalayak komik, menghidupkan apresiasi, kajian, dan kritik. “Karena perkembangan, kendati kecil, akan menjadi penting ketika dicatat, dikaji, dan dikritik,” imbuh dia. (Nador, Seputar Indonesia, 2007)*

“Numbers of our comic artists explore the visual language and literature possibilities of comics. They are also trying to create the production and aesthetic modes that are more independent than those of the mainstream,” said Ade. Thus, this exhibition tries to introduce the Indonesian comics to comics society through appreciation, study, and critics. “Comics development, no matter how small it is, can be significant if it’s being noted, studied, and criticized,” he added (translation is mine).

Here, Ade’s intention becomes even clearer. The comics of the DI:Y Exhibitions had value because the artists had artistic and literary merit, which, continuing to the second highlighted clause, they needed in order to break from the modes of production and aesthetics of the more expanded foreign comics. The word *independent* here shows the clear separation between what is considered mainstream (foreign) and what is not. The ones that are “not mainstream” and have become the ideal “self” are DI:Y comics,

which are associated with previously successful Indonesian comics (underground comics and alternative comics) and are accentuated as more “highly artistic” because they are significant enough to be “appreciated, studied, and criticized.”

The main narrative of the DI:Y Exhibition was to promote the works of alternative comics in Indonesia. Their role in this matter was to highlight the significance of underground and alternative comics in the Indonesian world. Hikmat’s statements are exposed as follows:

1. *“Kesebelas komikus ini adalah wakil yang boleh dibilang sangat berhasil memunculkan keunikan jati diri mereka dalam karya mereka,” kata kurator komik Hikmat Darmawan. [...] Maka komik pun pasif menunggu di ruang tunggu. Gerakan kesebelas komikus ini, kata Hikmat, membuat komik tak lagi pasif menunggu... Ruang tunggu telah diubahnya menjadi ruang miliknya sendiri. Bahkan, kata Hikmat, “Ruang itu semakin besar saja kini.” (Hidayat, Tempo Interaktif, 2007)*

“These eleven are the representatives of Indonesian comic artists considered successful in representing themselves in their work,” said curator Hikmat Darmawan [...] Thus (Indonesian, my term) comics are staying passive in the waiting room. The activities of these eleven comic artists, said Hikmat, turns comics into an active player... They turn the waiting room into their own room. Moreover, said Hikmat, “now the room is getting bigger” (translation is mine).

2. *Sebelas komikus lokal yang ditampilkan dalam eksposisi pameran komik DI:Y adalah wakil-wakil yang bisa disebut sangat berhasil memunculkan keunikan jati diri pribadi dalam karya-karyanya [...] Keberhasilan tersebut sebagian karena afinitas mereka dengan etos DI:Y (Do It Yourself). Di samping itu, mereka juga adalah pribadi-pribadi yang terus mencari*

*berproses dalam berkarya. Keunikan identitas mereka, kata Hikmat, akhirnya menawarkan daerah yang lebih luas lagi bagi medium komik. Mereka telah mentransformasikan etos dan modus DI:Y menjadi sebuah Daerah Istimewa, tempat berbagai kemungkinan narasi-narasi visual terbuka ke segala arah. Akhirnya komik lokal tidak pasif menunggu. (AHS, Suara Pembaruan, 2007)*

The eleven artists featured in the DI:Y comics exhibition exposition are representatives that, we can say, display their unique characteristics in their works [...] Their success lies in their affinity with the ethos DI:Y (Do It Yourself). Moreover, they are individuals who keep on processing while working. Their unique identities, said Hikmat, finally offer an even wider territory for the comic medium. They have transformed the DI:Y ethos and modus to a special region that helps to spread the visual-narratives possibilities to every direction. So the comics are not passively waiting anymore (translation is mine).

In the first statement, Hikmat uses an analogy to describe the current state of Indonesian comics. Through this analogy, Hikmat visualizes the constant acceptance of foreign comics, and the reproduction of similar ones in their own state makes it seem that the comics artists are in a stagnant phase under the ruling of foreign comics in the space of a waiting room. This narration antagonizes foreign (translated mainstream) comics by depicting them as trapping the Indonesian comics artists into the reproduction of aesthetics (in their presumptions) owned by the Japanese and American comics. The statements of both Ade and Hikmat are similar in dismissing the Japanese comics style. Underground and alternative comics, through DI:Y, came as heroes to liberate the Indonesian comics from the seemingly robotic reproduction of the mainstream comics. The DI:Y authors were able to liberate themselves from the cycle by searching for their own identity. I cannot praise Ade's and Hikmat's comments that imply mainstream comics artists lacked free will, creativity, or the willingness to search themselves by trying



to represent their own identity through drawing in their own style. However, presenting the mainstream comics and the extension of Japanese-styled Indonesian comics as the antithesis has positioned underground and alternative comics as a significant narrative in Indonesian comics discourse. Moreover, the discourse of antagonizing foreign products and their imitations agrees with the Old Order's discourse on Indonesian comics in particular and national culture in general. This set this narrative as more acceptable within the discourse of Indonesian comics.

However, while DI:Y highlighted traditional decorations as important in what it considered the Golden Age comics, the curators only brought the wayang and related conventions into the discourse of their discussion of DI:Y once (by Ade). The DI:Y exhibition tried to raise the aesthetic significance of the expression of Indonesian comics in an effort to stray from foreign styles instead of appropriating traditional prompts such as seen in cliché examples of wayang comics. This set "freedom from foreign styles to create Indonesian comics" as the main thesis for the DI:Y exhibition.

Meanwhile, the negative connotation implied in the DI:Y points to a lack of achievement in appropriating the foreign comics style, as stated by Ade, and shows that the third generation of Indonesian comics (in particular, the Japanese-styled Indonesian comics that rode the mainstream wave) never descended from Indonesian comics but was an extension of foreign comics. Thus, the third generation of Indonesian comics, which appropriated foreign styles and Japanese styles in particular, were dismissed from the idea of Indonesian comics.



### *Bara Betina (Female Flame) Comics Exhibition*

In contrast to the DI:Y Exhibition, which highlighted alternative comics artists, the Bara Betina Exhibition (BBE) exhibited the works of what were mostly considered mainstream comics artists. The Bara Betina Exhibition, like its namesake, highlighted the role of female characters in Indonesian comics. The exhibition was open for public viewing from April 9 to 30, 2011. It was curated by Gupta Mahendra, editor of KOLONI (Komik Lokal Indonesia—*Indonesian Local Comics*), a subsidiary group of Gramedia, which also houses the mainstream translated comics publishers EMK and M&C!<sup>165</sup> Gupta collected works and illustrations of female characters as depicted by the following eight comic artists: Is Yuniarto, Alfi Zachkyelle, Ario Anindito, Azisa Noor, Ariela “Rie” Kristantina, EKYU Studio, Kharisma Jati, and Beng Rahadian.<sup>166</sup> The participants and curators were actors of mainstream Indonesian comics, but the exhibition was organized as a part of the Salihara community’s events in its base gallery in South Jakarta. The Salihara community is not a comics community like Akademi Samali, MKI, or Komik Indonesia but is a community built by high-profile cultural critics, authors, artists, and journalists in order to accommodate and pursue highly intellectual developments of art. However, despite the Salihara community’s role in hosting the event, in contrast to DI:Y, the BBE did not try to put comics on a pedestal of high art.

