Critical Pleasures: Reflections on the Indonesian Horror Genre and its Anti-Fans

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Drawing on ethnographic audience research carried out during 2013-2014, this article examines how young, urban, tertiary-educated Indonesians engage with the Indonesian horror genre. For most of these consumers, Indonesian horror films are the subject of ridicule and derision. With reference to Bourdieu's theories of taste and distinction, I illustrate how the imagined "mass audience" of Indonesian horror functions as a symbolic "other," emphasizing the cultural capital of more discerning, critical audiences. In exploring these audience members' critical engagement with Indonesian horror, I also apply recent theories of "anti-fandom" that have come out of US cultural studies. There are many resonances between Indonesian anti-horror sentiment and US anti-fandom, but also some important divergences. I use these gaps and disjunctures as a departure point for reflecting on some of the challenges and opportunities of working at the intersection of Asian studies, media studies and cultural studies in the contemporary scholarly context.

***Keywords**: Indonesia, film, horror, audience, social capital, distinction, anti-fandom, morality*

In April 2013, I sat cross-legged with a group of six students from Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, discussing Indonesian national cinema. During the discussion, I sensed the group edging towards a topic that would inevitably generate lively conversation and trigger an outpouring of critical condemnation—that of horror films. And while this topic was not the main focus of my research at that time, I found myself looking forward to the subject being raised and anticipating the deluge of ridicule that would eventually follow. "I like watching Indonesian films, but only certain genres. Most importantly, not horror," said Agus, a 19-year-old management student (personal communication, April 25, 2013). The rest of the focus group nodded enthusiastically in agreement. "Why? What is wrong with horror films?" I asked, and the floodgates opened.

Drawing on ethnographic audience research carried out during 2013-2014, this article offers insights into how young, urban, tertiary-educated Indonesians engage with the Indonesian horror genre. Indonesian horror films are the subject of ridicule and derision the among majority of these

consumers who characterize the genre as cheap, exploitative and derivative, morally and aesthetically bankrupt, and emblematic of all the worst problems facing the Indonesian film industry and Indonesian society in general. Referencing Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) theories of taste and distinction, this paper also illustrates how the imagined mass audience of Indonesian horror functions as a symbolic other, reinforcing stereotypes around class and ethnicity, and emphasizing the cultural capital of more discerning, critical audiences. In addition, I argue that these consumers' modes of receiving and appreciating Indonesian horror are far more complex than a flat-out rejection of the genre. While they ridicule Indonesian horror films, many young urban Indonesians furtively enjoy watching them. Judging by how lively, passionate and humorous the focus group discussions became when discussing horror, I contend that there is a certain critical pleasure gained in mocking the genre and its moral failings. In exploring the intricacies of both textual pleasure and repulsion, I engage with recent theories of "anti-fandom" that have come out of US cultural studies, particularly with the works of Jonathan Gray, Francesca Haig, and Sarah Harman and Bethan Jones. There are many resonances between Indonesian anti-horror sentiment and US anti-fandom, but also some important divergences, which remind us that it is vital not to assume universality. I use these differences as a departure point for reflecting on some of the challenges and opportunities of working at what Emma Baulch and Julian Millie (2013) call the intersection of Asian studies, media studies, and cultural studies.

My focus in this article is Indonesian horror, which local audiences usually define in direct opposition to both "quality national cinema" and to "foreign horror," a vague descriptor that encapsulates anything from Thai to Japanese to Hollywood horror films. Yet in the closing sections I will reflect briefly on what these definitions mean for locating Southeast Asian horror more generally. Ultimately, this article grapples with the paradox of horror as the genre Indonesians love to hate, and in doing so, attempts to find new ways of working meaningfully at the intersection of media, cultural and area studies in the contemporary scholarly context.

While horror films have been produced in Indonesia since the 1930s when the nation was still under colonial control, the horror genre truly began to blossom in the 1970s and 1980s, with countless titles, often based on local myths and legends, screened throughout the archipelago (van Heeren, 2009). Although it has always been branded as somewhat trashy lower-class entertainment, horror has consistently been one of the most popular and widely produced genres in Indonesian cinema. Along with other Indonesian film genres, it experienced a slump during the 1990s but resurfaced in the increasingly deregulated media environment of the early

2000s, following the collapse of President Suharto's 30-year authoritarian New Order regime. The resurgence of Indonesian horror occurred around the same time that Japanese and Korean horror films were experiencing unprecedented success in international markets, yet the films produced in Indonesia remained quite distinct from their international equivalents.

