CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis offers a feminist cultural analysis of the Indonesian popular television serial (sinetron) *Misteri Gunung Merapi* (Mysteries of Mount Merapi). Since it was first broadcast by the Indosiar television station in 1998, it has ranked among the top-rating television programs in Indonesia. Its success has coincided with the fall of the New Order era in Indonesia, and I seek to understand the significance of its success in this era of rapid economic, social and cultural transformation. I am especially interested in the way the sinetron engages with changes in the gender order and female identities. However, as I argue in the chapters that follow, it is necessary to place these changes in a broader context of cultural change, and to analyse the sinetron in the context of the globalisation of the television industry. Thus, my detailed examination of this cultural text will be situated within various cultural and generic contexts.

Background and Significance of the Research

In Indonesia, television is a powerful sign of modernity, reinterpreted from its Western origins and refashioned to accommodate local needs.[1] Sinetrons play an important role in Indonesian popular culture. They are a local variant on the Western 'soap opera' or the Latin American 'telenovela'. The word 'sinetron' is an acronym of "sinematografi and elektronik", electronic cinematography. 'Electronic' refers to the film being recorded electronically on videotape rather than celluloid film. Originally single-screening films made for television, sinetrons are most often screened in serial form, in episodes broadcast at a regular

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[1] R. Anderson Sutton, "Local, Global, or National: Popular Music and Indonesian Television," http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/mpi/workshop98/papers/sutton.htm1998, (accessed 13 January 2006).

time every day or every week. Or they may be a series of self contained dramas with the same characters and setting. Thus, they attract loyal regular viewers who come to expect familiar characters and certain styles of production. The episodes are only subplots that constitute the main plot, which continues endlessly, like soaps. In the viewers' imagination there are many stories even though the one main story has not yet ended. Although one episode runs for about 50-55 minutes, this could take about three weeks to broadcast, depending on the number of advertisements inserted into it. The more popular the sinetron, the longer slots for advertisements and thus the more weeks needed to fully screen one episode. To gain more profit, *Misteri Gunung Merapi* was produced on VCD format, however not all episodes are yet available in this format. I have used these recorded episodes in my analysis reported in the thesis.

The sinetron genre has several sub-genres, such as drama, comedy, mystery and action but these characteristically overlap. *Misteri Gunung Merapi* is classified by Indosiar, the network which broadcasts it, as *kolosal-laga*[2] (colossal action), and I will use this category to locate this particular sinetron within the action sub-genres. This will help me to look at how the particular action sub-genre in *Misteri Gunung Merapi* is developed and how it relates to action genres in other global cinema and television productions. The category of *sinetron kolosal laga* (a 'colossal action sinetron') signifies that stylized fighting is dominant ('action'), and it has a very large cast of characters ('colossal'). The term *sinetron kolosal laga* has also come to signify historical or imagined events with mythic, legendary, or heroic figures, elaborate and panoramic settings, and extravagant costumes, providing a succession of splendours and spectacles. In all these ways it is close to the Western genre of 'epic film', which is characterized by being "very large in scale", " extreme in length", and telling a heroic tale from the past.[3]

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[2] I translate *laga* as 'action' as the concept of *laga* in sinetron refers to the dramatic plot which involves good characters combating evil ones, and also because this kind of sinetron has many characteristics of Hollywood 'action movie'.

[3] Djoymi Baker, ""The Illusion of Magnitude": Adapting the Epic from Film to Television," *Senses of Cinema*, (2006), http://www.senseofcinema.com/contents/06/41/adapting-epic-film-tv.html.

The use of historical and legendary figures enables another aspect of its appeal, in addition to spectacular action. It represents the past to the present and in doing so it can offer variant interpretations of national identity. *Misteri Gunung Merapi* is set in the seventeenth century, when the pre-colonial region which eventually became Indonesia was starting to be brought forcibly under Dutch control, initially mostly on Java. Although it presents a historical background of the Central Javanese kingdom of Mataram under the rule of Sultan Agung and his 1626 attack on Batavia, the relatively recently established, named and fortified trading centre of the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC), the sinetron does not present an accurate representation of that history. It is fictional and almost all the characters are fictive. In this thesis I will be arguing that, in this sinetron, history and tradition are presented more as cultural memory rather than as an authentic record. It is more, as Anderson has argued, a "desire to see the past through contemporary eyes".[4]

Although the sinetron takes traditional Java as its setting, it does not communicate through a uniquely Javanese cultural perspective. Instead, *Misteri Gunung Merapi* utilises many aspects of the traditions of other ethnic cultures in Indonesia. As Indonesia is ethnically diverse, forcing a Javanese ideology in commercial entertainment is likely to be similar to business suicide. These multi-cultural elements are combined with modern aspects of entertainment for, in order to survive in the context of economic globalisation, a producer of mass entertainment needs to be able to reinvent the local, but communicate in global terms. Yet reinventing 'tradition' is tricky in such a diverse society. In this thesis, I want to explore how this particular sinetron has reinvented Javanese history and tradition for its national audiences.

