

– BOOK REVIEW –

MASKULINITAS:

CULTURE, GENDER AND POLITICS IN INDONESIA

by Marshall Clark

Monash University Press, Caulfield, 2010. 192 pp. Paperback. RRP\$38.

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Reviewed by

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There are few topics on which one can ever hope to read everything that has been published. Masculinity in Indonesia is possibly one such subject, though. While there are a few articles and chapters on the topic, and it is threaded through more general work on gender and Indonesia, Marshall Clark's *Maskulinitas: Culture, Gender and Politics in Indonesia* can claim to be the first full length book on Indonesian masculinity. This alone makes Clark's contribution an important one.

Maskulinitas is divided into six substantive chapters, with an additional introduction and conclusion. It is a short book; excluding references it is just 150 pages long. The introduction and first chapter set the sense of the monograph, exploring the cultural landscapes in which Indonesian masculinity is developed. Chapter Two examines the images of the masculine in the historical novels of the well-known Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Chapter Three explores the reinvention of masculine archetypes through the polyphonic fiction of novelist Ayu Utami. Alternative masculinities are assessed in Chapter Four through the landmark film of Indonesia's Generation X, *Kuldesak*. Chapter Five uses the films of Rudi Soedjarwo to look at men, violence and horror. As this chapter argues, 'hegemonic masculinity is as strong as ever in post-New Order Indonesian society and culture, and, as a result, misogynistic and homophobic images and narratives are rife' (p.147). Finally, scandal, transgression and the politics of the erotic are explored in Chapter Six through the poetry of Binhad Nurrohmat.

Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of the book is that it undertakes a rigorous assessment of presentations of largely heterosexual men, men's practices

and masculinities in the Indonesian world of literature and mass media. It is no surprise to find that these industries are dominated by men (p.75). Clark shows that masculine violence – be it domestic, political or religious, personalized or nationalized – appears set to continue unchecked in a country already racked by violence, on and off screen (p. 100). Indeed male violence ‘can almost be considered as a normative response to the shame and humiliation of poverty, unemployment and associated feelings of hopelessness’ (p. 107). Discussions of parody as undermining yet simultaneously affirming masculinity (p. 84), and analysis of the ‘monstrous feminine’ (p.107), are compelling.

For me, perhaps the most interesting chapter focused on the 1998 film *Kuldesak* (Cul-de-sac), directed by Nan T Achnas, Mira Lesmana, Rizal Mantovani and Riri Riza. Clark suggests that there are images of a ‘new’ man entering Indonesian popular culture through films like *Kuldesak*. A central character in *Kuldesak*, Andre, presents a view of dominant masculinity under attack. Indeed, the vision of ‘men as weak’ has become somewhat of a counter discourse evident in Indonesian film since the fall of President Suharto’s authoritarian New Order regime in 1998. As Clark notes, ‘By escaping dominant masculinity and potentially threatening demands of feminism, Andre presents a rebellious [Kurt] Cobain-like model of alternative masculinity’ (p. 81). But Clark then questions whether Andre’s alternative masculinity really does subvert the centrality of Indonesia’s patriarchal order? Or, Clark asks, does Andre fall into the same trap as some feminists, whose subversions against the masculine status quo are produced and restrained by the structures of power through which emancipation is fought and, therefore, as Bourdieu suggests, are just as likely to perpetuate the social relations of domination between the sexes (p. 81)? Clark suspects it is the latter. Clark also reveals that the makers of *Kuldesak* seem to be searching ‘furiously for a way to undermine the constructions and patterns that produce and reproduce patriarchal domination’ (p. 81). As Clark highlights, men too are victims of patriarchy.

Kuldesak’s depiction of homosexuality includes the first man-to-man kissing scene in the history of Indonesian cinema, which for Clark is ‘surely a reflection of the growing visibility of the Indonesian gay movement’ (p. 84). Yet, as Clark points out, the scene was deleted when the film was released in Indonesia, a reminder that, in spite of a new openness towards homosexuality, homophobia runs deep (p.84). But, revealing the contrary nature of censorship in Indonesia, the film *Arisan!* (2003) depicted oral sex and homoerotic kissing without censure (p. 92). The discussion of *Kuldesak* suggests for Clark that the ‘contemporary image of the Indonesian male straddles outdated and archetypal images of the Indonesian man and alternative or non-traditional masculinities.

The alternatives, as seen in recent fiction, television advertisements and cinema, are contradictory and ambiguous' (p.86).

While this book makes a sorely needed contribution to the field of gender studies in Indonesia, I have to admit to expecting a different type book when I started reading. The subtitle, *Culture, Gender and Politics in Indonesia* gives the impression of a work grounded in a more anthropological field. Rather, and originally somewhat disappointingly for me, it is a textual analysis of representations of largely middle class, urban Javanese masculinity. Perhaps a subtitle reflecting the literary and cinematic base of the book would resolve this misreading. Nevertheless, the book is a great contribution to understandings of masculinity in Indonesia and I look forward to further studies that continue to bring to life meanings and expressions of masculinity in archipelago.