The new wave of horror emerging in the 2000s has been well studied by scholars of Indonesian cinema. Katinka Van Heeren (2007, 2009) traces the changing role of religious figures such as the *kyai* [Islamic scholar] in horror films, as well the ways in which post-reform Indonesian horror directors produced films which were no longer set in the mythical past but in the everyday modern urban environments. For van Heeren (2009), this change in setting is related to a desire to seek truth and authenticity in the wake of the New Order regime. She notes that such developments were arguably entwined with changes in the distribution of horror films, as high-end shopping mall cinemas increasingly outnumbered rural outdoor cinemas.

Approaching cinema from a cultural economy perspective, Thomas Barker (2011) also demonstrates how some of the structural changes brought about by the reform era have influenced Indonesian horror films. Barker finds the classic "return to order" (Sen, 1994) narrative arc of the New Order era replaced by filmmakers' attempts to articulate past traumas and violences committed by the regime. By looking at horror as allegory, he argues that the temporal gap between an original violent incident and its reappearance as ghost (a narrative arc that characterized most reform-era horror films) is a way for filmmakers to confront and work through the residual traumas of history (Barker, 2011, p. 30).

However, both van Heeren and Barker remain primarily focused on the production, distribution, and content of horror films; consequently, the voice of the audience continues to remain absent. Given the role of the viewer in constructing and shaping meaning, the reception context can be just as important as the text itself (Sandvoss, 2005), which leads me to examine this previously neglected area of how viewers engage with Indonesian horror. Throughout decades of horror production there have been many significant changes in the film industry, in the way that horror is produced and distributed, and in the kind of allegories at work within the films. Yet for millions of everyday consumers, the complaints remain much the same: Indonesian horror is cheap mass entertainment of highly questionable moral value.

I delve deeper into this negative characterization of Indonesian horror films by drawing on ethnographic audience research. The data used in this article was collected during a year-long study of popular cultural consumption practices across six Indonesian cities: Padang, Jakarta,

Yogyakarta, Banjarmasin, Makassar, and Manado. These cities, spread across four of Indonesia's major islands, were chosen due to their status as large urban centers with significant student populations. During fieldwork, I lived in student boarding houses, holding focus group discussions and in-depth one-on-one interviews with more than one hundred Indonesian university students. Participants were between 18 to 26 years old; the sample was gender-balanced and drawn from a range of faculties at leading universities in each city. This demographic of young, urban, educated people constitutes the majority of Indonesian film consumers. Most of our conversations centred on consumption practices, popular tastes and trends, the relevance of various themes, and the social roles of popular texts in Indonesia. Importantly, when I refer to "films" here, I mean not just those that are viewed in cinemas, which are expensive and not the primary sites for most young people's film consumption, but also the more frequently accessed illegal VCDs and downloaded copies. As such, it is impossible to offer concrete figures on audience numbers for these films. Ultimately, I am more interested in audience perceptions, rather than specific quantitative details of horror film production and distribution. In the sections that follow, I seek to understand the striking similarity that emerged in all interviews and focus groups: the unanimous concern that the Indonesian film market is flooded with low quality and pornographic horror films.

The Imagined Horror Audience as Symbolic Other

The majority of respondents in my study were keen to explain that they rarely watch Indonesian films because the industry is dominated by *jelek* [ugly/trashy] B-grade horror. This was frequently the very first point raised in each conversation, with many respondents asking incredulously why I was interested in Indonesian cinema at all. "Indonesian horror films aren't all pure horror, but actually porn," explained Citra (personal communication, September 9, 2013) during a focus group discussion in Banjarmasin. Among these young consumers, there was wide disapproval of the "soft-porn" aspects of these films and a sense that this was a worsening situation. Dessy told me that "not many people are interested in Indonesian horror films because these days, the sexual aspects are so dominant" (personal communication, May 2, 2013). Arif joked that "we call them KFC films: breast, thigh, breast, thigh" (personal communication, April 16, 2013).

Due to the stigma attached to the genre, it was very difficult to find fans of Indonesian horror during the course of my interviews. Only a handful of participants admitted they enjoy the genre, and these confessions were accompanied by nervous giggles and attempts to change the subject. It was easier to obtain information by inviting people to talk instead about

friends who watch horror. Even members of online Indonesian horror fan communities, anonymous spaces where we would expect to find true fans, stressed that they only obsess over retro horror films from the 1970s and 1980s, and their fandom is often expressed in an ironic way. "It's so bad that it's good" was a familiar refrain in such forums, implying a kind of "anti-fandom" that I will explore further in the next section.