Misteri Gunung Merapi basically tells a story of an evil and powerful witch, Mak Lampir, who tries to spread evil among human beings. Her efforts are opposed by Sembara, a questing hero. The story is unique among sinetrons in

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[4] Steve Anderson, "History TV and Popular Memory," in *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age*, ed. Gary R. Edgerton and Peter C. Rollins (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2001).

presenting the immortal Mak Lampir as a central and a very powerful female figure. This opens the sinetron for a feminist examination of gender and power. This thesis explores the representation of several powerful women in the sinetron and investigates how the show engages recent women's issues in Indonesia in the post-New Order era. What do the fighting women in the sinetron tell us about contemporary attitudes towards female power? If the widely-held gender ideology is changing, accompanying other social and cultural transformations, does this influence the way the women are represented in the sinetron? It is necessary to examine the cultural context from which the fighting women have emerged.

Thesis Objectives

To summarise the previous discussion, the main objectives of this thesis are:

1. To identify the main forces of cultural transformation in contemporary Indonesia, in particular, changes that have occurred since the fall of the New Order regime.
2. To examine the impact of globalisation and privatisation on the television industry, in particular the development of sinetron, and what makes for popularity among Indonesian audiences.
3. To analyse how *Misteri Gunung Merapi* negotiates and draws on global and local traditions for its national audiences.
4. In particular, to examine how the sinetron constructs powerful women and the contexts from which they emerge.
5. To investigate how the sinetron negotiates between global conventions of filming the female body and the dominant morality in Indonesia today.
6. To answer the question of what its representations of active female heroes say about Indonesian attitudes and beliefs regarding gender and power.

Literature Review

I need to locate my study of gender and power in the sinetron *Misteri Gunung Merapi* within the context of gender studies in Indonesian mass media.

Most feminist scholars writing in the 1990s on Indonesian women, such as Blackburn, Robinson, Sen, Budianta, Aripurnami, Suryakusuma and Sunindyo have been interested in researching women's issues in relation to state ideology. Some have been concerned with the women's movement in its dealings with the state, such as the relationship between women and the state,[5] gendered violence,[6] gender relations,[7] gender roles,[8] and how the state has controlled women's sexuality.[9] There have also been examinations into the wider context of gender relations in Indonesia, such as gender ideology implementation at school,[10] gender roles in the military system,[11] Javanese women's economic resources and social relations,[12] ambiguity of gender and power among the Javanese merchant class,[13] and husband and wife relationships in Javanese kampong.[14] Most have agreed that the New Order had set up a gendered and integrated ideology which defined

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[5] Susan Blackburn, "Women and Citizenship in Indonesia," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 34, no. 2 (1999).

[6] _____, "Gender Violence and the Indonesian Political Transition," *Asian Studies Review* 23, no. 4 (1999).

[7] _____, "Gender Relations in Indonesia: What Women Want," in *Indonesia Today: Challenges of History*, ed. Grayson Lloyd and Shannon Smith (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asia Studies, 2001).

[8] Kathryn Robinson, "Indonesian Women: From Order Baru to Reformasi," in *Women in Asia: Tradition, Modernity and Globalisation*, ed. L Edwards and M Roces (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 2000).

[9] Julia I. Suryakusuma, *Sex, Power and Nation: An Anthology of Writings, 1979-2003* (Jakarta: Metafor Publishing, 2004).

[10] Lynette Parker, "Engendering School Children in Bali," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 3, no. 3 (1997).

[11] Saraswati Sunindyo, "When Earth Is Female and the Nation Is Mother: Gender, the Armed Forces, and Nationalism in Indonesia," *Feminist Review* 58, no. 1 (1998).

[12] Ward Keeler, "Speaking of Gender in Java," in *Power and Difference; Gender in Island Southeast Asia*, ed. J Atkinson and S Errington (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990).

[13] Suzanne Brenner, *The Domestication of Desire: Women, Wealth, and Modernity in Java* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).

