



THE NEW HOMONORMATIVITY IN INDONESIAN CINEMA?

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Resumo: This paper focuses on two Indonesian films – *Arisan!* (2004) and *Janji Joni* (2005) - which have been noted for their ‘positive’ treatment of *gay* storylines, or for presenting characters who ‘just happen to be *gay*’. Nonetheless, this paper proposes that the construction of the gay subject position offered in these films, notable for their elite setting and reference to Western cinematic and cultural traditions, is very much influenced by the discourse of what Lisa Duggan has termed ‘the new homonormativity’. This paper asserts that in their desire to create new positive and acceptable images of gay Indonesians for Indonesian cinema audiences, film makers are simultaneously disavowing a body of citizens who, either through corresponding ‘negative’ imagery or complete erasure, may be described, drawing on Jon Binnie and others, as the ‘queer unwanted’.

Palavras-chave: Indonesian cinema, homonormativity, gay subjectivities.

This paper is concerned with two Indonesian films which are notable for their representation of *gay* characters.² Both films were made in the period known as *reformasi* (reform era), which followed the fall of President Soeharto’s authoritarian New Order regime (1966-98). In addition to playing a pivotal role in sparking the fall of the New Order, the South East Asian economic crisis also had a serious impact on local film production in that archipelagic nation.³ The number and quality of films produced

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² This paper is part of a larger project examining constructions of *gay*, *lesbi* and *waria* identities in Indonesian cinema being undertaken by the current author. A book entitled *Genders and sexualities in Indonesian cinema; gay, lesbi and waria identities on screen* is forthcoming, the writing of which has been supported by an Early Career Fellowship from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK).

³ With a population in excess of 235 million inhabitants, Indonesia is the 4th most populous nation on earth. It also has the largest Moslem population of any country in the world (around 87% of the population), though its state motto ‘Unity in diversity’ reflects an attitude of official tolerance towards other world religions, and indeed such tolerance is essential to the survival of a nation which is among the most ethnically and linguistically diverse on the planet.

in the early 1990s was already being seriously affected by factors such as the increasing rates of television ownership, growing numbers of private television stations and changes to regulations which allowed for increasing dominance by foreign distribution companies. An industry that was already in crisis went into complete collapse with the economic disaster that hit the country in 1997. Nonetheless within a few short years things were looking more cheerful again as domestic film production began to grow, and a whole new generation of producers, directors and actors emerged on the local film scene. As noted by Gaik Cheng Khoo and Thomas Barker, the post 1998 film industry is notable for a number of discontinuities from Suharto's New Order regime, in terms of the lack of contact with previous generations of film makers, and also with regard to film aesthetics (2010: 3).

The recovery of the film industry was coupled with a new era of comparative media freedom. That is not to say however, that there was a complete liberalisation of the censorship laws. Indeed the Indonesian board of sensors continues to be an irritant to many in the film industry. Neither does it mean that all sections of the Indonesian public were in step with the liberalisation. The lengthy debates over the new pornography laws⁴ and the opposition of certain Islamic groups in recent years to the QFilm festival⁵ are indications that with the reforms and a relaxing of centralised control by the state, other sections of the population were able to become more vocal regarding issues of morality in the media. Nonetheless, the fall of the regime meant that directors and producers were able to engage with themes and ideas which had been difficult or impossible during the New Order period.

Since the period around the fall of the New Order and the revitalization of the Indonesian film industry, a number of films have featured *gay*⁶ characters. *Kuldesak* (*Culdesac*, directors Nan Triveni Achnas, Mira Lesmana, Rizal Mantovani and Riri Riza, 1999), seen as the film that marked the reanimation of Indonesian cinema,

⁴ The best discussion on the protracted debates over the pornography laws is contained in Lindsay (2009).

⁵ For an overview of Indonesia's Q!Film festival see Maimunah (2008).