Overall, criticizing the horror genre is a favorite pastime for Indonesian audiences. Yet while everyone is keen to complain about such films, viewers are reluctant to talk about who consumes them and are anxious to distance themselves from the genre. Of course, many different people, including my respondents, watch these films in many different contexts and for a variety of reasons. But what is most interesting for the purpose of this article is how respondents seek to "other" the Indonesian horror genre, explaining that it is "other consumers" who create the demand. These others include "people with low education," "rural village people who just want some entertainment," "kids who enjoy being frightened," "curious teenagers," or the most abstract response, "people in other regions and islands." These are stereotypes, of course, and they are rarely accurate. From my own observations from living in both rural and urban areas of Indonesia, rural villagers tend not to watch films at all. Yet such stereotypes are highly consistent and powerful among the respondents who are keen to distance themselves from horror. The following comment from a respondent in Manado exemplifies this process of distancing, as it firmly characterizes the demand for horror as coming from "elsewhere," that is, from another island or ethnic group:

> Where does the demand come from? Probably not from Manado. Maybe in Java [horror films] have a good rating so they keep producing them… but we have different culture, different beliefs. The Javanese are too caught up in traditional mystic beliefs. (Ardi, personal communication, October 23, 2013)

This act of distancing or othering can also occur at the more local level. In Padang, Hikmat explained that it is rural people living out of town who watch horror, because "Their needs are at that level. They don't want anything serious, just some light entertainment" (personal communication, May 4, 2013). He too is locating the consumption of horror far from his own better-educated, urban lifestyle, thus projecting a particular image of his own identity. "Perhaps it's the *becak* [rickshaw] drivers?" suggested 21-year-old Putri (personal communication, April 25, 2013) from Jakarta, revealing more about her own social outlook and assumptions than about the demographic of horror audiences.

The overwhelming tendency to other the Indonesian horror genre as the purview of less worthy audiences reveals powerful hierarchies of class, region, age, and socio-economic factors, which become linked with ideas of taste, distinction and morality. By othering the horror genre, the respondents gain a form of symbolic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), positioning themselves as more discerning and principled than other consumers. Bourdieu (1984) asserts in his sociology of consumption that:

> Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects…distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed. (p. 6)

The notion of taste is thus relative, invariably based upon the rejection of the assumed lower taste of someone else. Moreover, the social and cultural capital that is built upon hierarchies of taste is not merely abstract, but "works hand in hand with economic capital to produce social privilege and distinction" (Fiske, 1992, p. 21). For many of the young urban audiences I worked with, their socio-economic positions can be relatively tenuous. As Luvaas (2009) points out, the so-called middle class status of many young Indonesians, made possible by recent changes in the Indonesian economy, "is often unstable and uncertain, newly attained and easily lost" (p. 261). In this context, the act of rejecting the "lower class" genre of horror plays an important role in reinforcing the status and cultural capital of many young Indonesian consumers. For this reason, although in reality there are many who enjoy horror, most people become scornful of the genre and its viewers during everyday conversation.

Anti-Fandom and Critical Pleasure

During the course of my fieldwork, it became clear that the respondents' modes of receiving and appreciating Indonesian horror were far more complex than a flat-out disavowal of the genre. Although they ridicule Indonesian horror, many of these young urban Indonesians also secretly enjoy watching the films in question, even if only to laugh at them. In addition, if we take into account how lively, passionate and humorous focus group discussions became when discussing horror, there is evidently significant critical pleasure gained in insulting the genre. This paradox has been examined at length in recent US cultural studies scholarship that focuses on that focused on the theory around "anti-fandom." It is useful for us then to critically engage with this body of theoretical work to examine

possible resonances and contrasts when looking at similar cases of "textual hate" in the Southeast Asian context.

