PART 3

Film discourse practices

The *kyai* and hyperreal ghosts

Narrative practices of horror, commerce, and censorship

In recent years there have been several publications about horror films and the connotations of horror in different societies which argue that horror serves as a field for the dramatization of cultural and universal nightmares.¹ Scholars have written about horror film being an outlet which exposes social taboos, or a channel for political critique. Sometimes in their discussions they have related the use of horror to theories about the role of carnival in certain societies.² It is not my intention here to discuss the Indonesian horror genre from any of these perspectives. The prime focus of this discussion will be on horror as a form of imagining and as a technical means of 're-presenting' elements of what constitutes the nation (Anderson 1983).

I examine the position of forms of imagination in the context of film narrative practices and debates on what kind of representations of society are acceptable in Indonesian audio-visual media. On one level, I consider horror from the perspective of film genres, discussing certain formats or formulas within such genres. On this level, horror is a forum for identity formation. Benedict Anderson (1983:30) turned to the basic structure of two forms of imagining, namely the novel and the newspaper, which 'provided the technical means for "re-presenting" the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation'. Building on this idea, I investigate discourses about Indonesian films which identify and imagine certain communities through the horror genre. In what way are audiences, communi-

1 An earlier version of this chapter was published in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* (Van Heeren 2007).

2 See, for example, Carroll 1990; Coates 1991; Schneider 2003. Gladwin (2003) discusses horror film in Indonesia in relation to politics. On the subject of carnival and film as deconstruction of political and aesthetic representations, see Shohat and Stam 1994:274; on the subject of carnival in film as a form of anti-canonical resistance, see Shohat and Stam 1994:302-6. For horror films related to Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, see Creed 1995.

ties, and classes identified and constructed around horror film? How is the character of horror film and its audiences determined by particular film formats (film versus television) or formulas? How have these identifications changed after the fall of President Soeharto in May 1998?

On another level, the chapter moves beyond the concept of imaginations and the labeling of small-scale communities and genres. In this part, I reflect on discourses about film formulas within the horror genre which are indicative of developments and problems in the search for a representative image of what constitutes the modern Indonesian nation. I explore discourses about tolerable modes of representation of the supernatural in film and television and as part of modern Indonesian society. The principal concern is the relationship between discourses about the genre and modes of representation weighed against socio-political strategies and commercial interests.

HORROR FILMS UNDER THE NEW ORDER: COMEDY, SEX, AND RELIGION

The horror genre has a long history in Indonesian media culture and it is found in writing, in radio and television programmes, as well as in cinema. The first horror film in Indonesia was produced by The Teng Cun in 1934 and had the title *Doea siloeman oeler poeti en item* (The two transmogrifications of the black and white snake).³ Since this pioneering effort, Indonesian horror films have been screened in cinemas, mobile cinemas, and on television in varying numbers. During the 1950s and 1960s horror films were pushed into the background as, at the time, there was a great interest in producing films which featured the Indonesian Revolution and the struggle to wrest Independence from Dutch colonial rule (1945-1949). It was only at the beginning of the 1970s that horror films were starting to be produced again (Kristanto 1995).

Since the film *Ratu ular* (Snake queen, 1972), the number of horror films screened in Indonesian cinemas increased. In fact horror films were about the only kind of films still produced after 1993, when the Indonesian cinema collapsed. But it was not before May 1998 that a revival of horror film production truly began. After 1993,

³ A *siluman* (present-day Indonesian spelling) is a human being who has assumed a theriomorphic guise for nefarious purposes.

most top-end cinemas screened mainly imported US films, while home-produced Indonesian films that tended to feature the erotic and horror genres were shown in lower-class cinemas throughout the country. Newspaper articles in 1993 and 1994 claimed that horror films were representative of the Indonesian film industry, and indeed associated the Indonesian film industry with horror films. This stereotype is similar to the way that the US has westerns, China has kung fu films, Japan has films about ninjas and samurais, and India has love stories featuring a liberal dose of singing and dancing.⁴ Indonesian cultural commentators have tried to explain the appeal of horror films by stating that the genre is closely related to the psyche of Indonesian people and is generally inherent to Eastern culture, which they assume to be synonymous with mysticism and the occurrence of supernatural beings and events. These explanations were based on the assumption that every region and ethnic group in Indonesia had its own superstitious beliefs and mystery tales recounting supernatural events. Some film producers even thought that horror stories formed a characteristic cultural asset of Indonesian culture. They were convinced that this feature should be exploited in films for both the Indonesian and the foreign market.⁵

The Indonesian horror film as a genre has its own format and peculiarities. Horror films are also labelled *film mistik* (mystical films) or *film klenik* (superstitious films). Generally speaking, anything can happen in these films, and the story does not necessarily have to make sense. Apart from these generalizations, some main features can be detected.⁶ Karl Heider (1991) noted that horror films were the most common type of film in Indonesia at the beginning of the 1990s. He delineated the productions of Indonesian horror as films set in the present but resembling the 'Indonesian legend' film genre, which dramatized traditional legends or folktales. It is true that, just as the 'Indonesian legend' genre, horror films often draw their inspiration from traditional Indonesian folk beliefs, above all those about supernatural powers. Heider also points out the use of 'horribly humorous' scenes as a distinctive aspect of Indonesian horror films. As an example, he remarks upon the recurring scenes in which supernatural mon-

4 'Tema mistik dan horor bisa menutupi tekori', *Pos Film*, 24-1-1993; Joko 1994.