The BBE refused to antagonize any form of comics in order to formulate an ideal Indonesian comics identity. This is seen in a statement from the exhibition introduction

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<sup>165</sup> Koloni publishes its comics in the same packaging as the translated Japanese comics.

<sup>166</sup> Is Yuniarto, Rie, Alfi Zachkyelle, Azisa Noor, and EKYU have published their comics in Gramedia’s subsidiary groups. Kharisma Jati’s work, while published by the more minor publishing company Gradien Mediatama, is highly popular among mainstream comics readers. Ario Anindito and Beng Rahadian’s comics are regulars in comics and cultural exhibitions in Indonesia. All except Ario have an educational background in design arts and/or are active as graphic designers as a side job.

written in a BBE pamphlet. The statement was written by Nirwan Dewanto, an Indonesian poet and actor and head of the Curatorial Board of the Salihara community:

We must highlight comics' genuine character, in contrast to "art comics" ("komik seni rupa"), which is more of an experiment done by higher fine art circles (more often in paintings) than actually being the efforts of comic artists themselves. If "art comics" insist upon their artistic claims, then the comics does not seem to indulge in any pretensions, merely telling a story in various ways rendered in vivid drawings... This exhibition is but one path among many, taken so that we may notice and find grace in comics: not so much as making more graceful, more beautiful comics, but to genuinely consider it as an art practice, that is: art that has allowed us to be literate to the visual. (Dewanto 2011, 54)

In BBE, Salihara created a definition that justified the valorization of comics, but not because its artistic intention was to elevate the status of comics. Salihara discerns pretentious artistic comics and praises comics because of their ingenuity. To Salihara, comics' potential is in creating their own standard value, and they should be evaluated by their own value. The theme of the exhibition, "female," was chosen because Salihara considers character to be one of the most important elements in comics storytelling and because the theme commemorated the Twin Months of Women (March 2011 for International Woman's Day and April 2011 for Kartini Day).<sup>167</sup> The theme (the depiction of women through comics) was the message Salihara wanted to expose, not the raising of value of artistic comics. Exposition in the introduction upheld the choice of exhibiting the

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<sup>167</sup> As stated in the pamphlet of the Bara Betina Comics Exhibition (Dewanto 2011, 54).

works of mainstream comics artists that were selected by the curator, Gupta, who is an active editor of a mainstream publishing company.

In the BBE narrative, where popular comics became the main subject, foreign comics were regarded positively. Like most of the introduction on the history of Indonesian comics, Indonesian comics were started by the introduction of the successful Golden Era (1970s) and time of stagnation (1980s).<sup>168</sup> However, as curator, Gupta provided interesting statements in presenting the foreign and 1970s Indonesian comics:

[...] comic artists must have witnessed the procession of eras in Indonesia, starting with European and American comics, and through the times of Japanese manga influence. By examining these various influences we can see how female characters in these foreign comics occupy very different positions... When previous Indonesian comic artists tended to be heavily influenced by foreign comics (for instance, various 70s superhero character designs), even with a lower exposure to foreign works than today; nowadays Indonesian comic artists have learnt to refrain from absorbing these influences indiscriminately [...] Our comic artists, especially those who have been involved in this particular field for quite a while, are no longer trapped inside a copycat phase [...] The influences of European and American comics, of *manhwa/manhua* and mangas seem to enrich our comic artists' path of visual expression so that they may create unique works that can satisfy the readers, and can finally help to significantly define 'the Indonesian comic style'; whatever it is. (Mahendra 2011, 55–60)

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<sup>168</sup> As written in the pamphlet of the Bara Betina Comics Exhibition, "...the Indonesian comic world has experienced two extreme ends of the spectrum during its developmental history. There has been a golden era, a time of stagnation, a great struggle, a peaceful rest, and now a great desire for revival" (Mahendra 2011, 54).

The BBE's narrative in neutralizing the negative inclination of "influence" and "style" also can be seen in the passage above. In this statement, Gupta acknowledges the existence of foreign comics' "influence" in Indonesia, but he never criticizes foreign comics in the Indonesian comics world. On the contrary, the connections between the foreign comics (in red) and third-generation Indonesian comics (in green) seem to support each other. The 1970s comics (in blue) developed earlier, as the Golden Age was never overly glorified or became an object of nostalgia.<sup>169</sup> Gupta, instead, took a different point of view than Ade's and Hikmat's on the second-generation comics in DI:Y: that the 1970s comics were simply being heavily influenced by foreign comics, in comparison to the third-generation mainstream artists who experienced different comics and struggled to cope with the simultaneous consumption of the three cultures. Gupta regarded this situation, normally seen as negative, as something very neutral.

I consider the BBE as one of the rare occasions in which mainstream artists were acknowledged positively by cultural elites by celebrating different "influences." The BBE tried to share the experience and mingled different artists from different style groups together. The BBE pushed the idea of indiscrimination of styles while still acknowledging the differences. Press reportage of the BBE forwarded the sense of positivity toward third-generation Indonesian mainstream comics. However, the BBE also brought about an interesting concept of separating the "comics" from attempts of trying to value comics as a product of "high-culture." This also reflects that a neutral evaluation of Indonesian comics can be achieved when comics are freed from the "high-culture" connection. The

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<sup>169</sup> To note, in the discussion of Indonesian comics performed as a part of the Bara Betina Exhibition, one of the panel speakers, Surjorimba Suroto, narrated his nostalgia for the past Golden Age. This was the only time when there was contradiction regarding the viewpoint of the BBE.



positioning of “high- culture” vis-à-vis comics will be key to the discussion in the next chapter.

### *Indonesian Comics History Exhibition*

Compared to the previously mentioned exhibitions, the Indonesian Comics History Exhibition (ICHE) was different because it was an exhibition that tried to conceptualize Indonesian Comics for the public to see, not an exhibition of comics works. This exhibition was managed by the collaboration of Institut Français in Indonesia (IFI), the Akademi Samali community, and the Komik Indonesia community. It was held in the IFI Gallery in Salemba, the center of the capital. The exhibition conjured the history of Indonesian comics from their inception until the present day into a comprehensive timeline. It also highlighted moments the curators deemed significant in Indonesian comics. Besides the timeline, the ICHE also exhibited samples of past Indonesian comics and newspaper clippings regarding Indonesian comics. The analysis in this section concentrates on the materials exhibited in the ICHE.

One of this exhibition’s biggest contributions was the timeline chart. The Indonesian Comics Timeline reflected the areas of Indonesian comics and defined the most influential Indonesian comics communities: what is and what is not Indonesian comics.