In a 2003 article titled "New Audiences, New Textualities: Anti-Fans and Non-Fans," Gray argues for the importance of studying the often neglected "anti-fan" in audience research. Gray points out that many viewers watch distractedly or casually, while many also hate or dislike certain texts or genres, and cultural studies scholars therefore need to pay particular attention on anti-fans and non-fans and see them as "distinct matrices of viewing and textuality" (p. 65). This kind of approach represents a significant refinement and elaboration of Hall's (1980) classic categories of "dominant," "oppositional" or "negotiated" reader positions as well as Abercrombie and Longhurst's (1998) taxonomy of audiences, which covers the casual consumer, the progressively more involved, active, and productive fan, the cultist, the enthusiast, and the petty producer. While not discounting the significance of these existing categories and the important progress made by fan studies scholarship, Gray (2005) takes us to the other end of the audience spectrum, theorizing about "those who refuse to let their family watch a show, who campaign against a text, or who spend considerable time discussing why a given text makes them angry to the core" (p. 840), and exploring the implications of this kind of textual engagement for a deeper understanding of the nature of textuality itself. According to Gray, "textual hatred and dislike have been understudied and underestimated, as has their intricate and nuanced relationship to textual love" (p. 841). Subsequent research in this area, including Gray's joint work with Sandvoss and Lee in 2007, has elaborated on this complex relationship. Described variously as "lolfans" (Klink, 2008), "snark fans" (Haig, 2013), and "ironic, guilty" fans (Harman & Jones, 2013), consumers engaged in practices of anti-fandom are increasingly the subject of scholarly attention and are understood in ever more complex ways. These recent theories of anti-fandom complicate the notion of fandom as uncritically affectionate and also add nuance to Gray's initial characterization of anti-fans as those who simply refuse to engage with certain texts.

In Haig's (2013) analysis of snark fandom among readers of Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* books and Harman and Jones's (2013) discussion of the ironic, critical online fandom of E. L. James' *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy, criticism is in fact a form of pleasurable engagement for anti-fans who engage in detailed close readings of the texts (Harman & Jones, 2013). The texts explored in existing anti-fandom research, including *The Simpsons* television series as well as talk shows and reality television, have been primarily US-based, but despite the difference in context and content, much

of the research is highly illuminating when analyzing Indonesian audience engagement with the horror genre.

There are a number of reasons for characterizing the Indonesian audiences I worked with as anti-fans. Firstly, many of these respondents, although claiming to be uninterested in Indonesian horror, are in fact highly engaged with these texts, regardless of whether they have viewed the films themselves or not. They can name titles and stars and criticize specific elements of the story and setting. "*Suster Keramas* [*Evil Nurse]* (Kardit, 2009), *Pocong Ngesot* [*Crawling Ghost*] (Nuala, 2011), *Sumpah Pocong* [*The Ghost's Curse*] (Suryadi, 2008), the titles are not good," explained Rezky (personal communication, September 10, 2013) during a focus group in Banjarmasin. In Manado, Billy advised me that "it's best to avoid anything starring Dewi Persik [a sexy Indonesian actress]" (personal communication, October 23, 2013). Doni from Padang had concerns with the believability of the films, saying that "the scenes are very unrealistic, not at all like the real life. They only show a little bit of sex scene to make the films interesting" (personal communication, May 11, 2013). In Jakarta, Mia echoed this sentiment: "Films like *Beranak di Dalam Kubur* [Birth in the Grave] (Saputra & Lingga, 2007) have a very illogical narrative and are also very ambiguous. You find yourself asking: is this a horror film or a semi-porno?" (personal communication, September 29, 2013). In addition, "the ghosts simply are not scary," said Zulis (personal communication, June 10, 2013). Maria from Manado complained that "the cinematography is terrible, and so is the setting" (personal communication, October 23, 2013).

Gray (2003) has suggested that the reason there is so little enquiry into anti-fans is that they are assumed to know little about the text and not to have watched it, and therefore make "poor informants" (p. 71). However, there must always be some basis for disliking a text, and it is by examining what such basis could be that we can observe the social life of the text beyond the screen. For Gray, "clearly anti-fans construct an image of the text—and, what is more, an image they feel is accurate—sufficiently enough that they can react to and against it" (p. 71). In the Indonesian context, these consumers have certainly constructed an image which allows them to engage in detailed critiques of films they claim never to have watched.

A second key resonance with anti-fandom theories is the significance of intertexts and paratexts in shaping the respondents' views about these films. Fiske (1989) has established that a text is much more than simply a book that is read or a film that is watched; a text is also made up of surrounding intertexts, which include reviews, advertisements, and the comments of other consumers about it, all of which contribute to a kind of secondary textuality. Genette (1997) has also explored this concept, using the term

"paratexts" to describe semi-textual fragments such as blurbs and cover art that surround and position a work. In theories of anti-fandom, the paratext or intertext plays a vital role in the distant reading that characterizes the textual engagement of many non-fans and anti-fans. For the Indonesian audiences I worked with, it was clear that semi-textual fragments indeed shaped their image of horror films. A film poster showing scantily clad film stars, a glimpse of a scene on a friend's computer, a nostalgic conversation with parents who yearn for the Indonesian horror of bygone eras, an online review decrying the stupidity of contemporary Indonesian horror—all these moments add to the meaning attributed to certain films.