LOCALIZING ASIA IN AOTEAROA

Edited by

Paola Voci and Jacqueline Leckie

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The Asian community contributes to New Zealand diversity while it itself is also diverse, as the contributors to this volume demonstrate. The editors stress that national labels such as ‘Chinese’ or ‘Indian’ embrace a set of shared values and common concerns at one level, but with different goals and unequal accomplishments that indicate unsolved tensions (p.9). They use the term ‘localizing’ to draw attention to the process by which communities face the ongoing challenge of constantly negotiating their place in New Zealand.

Contributors present their views of localizing in three genres: discussion of distinctive features that symbolise identity, commentaries on the presence of Asian communities in New Zealand, and personal histories. Half the contributors draw on their Asian backgrounds to illustrate the adjustments necessary to find a place in the new land, while the others are New Zealanders who have their own perspectives on the history and cultural aspects of the Asian population.

The three genres are well covered in Ruth DeSouza’s narrative. She discusses her own Goan experience of a precarious position in ‘the colonial sandwich’ (p.225) initially under Portuguese rule on the Indian continent, and later in Tanzania and Kenya, and more recently in Aotearoa. When Asians were expelled from Uganda as ‘surplus to requirements’, her family decided to seek the economic and educational opportunities that New Zealand offered. The New Zealand community of Goans is a small but cohesive part, she argues, of a third group in New Zealand, after Pakeha and Maori, that consists of Pacific Islanders and Asians. She thoughtfully addresses how these ‘new Asians’ consider, but

poorly understand, the Treaty of Waitangi, and questions whether migrants being accountable to Maori will merit inclusion in this plural nation (p.227).

Distinctive features of specific Asian cultures are introduced in terms of socio-religious adjustments, language and leisure/sport. The complex and multifarious identities of Muslim women from a range of Asian nations are revealed in Dobson's interviews; those identities emerged as part of wider processes revealing 'intersecting aspects of faith, ethnicity, gender and community' in response to other people's perspectives (p.202). Japanese taiko drumming performances, according to Johnson, offer a transcultural music experience in the new land that 'maintains Japan as its cultural home, regardless of where and by whom it is played' (Johnson 146). Similarly a history of Indian participation in sport serves to create collective memories, while also bringing players into the public spotlight (Watson, Chap.2).

The media provides an important channel for increasing awareness of Asia and Asians in New Zealand. Voci examines three Chinese documentaries that, she argues, complicate homogenizing strategies and distorting stereotypes in NZ. A greater exposure to Chinese adjustment is offered in Alison Wong's brief personal history of writing her first novel, *As the Earth Turns Silver*. For Sikhs in New Zealand, balancing competing identities as 'world citizens' was a key finding of Singh and Singh's interviews (p.215). A critical review of 'Inv-Asian' articles in the print media between 1993 and 2003 that monitored the portrayal of immigrants from Asia suggests the need for more detailed research. Butcher and Spoonley's analysis of a particular article in *North and South* magazine provides an example of how Asian immigrants have been criminalized and 'demonized and scape-goated as a problematic "other"' (p.112) in the press, a process of localizing that has decreased only slightly.

Historical views of the settlement by Chinese and Indian communities in New Zealand include examples of that stereotyping at the government level (Ip and Leckie, Chap.9). Considered 'sojourners,' Chinese were subjected to a range of discriminatory measures that kept them on the edge of New Zealand society. Indians who arrived 'from another colony' were subject to other restrictions that reflected government policies to restrict Asian immigration. Recent exhibitions of Chinese and Japanese art in New Zealand may only broach the earlier barriers to perceiving 'non-European' art forms but they contribute to developing local awareness of cultural differences (Bell, Chap.6). Sharing artistic and biographical experiences provides Duppati and others with a means to indicate repercussions in New Zealand to identity and human condition (Chap.5). They contribute to the ebb and flow over the 'sands of Manukau har-

bour' that Mayo draws on to symbolize the process of constant reconstruction of Asian and Pacific pasts (Chap.2).

The volume provides useful reading and bibliographies for a wide audience as well as for students in Asian Studies courses. Those following developments in multi-culturalism may find many of the references too oblique, except for De-Souza's thoughtful account. The lack of a Maori perspective on the Inv-Asian suggests that 'localizing' has been only partially covered. The introduction to this volume needs a tabulation of the growth of the various Asian communities over the last 50 years. A bi-cultural consideration of how the new Asian arrivals find a place amongst New Zealand's diverse population will be welcome in a follow-up volume. Such a volume needs to include those Asian cultural ethnicities not included here: Thai, Taiwanese, Malaysian, Filipino, Korean, and Indonesian communities contribute significantly today to the 'localizing' process, as they participate in awareness raising.

It is important that the label 'Asian' become more meaningful in terms of the diversity within Asia, not only for Chinese and Indian communities in New Zealand. Asia has become very significant for New Zealand businessmen approaching Japanese or Malay (or other) clients, as well as for New Zealanders encountering Asians in their everyday life. While Indian and Chinese restaurants are not as ubiquitous as in Britain, they offer a taste of diversity that takes Kiwis out of an earlier gastronomic space and leaves new impressions, so that the experience may be repeated – and lead to further travel, if only in the imagination. New Zealand is moving ever closer to Asia in many ways.