⁶ The Indonesian term *gay* is used here to indicate men who are erotically attracted to people of the same gender as themselves, and who identify themselves as being *gay*. This is quite different from the gender identity of *waria*, male to female transvestites, who tend to define themselves as men with women's souls who dress as women, and who in their attraction to men are expressing a desire for the other rather than the same. Clearly, the Indonesian *gay* is a borrowing from the English word, but as argued by Tom Boellstorff, it would be a mistake to understand the two words as being directly interchangeable (2005: 8). While the influence of Western gay identities should not be underestimated in their effect on the formation of Indonesian *gay* identities, it is equally important to recognize the significance of the local in reconstituting that imported identity.

included a *gay* storyline and *Arisan!* (*The Gathering*, Nia Dinata, 2003) featured a prominent storyline about a romance between two men from Jakarta's elite class. Since then, the number of films featuring a *gay* character has grown exponentially. The emergence of the *gay* and *lesbi* subject positions in Indonesia is a process that began in the 1970s (Boellstorff 2005: 60) and mass media interest in these alternative sexualities has been documented from 1980 onwards. However, it is since the mid-1990s and 'with a substantial increase after 2002' that *gay* and *lesbi* voices have made themselves heard in the general mass media (Boellstorff 2005: 75). A similar picture is evident if we look specifically at Indonesian cinema (Murtagh 2006, 2011a), though a common consensus in Indonesia today is that those images of *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians constructed during the New Order period were generally 'negative' and 'pathologising'. Recent directors have signalled a desire to construct a more diverse and tolerant imagining of Indonesian society, including stated objectives to produce more positive images of queer Indonesians. This paper will look at two key films from the reform era that are noted for their construction of *gay* identities – Nia Dinata's 2004 film *Arisan!* (*The gathering*) and Joko Anwar's 2005 film *Janji Joni* (*Joni's promise*). In particular I wish to engage with two particular notions which seem to be useful in unpacking what exactly is meant by 'positive' images in this Indonesian cinematic context; Lisa Duggan's notion of the new homonormativity, and John Binnie's concept of the 'queer unwanted'.

Key in this effort to represent marginalised groups, among them *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians has been the director/producer Nia Dinata and her production company Kalyana Shira films. Indeed it was Nia Dinata's second film as director, *Arisan!*, which grabbed headlines both in Indonesia and internationally for its positive *gay* storyline replete with Indonesian mainstream film's first uncensored *gay* kiss. The impact of that film in terms of encouraging film directors and producers to engage with alternate sexualities was huge. As one blogger noted, it almost became essential to include a *gay* character in one's film if it was to maintain credibility. So too many Indonesians took delight and pride in a film industry which was now able and willing to offer such positive representations of *gay* men. Not wishing to deny the impact which the film has had, and noting those academic voice which have welcomed the film for its new and refreshing approach to *gay* subjectivities in Indonesia (Maimunah 2010, Paramaditha 2011), the intention here is to take a somewhat more questioning approach to the very particular construction of *gay* male sexuality which it will be argued has as much to do

with western neoliberal notions of domesticated and depoliticised privacy than with the diversity of gender and sexual transgression evident in Indonesia today.

Chris Berry (2005) has argued that *Arisan!* might be considered part of the 'Wedding Banquet effect' in reference to Ang Lee's 1993 Taiwanese-American movie in which a gay Taiwanese man who lives in Manhattan with his American partner marries a mainland Chinese woman in order to placate his parents, in which 'queer is equated to Western-derived and elite global capitalist culture'. Berry argues that in *Arisan!*, as in a number of Asian films that preceded it, 'Having a gay man around seems to be like having the right clothes, the right car, and so on – another sign of the successful attainment of modernity' (2005: 306). Nia Dinata is reported to have countered this point arguing that the association between the *gay* identity and middle or upper class lifestyles is a reflection of social reality (Maimunah 2010: 120). Arguing that it is easier for socially and economically independent *gay* men to survive in Indonesia, the film's producer seems to be equating *gay* 'survival' with an ability to follow a model of being which shares remarkable similarities with certain increasingly vocal Westerns constructions of gay subjectivity.