The third reason for characterizing young Indonesian audiences as anti-fans is the sheer enjoyment they derive from criticizing the horror genre. As in the case of Haig's snark fandom and Harman and Jones's ironic critical fandom, Indonesian audiences enthusiastically embrace the chance to criticize the minutiae of trashy horror films, not just during focus group discussions but during everyday film-viewing practices. "Have you watched horror porn?" asked one student, during a focus group discussion in Manado. "*Hantu Jeruk Purut* [*The Ghost of Jeruk Purut*] (Pagayo, 2006), *Suster Keramas* [*Evil Nurse*] (Kardit, 2009)]…it's funny! We kind of insult it. As far as I know there is no one who says 'Wow! That's a good movie!'" (Ricky, personal communication, October 23, 2013). Another respondent, Teddy from Banjarmasin explained to me that "all this vulgar Indonesian horror…it's light entertainment. The scenes are funny! You can laugh with your friends about how terrible it is" (personal communcation, October 10, 2013). The situations described here involve social, collective critiques of the genre, echoing Haig's (2013) analysis of *Twilight* snark fandom:

> The criticisms aren't incidental to the pleasure taken in the texts; they appear, in large part, to constitute that pleasure. This form of critical fandom does not simply recognise *Twilight* as rubbish and enjoy it in spite of that recognition; the recognition itself and the analysis, discussion and parody that it permits, provide much of the fans' pleasure. (p. 15)

Enjoying the act of criticism is a key element of anti-fandom, and one which forges connection and a sense of community among anti-fans, whether in online forums or in everyday conversation (Gray, 2005). It is in fact this lively, social element of criticism that drew my attention to the topic of Indonesian horror in the first place. A discussion of the Indonesian horror genre and its failings was always a failsafe way to break the ice during a quiet focus group discussion, allowing for a kind of bonding over shared

moral and aesthetic values before moving on to other topics. Moreover, as Gray (2003) has noted in his early musings on potential strategies for studying anti-fans, "because part of our interest in interviewing anti-fans and non-fans would be to see how media texts fit into society, we could learn a great deal from observing how a group of friends activate the text in discussion" (p. 77). During my focus group discussions I indeed encountered a wide range of group dynamics, from a group of girls who strove to out-do each other in their disgust with the genre, to a mixed group who found it very awkward to discuss pornography in front of the opposite gender, to an all-male focus group who laughingly singled out one of their number as a "big fan" of horror films. As predicted by Gray, these kinds of interactions are highly illuminating when it comes to the connotations and social roles of certain texts.

Fourthly, as has been examined in the previous section on the imagined audience of horror films, respondents often express concern for the "other" viewers, that is, those less discerning than themselves, such as "children" and "uneducated rural villagers." This is also a preoccupation that emerges frequently in studies of the anti-fan. Gray's 2005 study of the online forum "Television Without Pity" finds that much of the animosity directed towards certain shows or characters "stemmed from a concern for third-person effects" (p. 851). In other words, viewers claimed to be worried about other people's reception ("children, racists, human resource departments"), which for Gray reveals "the degree to which much reception occurs with an imagined community of others" (p. 851). In this way, the text is a "remarkably refracted object" (p. 851), and much of what the text means to the viewer in fact stems from what they perceive its impact to be on others. Here, we can see a familiar concern with the impact of mass culture, which is essentially any form of mass-produced entertainment, on the so-called masses (Strinati, 2004). Similarly, Harman and Jones's (2013) analysis of online anti-fandom communities conclude that:

> The oppositional reception of *Fifty Shades of Grey* says more about anti-fans than it does about those actually "enjoying" the trilogy, who are largely silent in mainstream discourses. In fact, one wonders whether this constructed Other of the "vanilla" housewife, the undiscerning reader of "trash," truly exists except as an imagined spectre, or whether, for the majority of readers, it is this "hate-reading"... which offers the real readerly pleasures of performing and sharing distinctions of taste. (p. 961)