ICHE divided the Indonesian Comics Timeline into 14 panels (see Table 1), each consisting of shorter timelines. The summary for the 14 panels is as follows:



Panels	Period	Contents
1	1931–1955	The first Indonesian comic strip; comics; propaganda comics Highlighted authors: Kho Wang Gie, Nasroen AS, Abdulsalam, R. A. Kosasih, Delsy Sjamsumar
2	1956–1965	The emergence of wayang comics, Medan comics, and romans Highlighted authors: Saleh Ardisoma, Taguan Hardjo, Zam Nuldyn, Jan Mintaraga
3	1967–1968	Uniformity of comics format; the foundation of IKASTI Highlighted authors: Ganes TH, Djair Warni
4	1968	Comics censorship by <i>Seksi Bina Budaya</i> and POLRI Highlighted authors: Hans Jaladara, Oerip, Siauw Tik Kwie
5	1968–1969	Superhero comics popularity; the emergence of comics magazines and illustrated novels Highlighted authors: Hasmi, Wid NS, Kus Bram, Teguh Santosa
6	1972–1977	Teenage magazine <i>Hai</i> publishing comics Highlighted authors: Gerdi WK, Mansjur Daman
7	1977–1983	Gunawan Muhammad's academic article; Suharto's propaganda comics; commissioning high-profile superheroes Highlighted authors: Dwi Koen
8	1993–1997	Indonesia's Education and Culture Department's comics competition; comics community establishments; community pioneered comics exhibitions; religious comics Highlighted authors: Ahmad Thoriq, Studio QN
9	1998–2001	Publication of Bonneff's <i>Komik Indonesia</i> ; Comics & Animation Weekend establishment; the new wave of indie comics Highlighted authors: <i>Daging Tumbuh</i> (anthology), Wisnu Lee
10	2002–2005	Emergence of the comics communities Komik Indonesia and Akademi Samali; accomplishment of Seno Gumira Ajidarma's doctoral thesis Highlighted authors: Beng Rahadian
11	2005–2007	Comics exhibition in Erasmus Huis highlighting alternative comics; World's 24 Hours Comics Day Highlighted authors: Tita Larasati, Dwinita Larasati, Alam Muammar, Benny Rachmadi and Muh. Misrad, Chris Lie, Shirley Y. Susilo, Sami Basri

12	2007–2009	Indonesian comics exhibition and establishment of <i>Kosasih awards</i> ; state-sponsored creative-products weekends that involved comics publishers Highlighted authors: Admiranto Wijaya, Azisa Noor
13	2010–2011	Southeast Asian comics anthology establishment; Indonesian comics magazine; Indonesian comics online publishing companies; Comics Publisher Association–based comics award Highlighted author: Sheila Rooswitha Putri, Christiyani Kabul, Surjorimba Suroto (essay writer), Abuy Ravana’s death
14	2011	Aji Prasetyo’s <i>Hidup itu Indah (Life is Beautiful)</i> controversy; <sup>170</sup> the publication of Seno Gumira Ajidarma’s thesis; the involvement of CCF (Centre Culturel Français) and the Goethe Institute in Indonesian comics events Highlighted author: Ardian Syaf, Aji Prasetyo

Table 1. Summary of the ICHE’s Indonesian Comics Timeline<sup>171</sup>

The conceptualization of Indonesian comics is shown in Akademi Samali and Komik Indonesia’s timeline of Indonesian comics. From the first until the seventh panels, the ICHE mentioned all genres of comics Bonneff mentioned in *Komik Indonesia*—humorous, propaganda, folklore (Medan), wayang, and silat comics—while also highlighting accomplished authors writing in the aforementioned genres, which are all published domestically. Meanwhile, works included in the latter half of the panels were not limited to those published by the comics industry/publishers in Indonesia but covered even authors of Indonesian nationality who wrote for other countries’ comics publishers.

The ICHE’s narrative shows that Indonesian comics are written and drawn by Indonesians. The ICHE celebrated Indonesian cartoonists who earn awards and success

<sup>170</sup> Aji Prasetyo’s *Hidup itu Indah (Life is Beautiful)* contains humorous comics of daily life in Indonesia; the cover depicts three Muslim men riding one motorcycle and being ticketed by a traffic police officer. The Muslims protest that they have not violated any Muslim laws, and thus, they do not deserve a ticket. The book enraged the radical Muslim community. Fearing attacks, publishing companies stopped publication of the book and pulled every available copy from bookstores.

<sup>171</sup> Panels 1 to 7 in the ICHE’s timeline cover the first and second generations, while panels 8 to 14 cover Indonesian comics history as summarized in this thesis.



on international stages despite the lack of availability of the books in Indonesia. Some examples are Sami Basri, who became the artist of Top Cow's *Witchblade* series, or Admiranto Wijaya, the illustrator for Radical Comics' graphic novel *The Thracian Wars*. These titles were published in a different geographical territory than Indonesia (i.e., the United States) and for a different comics industry. The ICHE's narrative shows that Indonesian comics also include the works of Indonesians working outside of Indonesia or recognized on international stages.

However, the timeline the ICHE constructed lacks any mention of mainstream Indonesian comics, i.e., Indonesian comics published by the translated Japanese comics publishers EMK and M&C!, as if denouncing their involvement and achievements in the timeline. (The exception is Shirley Y. Susilo's *Sang Sayur*, which won the Japanese Foreign Ministry's International Manga Award. But again, Susilo's achievement is highlighted because she received an acknowledgement from a foreign state-actor.) Instead of the more widely circulated (Japanese-styled) Indonesian comics, the ICHE focused on the alternative and underground scenes of Indonesian comics—for example, *Apotik Komik*, which challenges comic themes in art. As mentioned previously, *Apotik Komik* creates stacks of shapes with trash cans to create frames and names the sculptures "comic." The ICHE also featured *Daging Tumbuh*, which publishes avant garde anthologies, and Tita Larasati, who pioneered the graphic diary to depict her everyday life in comics. Additionally, the ICHE timeline highlighted the most prominent academic works in Indonesian comics: Bonneff's *Komik Indonesia* and Seno's *Panji Tengkorak*.

The timeline shows the ICHE's two suggested categories of Indonesian comics: (1) artistic, underground, and intellectual comics and (2) comics that achieve

acknowledgements/success in other countries. These two directions are conceptualized while dismissing the mainstream published transnational manga creations.

Transnational comics (manga) and adaptations of the Japanese manga style in the exhibition represented the “other” in the ICHE’s Indonesian comics narrative. A more evident example of this connotation can be seen in other exhibited items in the ICHE: newspaper clippings about Indonesian comics.