In considering the model of *gay* subjectivity put forward in the film, and also the queer possibilities which it might be argued are simultaneously rejected, I draw on Lisa Duggan's concept of the 'new homonormativity', a concept which she developed in her critique of American neoliberalism, but which has also been used in a number of disciplinary interventions, particularly in the field of the geography of sexualities. In particular, Jon Binnie and other have drawn on Duggan's work to frame the notion of the 'queer unwanted'. Duggan defines the 'new homonormativity' as a politics that 'does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them, while promoting the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticised gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption' (2003: 50). The championing of gay marriage, adoption rights, and the right to join the military by those asserting the similarity - and lack of threat posed - of some lesbians and gays to normal heterosexual citizens, inevitably leads to a marginalisation of those who are oppressed by a binary sex and gender system and also those who challenge serial monogamy. While it may be opined that Duggan's argument is particular to a certain historical-political moment in the United States, the fact that the basis of this new homonormativity lies in consumer rights rather than citizen rights means that the influence of the politics of homonormativity can be felt well beyond the borders of the

United States, albeit with varying degrees of slippage and reinterpretation. In terms of mainstream cultural production, particularly television and film, this new homonormativity is most apparent in the desexualisation of gays and lesbians in an effort to make them more 'acceptable' to the perceived 'majority', in a stress on the domestic private sphere, and through an emphasis on the economic contribution which gays and lesbians make to society by virtue of their consumption – the pink pound as it has become known in the UK. It is my contention that the influence of this homonormative politics is particularly apparent in certain cinematic constructions of homosexuality in Indonesian films made by the new wave of producers and directors. In particular the film *Arisan!* provides a very useful case study to examine how such ideas have permeated into recent Indonesian cinema.

Set among the hyper reality of the Jakarta elite, *Arisan!* sets out to critique the hypocrisy and materialism of certain members of the elite class, in a comical and self referential style. The term *arisan* refers to a monthly social event in which a number of wealthy female friends come together to network and gossip. The film focuses on three friends Meimei, Andien and Sakti, though for the purposes of this paper it is Sakti's storyline which is most relevant. Sakti, a successful 30-something architect who is under some pressure from his mother to get married is seeing a psychiatrist to try to overcome his homosexuality. When he meets Nino, a film director, a relationship quickly blossoms, though with a number of hurdles along the way. In particular he fears that his mother will find out about his sexuality and a conflict arises when his best friend Meimei, who knows nothing of his sexuality, falls for Nino. Finally, his family and close friends come to learn about and accept his sexuality. Sakti's friends also confront various problems as the film progresses. Most of these difficulties are resolved by the film's end when the three characters face up to and accept each other for what they truly are with the motto 'be yourself'.

The elite setting of *Arisan!* means that the film is rather difficult for some non-Indonesian viewers to warm to. A common response from my undergraduate students when watching this film is to question its 'Indonesianness'. Chris Berry notes that the entire film takes place 'in what could be Beverly Hills'. In her report on the film for Associated Press, Leila Djuhari noted that the 'upmarket' setting of the film means that it 'could almost be in any cosmopolitan city in the world' (2004). This is not to deny that the film might bear some resemblance to the lives led by a certain coterie of Jakarta's citizens, and Intan Paramaditha has argued the eclectic quality of the

architecture and urban space of Jakarta as represented in *Arisan!* might usefully be interpreted as ‘a rejection of any essential notion of Indonesian-ness’, a quality also apparent she opines in the cosmopolitan and urban nature of the film’s characters (2011: 508-9). On this basis, she argues, the characters reflect an identity which ‘mediates between local and global culture’ (2011: 508).