This "imagined spectre" was something I regularly grappled with during my own research. Despite the selection of highly varied respondent groups, I was ultimately unable to find any consumer who engaged in pure un-critical, un-ironic enjoyment of Indonesian horror films.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is the centrality of morality in the Indonesian audience's critiques of the horror genre. According to Gray (2005), all texts have moral, rational-realist, and aesthetic dimensions, yet anti-fans are often "unwilling or unable to interact with all three levels" (p. 844); that is, having already passed judgement on the "moral text," they dismiss any possibility of enjoying the other elements such as the cinematography, the acting, or plotlines. Indonesian horror films are frequently criticized for their monotony, irrational plotlines, and ugly cinematography, yet during focus group discussions it becomes clear that the main criterion underlying these complaints is a moral one. In contrast, sub-par aesthetics and plotlines in other genres are frequently overlooked if audiences agree with the moral messages of a film.

From an outsider's perspective, I could not discern a huge difference in terms of cinematic quality, narrative coherence, and acting capability when comparing a typical Indonesian horror film with a romantic comedy or religious drama of similar budget. This suggests that, as in Gray's research, the Indonesian horror genre's moral text engulfs the aesthetic or rational text. Yet it is also important to note here that the entwining of the moral and rational-realist text does not only occur with horror films. The lack of realistic or proper narrative logic is a common criticism of Indonesian films across various genres (Kristanto, 2004), particularly those narratives that do not follow the prevailing teleological and developmentalist logic that pervades much of contemporary public discourse in Indonesia. In other words, the rational text (plot and narrative) is in fact often a moral text in its own right, as certain narrative trajectories have specific ideological and moral implications. In Indonesia, popular discourses around Islamic modernities, as well as the fusion of religious and developmentalist ideologies, play a key role in blurring the distinction between the rational and the moral text. This leaves us with a far more complicated picture than Gray puts forward in the US case, which I will examine further in the next section.

Ultimately, given the many resonances between my own case and the work of Gray and others, there is a strong case for engaging with their theories. The existing work on anti-fandom undoubtedly enriches the analysis of these young Indonesian audiences' modes of engagement with the horror genre. At the same time, there are some important divergences, and in examining these, I propose some ways in which engagement with

different cultural contexts can in turn enrich anti-fandom theory specifically and cultural studies in general.

Cultural Studies in Southeast Asian Contexts

While there are certainly valuable insights that we can take from anti-fandom theories, there are also some important distinctions specific to the Indonesian context that complicate the view from US cultural studies. I will focus on two main issues here: firstly, the different methodological challenges involved when anti-fans are not a small minority group but rather a mainstream shared national sentiment; and secondly, how the role of the moral text in the Indonesian context can shed light on some of the blind spots of the Euro-American approach to cultural studies.

In his early theorization of anti-fandom, Gray (2003) points out that most fan studies projects likely start out simply as reception studies, but find it convenient to study fans as they guarantee an engaged commentary on the text. "Intentionally or not, audience research often equals fan research, as anti-fans and non-fans are ignored or assumed" (p. 64), and Gray challenges researchers to engage instead with these other viewers in order to create a more complete and nuanced picture of consumption. Yet during my own fieldwork I experienced quite the opposite methodological challenge: when it comes to Indonesian horror, anti-fans are not the "other" but rather the comfortable majority. In fact, even when I was not interested in pursuing the subject of horror, it was among the first topics raised in any discussion of contemporary Indonesian cinema. This forced me to take anti-fandom seriously from the outset—to look beyond what was being said and focus on the implications behind it, to expose the gaps between discourse and reality, and to investigate the way cultural capital and stereotypes are played out in anti-fan critiques.

Gray, Haig, and Harman and Jones all characterize their anti-fans one way or another as a small community or even a subculture. In contrast, I found myself conceptualizing Indonesian horror anti-fandom as a kind of shared national sensibility. Although the primary focus of my project was young middle-class university students, I interacted with a wide range of audiences. From Islamic boarding schools to Javanese villages, from evangelical prosperity churches to Buginese fishing communities and elite Jakartan malls, at the surface level, there was widespread mainstream condemnation of contemporary Indonesian horror. In fact, being an anti-fan seemed to be the only socially acceptable option throughout much of Indonesia. This has prompted me to speculate beyond existing anti-fan studies, which limit themselves to, say, the minutiae of a particular online forum. By engaging with the notion of anti-fandom on a national scale, we

have the opportunity to tease out wider issues of socio-political importance that are entwined with anti-horror critiques.