[14] Norma Sullivan, *Masters and Managers: A Study of Gender Relations in Urban Java*, Women in Asia Publication Series (St. Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 1994).

Indonesian women as subordinate to Indonesian men within the Indonesian family and the Indonesian state. More recently studies of the changes for women since 1998 have begun to appear, for example Adamson's study of Muslim women activists in Java,[15] Budianta's study of how Indonesian women redefine the meaning of democracy,[16] Blackburn's attempt to identify what Indonesian women want,[17] and various studies of new definitions of sexuality, either heterosexual or gay and lesbian.[18] I have drawn on these studies for the background to my analysis, especially in Chapters 2, 9 and 10.

Most researchers on entertainment in the New Order era raised the issue of the restrictive ideological controls on both traditional performances and television programs. They were claimed to be free, but only under terms set by the government. These studies add depth to the analysis of post-New Order changes that I and others can offer.

There have been some major research studies on gender in Indonesian media, including gender discourse in public spaces, print media, entertainment, and advertising. Most have focused on the construction of images that assume a gender gap and the minimal participation of women in the public sphere, such as Soemandoyo's findings in his research on gender discourse on television news. He has found that although now some important administrative positions in media are occupied by women this has not changed gender bias in mass media

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[15] Clarisa Adamson, "Gendered Anxieties: Islam, Women's Rights, and Moral Hierarchy in Java," *Anthropological Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (2007); Saskia Eleonora Wieringa, "Islamization in Indonesia: Women Activists' Discourses," *Signs* 32, no. 1 (2006).

[16] Melani Budianta, "Plural Identities: Indonesian Women's Redefinition of Democracy in the Post-Reformasi Era," *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affair* 36, no. 1 (2002).

[17] Blackburn, "Gender Relations in Indonesia: What Women Want."

[18] Evelyn Blackwood, "Tombois in West Sumatra: Constructing Masculinity and Erotic Desire," *Cultural Anthropology* 13, no. 4 (1998); Tom Boellstorff, "Between Religion and Desire: Being Muslim and Gay in Indonesia," *American Anthropologist* 107, no. 4 (2005); Linda Rae Bennett, "Indonesia Youth, Love Magic and the in/Visibility of Sexual Desire," *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 37, no. 1 (2003); Kathryn Robinson and Iwu Dwisetyani Utomo, "Introduction," *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affair* 37, no. 1 (2003).

production.[19] Focusing on advertisements on print media, Sen has studied the representation of working women and their participation in the public sphere.[20] Meanwhile, Brenner has focused on the representation of women and the family in the popular print media to reveal the imagined transition from tradition to modernity.[21] Attracted to the number of advertisements of whitening products, Prabasmoro has analysed whitening soap advertisements to explore the meaning of white in relation to class, race and gender.[22] The main criticism of Indonesian media is that it has always strengthened gender stereotypes. The main findings of researchers on various media, print and electronic, produced during the New Order were compiled in two books, *Wanita dan Media: Konstruksi Ideologi Gender dalam Ruang Publik Orde Baru* [Women and Media: Gender Ideology Construction in the New Order Public Sphere][23] and *Eksplorasi Gender di Ranah Jurnalisme dan Hiburan* [Gender Exploration in Journalism and Entertainment].[24] The all-pervasive gender discrimination can be seen in films, sinetron, advertisements, jingles, videoclips, news broadcasting, and station identities like news broadcasters.

Most feminist researchers on sinetron have focused on the image of women in the New Order era and how the state ideology dictated the way the producers could construct women. Aripurnami looked at the Indonesian sinetron broadcast by the state national broadcaster TVRI in 1980s and concluded that there was a requirement that they should present the theme of the good woman as

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[19] Priyo Soemandoyo, *Wacana Gender & Layar Televisi: Studi Perempuan Dalam Pemberitaan Televisi Swasta [Gender Discourse and Television Screen: Women's Study in Private Television News]*, Cet. 1. ed. (Yogyakarta: LP3Y dan Ford Foundation, 1999).

[20] Krishna Sen, "Indonesian Women at Work: Reframing the Subject," in *Gender and Power in Affluent Asia*, ed. Krishna Sen and Maila Stivens (London: Routledge, 1994).

[21] Suzanne Brenner, "On the Public Intimacy of the New Order," *Indonesia* 67 (1999).

[22] Aquarini Priyatna Prabasmoro, *Becoming White: Representasi Ras, Kelas, Femininitas Dan Globalitas Dalam Iklan Sabun [Becoming White: Race, Class, Femininity and Globalization Representation in the Soap Advertisements]* (Yogyakarta: Jalasutra, 2003).