However, an interesting question arises when we consider that these new, and supposedly more positive constructions of *gay* Indonesian subjectivity are based around a wealth, opulence and freedom to consume which will never be achieved by the vast majority of Indonesia’s citizens. This point becomes all the stronger when we reflect how the three friends at the end of the film may well liberate themselves from the hypocrisy and banality of other members of the Jakarta elite by learning to ‘be themselves’. But the film does nothing at all to imagine a world in which the rights and privileges enjoyed by that elite might be extended to other Indonesian citizens.

It is useful at this point to draw on debates about the ‘consumer citizen’, the globalized inhabitants of world cities. John Urry’s definition of such citizenship as ‘not only about the right to buy across the globe the products, services and icons of other cultures’ but also ‘the ability to locate them within ones own culture’ (2000: 70) is clearly exemplified in the world depicted in *Arisan!*. This is most obviously characterised by their occupation of global travel networks – Sakti travels to London, Meimei’s husband Ical to Singapore. But so too we see this consumer citizenship in their use of the English language, and their consumption of foodstuffs which come almost exclusively from overseas.⁷ Sakti first meets Nino in a café in which American icons hang on the wall, and Sakti drinks from a mug bearing the American flag. Payments to the *arisan* are made with a 100 US dollar bill. When Sakti’s cousin Lita searches his bedroom for evidence of his *gay* subjectivity, it is not a copy of one of the various Indonesian *gay* publications which she finds, but rather an issue of the British magazine *Gay Times*.

In their discussion of the consumer citizen, Bell and Binnie have highlighted questions regarding those who are excluded from these places and practices of consumption (2004: 1809) and it is also appropriate to reflect upon those who are excluded or made invisible from the movie’s construction and representations of the city. Non-elite Jakarta folk are all but eliminated other than to consolidate a sense of

⁷ Certainly there are moments when the film mocks the behaviour of the elite, but the derision is always far from totalising.

geographical setting in the opening credits, or to be driven past or fought through as in one scene set in a police station. So too it might be argued, some non-elite *gay* Indonesian audiences are excluded due to an inability to relate to the constructions of *gay* identities offered in the film. As such, when the film was mentioned in the focus groups which I conducted with *gay*, *lesbi* and *waria* identified Indonesians in Surabaya, the general consensus was that the lives depicted in that film had very little to do with them, and on this basis they generally found the 1987 film *Istana kecantikan* more thought provoking and meaningful (Murtagh 2011b). Thus for some queer Indonesians, the elite background of the characters and their lack of engagement with the issues that affect so many citizens of Indonesia's cities, meant that the film was perceived to have as little relevance to their lives as many of my London-based undergraduate students.

The characters of Nino and Sakti are unlike any other *gay* men that had been seen up to that point in Indonesian film. Nino is confident in his sexuality, has a high level of formal education, a good career and is apparently financially independent. We know little about his family background but to all intents and purposes he is established as an out *gay* man. Sakti is more troubled by his sexuality – he is seeing a psychiatrist to try to overcome his same-sex attraction - but when propositioned by Nino soon falls into a relationship with him and eventually his sexuality becomes known to his friends and immediate family. Most importantly the two characters both survive the film without being locked up, murdered, chased out of the city or saved from deviant sexuality. They end the film more confident in their *gay* identities than when it began. Thus Nino and Sakti achieve what none of the *gay* men in Indonesian cinema had managed before them. They are accepted by their family and friends, their careers remain intact and there is no religious or moral censure of their identity. So too their two kisses were allowed to be screened by the censors. Their modernity, and as such the modernity of the class to which they belong and which accepts them is confirmed.