ICHE exhibited 20 articles about Indonesian comics, as follows:

Headline	Publication, Section	Date
Still in the Grasp of “Manga” ( <i>Masih dalam Dekapan “Manga”</i> )	<i>Kompas</i> , highlight ( <i>Teropong</i> )	November 26, 2007
“Manga” Still Dominates the World ( <i>Manga Masih Mendominasi Dunia</i> )	<i>Kompas</i> , highlight ( <i>Teropong</i> )	November 26, 2007
<b>Mahabharata</b> and Wayang in Kosasih Comics ( <i>Mahabharata dan Wayang dalam Komik Kosasih</i> )	<i>Kompas</i> , highlight ( <i>Teropong</i> )	June 11, 2007
Ganes Th’s Masterpiece “Tjisadane” Reborn ( <i>“Tjisadane” Mahakarya Ganes Th Lahir Kembali</i> )	<i>Kompas</i> , highlight ( <i>Teropong</i> )	September 10, 2007
Weak in Story Composition ( <i>Lemah dalam Menyusun Cerita</i> )	<i>Kompas</i> , highlight ( <i>Teropong</i> )	September 10, 2007
Indonesian Oldies Comic Heroes: They Once Had Glory ( <i>Indonesian Oldies Comic Heroes: Mereka Sempat Berjaya</i> )	<i>HAI</i> , article	October 18, 2004
The Blind of the Phantom Cave ( <i>Si Buta dari Goa Hantu</i> )	<i>HAI</i> , article	October 18, 2004
The Legend of Sawung Kampret; Archrival of J. P. Coen ( <i>Legenda Sawung Kampret Rival Berat J. P. Coen</i> )	<i>HAI</i> , article	October 18, 2004
CAROQ: Champion of Madura ( <i>CAROQ: Jawara Madura</i> )	<i>HAI</i> , article	October 18, 2004



Indonesian Comics Society: The Soldiers Defending Local Comics! ( <i>Masyarakat Komik Indonesia: Pasukan Pembela Komik Lokal!</i> )	<i>HAI</i> , article	October 18, 2004
Penetrating the Final Fortress: Comics Exhibitions and Bazaars ( <i>Menembus Benteng Akhir: Pameran &amp; Bazar Komik</i> )	<i>Harian Seputar Indonesia</i> , Culture section	189th edition year, 2005
The Return of Local “Superhero” ( <i>Kembalinya “Superhero” Lokal</i> )	<i>Kompas</i> , Family: Hobby and Community ( <i>Keluarga: Hobi dan Komunitas</i> )	January 8, 2006
Are There Any Indonesian Comics? ( <i>Adakah Cergam Indonesia?</i> )	<i>Media Indonesia</i> , youth opinion	February 20, 2008
If the Blind of the Phantom Cave Revives ( <i>Jika Si Buta dari Goa Hantu Hidup Kembali</i> )	<i>Media Indonesia</i> , youth opinion	February 20, 2008
Inventor of the Time Machine: Looking Back to Indonesian Comics’ Golden Age ( <i>Penemu Mesin Waktu: Melongok Masa Keemasan Komik Indonesia</i> )	<i>Media Indonesia</i> , youth opinion	February 20, 2008
Learning about Comics in Samali Street ( <i>Belajar Komik di Jalan Samali</i> )	<i>Media Indonesia</i> , youth opinion	February 20, 2008
Akademi Samali: Pioneer of Quality Enhancement in Comics ( <i>Akademi Samali: Prakarsai Peningkatan Kualitas Komik</i> )	<i>Stabilitas</i> , article	January–February 2008
Making Comics Needs Creativity: Good Art Doesn’t Cut It ( <i>Membuat Komik Perlu Kreativitas: Gambar Bagus Saja Tidak Cukup</i> )	<i>Kompas</i>	April 4, 2008
Comic Yourself: Indonesian Comics Guerilla ( <i>Komik Yourself: “Gerilya” Komik Indonesia</i> )	<i>Republika</i> , horizon	March 11, 2007

Table 2. Print media clippings exhibited in the ICHE (All article translations is mine)



The newspaper articles, which became showpieces of the ICHE, were originally published in the most prolific print media in Indonesia and summarize the major discourse on Indonesian comics. As discussed earlier in the first section of this chapter (through DI:Y exhibition), one of the major topics in the discourse is the positioning of foreign comics as the antagonist in the Indonesian comics world. The same topic was also raised in the ICHE. The most blatant example was the article in *Kompas*, the most widely read newspaper in Southeast Asia, with a daily circulation of 600,000. In the article “*Masih Dalam Dekapan ‘Manga’*” (“Still in the Grasp of ‘Manga’”), which featured comics scholar Seno Gumira Ajidarma as a correspondent, Umi Kuslum reported the following:

#### **Gerakan anti-“manga”**

...Seno mengemukakan bahwa dalam hegemoni pasti muncul kekuatan atau komunitas yang mencoba menolak hegemoni tersebut... Kini di Indonesia pun muncul komunitas pencinta komik yang mencari celah bertahan menolak *manga*. Sebut saja Masyarakat Komik Indonesia yang terdiri dari kelompok dan perorangan yang mencintai komik Indonesia untuk mengangkat dan mempromosikan komik lokal.

#### **Anti-“manga” Movement**

... Seno states that there must be an opposing power of the hegemony... Now in Indonesia, there is a comics lovers community seeking a chance to reject *manga*. One example is Masyarakat Komik Indonesia, with groups of individuals who love Indonesian comics working to uplift and promote local comics.

The article, citing data about sales of translated Japanese manga in Indonesia and statements from mainstream comics publisher M&C's editor Anita Ratnayanti, EMK's editor Sari, and Seno, mourns the lack of Indonesian comics in Indonesia. The extremely popular Japanese comics, then, have become the hegemony in the comics-publishing world in Indonesia. However, in this article, they are also depicted as the antagonist suppressing Indonesian comics. The highlighted words enhance the positive support for the MKI's views on Indonesian comics and the will to defend them against foreign powers (in particular, Japanese manga and transnational comics—its appropriation in Indonesia). The local comics community MKI is set to become the hero that rejected the foreign "other." Similar showpieces that contained the same message of the local comics communities' rejection of the "other" were also present—for example, the 2004 HAI article "*Masyarakat Komik Indonesia: Pasukan Pembela Komik Lokal!*" ("Indonesian Comics Society: The Soldiers Defending Local Comics!"). Meanwhile, similar notes positioning the foreign as opposition were also seen in the newspaper clippings of DI:Y, discussed earlier in the first section of this chapter.

Another tendency seen in the showpiece articles in the ICHE is the glorification of 1970s comics. One article that showed how the 1970s comics excelled was the 2007 Kompas article about Kosasih, "*Mahabharata dan Wayang dalam Komik Kosasih*" ("Mahabharata and Wayang in Kosasih Comics"), also written by Umi Kuslum. There is one interesting excerpt I want to highlight:

Kosasih mengisahkan, munculnya ide membuat komik wayang yang karena di satu sisi pada awal tahun 1950-an banyak yang mengritik komik itu bersifat "kebarat-baratan" dan tidak memiliki muatan lokal.

Kosasih said that the idea of wayang comics appeared because in the 1950s many criticized comics as being “too western” and lacking local content.