The other significant disjuncture between the Indonesian context and the conventions of US cultural studies lies in the different assumptions and approaches regarding morality, or the "moral text" as Gray terms it. Gray (2003) has suggested that studying anti-fan disapproval can offer media and cultural studies "meaningful re-entry points" for discussing quality, values, and expectations, particularly the ways in which everyday viewers' values interact with media consumption, use, and meaning —a discussion he claims rarely arises in cultural studies (p. 73). Elsewhere, he makes the apparently ground-breaking pronouncement that "the text, long considered the basic unit of aesthetics, may at times be solely or predominantly a moral unit instead" (2005, p. 844).

I find Gray's surprise here somewhat unexpected. Working in the Indonesian context, researchers have always been forced to come to terms with the text as a moral unit. This is a situation common to many postcolonial contexts, where ethics and moralities become important sites in the struggle to define contemporary national identities in the wake of the colonial encounter. Furthermore, it is impossible to lose sight of religion as a public and private reality of Indonesian lives. Around 88 percent of Indonesia's population of around 240 million self-identifies as Muslim. For them, as well as for significant minorities such as Hindus and Christians, religion is an important lens through which they interpret contemporary realities, including media products. This has become increasingly clear in the post-authoritarian context, with the power vacuum left by the collapse of Suharto's regime in 1998 increasingly filled by public morality discourses, perhaps most notably illustrated in the anti-pornography laws introduced in 2008 (Allen, 2009; Lindsay, 2010). Gray (2005) cites work by Barker et al. (2001) on the 1996 David Cronenberg film *Crash* to show how a film can pass from screen to the terrain of news and public debate on morality and the media, overloading expectations of the text and limiting the frames through which many viewers could make sense of it (as cited in Gray, 2005). In my own research on Indonesian films, these kinds of framing processes involving public debates over media and morality are always a given, and therefore, any such discussion is rarely considered radical.

Yet if we examine the bulk of Euro-American cultural and media studies, it is clear that morality and religion are largely absent as key theoretical concepts and are instead submerged beneath other more secular concerns and enquiries. As Baulch and Millie (2013) point out in their reflections on working at the intersection of area studies and cultural studies, "in classical cultural studies, religion has deferred to other modes of subjectivity

considered as key constituents of capitalist modernity: race, class and gender" (p. 234). Of course, these different approaches and focus points are shaped by the concerns of specific research contexts. Gray (2005), in his analysis of online anti-fandom in the US, notes that "all posters temper their comments somewhat, most with humor" (p. 849), in order to seem "less overtly moralistic" because of their awareness that "outright moral posturing may be considered decidedly uncool" (p. 849). In contrast, the rise of an increasingly performative style of popular public piety in Indonesia (Fealy & White, 2008; Subijanto, 2011) means that the opposite is true: to avoid making moral judgements is the "decidedly uncool" option in this case. In a context where religion, particularly Islam, manifests in fashion, pop songs, and celebrity culture, moral posturing can in fact signal a modern and trendy outlook. This situation problematizes the assumptions underpinning much Euro-American cultural studies. While there is nothing inherently wrong with a theory tailored to either of these specific sites of enquiry, any attempt to internationalize cultural studies requires an acknowledgment of diverse cultural contexts and therefore a more serious engagement with questions of morality and religious practice. Despite the "secular ideal underpinning the genesis and history of cultural studies" (Baulch & Millie, 2013, p. 235, it is undeniable that religious practice, religious authority and religious media remain ever-present facts of capitalist modernity, particularly in postcolonial contexts. Baulch and Millie further contend that coming to terms with religion is:

> [A] process more complex than simply applying staple cultural studies conceptual tools to existing structures and practices. It will also entail giving serious attention to spaces outside the 'approved' cultural studies structures, and recognizing the different historical and social realities that motivate the scholarly interventions produced within them. (p. 235)

This re-engagement with questions of religion and morality is one of the many areas in which what Ariel Heryanto (2013) has termed the "intimacies" between cultural studies and specific area studies can be theoretically fruitful. Pioneering initiatives such as the establishment of an Inter-Asia Cultural Studies community (see Chen, 1998; Ichiyo, 2010; Sakai, 2010) have reinforced the significance of re-evaluating cultural studies in Asian contexts, prompting reflections on the strengths and drawbacks of different scholarly approaches in different areas of the world. By attempting

to locate anti-horror sentiments among Indonesian audiences as a kind of anti-fandom, this article joins these important conversations.