5 'Tema mistik dan horor bisa menutupi tekori', *Pos Film*, 24-1-1993; 'Film mistik Indonesia mencoba menembus pasar luar negeri', *Suara Pembaruan*, 20-11-1993; Joko 1994. This point was also made by Hasim 1997; Suyono and Arjanto 2003.

6 Both Indonesian and foreign critics of Indonesian horror films have commented that the storylines are often hard to understand. See for example www.iluminatedlantern.com, and www.dvdmaniacs.net in relation to remarks about Indonesian horror films abroad.

sters attack their victims. In his viewing experience, this raised uproars of laughter from the audiences (Heider 1991:44). Indeed, the element of humour or comedy is a frequent component of the horror genre in Indonesia. Another example of a frequently used comic scene is when someone mistakes a ghost for a real person and vice versa (Suyono and Arjanto 2003). A prototypical Indonesian horror film from the 1970s is usually set in a village and revolves around the quest for *ilmu* (spiritual knowledge) or *ilmu gaib* (supernatural powers). An inherent part of such supernatural powers or black magic is that such forces always have some inherent weakness (*pantangan* or 'taboo'), a prohibited action or certain spell by which the powers can be undone. The best way to break the spell cast by magical powers is by reciting a verse from the Quran, but other, more peculiar *pantangan*, such as eating more than three portions of sate (Suyono and Arjanto 2003:71) or encountering a monkey (Kristanto 1995:145) have also been used in horror films.

Besides supernatural powers and humour, there are two other distinct features of Indonesian horror films, namely their use of sex and the appearance of religious symbols or of religious leaders as protagonists.⁷ The use of sex emerged in the 1970s and was used to titillate the audience. By the 1980s and 1990s, the extravagant use of erotic elements, which debased them to the level of smut and kitsch, had become the main ingredient of such films. The central themes of these 'horror-sex' films were men having an affair, *tante girang* (in English: 'merry aunt', a pushy woman of loose morals), rape, and promiscuity. The use of sex was not confined to horror but was part of a wider trend of Indonesian films from the 1970s, capitalizing on its selling power.⁸ However, particularly in horror films, sex was made fairly explicit. The second classic feature of horror films, the use of religious symbols and a *deus ex machina* in the form of a religious leader, who is able to overcome all evil at the end of the film, emerged in the 1980s (Suyono and Arjanto 2003:72). The protagonist in horror films since the 1980s has mainly been a *kyai* or some other religious figure with Islamic connections. There is, however, also at least one instance in which a Roman Catholic Priest is the religious protagonist; he conquers a Dutch ghost which is haunting an old

7 Heider (1991:67-9) does not specify these features in relation to Indonesian, though he does mention the use of sex in Indonesian films in relation to narrative conventions under the heading of 'sexuality'.

8 Heider remarks that sex in Indonesian cinema was either downplayed or presented as sadism. He observed that in Indonesian films, sex is often represented as rape (Heider 1991:66).

colonial house in the film *Ranjang Setan* (Satan's bed, 1986, Tjut Djalil). In the 1981 movie *Mistik (punahnya rahasia ilmu Iblis leak)* (Mystic (the vanishing of the secret devilish knowledge of the evil spirit), 1981, Tjut Djalil), for which Bali is the setting, the hero is a Hindu priest who defeats evil.

The central role of a religious figure in horror films is a perceptible effect of the Ethical Code of Film Production in Indonesia, which was drawn up in 1981 by the National Film Council (henceforth Film Council) under the Minister of Information, General Ali Murtopo (1978-1983). The Ethical Code was based on censorship guidelines drafted by the Film Censor Board (BSF), as laid down in a ministerial decree in 1977. In 1980, the BSF drew up its own further guidelines for censorship in the Kode Etik Badan Sensor Film (BSF Ethical Code). These guidelines were elaborated in the Kode Etik Produksi Film Nasional (Film Council's Code of Ethics) and issued in 1981 (Sen 1994:69). The Code of Ethics of the Film Council was drafted by eight commissions, including the commission for 'film and national morality' (*film dan moral bangsa*), the commission of 'film and the awareness of national discipline' (*film dan kesadaran disiplin nasional*), and the commission for 'film in its relation to devotion towards the One and Only God' (*film dalam hubungannya ketakwaan terhadap Tuhan Yang Maha Esa*). The last-mentioned commission recommended that all filmic aspects had to lead to devotion and the praise of God. It also demanded that '[t]he storyline ought to be composed in such a way that it gives the audience the impression that what is bad will definitely be made to endure the consequences of its actions and suffer; that what is good will surely receive a reward and happiness'.⁹ Consequently, most films made under the New Order in the 1980s and 1990s followed a predictable pattern of good versus bad in which the good always triumphed.¹⁰

Even though there was never an official prescription that a religious figure had to be the hero of horror films, many producers of such films today have the impression that during the New Order, a *kyai* had to be part of horror movies. Ali Tien, former producer of production company Cancer Mas, suggests that by 1981, BSF had sanctioned horror films, stipulating that they should fulfil a reli-

9 'Jalan cerita disusun sedemikian rupa sehingga menimbulkan kesan kepada penonton bahwa yang jahat itu pasti akan menerima/menanggung akibatnya dan menderita, dan yang baik itu pasti menerima ganjaran dan kebahagiaan.'