Kuslum’s article, and many others highlighted, may set the 1970s comics as the Golden Age because of their popularity in that era, and they regret the discontinuity of the Indonesian comics tradition. However, the most important fact here is that there are critics of the foreign influence in the 1950s, and komik wayang (or Kosasih comics, in this case) became the successful example of how to overcome foreign influence in local comics. Kosasih did it by appropriating the *Mahabharata* epic often used in wayang storytelling. As mentioned earlier, a type of appropriation similar to the *keroncong* music after the ManiPol incorporated traditional commodities in comics while maintaining the semantics learned from foreign comics. Another showpiece newspaper article highlighted Indonesian comics with similar appropriation: *CAROQ*. The article “*CAROQ: Jawara Madura*” (“*CAROQ: Champion of Madura*”) highlighted the Marvel-esque Caroq and his Maduran<sup>172</sup> props, showing the Madura tribe to be uniquely traditional. Upon their release, the comics were hyped as the return of Indonesian comics among the translations of Japanese comics, and they too were celebrated at the ICHE as representing the Indonesian comics movement. From these examples, it is clear that the ICHE shows the appropriation of traditional culture as representing Indonesian identity in Indonesian comics.

The ICHE blatantly voiced an idea of Indonesian comics because of its summarization of Indonesian comics in a timeline and its selection of media articles that represented its beliefs about Indonesian comics. From the selections of media articles, the

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<sup>172</sup> Madura is an island north of East Java.

ICHE exposed three main ideas for Indonesian comics discourse that also appeared in our previous discussions: (1) setting the foreign (mainstream) comics—in this case, Japanese comics—as the antithesis of Indonesian comics, (2) glorification of 1970s comics, and (3) appropriation of traditional culture. The ICHE also added a fourth (new) idea, acknowledgement by foreign authority, that is important to the fortification of Indonesian identity. Also, from its summarization in the Indonesian Comics Timeline, the ICHE exposed a definition of Indonesian comics as any comics drawn by an Indonesian by also highlighting the works of Indonesian comics artists outside of the state. However, the ICHE deliberately cast aside the history of mainstream Indonesian comics (those in the Japanese style), I presume because of the position of Japanese comics as the antithesis in their discourse.

### *Conclusion*

The analysis of the texts from three exhibitions (DI:Y, BBE, and ICHE) has provided main ideas for discourse on Indonesian comics after the entrance of Japanese comics. In our discussion, four types of comics appear in the discourse of Indonesian comics: (1) the Golden Age Indonesian comics, (2) the foreign comics, (3) the foreign-styled (mainstream) Indonesian comics (transnational comics), and also (4) the underground and alternative comics. There are various ways of positioning each type of comics in each exhibition's narrative.

The DI:Y positioned the underground and alternative Indonesian comics and the transnational comics against each other. In the DI:Y's view, transnational comics act as an extension of foreign comics that carry foreign influences. On the other hand,



underground and alternative comics are an extension of “Indonesian” traditions from the Golden Age because of their freedom of expression, or in short, freedom from the influence of the mainstream Japanese style.

The BBE acknowledged all types of comics roles in Indonesia, including the influences of foreign comics style, but did not consider the use of the foreign comics style as something problematic, as did the DI:Y. The BBE recognized the presence of the foreign and the Indonesian, but instead viewed all elements as synthesizing with each other. The styles on which transnational comics are based were seen as tools that enrich the comics portfolio. The BBE also tried to free comics from any hidden cultural agendas.

The ICHE positioned types of comics similarly to how the DI:Y had, six years after the DI:Y took place. The ICHE focused on underground and alternative comics activities as representative of its definition of Indonesian comics. The ICHE’s decision to put mainstream foreign comics titles (drawn by Indonesian nationals) into their equation of Indonesian comics can push an idea of “works of Indonesian authorship” as a part of national pride. However, the exclusion of Indonesian comics that appropriated a foreign style from the ICHE timeline (except for one that received an award from a foreign state) implied animosity toward the mainstream (Japanese-styled) Indonesian comics.

This constant rejection of foreign-styled comics in order to pursue a purer form of Indonesian comics in the discourse is the idea that this thesis views critically. The formulation of Indonesian comics or national comics appeared because of the appearance of the “other.” This happen once before the 1970s (specifically in the 1950s). That time, Indonesian comics were criticized for their foreign influences, prompting a quest for authentic Indonesian comics. This resulted in the success of wayang comics,



representative of the Golden Era, according to the current discourse of Indonesian comics. After the 1990s, Indonesia faced a new “other”: the Japanese manga. Again, the Indonesian comics lost any form of authenticity because of “the influence of Japanese comics style.” The discourses of both the first and the third generation are similar in the attempt to be free from a foreign influence or foreign style. However, in the 1990s, there was a new (mis)understanding in Indonesian comics debates: each geopolitical style had its own aesthetic identity. This prompted Indonesians to define Indonesian comics while geopoliticizing the semiotics of comics. To describe “other,” they used the terms *Japanese style*, *American style*, and *European style* and hoped they could get away with ambiguous definitions for each. Two words, *style* and *influence*, triggered this understanding that domestically produced comics were contaminated by other cultures.

The analysis in this chapter shows that third-generation discourse on Indonesian comics attempts to define authentic Indonesian comics that are free from the styles and influences of others. In the third generation, where “Japanese comics” (and by extension, transnational comics) became the main antithesis of Indonesian comics, the discourse shows two comics forms that have Indonesian authenticity: the 1970s (Golden Era) comics, mainly represented by the wayang comics, and the alternative comics.

This brings us to the question of wayang comics. Indonesian comics expert Seno positions wayang comics highly in his Indonesian comics discourse, mainly because of their success in assimilating the high culture of wayang (not only the story but the “traditional, modern, dance, and pictorial art”) into a product of mass culture: comics (Bonneff 1998, 214). Seno argues that comics are a product viewed disdainfully by society. Inserting the sophisticated wayang into the comics scene created “momentum of creativity” and a potential for a “cultural discussion” (Ajidarma 2011, 215) for comics.

This developed the Indonesian comics community in an emancipating way (Ajidarma 2011, 215) by promoting certain Indonesian comics as protagonists against the threat of foreign comics. This is also seen repeatedly in Indonesian comics discourse, not only in the case of wayang but also in the alternative Indonesian comics.

However, in present-day Indonesia, the appropriation of Indonesian traditional culture is not enough to authenticate the Indonesian in Indonesian comics. As mentioned earlier, there are problems of “style.” Appropriation of wayang is not enough to erase the Japanese “influence” from transcultural manga. Here, the elevation of comics’ status becomes significant to alienate the “foreign” in Indonesian comics, as shown from DI:Y. Alternative comics become the new way to promote comics to a higher degree than the mainstream comics. The alternatives and the undergrounds are successful in expressing themselves differently from the mainstream, such as the *Apotik Komik*’s comics sculptures created from trash cans or Tita Larasati’s creation of a new genre, graphic diary, in the Indonesian comics world. The idea of positioning Indonesian comics in a higher plane than imitation (mainstream or Japanese-styled) comics was visible in the DI:Y. However, the BBE clearly rejected the idea, stating that the value of Indonesian comics rests in the intrinsic elements of the comics, such as the characters.