[23] Idi Subandy Ibrahim and Hanif Suranto, *Wanita Dan Media: Konstruksi Ideologi Gender Dalam Ruang Publik Orde Baru [Women and Media: Gender Ideology Construction in the New Order Public Sphere]* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 1998).

[24] Ashadi Siregar and others, *Eksplorasi Gender Di Ranah Jurnalism Dan Hiburan [Gender Exploration in Journalism and Entertainment]* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Galang, 2000).

a domestic person and that these shows presented "a stereotype of women as dependent, irrational, emotional, passive and obedient". Further, she charged that these sinetron were actually "a role model which informed people about what women were and who they should be, depressed the spirit and restricted women's freedom".[25] A similar finding has been reached by Sunindyo in her study of a number of sinetron produced and broadcast around 1987-1988; that gender discourse was not only implemented in everyday life but also represented in television entertainment. She found that women in sinetron were constructed as *ibu* (mother or mother-figure) or in the context of family. However, unlike the construction of women in Indonesian cinema of 1980s, women in the sinetron, such as *Apa yang Kau Cari Adinda* (What are you looking for Adinda), *Karina,* and *Wanita-wanita* (Women) do not punish the prostitute or the divorced wife.[26] Further work on the construction of female characters in sinetron carried out by Wardhana (2000) identified the negative images of the *ronggeng* (paid dancer or singer) as sexual seducer, the wife unsatisfied with her husband's income, the teenage girl as *perek* (with loose morals), the fussy mother-in-law, or the finicky mother. He also questioned the creators of the sinetron about the representation of powerful women either as spirits or as only pseudo-human beings.[27] My thesis will ask to what extent these stereotypes have shifted.

In terms of popular cinema Sen argued that the New Order ideology, which defined women "as primarily mothers and wives," guided film production during this era. She noted that working women were criticised by blaming them as the cause of juvenile delinquency or pre-marital pregnancy. When the woman worked and the man did the household duties, the situation was criticised as

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[25] Sita Aripurnami, "A Feminist Comment on the Sinetron Presentation of Indonesian Women," in *Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia*, ed. Laurie J. Sears (Durham: Duke University, 1996), 254.

[26] Saraswati Sunindyo, "Wacana Gender Di Tvri: Antara Hegemoni Kolonialisme Dan Hollywood [Gender Discourse in Tvri: Between Hegemony of Colonialism and Hollywood]," in *Wanita Dan Media: Konstruksi Idiologi Gender Dalam Ruang Publik Orde Baru [Women and Media: Gender Ideology Construction in the New Order Public Sphere]* ed. Idi Subandy Ibrahim and Hanif Suranto (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 1998).

[27] Veven Sp Wardhana, ed., *Perempuan Dalam Sinetron Indonesia: Petaka Atau Perkasa [Woman in Indonesian Sinetron: Catastrophe or Disaster]*, Eksplorasi Gender Di Ranah Jurnalisme Dan Hiburan [Gender Exploration in the Journalism and Entertainment] (Yogyakarta: Galang Printika, 2000).

Zaman Edan ("Crazy Times"), a popular comedy film made in 1978. As might be predicted this film concluded with "the restoration of the proper social and natural roles of man and woman".[28]   In relation to gender construction, Sen noted that femininity is represented through the portrayal of women as silent and passive. When the woman was pictured as a vocal, active, smart and powerful, she was depicted as a prostitute. But once she decided to be a housewife, she became 'quiet' and 'speechless'.[29] The image of femininity which is dominant in most Indonesian films, according to Aripurnami, is "stupid, quick to cry, bitchy, fussy, and objects to be enjoyed for their beauty and bodies".[30]   These dominant cinematic images are also part of the context in which *Misteri Gunung Merapi* is produced.

Although an analysis of the Indonesian Film Festival of 2006 showed that 80% of 162 titles of the *film cerita lepas televisi*[31] (television films) were about women's exploitation such as domestic violence,[32] this does not necessarily apply to serial or series sinetron. In this thesis I will argue that, although *Misteri Gunung Merapi* is categorised as an action sinetron, normally a 'male genre', it does not exploit violence against women by always putting women in a powerless position.

Warrior women in television and film are now globally popular. Many Western feminist scholars consider the emergence of warrior women as the answer to their prayer of equal representation between male and female. They have analysed the representation of girl heroes in terms of "a new stereotype of

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[28] Krishna Sen, *Indonesian Cinema: Framing the New Order* (London ; Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Zed Books, 1994), 138.