10 Suyono and Arjanto 2003:72. Another pattern of New Order films was that a film evolved from a depiction of a situation of order, followed by the descent into disorder, with order being restored at the film's conclusion (Heider 1991:34-8; Sen and Hill 2000:138, 143-6).

gious mission. Likewise, in the experience of Ferry Angriawan of Virgo Putra Film, a horror film in the 1980s which did not feature a *kyai* at the end of the story would be banned from being screened. Hence, in his opinion, a *kyai* would often appear where his sudden intrusion did not make any sense in the story. According to producer Budiati Abiyoga, who used to be on the jury of the Indonesian Film Festival under the New Order, the outline of the Code of Ethics led to a tendency to use religion for religion's sake. As an example, she recalls the depiction of a Quranic verse with the added phrase: 'This is not approved of by the Quran,' straight after a sex scene (Suyono and Arjanto 2003:72).

In his catalogue of Indonesian films produced between 1926 and 1995, Kristanto (1995) shows that horror films had already begun to use religious symbols as early as the 1970s and many *kyai* regularly turned up in horror films from 1978 onwards. The use of religious heroes in horror films before the 1980s led Krishna Sen (1994:53) to describe the guidelines of the Code of Ethics as representing 'no more than a setting out of practices already in operation in the censorship system'. The fact that directors today believe it was a prerequisite to feature a *kyai* in horror films may indeed offer a clue to the way film censorship under the New Order worked. As Sen suggests, there were relatively few cases of film censorship under the New Order in which BSF intervened directly by excising sections of a film or banning films altogether. Prescriptions issued by such other film institutions as production companies, professional film organizations, film schools, and festivals shaped the kind of films which would be produced and as such worked as a system of self-censorship (Sen 1994:50-1).

The detailed censorship regulations which had been made public by 1980 contributed to an increase in self-censorship in the film industry (Sen 1994:70). Possibly because the use of a *kyai* in horror films was a successful formula resorted to in order to prevent a film from being banned, many film-makers did not take recourse to other formulas with no proven success. Although films which used *kyai* prevailed, not all horror films since the 1980s in the film catalogue mention the role of religious figures. Other formulas were also possible. For example, some horror films were based on traditional legends or placed in a mystical setting and did not feature a religious figure.¹¹

11 For example, *Bangunnya Nyai Roro Kidul* (The awakening of Nyai Roro Kidul, 1985, Sisworo Gautama), *Putri Kunti'anak* (The witch's daughter, 1988, Atok Suharto), *Pembalasan Ratu Laut Selatan* (Revenge of the Queen of the South Sea, 1988, Tjut Djalil), *Kisah cinta Nyi Blorong* (The love story of Nyi Blorong, 1989, Norman Benny).

Be that as it may, after the implementation of the Code of Ethics in 1981, many horror films did use religious leaders and symbols because of the perceived need to include them. Such an inclusion was well worthwhile, for these films were sure to pass the Board of Censors even though they might show all that God had forbidden. Under the influence of the combined commercial interests of the film producers and government film regulations, under the New Order a bizarre situation developed whereby the horror film genre was simultaneously equated with sex and with religious propagation (*dakwah*), the latter represented through the use of Islamic symbols and Islamic religious leaders.

HORROR FILMS FOR TELEVISION: NEW NARRATIVES AND DEBATES ON THEIR BOUNDS

Besides on the silver screen, horror and mystical films during the New Order could also be watched on television. At the beginning of the 1990s, when there was a sudden rise in the number of commercial television stations, many film directors who used to produce films for the cinemas crossed over into television production. Even before the production of mystical television films began around 1995, many old horror films were aired on television. Both domestic and imported US horror films were usually shown on Thursday night, referred to in Indonesia as 'Friday eve' (*malam Jumat*). Friday is a religious day for Muslims and at noon Muslim men are supposed to perform communal prayers in the mosque. The significance of this day will be discussed later.

In 1995-1996, the private television station RCTI began to produce and screen the *sinetron misteri* (mystery series) *Si Manis Jembatan Ancol* (The sweetie of Ancol bridge). Later this was followed by the *sinetron komedi misteri* (comedy-mystery television series) *Jin dan Jun* (Jin and Jun). Because of the success of these programmes, other television stations soon followed suit, though during a very short time, the number of comedy-mystery series was limited. This probably had to do with the fact that then Minister of Information Harmoko 'recommended' reducing the screening of Indonesian mystery series in 1996 – a recommendation which, strikingly, did not seem to apply to foreign products of the same genre.¹² Despite Harmoko's recommendation, a year later, in July 1997, every private television station had its own Indonesian mystery series. RCTI

12 'Sinetron misteri kian diperbanyak', *Harian Terbit*, 2-9-1996.

added two series similar to *Si Manis Jembatan Ancol* and *Jin dan Jun* to their programme: *Kembalinya Si Manis Jembatan Ancol* (The return of the sweetie of Ancol bridge) and *Tuyul dan Mbak Yul* (Tuyul and Miss Yul), and a mystery series based on a Javanese folk legend, *Misteri sinden* (The singer mystery). Other private television stations didn't drag their heels and quickly produced their own mystery series: *Hantu sok usil* (The fidgety ghost) and *Janda kembang* (The virgin widow), both of the folk-legend type on SCTV, *Dua dunia* (Two worlds) on Indosiar, and *Misteri* (Mystery), recounting people's stories of encountering the supernatural, on Anteve (Pudjias-tuti and Redana 1997).

