

Sustaining the Local, Creating Community in Post- New Order Art and Popular Culture

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Abstract

The current combination of regional autonomy in the political sphere and rampant cultural globalisation has had complex and diverse effects on Indonesian arts and popular culture.

On the one hand local officials are using glamourised, reinvented local art forms to celebrate and promote the image of their regions (provinces, kabupaten) and the unique, exclusive identity of its citizens. At the same time, independent artists' groups' draw on local resources and traditions with very different aims and outcomes.

A shared concern is that of connecting with local communities, either by performing to village and kampung audiences or opening up spaces and providing training so that community members can themselves participate. There are sites like Kedai Kebun in Yogyakarta giving space to local visual and performing artists, and sanggar on the outskirts of town staging arts events attended by both city intellectuals and local communities. Attention to local culture may involve reviving traditional skills, such as dongeng folk-story telling for children at a recent neighbourhood festival in Solo. Or there may be a dynamic merging of the local and global, like the traditional Javanese poetry sung in rap style by a Yogya acapella group. Much interaction takes place between practitioners of different art forms - actors, musicians, visual artists, film-makers. Groups in different regions are linked by electronic technology - by email networks, websites, dvd copies of their work, facebook, blogs. They are arguably constructing local cultural identities which also outward-looking, globally-wired.

In this paper I will look at several case studies of such groups in Yogya and Solo, an area I know well, analysing their work. Eventually it would be great to conduct team research on such activities across Indonesia. To see how widespread, they are outside Java, who attends performances and how they respond, what connections exist between local arts groups and government bodies, as well as Indonesian and overseas NGOs. How do these arts activities relate to the mass media? What links are there with local tv and radio? Does mass pop culture substitute for local cultural expression for the vast majority of people or is there mixture and integration? Is it possible to suggest that through these processes a new kind of Indonesian cultural identity is being produced, a new form of national culture?