One cannot deny *Apotik Komik*’s and Tita’s works. Wayang comics also contribute to Indonesian comics. However, we must be aware that foreign styles appropriate rejection of Indonesian comics in the discourse. Alienating them from the discourse will create a concept that Indonesian comics will always be about alternative comics or about something artistically or thematically different, unique, and more avant-garde than the mainstream comics influenced by foreign style, *or* that Indonesian comics will never move on from the 1970s golden era (nostalgic).

This concludes the discussion of Indonesian comics' identity through analysis of the critical discourse of three comics exhibitions in Indonesia. The next chapter will try to conclude the discussion of identity in the Indonesian comics discourse by making connections between national media and cultural policy (as discussed in chapter two), past historical Indonesian comics arguments (as discussed in chapter three), problematic terminologies that halted productive discussions (as discussed in chapter four), and recent movements of making meaning of Indonesian comics (as discussed in chapter five).

## Chapter Six

### Discussion and Conclusion

This study has discussed the identity of Indonesia in Indonesian comics after the entrance of Japanese manga. Japanese comics revitalized the industry in the country and inspired a new generation of comics artists, who applied the semiotics of the manga. The creation of transcultural manga eventually came under the radar of comics critics, the comics community, and other cultural elites. In the 1990s, comics once again took a place in cultural discourse—in questioning the Indonesian identity in Indonesia comics—as they previously had in the 1950s.

However, the appropriation of Japanese comics in the third generation created a twist that had never been seen in the previous Indonesian comics discussion. Comics critics misinterpreted the ideas of “national style” and “differences in comics visual narratives” coined by Will Eisner and Scott McCloud. They fragmented comics into multiple “styles” that represented national identity. Each style corresponded to a particular location and signified various elements intrinsic to comics. Examples are the Japanese style, signified by big eyes and skinny bodies (character visuals), love stories (themes), and thick monochrome volumes (format); the American style, signified by bulky, muscled superheroes (character visuals); and the European style, with *ligne claire* (simple line, cartoon deformation aesthetic) depictions. Each element, of course, can be found easily in other countries’ works but cannot represent all the comics that every respective country has produced. This overgeneralization is based on the oversimplified interpretation of McCloud’s notions about the popular comics products in each country



(for example, superheroes comics in North America, Tezuka Osamu's comics in Japan, and Herge's Tintin in Europe). Debatable as they seem, McCloud's notions are not without foundation, and they have become the basis for various comics scholars' work in Indonesia, such as Ahmad et al. (2005, 2006), Berman (1998), Giftanina (2012), Darmawan (2005), and many more. Scholars later even fragmented the readers of comics accordingly into the type (style) of comics they read. The notion of style has become a helpful practice in the comics industry. It becomes an introductory element in a book summary, a keyword in recruiting comics artists, and for artists and readers, a way to identify themselves by the type (style) of comics they draw or read. However, the lament of the loss of Indonesian comics has followed this style-based fragmentation. Scholars also have problematized the lack of Indonesian identity in Indonesian comics, especially in popular mainstream Indonesian comics.

Popular manga, or locally produced comics drawn by artists who are inspired by a foreign comics "style" in general (Japanese manga in particular), are accused of bringing negative influences through the appropriation of a foreign style and of losing their national identity. In order to find Indonesia in Indonesian comics, the comics community refers to the once successful Indonesian comics published in the 1970s. One source it relies on is Marcel Bonneff's *Komik Indonesia* (1998), published nearly 20 years after the book's initial completion. This dissertation of a French cultural scholar became the pioneer of the study of Indonesian comics and is referenced by multiple comics scholars and critics in Indonesia. However, the current dissertation has found that Bonneff's study shows multi-interpretative and undefined uses of the terms *influence* and *style*. *Influence* used alongside *style* has become a problematic theme in Indonesian comics discourse since the 1990s, when the book was published in Indonesia. The terms



hover between several understandings—for instance, *inspired*, which is taken as neutral; *genealogical source*; and *imitating* or *copying* that connote the negative impact of a foreign/outside culture. The latter affected the meaning in Indonesian comics discourse later on. Here, transnational comics—that is, those created in Indonesia post-1990s—lost their authenticity.

The topic of the negative impact of foreign influence has been an issue since Old Order Indonesia. At that time, the state criticized the adaptation of foreign cultures (mainly Western) that had entered Indonesia. Former president Sukarno expressed his distaste for Western popular culture directly in his ManiPol address. ManiPol then become one of the important cultural policies that founded the thought of “negative foreign culture” and Western imperialism. Comics had also become the target of cultural critics. At that time, Indonesian comics were accused of appropriating Western pop culture and its themes and imitating its storytelling. However, Kosasih created a revolution by incorporating the traditional wayang theme and decorations into his comics without changing the nature and semantics of the medium itself. Kosasih’s wayang comics have been valorized and are praised even now as a case example of successful appropriation of Western culture in Indonesia. This solution also gave an impression that incorporating traditional aesthetics is a way to authenticize national identity in a formerly global commodity. Wayang comics later became a popular genre in the comics readership.

However, Indonesian comics production met its demise at the end of the 1970s, creating a space for global products to enter Indonesia. The problem of identity rose again in the 1990s because of the aforementioned new Indonesian comics and their connection to foreign influences. These transnational comics showed attempts to incorporate national and traditional values in the comics medium—similarly to Kosasih’s attempt in the

previous period. However, these attempts were considered unsuccessful because “style” had developed a strong odor of the foreign inside the comics medium, and any appropriation of the traditional and ethnic had become superfluous. Comics critics such as Giftanina (2012) and Darmawan (2005) even suggested that in order for Indonesian comics to be “authentic,” they needed their own “style” (or in Darmawan’s suggestion, an “icon” that represented the country; Darmawan 2005, 251–265).

To solve the problem of inauthenticity of the popular Indonesian, critics try to separate the territory of particular Indonesian comics from the mainstream where the global and transnational comics thrive. The attempt to push “comics” into “high culture” outside the boundary of popular culture appeared within a decade after the entrance of Japanese comics. The comics community created a bipolarization between the area of comics as popular culture and as high culture. One of the sites where the actors (mainly the comics community but including cultural elites, industry actors, readers, and state actors representing different comics) can broadcast their discourse is in comics exhibitions. This dissertation has studied the discourse of Indonesian comics by examining the polemic created by the community above. The case study where we see this is of three Indonesian comics exhibitions held during and after the 2000s.