Unlike the screening of Indonesian horror films in cinemas, which passed virtually unnoticed apart from some protests decrying erotic film posters, there were fierce debates about televised horror films and the mystery television series. These debates began in 1994, when the Head of the First Commission of Parliament (*Ketua Komisi I DPR*) Aisyah Amini criticized the Department of Information for permitting television stations to screen horror films as a matter of routine on *malam Jumat*. Her argument was that broadcasting these productions at that specific time of the week 'gives that evening a bad image' (*membuat image jelek tentang malam itu*). She was worried that it would cause people to regard that evening as one full of fear, whereas it should actually be a very virtuous point of time in the week [for Muslims].¹³ The debate about the screening of mystical films on *malam Jumat* and the possible harm to the 'image' of Friday continued until 1995 and was the probable motivation behind the edict issued by Minister of Information Harmoko's appeal to reduce the screening of horror and mystery films on television in 1996.¹⁴ Another discussion, in 1994, revolved around the need to re-censor horror films, primarily those which were produced for the cinema, before these were screened on television. In the words of Harmoko, this was essential 'because the characteristics of television viewers are different from [those who attend] cinemas' (*[s]ebab, karakteristik penonton televisi lain dengan bioskop*).¹⁵

Yet another debate, launched in 1995 but only becoming an issue in 1996/1997, revolved around the prevailing idea that mystical films would lead Indonesian people astray from reality and set them apart from modern life. The anti-campaign was run largely by the government, aided and abetted by individuals and Islamic groups who saw mystical films as an obstacle to Indonesia becom-

13 'Film horor di TV dikritik anggota DPR', *Jayakarta*, 5-2-1994.

14 'Ali Sahab; Film horor TV rusak citra malam Jumat', *Republika*, 12-6-1995.

15 'Film horor di TV dikritik anggota DPR', *Jayakarta*, 5-2-1994.

ing a modern, pious nation. They declared that mystery films were devoid of any educational value, and therefore might harm the mental and spiritual development of the people. Generally speaking, the popularity of mystery films was inversely related to the dominant discourse of the New Order, with its constant reiterations about the 'development' of Indonesia into a modern nation. It was feared that mystery films would fuel superstition and the belief of Indonesian people in the supernatural; this would thwart development. Moreover, some Muslim groups and authorities had great difficulty coming to terms with the idea that these series would show concepts contrary to religious teachings. The complaints raised were that these series depicted a realm outside reality, were far from rational, and were devoid of any educational value.¹⁶

Interestingly, in the debates about mystery films on television it transpired that the main problem was not the mystical itself. Several articles made the point that this was an enduring part of Indonesian culture, and the existence of mystics and belief in supernatural powers in Indonesian society was not denied. All kinds of shamanism, superstition, mystical objects, ghosts, and a seemingly endless number of other supernatural creatures were cited as an undeniable part of the beliefs and culture of the Indonesian people.¹⁷ To a great extent Indonesian horror films built on that foundation, and even those who protested against horror films often professed a belief in ghosts, *jin* (genies), *tuyul* (a spirit which obtains wealth for its human master), and other supernatural beings. Yet, there was a particular narrative allotted to the supernatural in which it was supposed to operate. In horror films set during the New Order, which was ruled by policies of development, there was no space for the supernatural. In legends of the past, or under the guidance of a religious authority, who would step in and restore order at the end of the film, however, the supernatural was tolerated. Similarly, newspaper articles which voiced complaints about mystery films did not pay much attention to films of the legendary or folk-story type. Their objections to mystery films and television series applied to those films and series which diverged from the sanctioned modes of addressing the issue, or which were felt to be out of kilter with leading state and Muslim discourses. Hence, heated debates about

16 'Film mistik bisa jadi "narkotik psikologis"', *Angkatan Bersenjata*, 14-2-1995; 'Sinetron misteri kian diperbanyak', *Harian Terbit*, 2-9-1996; 'Ubah jam tayang sinetron misteri', *Republika*, 9-10-1997; 'Menpen minta; LSF tidak loloskan film tentang jin dan setan', *Angkatan Bersenjata*, 25-2-1998; Gus 1997; Suryapati 1997.

17 'Dari diskusi "Pengaruh siaran radio dan TV terhadap anak" tayangan mistik sudah dianggap berlebihan', *Media Indonesia*, 7-10-1997; Hasim 1997; Gus 1997; Nurudin 1997; Pudjiastuti and Redana 1997; Suryati 1996.

mystery films in newspaper articles from February 1995 to April 1998 were about defining 'authorized' narrative practices for the supernatural or mystical.