[29] Ibid., 141-44.

[30] Sita Aripurnami, "Whiny, Finicky, Bitchy, Stupid and 'Revealing': The Image of Women in Indonesian Films," in *Indonesian Women: The Jouney Continues*, ed. Mayling Oey-Gardiner and Carla Bianpoen (Canberra: The Australian National University Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies 2000), 57.

[31] FTV (Film Televisi) or *film cerita lepas televisi* or *sinetron lepas televisi*: produced as single features thus different from serialised or series sinetron.

[32] "Kualitas FTV Tidak Meningkat [FTV Quality Does Not Improve]," *Suara Pembaharuan*, 18 October 2006, http://www.suarapembaruan.com/last/index.html, (accessed 3 May 2007).

ideal femininity",[33] as "a global entertainment commodity",[34] and as "girl power".[35] They have considered the comparative construction of these female figures across space, format and theories,[36] gender and the image of female action heroes,[37] postfeminism and the representation of female action-adventure heroes,[38] the representation of the female body,[39] and sexuality in these films.[40] I will consider the relevance of these feminist analyses to my reading of *Misteri Gunung Merapi* in Chapter 9.

There has been relatively little research on women as sinetron viewers. However, Nilan has examined the phenomenon of Balinese women watching sinetron. She considered that the domestic space of home and the problems of personal relationships particularly in the family were emphasized and validated as female concerns in sinetron. Futher, the Balinese viewers were able to add to their

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[33] Elizabeth Hills, "From 'Figurative Males' to Action Heroines: Further Thoughts on Active Women in the Cinema," *Screen* 40, no. 1 (1999); Susan Hopkins, *Girl Heroes: The New Force in Popular Culture*, Media.Culture Series (Annandale, N.S.W.: Pluto Press, 2002); Sherrie A. Inness, *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

[34] Mary Grigsby, "Superheroine Meets Barbie: Global Entertainment Commodity Comes to United States," *Journal of Popular Culture* 32, no. 1 (1998).

[35] Victoria Newsom, "Young Females as Superheroes: Superheroines in the Animated Sailor Moon," *Femspec: an Interdisclipinary Feminist Journal* 5, no. 2, http://www.femspec.org/samples/sailormoon.html.

[36] Angela Waldrop, "The Portrayal of the Highkicking Action Heroine: Across Space, Format, and Theories," *Latent Image*, (2001), http://pages.emerson.edu/organizations/fas/latent_image/issues/2001-05/heroine.htm.

[37] Douglass Eby, "Warrior Women on Screen," Talent Development Resources, http://talentdevelop.com/wwos.html2003, (accessed 25 October 2006); Rikke Schubart, "Woman with a Gun Does Not Signify Man with a Phallus," *Nordicom* 13, (1998), http://www.nordicom.gu.se/common/publ_pdf/38_schubart.pdf#search=%22%22woman%20with%20a%20gun%20does%20not%20signify%20man%20with%20a%20Phallus%22%22; Isabel Santaularia, "'He Comes Back Badder and Bigger Than Ever!': Adapting the Masculine and Negotiating the Feminine in Trasure-Hunting Adventure Narratives.," *Links & Letters* 8, (2001), http://www.bib.uab.es/pub/linksandletters/11337397n8p83.pdf.

[38] Elyce Rae Helford, "Postfeminism and the Female Action-Adventure Hero: Positioning Tank Girl ", (1999), http://www.msu.edu/~dhw/spring2006/eng310d/tankgirl.pdf.

[39] Dawn Heinecken, *The Warrior Women of Television: A Feminist Cultural Analysis of the New Female Body in Popular Media*, Intersections in Communications and Culture ; Vol. 7 (New York Peter Lang, 2003).

[40] Jeffrey A. Brown, "Gender, Sexuality, and Toughness: The Bad Girls of Action Film and Comic Books," in *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Harvey R. Greenberg and others, "The Many Faces Of "Thelma and Louis"," *Film Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (1991-1992).

real life expertise in dealing with their own problems of men, family, and economic circumstances outside the fictional world. For them, watching sinetron "was not just an exercise in developing critical skills of textual analysis, but adds to and thereby changes, the repertoire of possibilities for fruitful analysis of the dilemmas characteristics of women's lives".[41] This research supports Fiske's view of audiences actively using the repertoire of images and stories from popular entertainment to make sense of their own lives and pleasures. I do not take up these issues of the gendered audiences. As my study is principally concerned with cultural and social transformation, the most appropriate method is to examine the representation itself, the text of *Misteri Gunung Merapi* and its contexts.