The popular comics voices are represented by the curation of comics editor Gupta Mahendra in the Bara Betina Exhibition (BBE), held in 2011, the participants of which included mainstream comics culture artists. The site celebrated multiple “styles” and “variations” of the comics culture and “freedom from high-cultured comics.” The BBE saw the differences of styles as elements that could enrich the further development and creativity of Indonesian comics. It embraced the nature of popular culture homogenization while maintaining the cultural needs of multi-interpretation of this

popular culture commodity. This contrasts with the DI:Y exhibition, curated by Ade Darmawan, here representing the state-actor (as the head of the art committee from the Jakarta Art Council). The DI:Y immediately positioned itself against the mainstream culture (or the popular) and its plastic reproduction of global comics (in particular, Japanese comics), accusing them of being “inauthentic.” The DI:Y positioned alternative comics in a high-culture spectrum for their aesthetic achievements in expressing their own identity. These two exhibitions juxtaposed two different spectrums in Indonesian comics. At one end, the mainstream comics were positioned as the popular, which paid importance to the intrinsic singularity of the comics medium while celebrating various cultural products. However, these comics were accused of being inauthentic. At the other end were the alternative comics, positioned as high-culture and artistic and as containing more aesthetic values and authenticity than the popular comics. This positioning was created by the state actors and industry actors themselves. However, in order to represent themselves, the industry actors were supported by a cultural elite (Nirwan Dewanto from the Salihara art community). Industry actors themselves played no role in positioning the Indonesian comics within the cultural discussion. This phenomenon already showed the self-assumed legitimacy of the nation–state and cultural elite in regulating cultural identity.

This study also noted a third example that contributed to the understanding of Indonesian identity in Indonesian comics. The Indonesia Comics History Exhibition (ICHE; Pameran Sejarah Komik Indonesia) was curated by neither nation–state nor industry representatives. It was held by a foreign cultural entity (IFI) collaborating with the comics community Akademi Samali. However, Akademi Samali had cultural-elite comics critics as its frontrunners. In comparison to the previously mentioned exhibitions,

the ICHE did not showcase artworks of comics artists from mainstream or alternative comics. The ICHE instead exhibited a timeline of Indonesian comics. In the process, it formulated what should be included and excluded in the discussions of Indonesian comics. In its efforts, it eliminated almost completely the trace of Japanese comics in Indonesia except for criticism of the readership of translated Japanese comics and an acknowledgement by the Japanese government of local artist Susilo's works. Meanwhile, the ICHE highlighted the activity of Indonesian comics who worked as employees in popular foreign comics industries. This exhibition also showed nostalgia for the Golden Age Indonesia in the 1970s, believing it to have been the pinnacle of Indonesian comics. In contrast to the previous two exhibitions, the ICHE was not clear on the position of comics media in the cultural site. It valued the mainstream popular comics alternatives (with the exception of the transnational manga) as well as the alternatives. It is also obvious that the ICHE was unclear about the definition of national identity, with the exception of antipathy toward Japanese comics and their transcultural incarnation. However, if I could simplify the ICHE's stance on "Indonesian comics," it would be "national pride based on acknowledgement from foreign others," since it acknowledged the works of Indonesians working in outside comics factories and transnational manga that received an award from the Japanese state. Here, I want to underline that there is a possibility that the matter of "Indonesian identity," for some people, is actually an acknowledgement from a foreign other.

This thesis has summarized the discourse of Indonesian comics after the entrance of globalized Japanese comics. It has approached multiple points of view regarding interpretation and meaning making of Indonesian identity in comics as well as the problem of "style" and "influence" that brought up this topic. This dissertation has



examined this meaning making through the discussions held in exhibitions curated by various actors involved in Indonesian comics. However, this dissertation still has one more task: to position and map the discussion of national identity in comics media and see the common thread on the fight/power play surrounding the “Indonesian” in Indonesian comics.

### *The “Indonesian” in Indonesian Comics Discussion*

Indonesian comics in both pre-Golden Age comics and current time frames are criticized because of their foreign influence. This started during the Old Order doctrine that “foreign” influence translated to a weapon of modern imperialism, and the concept continues today. The “style” fragmentation that arose in the 1990s became a problem because it contributed to the interpretation of the foreign influence that existed intrinsically in comics. Many Indonesian comics scholars and observers rationalized the fragmentation and made the comics discussion one of different aesthetics in comics. However, in essence, it is a problem about the creation of national borders inside the comics domain, not about the comics medium or its aesthetics. Style is the most practical way to bring the discussion of identity into the comics medium (even if the definition of each style is ambiguous).

By this point of the thesis, the fact that Indonesian comics are a subject for discussion of national identity is undebatable. The issue was brought up during the 1950s and again after Japanese comics entered Indonesia in the 1990s. This dissertation focuses on the latter time frame. However, by studying the 1950s discourse as a foundation for



later discourse, I have found a distinction between how national identity has been viewed in the two separate eras.

In the 1950s, to solve the problem of foreign media, state actors and cultural elites praised appropriations of traditional and ethnic symbols in locally produced works. Wayang comics were a success story in the cultural struggle of that time. However, in the 1990s, the incorporation of traditional culture (ethnic elements) lost its validity in the national identity debates. This was clearly reflected in comics discussions. Numerous Indonesian comics with traditional elements were said to have rejected their Indonesian identity simply because they were drawn with Japanese “style.” The incorporation of commodified traditional elements was not enough to make comics Indonesian.

After the entrance of Japanese comics, “style” created a territorial map inside the comics medium and designated particular elements as belonging to an identity of a particular “nation-state,” eventually politicizing the medium. Every effort an artist made to be creative in the comics medium was rejected as not being “Indonesian” because of the use of an “identity” (style) that supposedly belonged to another nation–state. In order to create Indonesian-ness, cultural elites made a new effort to “defend” the national borders of Indonesian comics. The solution they offered was to reduce foreign comics that had entered Indonesia to a “popular culture” and “mainstream” status. This way, Indonesian comics “influenced” by the foreign comics (transnational comics) were considered merely unartistic copies and had to be rejected by national territories. Cultural elites praised the efforts of the alternatives—artists who broke away from the foreign influences—by putting them on a pedestal of “high culture.” This way, they could separate Indonesian comics from modern imperialism. This dissertation concludes that

reducing the status of mainstream comics and raising the status of alternative comics was *the* solution cultural elites came up with to push “Indonesian” identity forward.

The differences in the discourse (by the state actors) of Indonesian identity in comics throughout the different periods are reflected in Table 3:

Period	Global Comics in Indonesia	View on Comics	Indonesian Identity	Representation of Indonesian Identity (Example)
1950s–1970s (first–second generation)	Western comics, Chinese comics	Foreign comics contain Western imperialism	Incorporation of national or traditional values	Wayang comics
Post-1990s (third generation)	<b>Japanese comics,</b> American comics, European comics	Foreign comics and transnational comics appropriating foreign styles are inauthentic	Artistic and high-cultured comics are stylistically free from foreign comics styles and territory	Alternative

Table 3. The comparison of national identity formulation

This distinction proves that the notion of pushing the traditional ethnic as a solution vis-à-vis the appropriated local culture is outdated in Indonesia. After the entrance of Japanese comics and the fragmentation of “styles” within global comics, the cultural elites confirmed Indonesian identity through dismissing the status of globalized commodities as “popular culture” and raising the status of certain Indonesian comics to an autonomous level untouched by the industry: the “high culture.”