Most debates in articles from September 1996 to April 1998 were about the mystery television series, which had adopted a new formula. This required a new definition and demarcation of the supernatural and the rational. The mystery series *Si Manis Jembatan Ancol* was based on an urban legend of Jakarta about a female ghost and set in the present. The series *Jin dan Jun* was about a girl called Jun, who finds a *jin* in a bottle who becomes her friend. *Tuyul dan Mbak Yul* was about a girl who befriends a *tuyul*; it bore a very strong resemblance to *Jin dan Jun*. None of these three series depicted the familiar horror legend type, nor did they feature a *kyai* as rescuer. In *Si Manis Jembatan Ancol* a ghost, Mariam, settles the scores with evil. She helps murder victims to take revenge, haunt, and kill their murderer in retribution. The series of the *jin* and *tuyul* type, which had a mystery-comedy format, solved problems with humour.¹⁸ Initially the majority of those with objections to these new series were Islamic groups and persons with Muslim backgrounds. Later their ranks were joined by government ministers, psychologists, and others who can loosely be styled 'authorities'. *Si Manis Jembatan Ancol* and, in particular, the series about *jin* and *tuyul* were considered problematic as they were thought to pose an indirect challenge to religious (Islamic) and state discourses on the sanctioned forms of imagining the supernatural and reality.

Among those with Muslim backgrounds the difficulty lay not so much in the fact that the series did not feature a *kyai* to step in and clarify and resolve the plot. On the contrary, on various occasions Muslims protested against a perceived misuse of Quranic verses in mystery films: verses were used simply as a spell to exorcise ghosts, rather than as an intrinsic part of a code of belief. Some Muslims were also greatly upset by the unrealistic depiction of *kyai* in horror films, which accorded the religious teachers supernatural powers and had them tossing around balls of fire. It was a problem of negotiating and demarcating representations of the fictitious and the real, on the basis of 'facts' emanating from competing worldviews.

The debate about narrative practices and the bounds of representing the supernatural and the rational in mystery television series was launched in 1996, when the chairman of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, Indonesian Council of Muslim Scholars), Hasan Basri, stated that *Jin dan Jun* and *Si Manis Jembatan Ancol* indi-

18 I thank Dimas Jayasrana for providing me with useful information and comments about these series.

rectly disputed religious teachings.¹⁹ While Basri did not divulge his objections to mystery series, Imam Tantowi, film director and screenplay writer, did. Tantowi stated he did not object to mystery films, as long as the content or message of these films did not contravene religious teachings or mislead the viewers. It was on these grounds that Tantowi did not approve of *Si Manis Jembatan Ancol*: the series was about a female ghost and, in Islam, there are no such things as ghosts. However, Tantowi, who held a minority viewpoint amongst those protesting against new horror formulas, did not have a problem with *Jin dan Jun*. Even though he had seen it only once, he did not think its content strayed too far from Islamic teachings, in which the existence of *jin* is acknowledged.²⁰ He said that he assumed the film-makers had consulted a Muslim *jin* first.²¹

His opinion was one of a few voiced and it was only gradually that the *jin* and *tuyul* series specifically emerged as the subject of a heated debate.²² In an article in the newspaper *Pikiran Rakyat*, critic Abdul Hasim wrote about the return to Indonesian television of the mystical in a new format. Hasim (1997) states that, unlike earlier in horror films, in this new format, the *jin* and *tuyul* were no longer presented as frightening creatures, but were 'kind, friendly, and often very close to human beings and their everyday lives'. This atypical representation of *jin* and *tuyul* was perceived as problematic. Besides the fear that such series would reinforce people's belief in *jin* and *tuyul* (Gus 1997),²³ the greatest objection expressed in most articles was that mystery series were either not in accordance with people's general perception of *jin*,²⁴ or not in harmony with Islamic teachings.²⁵ Hence, in some articles it was denied that the appearance of *jin* and *tuyul* in mystery television series was part of Indonesian culture, and allegations were made that they had been

19 'Ketua MUI; Jin dan Jun tak ada gunanya', *Pos Film*, 22-9-1996.

20 In Islam, the existence of *jin* (Ar. *jinn*) is completely accepted. Muslims believe that jinn are ethereal or fiery bodies, intelligent, imperceptible, with the capacity to assume different forms and capable of performing heavy labour. Their relationship to Iblis or Shaitans (the Devil or devils) in general is obscure. In Sura xviii.50, Iblis is said to be of the jinn; Sura ii.34 however, implies that he was one of the angels. As a consequence great confusion followed, with many legends and hypotheses being spawned (Gibb and Kramers 1974).

21 Suryati 1996. Literally, he said: 'So, it seems it has not strayed too far from religious teachings because possibly they talked to a Muslim jin first' ('Jadi, rasanya, tidak terlalu menyimpang jauh dari kaidah agama, karena mungkin mereka telah berdialog terlebih dahulu dengan jin muslim'). This also relates to the point about people raising objections to mystery films and at the same time emphasizing their belief in supernatural issues.

22 Many viewers of the series, probably the majority, apparently had no objections.

23 'HSBI prihatinkan sinetron mistik', *Harian Terbit*, 14-4-1997.

24 'Ubah jam tayang sinetron misteri', *Republika*, 9-10-1997.