Given that the film purposefully sets out to resist the use of stereotypes to signify the alternate sexual identities of Nino and Sakti, it is through dialogue that we learn much about Nino and Sakti. While all of the characters in the film speak Indonesian most of the time, several of the characters also drop English language words and phrases into their conversations, as is not uncommon among some urban Indonesians. When Nino proclaims his sexuality to Sakti he does so in English, 'I'm gay', and then also seeks confirmation from Sakti regarding his sexuality, again in English, 'But ... you are not gay?' in a conversation which is otherwise almost totally

conducted in Indonesian.⁸ So too in the final scene, when the three friends confront the rest of the *arisan* ladies, and Sakti comes out as *gay* (in Indonesian), one of the ladies, who subsequently faints in shock repeatedly exclaims in English, 'he's not gay!'. Clearly this use of English functions to make the identity sound more foreign, more Western, and as something which cannot be lexicalised in the local language. We might also interpret Nino, who generally expresses himself in Indonesian, as defining his sexuality in a non-Indonesian sense, perhaps in contrast to Sakti who, once his sexuality is known by his family and friends, proclaims his sexuality in his native tongue. That the fainting *arisan* lady also resorts to English may well represent a laughing aside at the self-consciousness of socialites, but it seems also to convey the idea that the unsayable becomes sayable in this foreign, or at least international, language.

Maimunah has suggested that the film be seen as an illustration of 'how *gay* men can be accepted in the *normal* world if his coming out is handled in a gradual and non-confrontational way' rather than a realistic representation of Indonesian *gay* culture (2010 118), an argument reminiscent of Duggan's concern with the neoliberal brand of identity/equality politics which among other things promote *gay* 'normality' (2003: 44). Remembering Dinata's argument that in pitching the *gay* storyline among Jakarta's elite the film was reflective of social reality, and combining this with the clearly well intentioned ethos behind the movie of showing how relationships between men can be a positive thing, unthreatening to family and other social values, we are again reminded of what Duggan labels 'a trickle-down version of equality' in which *gay* positive sentiments are imagined to trickle down from boardrooms to shops, farms and factories (Duggan, 2003: 54).⁹

Besides Nino and Sakti, we only meet one other character in *Arisan!* who is marked as being of a gender or sexuality beyond the heteronormative. Yung-yung (Sapto S.) is a slightly older male photographer who accompanies the *arisan* ladies to the monthly meeting when it is held at Sakti's house. Camp, effeminate, limp wristed and with a somewhat fawning attitude towards the wealthy ladies yet confident in his

⁸ It is interesting to note that in the published screenplay of the film, the word *gay* is always italicised to indicate that it is a foreign (non-Indonesian) word, even when only used in combination with Indonesian words. Thus adding another layer to the perception of the degree of indonesianness of the subject position described. Furthermore in the quotes attributed to Tora Sudiro and Surya Saputra they always use the word *homoseksual* to describe the characters they pay rather than *gay* (Dinata 2004).

⁹ Duggan here is referring to an American writer for the Independent Gay Forum (IGF) Bruce Bawer who proposed that major corporations were doing more to bring about *gay* equality than any other establishment institutions or a radical *gay* rights movement (2003 54).

subjectivity, the contrast with Sakti could not be more apparent. While Nino and Sakti calmly walk around the garden speaking to friends and acquaintances, Yung-yung bustles about, cutting inexplicably backwards and forwards across the camera, flicking his hand held fan. This difference is not just evident in manner, but also in appearance, as Yung-yung, much smaller in stature than both Nino and Sakti, uses a style of dress and hair which also contrasts with the gym-fit and more normatively masculine style and comportment of Sakti and Nino. His snide and derisive comments about others at the gathering, in the style of the main group of *arisan* ladies, also marks him as of the type from whom Sakti, Meimei and Andien eventually manage to break free in their quest to 'be themselves'.