Working at the intersection of area, media and cultural studies is a valuable endeavour, with lessons to offer both areas of enquiry. While insights from the Indonesian context can be helpful in expanding the horizons of cultural studies research, there is also much in US cultural studies that has been useful when examining the Indonesian case. Extended critical analysis of the nature of textuality and audience engagement rarely appears in the context of Indonesian studies, which has tended to prioritize formal political processes and structures as frames for viewing Indonesia (Baulch & Millie, 2013). Furthermore, as noted in this article's introduction on the horror genre, Indonesian media studies scholarship tend to focus on the production and content of texts, rather than the living text as it operates in day-to-day life. The works of Gray and others, therefore, offer important insights into these questions of audience and textuality. For Gray (2005), because a text can exist in "everyday talk," it becomes a "structure of feeling and a matrix of power, meaning, effects, and identity that can and frequently does separate itself from its mooring of the actual program as broadcast" (p. 843). Anti-fandom theory's analysis of the "multiple connections between fandom and anti-fandom, the moral and the emotional, the text, and ideals of the public and textual spheres" (p. 841) therefore offers an important framework for looking beyond the surface of media, representation and communication in the case of Indonesian horror films.

Locating Southeast Asian Horror

Returning to the specific question of Indonesian horror films, I will conclude with some brief reflections on how audiences position these films in relation to other film genres. Given the Indonesian horror genre is often defined in direct opposition to both "quality national cinema" and "foreign horror," it is worthwhile spending a moment examining what these kinds of definitions mean when locating Southeast Asian horror more broadly. *Horor asing* [foreign horror] or *horor dari luar* [horror from outside] is a broad category in Indonesia, encapsulating everything from Thai to Korean to Hollywood horror films. Horror devotees usually claim to prefer foreign horror films as they are less overtly pornographic, as is the case for Nita, who exclaimed, "I love horror! But not Indonesian horror… Indonesian horror is too open (in terms of sex)" (Nita, personal communication, June 10, 2013). Similarly, Ray said, "I watch horror (from) Thailand or Japan (because) it's more exciting and actually scary" (personal communication, September 10, 2013). Of course, individual tastes vary, with some respondents preferring Korean horror to Hollywood horror or expressing nostalgia for Indonesian

horror of previous eras. Yet audiences overall tend to construct a clear dichotomy between local and foreign offerings. There emerges a somewhat monolithic notion of what foreign films are, which does not pay much heed to distinctions between East and Southeast Asia. This relates to the often insular nature of Indonesian worldviews, whereby ideas about what lies beyond the borders are often hazy, and the Indonesian "self" is defined against all others which are generalized into a mass outside (see Heryanto, 1999; Schlehe, 2013). As such, it is difficult to "locate" Southeast Asian horror in the imagination of Indonesian audiences, for the very category of "Southeast Asia" as a community of belonging carries little salience (Bonura & Sears, 2007). Despite increasing transnational flows of people and media products, the Indonesian horror genre remains a remarkably situated phenomenon, serving very specific functions in local discourses of morality and taste. Indonesian horror, as the genre that local audiences love to hate, has become a site for performing critical condemnation and reinforcing stereotypes and divisions of cultural capital within the specific Indonesian context.

My attempt to locate anti-horror sentiment among Indonesian audiences as a form of anti-fandom has prompted an interactive encounter between US cultural studies and the Indonesian context. I have built a case for critically engaging with—and if necessary, adapting—cultural studies theories and approaches in the Southeast Asian context. Put simply, we should not only be interested in what a particular theory can tell us about a situation but also in what a particular situation or cultural context can tell us about the theory in question. During the course of my fieldwork, I came to understand that, for my respondents, modes of receiving and appreciating Indonesian horror go beyond simple rejection and disavowal, and the works of Gray and others have been highly useful in illuminating how textual pleasure and repulsion can be inextricably linked. Behind dislike, after all, there are always expectations—what kind of story deserves media time and space, what morality or aesthetics a text should display, and what we think others should watch or read. Studying the anti-fan is, therefore, a way to study the expectations and values that structure media consumption; thus, anti-fandom can be a useful framework for audience research everywhere.

Conversely, some of the divergences apparent in the Indonesian case point to ways in which research into different cultural contexts can challenge and enrich the existing theoretical and methodological conventions of cultural studies. Taking the role of religion and public morality more seriously is one among many areas in which working at this intersection of area, media and cultural studies can prove fruitful and contribute to new research directions.

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