25 'HSBI prihatinkan sinetron mistik', *Harian Terbit*, 14-4-1997.

borrowed from Indian fairy tales²⁶ or were attempts to imitate films from Hong Kong (Suryati 1998). Refuting the allegations that the mystery series were based on Indian fairy tales Raam Punjabi, owner of the very successful production house Multivision Plus, which produced some of the most popular programmes on Indonesian television, including *Tuyul dan Mbak Yul*, stated that the *tuyul* in his series was closely modelled on descriptions of *tuyul* in old Indonesian folk tales.²⁷ Punjabi, who is of Indian descent, has often been criticized for his background; critics claim that his soaps do not represent Indonesian culture and are only the purveyors of dreams.

In February 1998, Minister of Information Hartono instructed LSF to ban films and television series with *jin* or *tuyul* as a theme. His stated reason was that these were not didactic. Hartono felt that if a story in a television series presented the goodness or kindness of a *jin*, this did not accord with reality/the truth: 'Honestly, I've never seen a *jin*. So how can we tell if there are good *jin*. Please do not cause a rift in our nation by purveying items which are at odds with religion. Do not teach the people to see something that does not exist'.²⁸ The former Director General of Radio, Television and Film, Alex Leo Zulkarnaen, was also disturbed by false representations of *jin* in television series. In an interview in which his opinion was asked on the increase in number of the members of LSF to specifically censor mystery films, he made the remark: 'Can you imagine producing television series with a *jin* as the main character, going so far as to have the *jin* called Uncle Jin or Auntie Jin. They [all parties involved in the production and screening of television series] go overboard selling dreams.'²⁹ Despite the ban on the *jin*-type mystery comedies in February, the series were still being screened in March 1998, with *Jin dan Jun* the most popular. When asked about the actions taken by the Department of Information to end the screening of such series, the Guidance Council of Film and Video answered that a letter had been sent to all private television stations requesting them to obey broadcasting regulations and reduce the number of films with superstitious themes.³⁰ How-

26 'HSBI prihatinkan sinetron mistik', *Harian Terbit*, 14-4-1997.

27 'Setelah dikritik MUI "Tuyul dan Mbak Yul" akan berubah cerita', *Berita Yudha*, 7-11-1997.

28 'Terus terang, saya tidak pernah melihat jin. Lalu bagaimana kita bisa bercerita bahwa jin ada yang baik. Tolong bangsa kita jangan diasah dengan hal-hal yang bertentangan dengan agama. Jangan mendidik masyarakat untuk melihat sesuatu yang tidak ada.' ('Menpen minta; LSF tidak loloskan film tentang jin dan setan', *Angkatan Bersenjata*, 25-2-1998.)

29 'Masak bikin sinetron yang tokohnya jin, sampai jin-jinnya dipanggil Om Jin atau Tante Jin. Mereka itu menjual mimpi terlalu berlebihan.' See 'Mantan Dirjen RTF Leo Zulkarnaen; 'masak bikin sinetron yang tokohnya jin'', *Sinar Pagi*, 7-3-1998.

30 'Seputar tayangan takhayul; TV swasta dapat peringatan', *Harian Terbit*, 16-3-1998.

ever, before the regulations could be enforced, Reformasi, the bid for change in every possible field after thirty years of New Order rule, culminated in the stepping down of President Soeharto in May 1998.

HORROR FILMS FOR CINEMA AND TELEVISION: DEVELOPMENTS OF REFORMASI

During and after Reformasi the world of film was overwhelmed by a host of new developments. Under the presidency of B.J. Habibie (1998-1999), a process of democratization of the media was set in motion. During the presidency of Abdurrahman Wahid (1999-2001), the Ministry of Information was officially abolished, but LSF continued to exert its function, even though its position was called into question. As discussed in chapters 2 and 4, the euphoria and disorder accompanying Reformasi gave rise to new film genres and also redefined the use and substance of film discourse and narrative practices. The spirit of Reform also had an impact on the genres of horror films and mystery television series. Two distinct changes were introduced for horror films: newly released horror films often ignored the old formula of the film genre, and from 2001 onwards they were being screened in top-end cinemas.

The first horror film produced for the cinemas after the fall of Soeharto, *Jelangkung*, represented both these changes. In October 2001 this film, which was shot on digital video camera and directed by the young film-maker Rizal Mantovani, was shown in major cinemas in Jakarta. As discussed in Chapter 2 the story, based on urban legends in Jakarta, was totally different from that of New Order horror films. Shot in music-video style and with a soundtrack of popular music, the film tells the story of a group of teenagers who set out on an adventure to look for ghosts in haunted places in and around Jakarta. On a camping trip to a little village, Angker Batu in the hills of West Java, one of them conjures up a ghost by using a *jelangkung*, as a result of which the whole group is haunted. Nowhere in the film does a *kyai* appear, nor are any other religious symbols apparent. Moreover, the film does not have a mystical setting and, even though it is about legends, these are filmed as part of reality and the lives and beliefs of teenagers in present-day Jakarta. After its success in Jakarta, *Jelangkung* was screened in cinemas throughout the country; it was the box office hit of 2001, reaching 1.3 million viewers. Following *Jelangkung*, more horror films, the bulk of them produced by young film-makers, were released and

screened in top-end cinemas: *Titik hitam* (Black point, November 2002, Sentot Sahid), *Satu nyawa dalam denting lonceng kecil* (One soul in a little tinkling bell, November 2002, Abiprasidi), *Peti mati* (*The coffin*) (February 2003, Mardali Syarief), *Jelangkung's* sequel *Tusuk jelangkung* (Demon's spike, March 2003, Dimas Djayadinin-grat), and *The soul* (November 2003, Nayato Fio Nuala). None of these films made any pretence about inserting religious elements and, apart from *Peti mati*, which was set in the 1960s, the films were situated in the present.