Yung-yung is clearly presented as a threat to Sakti, and it is interesting to examine exactly why this is. It might be simply understood that the effeminate, camp photographer is unwelcome because Sakti is loathe to be associated with other men of a non-normative gender or sexuality, as if his presence may somehow make Sakti's sexuality more explicit. However, Sakti's rejection of Yung-yung also seems to be about the rejection of a certain type of subjectivity, in which *gay* and gender transgression are inextricably linked. The encounter between the two comes to a head when Sakti is about to leave for London and is already in the transport to take him to the airport. Yung-yung arrives and as he flirts with Sakti, the latter repeatedly tries to close the car door as Yung-yung keeps trying to open it again. At this point the differences between the two is enhanced by differences in language used by the two men. While Sakti continues to use a mix of Indonesian and English as he has done throughout the film, Yung-yung's language is littered with words and syntax from Indonesian *gay* slang. Not only does this mark him as confident in his alternative gender/sexual identity but one which threatens Sakti's secret world. As Sakti finally succeeds in shutting the door on Yung-yung, he uses English 'Sorry, but I'm in a relationship' to reinforce his attempt to distance himself spatially, emotionally and now linguistically from his camp pursuer.

This is not just a case of Sakti being made to feel uncomfortable by a rather flamboyant photographer. Rather it is an attempt to shut out the queer world out from the homonormative bubble in which Sakti and Nino seem to be trying to live. Just as the main characters of *Arisan!* negotiate the geographical space of Jakarta by travelling around in cars with blacked out windows from one luxurious space to another, keeping the rest of the unpleasant reality of the city at bay, so too in closing the door on Yung-

Yung as he heads off to catch a plane to London, Sakti is also seemingly trying to keep the 'queer unwanted' at bay.

The second film to be considered in this paper is Joko Anwar's *Janji Joni* (Joni's promise). Alongside numerous references to Indonesian and western film making traditions, it contains a particularly interesting reference back to *Arisan!* The film is essentially a romance/comedy/adventure film in which Joni (Nicolas Saputra) a film delivery boy meets with a number of obstacles as he tries to deliver a roll of film on time, in order to win a date with a beautiful girl he meets in the cinema. On the basis of this extremely brief summary it appears to follow a fairly conventional structure; a lower class boy meets an upper class girl and has to go through all sorts of tribulations in order to convince her that he is worth a date, which of course he manages to do by the end of the film. However, two aspects of the film, both of which occur near the film's beginning, indicate a view of the world which is far more nuanced than this conventional film structure might suggest.

An opening montage explores the way in which Jakarta folk think about, explore and transform their lives in response to films which they have seen (all of which interestingly enough are western films). For example, one woman is shown saying to herself 'I really love the film *The Last Samurai*, Tom Cruise is so cool' before the camera pans to a man standing nearby who thinks 'I really love *The Last Samurai*, Tom Cruise is really sexy'. Next the narrator recalls how film has transformed the lives of some of his friends; a punk who became a policeman after watching *Police Academy*, a nerd incapable of making personal relationships who was able to make imaginary friends after watching *A Beautiful Mind*, and a hard rock guitarist who after watching *Bring it on* became a cheerleader. These narrated recollections are illustrated with a succession of Polaroid shots to further entrench the transformation of the individuals, such that the last of the three friends, the long haired musician, becomes a skirt and bra-top wearing cheerleader whose guitar is replaced sequentially by pompoms, a large lollypop and a lapdog. In recognising this alternate performance of masculinity which deliberately plays against imaginings of inevitable childhood effeminacy it is a construction of gender which destabilises rigid notions of conformity and instead posits that there is perhaps something a little queer within us all.

Having established the pivotal role that film might play in the formation of queer identities the story then moves on to a scene in a cinema in which the hero overhears a conversation between two men in the washroom. It soon becomes apparent that the two

men are a *gay* couple, and given that one of them is played by Tora Sudiro, who played Sakti in *Arisan!*, it is impossible not to associate this couple with the Nino and Sakti from that film. The couple are discussing the essence of true love and drawing on Jennifer Anniston's character in *The object of my affection*, Tora Sudiro's character argues against settling for compromise, maintaining that your heart will tell you when you have met your soulmate. The other man (Winky Wiryawan) then asks his friend if he has already met his, at which point he affectionately pulls him towards him, puts his arm round his shoulder and affirms that of course he sees this friend as his soulmate. It is this example of perfect and idealised love that then encourages the hero to similarly reject compromise, to follow his heart and go after the upper class girl he has recently bumped into in the cinema lobby. Thus Joni's quest for true love is based on the example of the *gay* couple he overheard in the cinema washroom. This '*gay* inspiration' is further apparent for the film's audience, with their intertextual knowledge of the relationship they had already seen develop in *Arisan!*. In this second respect *Janji Joni*'s credentials as a queer film in which *gay* romantic love can become the model for heterosexual romantic love seem clear.