Theory and Methodology

This thesis applies a multidisciplinary study to sinetron. In order to carry out the kind of analysis that I believed was needed for *Misteri Gunung Merapi*, I have had to learn to be multidisciplinary. I have tried to expand my expertise from literary studies into media and cultural studies, and gender/women's studies as well. I agree with the continuing value of the trend, recently pointed out by Boddy, that television studies, which emerged in the 1980s, had evolved a "confluence of film studies, political economy, feminism, and cultural studies".[42] I have learned from film studies the techniques of analysing image, sound and narrative. In the chapters on the television industry and the production of *Misteri Gunung Merapi*, I have drawn from the political economy of television. Cultural studies offer various perspectives on the interrelationships between television products, social conditions and cultural values and attitudes. And feminism informs my questions about the representation of women and gender relations and their significance.

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[41] Pam Nilan, "Gendered Dreams: Women Watching Sinetron (Soap Operas) on Indonesian TV," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 29, no. 84 (2001).

[42] William Boddy, "In Focus: The Place of Television Studies," *Cinema Journal* 45, no. 1 (2005): 79.

Television is a complex phenomenon that requires a number of theoretical approaches. Dow has argued that the television text does not exist in a vacuum separated from "its historical, cultural, and televisual milieux".[43] She has also argued that television "works rhetorically to negotiate social issues: to define them, to represent them, and, ultimately, to offer visions of their meanings and implications".[44] Dow described "television entertainment as serving a similar function of interpreting social change and managing cultural beliefs".[45]

Television is important in the life of Indonesians as they spend a lot of time watching it.[46] A story in a sinetron need not have any direct relationship with reality. It is fiction. However, a story in a sinetron is often a cracked mirror of reality, reflecting back an impression of reality which has been amended through ideological filters. To be popular, the production team of a sinetron has to be able to read the taste of the audience and create a sinetron that includes some current and popular issues such as the current emotional climate of society, fears, hopes, anxieties and desires.[47] As a product of culture, sinetrons are cultural texts, cultural statements which communicate to huge audiences.

Entertainment such as sinetron is thus closely related to ideology. During the New Order government, sinetron were expected to glorify the state ideology of 'National Development'. Women's role in the prescribed national purpose was to be performed from within their family context and their rights were protected in that context. However, the ideologically dominant image of women can change with the changing of the social and cultural environment, and a film or a sinetron could be a relevant cultural object to study in the search for symptoms of change in woman's image. As a serial sinetron continues over an extended period of years, it is likely to be more valuable for an exploration of possible changes than would be a single film.

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[43] Bonnie J. Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), xiv.

[44] Ibid., xv.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Nilan, "Gendered Dreams: Women Watching Sinetron (Soap Operas) on Indonesian TV," 1.

[47] Jonathan Bignell, *An Introduction to Television Studies* (London: Routledge, 2004), 21.

I will argue in this thesis that although this particular sinetron, *Misteri Gunung Merapi,* is an entertainment and its audience experiences it mainly as a form of escapism, it can be used for a serious study of contemporary cultural change. I will argue that the sinetron can be interpreted as a witness of the larger social and cultural processes, even, in some respects, as a critique of past and present attitudes and values. In this respect, my thesis draws on theoretical debates about the nature of commercial popular culture and its relationship to social change.

There are two main approaches to commercial popular culture. One, represented by Kuntowijoyo's recent work, argues that popular culture objectifies and alienates people because it depends on the market. It only reflects the myths, beliefs or dreams of the society in its production of cultural commodities.[48] In contrast, Fiske has argued that the culture industry produces "a repertoire of texts or cultural resources for the various formations of the people to use or reject".[49] This view gives a more positive role to audiences or consumers in "the active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures within a social system".[50]

On the question of defining popular culture, Bennett discerned four then-current ways. The first was to define "popular in terms of television ratings, record sales and other quantifiable indicators". The second was "in terms of what was left over when one subtracts traditional culture forms from our current types of entertainment". The third is "in terms of new mass forms of entertainment generated by capitalist investment". The last "perceives this new 'mass' art as enjoying more a more active relationship with its audiences and aligns this art with the creative impulses of the people".[51] Using these definitions to consider

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[48] S. Kuntowijoyo, "Budaya Elite Dan Budaya Massa [Elite Culture and Mass Culture]," in *Ecstasy Gaya Hidup: Kebudayaan Pop Dalam Masyarakat Komoditas Indonesia [Life Style Ecstacy: Popular Culture in Indonesian Commodity Society]*, ed. Idi Subandy Ibrahim (Bandung: Mizan, 1997).