This seems to provide evidence that during Reformasi, the Code of Ethics for film production was abandoned. Horror films for cinemas were being produced in a new style and their formulas were more varied. The appearance of a *kyai* was no longer perceived as obligatory. Moreover, most films which reached the top-end cinemas depicted the mysterious in the present, as part of modern life. Did this signify the end for the *kyai* then? It did not. In cinemas, the *kyai* was still found where he had always been since the 1980s: in the lower-class theatres, primarily those located in the outskirts and kampung areas of the city and in rural areas. Even though most contemporary Indonesian horror films used new styles and formats, a horror film released in November 2002 still adhered to the old New Order format of horror films. *Kafir* (*Satanic*) (Infidel (*Satanic*), Mardali Syarief), was inspired by a true story which occurred among the people of Cigugur in West Java during the fight for Independence in 1945. Through flashbacks, it tells the story of a shaman who is obsessed by the idea of becoming a *wali* after he has gone in search of spiritual knowledge (*ilmu*) and has become an apprentice to a mysterious, allegedly immortal man on a mountain. Moving to a small village with his wife and son, he sets up a practice as a healer there. But as the story advances, he becomes involved in practices of black magic, and after he has been killed, the earth refuses to receive his body.³¹ In *Kafir* (*Satanic*), as in the old New Order horror films, an Islamic authority figure comes to the rescue by restoring peace and order. Film critic Joko Anwar (2002b) writes: 'Watching the latest release of locally made horror flick *Kafir* (Unbeliever), the joy of watching such campy horror movies in the '80s would certainly come back to the audience's

31 In 2003, the producer and director of the film had to defend their statement that they had based the film on a true story from Cigugur before the National Commission of Human Rights. The people of Cigugur were of the opinion that the film insulted their ancestors and presented a false representation of history, misrepresenting the teachings of the religious figure Pangeran Madrais, whom they believed was referred to in the film ('Komnas HAM panggil sutradara "Kafir"', *Sinar Harapan*, 16-4-2003; 'Film Kafir diprotes', *Kompas*, 17-4-2003; 'Produser film Kafir datangi Komnas HAM', *Bisnis Indonesia*, 19-4-2003).

mind'. He mentions that *Kafir* was made by an 'old-time film director', while other recently released horror films had been the work of new talents (Anwar 2002c). In contrast to *Jelangkung* and other films made by young film-makers, *Kafir* (*Satanic*) was released in lower-class cinemas. Its producer, Chand Parwez, claims the film was very popular, especially in rural areas (Anugerah 2003).

Apart from the *kyai*'s enduring presence and popularity in old-style horror movies mostly found in rural areas, this figure also appears in a new mystery television format after the fall of Soeharto. Due to the momentum of Reformasi, the February 1998 decree, which enforced the reduction of the screening of *jin* and *tuyul* series, never came into force. A year later, in March 1999, when questions were asked about the continuation of mystery series on television, it was said that people needed entertainment and that it would be better not to ban these series until there was more political stability.³² By 2001, the screening of horror films and mystery series on television had increased considerably. Initially, reruns of old horror films and mystery television series were screened, but gradually the production of new series and television films ensued.³³ By the end of 2001, a new formula of mystery series for television had emerged. At the root of this new formula lay the re-instatement of religious authorities in the form of *kyai*, *ulama*, or simply people with authority speaking on behalf of Islam. When a new television series, *Kismis* (an abbreviation of *kisah misteri*, mystery tales), was screened by private television station RCTI in 2001, it launched a new formula in the mystery genre called *infotainment horror* (horror infotainment), which would eventually lead to the return of the religious figure. Inspired by the huge success of *Jelangkung*, *Kismis* was based on the reconstruction of existing legends and stories about ghosts and haunted sites in Indonesia.³⁴

Kismis follows a formula where the programme host, a model (Caroline Zachri), interviews people who have had a blood-curdling experience (*peristiwa seram*). After the interview, the stories of the informants are visualized in a semi-documentary-style reconstruction. For example, a couple of young men happened to be walking home late at night after having played cards. Along the way, they see a beautiful woman to whom they are attracted, but as they come closer, her face suddenly transforms into a hideous apparition. Rumours abounded that the well they had just passed was haunted. In the first year of the series, the programme was

32 'Sinetron mistik terlibas politik', *Harian Terbit*, 15-3-1999.

33 'Klenik dan tayangan misteri yang tetap digemari', *Kompas*, 5-8-2001.

34 'Acara horor di TV dan radio; liih ngeriii... tetapi, bikin penasaran lho', *Kompas*, 13-1-2002.