In thinking about this '*gay* model', it is noticeable that all the cinematic examples invoked in the opening stages of this film are from Western film. While later on in the narrative *Janji Joni* does reference Indonesian traditions, all of the inspirations for *gay* love, for *gay* erotic desire and for understandings of the *gay* subject position come from Hollywood. This construction of the model of the modern *gay* relationship, seemingly free from the anxieties evident in earlier Indonesian film with its apparently upper-class setting and inspiration based far more on global circuits of queer knowledge rather than anything intrinsically Indonesian, becomes even more apparent when we consider one brief but telling moment towards the end of *Janji Joni*. In that scene Joni finally has the film roll back in his hands, and simply needs to get back to the cinema as fast as possible. He stops a passing taxi and the taxi driver says three words to him: 'Good afternoon sir'. The words of course are all one would expect of a friendly taxi driver. So why does Joni decline the lift and opt instead for trying to hitch a lift with an ambulance? The sudden change of mind can only be explained by the manner of the taxi driver and while some Indonesians have explained this development in the plot as based on Joni's fear that the taxi ride would result in more mishaps, it seems to me that the explanation is simply based on the fact that the cabbie is a little bit camp. Certainly this was also the view of the subtitler of the DVD version who translates these words as

‘Good afternoon, Handsome!’. Heteronormativity seems to be the model here, and homonormativity the result. This is an hierarchy of worthiness which is based on models of gender conformity in which *gay* couples who perform their gender according to acceptable masculine codes and understand their relationships in terms of modern notions of heterosexual marriage are not only tolerated, but potentially inspirational, but at the expense of delegitimizing other models of queer masculinity – as exemplified by the camp, effeminate cab driver.

The queer unwanted in this film however is not simply unwanted because he is camp, a little bit *banci*. We should also note here the class difference, for while we can presume that the opening *gay* couple played by Tora Sudiro and Winky Wiryawan are from Jakarta’s elite – based on the intertextual reference to *Arisan!* and the fact that like Joni’s intended they are part of the audience in the upmarket cinema, not employees of the institution – the cab driver is clearly from far a less privileged social background. While the homonormative model of perfect monogamous love invoked at the opening of the film provides the inspiration for Joni to pursue his own true love, this other apparently less palatable variant of queerness strikes fear and confusion into Joni’s heart. He would rather risk losing his girl than getting in a car with a camp cabby. In constructing the homonormatively *gay* couple as part of the acceptable side of Indonesian society, the cab driver is othered as part of the lower class, not quite modern, troublingly effeminate, queer unwanted.

Undoubtedly *Arisan!*, and *Janji Joni* mark a specific effort to engage with the *gay* subject position in a more ‘positive’ light. Based on various comments made by those in the film industry regarding their perception of constructions of homosexuality in the New Order era, these films may be interpreted as a response to what had gone before. In thinking about what exactly it is about these films which is so positive it seems that many of the influences on the construction of the *gay* characters can be traced to certain Western, specifically recent Anglo-Saxon, models of the modern *gay* identity.

The impact of Western conceptions of the *gay* identity is apparent in three aspects. Firstly in the clear reference to Western television and cinematic representation of *gay* men, which have been referred to by actors and directors alike. Secondly, the construction of the *gay* identity in these film, particularly *Arisan!* seems to be rooted as much in Western notions of homosexuality, in particular the notion of coming out, in contrast to what has been documented as the *gay* Indonesian division of space into open

and closed spaces (Boellstorff 2005). A third aspect in which the Western (specifically Anglo-Saxon) influence seems particularly strong is in regards to what has been described by Duggan as the new homonormativity.