There is another important point in the discussion of solutions to national identity in the 1990s. This lies in the presence of other actors in the debate: the industry actors and the comics community. Understanding the nature of the Indonesian comics debate

means that this dissertation must examine the power play and relationships between all actors in the discussion.

Industry actors dismiss the political implications of style fragmentation in comics media and refuse to put comics on a higher cultural plane. This does not mean they reject the “styles.” On the contrary, they acknowledge the differences in “style,” but they view it as the one way to enrich the creativity of comics, as they also acknowledge the past comics history. However, actors in culture and industry refuse to consider the formulation of Indonesian identity vis-à-vis the foreign as important. Instead, they propose that the valorization of comics should come from the comics intrinsically, not be based on other external political or cultural factors. Industry actors put more importance on valorizing comics based on the comics’ own intrinsic domain. They have never entered other domains. In other words, the industry actors and the actors involved in mainstream publication have contained themselves within their industry and comics medium and have not tried to rise into ideological discussions of comics.

This dissertation uses an example from the ICHE, whose position on the identity discussion was more difficult to analyze than that of the DI:Y and the BBE. The ICHE itself was curated by the comics community, readers, and writers. These people by no means fully represented the state actors or industry actors, since cultural observers and cultural elites were their forefront. At first, it seemed that they took the same position as the state actors—they placed importance on national identity and dismissed foreign comics and global comics readership in Indonesia. They also mourned the lack of Indonesian-ness in the local industry. Their attempts to create a genealogical map of Indonesian comics and to highlight every significant point in Indonesian comics history also rejected the current mainstream hegemony (Japanese comics and their transnational

counterparts). However, the messages they sent were mixed; they sought the reinvention of Golden Age comics, which commodified ethnic elements. They also gave the impression that they were focusing on the industry aspects of local comics but dismissed any local artists who had created transnational comics—in particular, transnational manga. Meanwhile, they highlighted the activity of other Indonesian comics artists in the global comics industry outside of the country. While their position appeared to be similar to that of the cultural elites, they were not, by any means, formulating any clear message on national identity. In the end, the ICHE simply pushed groundless national pride. There was no common thread on what made “Indonesian comics” Indonesian; the ICHE just dismissed one part of Indonesian comics history and industry while taking examples from the global comics industry that acknowledged “Indonesian” existence globally. In short, Indonesia comics, in the view of the ICHE, rejected transnational manga in Indonesia as well as international achievements. However, their attempt to map the history of Indonesian comics was commendable, and it is still one of the better attempts to compile the history of Indonesian comics.

The positions of each actor in compiling national identity in the 1990s are summarized in Table 4:

Actors	View on Indonesian Comics	Comics Represented
State actors	Indonesian comics can be achieved by dismissing foreign “styles” in the works of Indonesian comics. These Indonesian comics are placed in a higher cultural plane than plastic copies.	Alternative comics
Industry actors	Indonesian comics should be valorized by themselves, not by other external (political, cultural, ideological) culture.	Popular/mainstream comics



Community	Comics and authors are acknowledged by cultural elites domestically or internationally.	Golden age comics, Mainstream comics, Alternative comics, and Indonesian comics that have received acknowledgements and are working in foreign industry
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Table 4. Positions of each actor toward Indonesian comics in 1990s Indonesian comics discourse

The beginning of this dissertation discussed the relationship and position of powers within the Indonesian comics industry. This was important to understanding the discussion within popular culture—in particular, the reaction toward the global presence. The discussion found two different attitudes toward global culture and its relation to national identity. In the timeline, we have found that state actors have brought national culture into a higher cultural plane to separate themselves from popular-culture commodities.

Indonesian comics in the historical comics discourse have never been treated as high culture. One of Ajidarma's biggest concerns in his dissertation, *Panji Tengkorak*,<sup>173</sup> was how to verify that comics as popular culture were a topic for cultural discussion. After the entrance of Japanese comics, state actors tried to raise Indonesian comics to the high-culture position and dismissed global comics as part of the popular-culture domain. The industry itself had never brought up the concern of identity, as shown in the containment of global commodities within comics discussions in Indonesia.

As stated by Endersor (2003), the study of national identity is mostly held in the “high-culture” plane because of its formulation from top to bottom. Such formulation of national identity in Indonesia was done by the New Order in pushing forward Javanese

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<sup>173</sup> See chapter four.



by sacrificing other local cultures. On the other hand, this has never been a problem for popular culture nor its actors, because they believe in the homogenizing factors that are crucial to create “popularity.” Identity, in the first place, is only a problem in the eyes of the state actors who are concerned about national borders. “Style” in the debate of comics was a practical way of defining that problem. Indonesian comics adapted the term for functional purposes, never concerned about the comics themselves, because that was never in their domain of interest. The industry actors and the state actors, then, had different interests and occupied different poles in the discussion. Their interests in comics never overlapped. There has never been power play between both actors; both occupy different categories, and the comics represented are from different markets or for different readers. Any formulation made by one will never be accepted by the other because of their differing domains.

The industry and the state were always dichotomous, with one party open and the other defensive. There is a possibility that the industry’s formulation of comics overlapped with that of the state actors for the purpose of gaining capital from the state. However, examples of such cases never arose in the context of Indonesian comics this dissertation has been discussing, so this can be a prospect for future research on the study of identity in Indonesian comics.

In discussions of national identity in popular culture, which is mostly formulated by state actors, there has never been any concern about the medium. The concern always lies in the national borders. In this case, this thesis renders any attempts to study the aesthetic distinctions of style fragmentation within Indonesian comics as political. Therefore, the appropriation of national identity within the popular-culture domain is done while de-emphasizing the popular culture and intrinsic values of comics. However,

the polemic on national identity and national borders (such as fragmentation of style) is not useless. This discussion of comics identity becomes a key point where Indonesian comics gain attention and importance. Comics exist on the national radar, and attempts have been made to understand this popular-culture element in general. Here, the subject of comics has become significant, not because of its potential to broadcast national identity, as discussed by the cultural elites, but more because of how it generates productive dialogue between actors within popular culture.

### *Afterword*

To conclude the thesis, the lack of concern for the comics medium itself in discussions about Indonesian comics creates a need for studies that highlight the comics works and medium in Indonesia. In the four years it has taken to write this thesis (2011–2015), debates on Indonesian comics have evolved. New players are entering the Indonesian comics market, with a new model of entrepreneurship. These are comics creators who create their own business in order to publish their own comics (e.g., Faza Meong and Sweta Kartika). There are also new comics magazines utilizing distribution destinations other than the normal bookstores. Re:On Comics has used retail convenience stores to distribute its comics magazines and sees an initial print of 25,000 copies per publication. These are important examples that must be included in future discussions of Indonesian comics.

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