[49] John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Winchester: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 23-24.

[50] Ibid., 23.

[51] Colin MacCabe, "Defining Popular Culture," in *High Theory/Low Culture: Analysing Popular Television and Film*, ed. Colin MacCabe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 3.

Misteri Gunung Merapi as a text of popular culture, it is 'popular' in the sense that it has almost consistently been ranked in the top-rating positions, especially during the first years of its broadcasting. In terms of the second condition, although the sinetron uses a setting of 17th century Java, it is basically modern entertainment, both in its production technologies and also in its 'reinvention' of traditional cultural forms. It fits the third definition, as it is the product of capitalist investment intended for large television; but before I started my research I did not know whether, or in what ways, it had an 'active relationship with its audiences' (which underlies the fourth definition).

Under the combined pressures of economic globalization and reformasi era economic and cultural freedoms, sinetron, which were initially intended to carry government messages about living properly in the New Order era, have changed into popular commercial entertainment. Although people enjoyed those state-sponsored sinetron, which usually addressed problems of everyday life in Indonesia, they eagerly welcomed the new commercial sinetron which employ fantasy. However, many educated people disapprove of these more sensational images and stories. In this thesis, I take up Wright's argument that "popular stories tend to be far more revealing of social values and changes".[52] I will attempt to trace the changes which reflect the new social context through the stories of *Misteri Gunung Merapi*. Wright also argued that the social success of the hero of a popular story changes following changes in the social context of the story. I will examine possible cultural and social explanations in the construction of 'heroes' in this sinetron and, through this analysis, will ask whether a powerful woman could ever be a hero in either Indonesian or Javanese social and cultural contexts.

In earlier discussions of cultural globalisation, scholars often argued that it led to the homogenization of culture and the erosion of differences of time, space, culture and geography; it was seen as a kind of cultural imperialism, in which the local culture was replaced by mass-produced and mass-marketed western

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[52] Will Wright, "Introduction: The Hero in Popular Stories " *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 32, no. 4 (2005): 147.

(American) culture. However, the spread of modernity and globalization need not mean the disappearance of local culture. As is the case in Indonesia, global flows of capital, commodities, images, technologies and ideologies may even stimulate the growth of the local, as this 'cultural imperialism' stimulates competition or resistance. Kitley has noted that in Indonesia the local content has increased significantly following the popularity of imported programs.[53] In Nugroho's view, when global products are dominant in Indonesian television, the audiences begin to miss local products. This is an indication of the desire for specificity when universalism dominates everywhere. In this case, a balance between local and global is needed, which requires the adaptation of global elements.[54] His opinion is in line with Kong's argument that "globalization intensifies localisation",[55] and Mahtani's and Salmon's view that the growing ascendancy of globalizing processes actually accentuates the importance of localised processes of consumption and the identification with place.[56] In this thesis I want to explore the ways the sinetron *Misteri Gunung Merapi* both resists and colludes with the flow of globalization in Indonesia.

While the thesis considers some of the effects of economic and cultural globalization, it is important to consider, in passing, the context of intellectual globalization in which we work today. Budianta has noted that scholars working in women's studies in Indonesia face a challenge of "the general suspicion toward an ideological framework". She has also noted that "in Indonesian popular discourse, the word 'feminism', like 'liberalism' and 'individualism' is considered to be the flag of 'Western' mind, is thus tainted". The word 'feminism' has created a debate for 'its defenders and accusers' especially in relation to whether

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[53] Philip Kitley, "Closing the Creativity Gap - Renting Intellectual Capital in the Name of Local Content: Indonesia in the Global Television Business," in *Television across Asia*, ed. Albert Moran and Michael Keane (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 142.

[54] Garin Nugroho, *Kekuasaan Dan Hiburan [Power and Entertainment]* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budya, 1995), 167-9.

[55] Lily Kong, "Popular Music in a Transnational World: The Construction of Local Identities in Singapore," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 38, no. 1 (1997): 21.