Various scholars have pointed to the problem of simply criticising negative representations and praising positive ones. Following this line of thought, positive representations of homosexuality are just as likely to be removed from reality as negative ones, and as Judith Halberstam argues, a cinema in which there are only positive representations of queer subjects would not be very interesting (1998: 184). More interesting here is to think about what sort of characters are being seen as positive and what sort of impact this may have on popular discourse regarding *gay* men (as the specific focus attention of this paper), and more broadly on all manner of queer identities which do exist in Indonesia but which seem to be being ‘invisibilised’ or erased in this recent cinema. Again drawing on Halberstam, she notes that in Western cinema the most common stereotypes linked to queer subjectivities are those of the queen and the butch. But while recognising the violence that may be done in repeating these stereotypes, this is not to argue that these stereotypes do not have some reflection in reality. Butch dykes and queens do exist, and they should not be expunged from the screen simply because such use of stereotypes in the past has been judged to ‘prop up a dominant system of gender and sexuality’ (1998: 180). As Halberstam argues these stereotypes can also ‘exceed the limits of representation imposed by the law of the stereotype and disrupt the dominant system of representation that depend on negative queer images’ (1998: 180). In the case of Indonesia, the common and much complained about stereotypes of the *waria* (transgender) and the camp man could be coerced to disrupt the dominant system of representation far more effectively than simply constructing *gay* men in the same image as heterosexual men. For in avoiding the use of stereotypes these films have not resisted the tendency to essentialize a diverse group of individuals into a small number of types. Rather, traditional stereotypes have been shown to be unwanted and problematic, while at the same time creating a new model *gay* man that is just as limited as the stereotypes he is intended to replace.

Films such as *Arisan!* and *Janji Joni* marginalise those subjectivities which are not seen as being conducive to the desire for ‘positive images’. In making a case for tolerance and acceptance of the healthy, professional, clean living, monogamous upper class, elite *gay* men, these films ‘other’ more marginalised identities. There are of course significant differences between the new homonormativity being proposed by

neoliberals in the United States and the images being constructed by the Indonesian elite in these films. There is certainly no argument regarding the desire to express citizenship through the right to take up arms for example. But in the focus on consumerism, acceptance by the heterosexual world, monogamy and personal wealth there are remarkable similarities. When Sakti slams the door on Yung-yung, and when Joni declines to get into the cab, both films seem to be asserting that to be *gay*, wealthy and monogamous is acceptable, but reminders of sexual or gender identities which go beyond or threaten this normativity are no longer desirable. It is this aping of heteronormative ideals which fracture Indonesia's queer communities by degrees of worthiness and acceptability. As such they bring to the screen the notion of the queer unwanted.

I am deeply aware that the arguments that I am picking up on are not well known in Indonesian. Debates about ideas such as *gay* marriage are not even on the radar and so to criticise film makers for the types of 'positive' images such as those discussed in this paper, in the face of sections of Indonesian society which are vehemently opposed to any notion of the expression of same-sex desire on the basis of irrational fear of corrupting youth and claims that such subjectivities are 'unIndonesian', may seem unduly harsh. Given the censorship regulations under which films are still made in Indonesia, and perhaps even more concerning, the power of Islamic groups to demand the pulling of films from circulation and posters from display, there are clearly limits as to what images and ideas directors and producers are willing or able to put into their films. Nonetheless, my work with *gay* and *waria* focus groups found that the majority of participants dismissed *Arisan!* as having no relevance to their social position nor to their lived experiences as *gay* or *waria* Indonesians (Murtagh 2011b). I do not wish to criticise filmmakers for their cultural outputs. As a non-Indonesian this is hardly my role. What I am interested in doing is questioning the impact that such images have on popular notions of homosexuality and in particular for the vast majority of queer Indonesians who do not fit the images being constructed in these films.

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