[56] Minelle Mahtani and Scott Salmon, "Site Reading? Globalization, Identity, and the Consumption of Place in Popular Music," in *Popular Culture: Production and Consumption*, ed. C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001), 166.

it is congruent with religious values.[57] She has also found that the study of race, gender and ethnicity, as developed in feminist discourse, is relevant to looking at women's issues in Indonesia. However, she has argued that globalization theories are often inadequate for examining Indonesian matters. I have found this to be so, and have tried my best to use these theories critically. My experience confirms Jackson's point that "while some varieties of globalization theory and poststructuralism pronounce the end of geographically based difference, empirical research consistently demonstrates the persistence of localised, geographically bounded forms of knowledge, culture, economy, and political organization.[58]

With multiple theories come multiple research methods. In this thesis, they are predominantly text-based, although I was fortunate to have the opportunity to talk with some members of the production team of *Misteri Gunung Merapi*, as reported in Chapter 4. As mentioned above, I used techniques of textual analysis that derive from film studies to carry out a detailed examination of the text of *Misteri Gunung Merapi* – which, in this case, was not the series as broadcast on television, with many inserted advertisements, but the version sold on VCD. I have contextualised these observations and analysis of setting, narrative, image and sound by means of extensive research on globalization and cultural mobility; the Indonesian television industry; film and television genres and hybridity; history, popular memory, supernatural beliefs and concepts of power in Indonesia; gender and heroism; the body and screening the female body. I have also drawn extensively on my own experience and training in both traditional Javanese dance and martial arts.

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[57] Melani Budianta, "Double Texts: Representing America and Discussing Women's Issues in Indonesia," *American Studies International* XXXVIII, no. 3 (2000): 47.

[58] Peter A. Jackson, "Space, Theory and Hegemony: The Dual Crises of Asian Area Studies and Cultural Studies," *Sojourn* 18, no. 1 (2003): 2.

Structure of the Thesis

The first chapter of the thesis is this introduction which discusses the reasons for choosing serial sinetron, especially the sinetron *Misteri Gunung Merapi*, in order to study social and cultural change in contemporary Indonesia, in particular the position of women and gender ideology.

With the fall of Suharto and the New Order era in 1998, Indonesia has experienced a major transition, from regime control into freedom of expression – and a free market. The second chapter outlines briefly the fall of the New Order and the subsequent period of cultural mobility, a transformation from traditionalism to modernism and globalization, and its impact on the culture of Indonesians.

Misteri Gunung Merapi is produced for broadcasting on television. Chapter Three discusses the television industry after the fall of the New Order, describing how the producer and the sinetron workers have experienced changing pressures, from the government regulation through the board of censorship into market demand through competitive ratings.

Chapter Four focuses on *Misteri Gunung Merapi* and explores how the producer, PT Genta Buana, has created a formula to compete with global entertainments. It thereby places Indonesian television production in the context of a global television industry.

Chapter Five focuses on genre and narrative in television production. To compete with the international market for imported programs, the producer has to be creative in adapting 'global' genres like kung fu and Hollywood action-adventure to local traditions. The narrative is also a hybrid mixture of male-centred action and female-centred love story.

Chapter Six extends the discussion of *Misteri Gunung Merapi*'s use of popular themes by exploring how the sinetron simplifies and distorts historical events, and exploits them for the purpose of creating dramatic conflict.

Chapter Seven focuses on supernatural power as an important local element of the sinetron. It describes how the sinetron exploits popular belief in supernatural power and presents it as postmodern entertainment. This chapter also considers how religion and traditional belief are simplified and secularized for entertainment purposes.

The key conflict of the sinetron is between a powerful evil witch, Mak Lampir and a questing hero, Sembara. Heroes in popular stories represent the beliefs, values, and goals of the society. A hero is essential in culture. The hero in this sinetron is male but the principal antagonist is a very powerful female figure and there are many other heroic women, some of whom are also fighters. Chapter Eight examines gender and heroism in the sinetron.

In Chapter Nine, a cultural analysis of gender and the body considers the ways in which textual strategies of representation, such as narrative, camera work, or dialogue construct particular ways of understanding the body, telling us about the culture of the context of the sinetron. Screening the female body is problematic in Indonesia. In Chapter Nine I will also explore how this sinetron negotiates between global conventions of filming the female body and sexuality and Indonesian cultural norms and local discourses about woman as the guardian of the nation's morality.

The discussion of how powerful women are constructed within the narrative and their position in the story will lead to a discussion of the ideology of gender and power. The setting of the story is Java in the seventeenth century but this does not mean that the underlying ideology of gender and power in this sinetron is traditional Javanese. Many scholars have argued that the New Order government set up Javanese ideology as state ideology. In Chapter Ten I discuss whether this sinetron still glorifies New Order gender ideology or tries to contest it within modern elements.

Chapter Eleven provides the conclusions of the thesis.