24 minutes long and included three separate accounts by three sets of informants. Screened on Thursday evenings at ten o'clock, its slot was filled with commercials and it proved popular with television viewers (the first couple of episodes had a rating of about 7% to 9% according to the AC Nielsen survey).³⁵

In the wake of *Kismis*' success, similar programmes soon followed suit. In 2002 there were three: *Percaya nggak percaya* (Believe it or not) and *O seraam* (O scary!), which were screened by Anteve, and *Dunia lain* (The other world), which was broadcast on Thursday evening by Trans TV. The series *Percaya nggak percaya* greatly resembled *Kismis* in that it was also about true ghost stories and legends, and was presented by a model (Arzeti Bilbina). Some episodes of *Kismis* and *Percaya nggak percaya* dealt with the same subject, such as the story of a haunted house in Pondok Indah, South Jakarta, but in *Percaya nggak percaya*, the presenter did not interview informants herself but just introduced excerpts of mystery stories. These mystery stories were told to a reporter who went on location accompanied by an informant and an eyewitness. As proof of the authenticity of the story in *Percaya nggak percaya*, the reporter was accompanied by a supernatural expert/practitioner (*praktisi supernatural*). This person would relate what he 'saw' at the haunted site, and at times transmit (that is 'speak on behalf of') the wishes of the ghosts or other creatures at a certain location. The inclusion of strange occurrences in a part of the programme was a standard part of the series. A foggy image or shadow would appear on the television screen, or perhaps some eerie sounds would be heard, and a narrator (either a voice-over or the reporter on location) would then say: 'That is not simulated, but is actually happening' (*itu bukan rekayasa, tetapi kejadian sesungguhnya*).³⁶

Taking a slightly different tack to *Kismis* and *Percaya nggak percaya*, Anteve's second series *O seraam* recounted various ghost stories based on people's own experiences. This horror infotainment programme was interactive and people could phone in and recount the uncanny events they had personally experienced. This programme also included a quiz about a ghost story.³⁷ The third new horror infotainment programme, *Dunia lain*, had a host (Harry Pantja) who challenged people to stay overnight at haunted

35 'Acara horor di TV dan radio; liih ngeriii... tetapi, bikin penasaran lho', *Kompas*, 13-1-2002; Anugerah 2002.

36 "Infotainment horror" di televisi hasratnya mencekam, wujudnya menggelikan', *Kompas*, 22-9-2002.

37 "Infotainment horror" di televisi hasratnya mencekam, wujudnya menggelikan', *Kompas*, 22-9-2002.

locations. They were then asked to narrate their experiences the next day. One episode entitled 'Hantu kuburan Cina' (Ghost of the Chinese graveyard, broadcast on 19 September 2002) begins with a man narrating how he regularly desecrates Chinese graves when digging up the riches rumoured to be buried inside. Once when he was engaged in this nefarious pursuit, a ghost suddenly appeared. In the next segment of the programme, someone was dared to stay overnight at the grave where the ghost had been seen. The camera then filmed that person remaining at the grave all night long, and recorded all movements. After sunrise, the reporter returned and asked the person about his experiences.³⁸ As in *Percaya nggak percaya*, during the recording eerie sounds could be heard and images, which were said to be authentic, appeared on screen.

Even though they still greatly resembled one another, the various horror infotainment programmes made strenuous efforts to find diverse forms to transmit authentic experiences of the supernatural as facts and part and parcel of the daily lived reality of Indonesian people. The key word reiterated in the depiction of the supernatural in the horror infotainment series was 'real'.³⁹ All series were based on true stories (*kisah nyata*), and what was recorded or reconstructed was claimed to be authentic and not fabricated (*bukan rekayasa*). Although in 2002 for the authentication of the supernatural experiences the stories of eyewitnesses and the help of a paranormal or supernatural expert was deemed sufficient, by 2003 religious authority, through the participation of a *kyai* or an *ulama*, was once again favoured as an essential part of horror infotainment programmes. It was in this year that the number of horror infotainment series markedly increased. Besides the above-mentioned programmes on RCTI, Anteve, and Trans TV, other television stations now also broadcast their own horror infotainment series. To compete with this, in January 2003 *Kismis* came up with a new segment of thirteen half-hour episodes called *Kismis; Arwah penasaran* (Mystery tales; Lost souls). Again the series was about true stories, but this time the focus was restricted to the category of ghost stories about the wandering souls of people who had died by suicide or had been murdered, consequently leaving behind their unresolved problems on earth. The director of the new series, CC Febriono, claimed that *Kismis; Arwah penasaran* was different from the other mystery series which had recently swamped the television stations.

38 "Infotainment horror" di televisi hasratnya mencekam, wujudnya menggelikan', *Kompas*, 22-9-2002.

39 On post-Reformasi television programmes focusing on the depiction of what is 'real' and on 'facts', 'truth', and 'authenticity', see Arps and Van Heeren 2006.

Its scope extended far beyond exploiting the scare factor of the stories of lost souls, as the programmes of other television stations did; *Kismis*; *Arwah penasaran* would also find a solution at the end of the story. Publicity contained such sentences as: 'For example, to help the lost soul enter the Hereafter in peace the mediation of a *kyai* is required', and: 'And indeed a good solution is still to ask Allah for help.'⁴⁰ An example of *Kismis*; *Arwah penasaran* screened on 5 January 2003 was the story of Eriya, a girl from Kampung Asem, Cililitan, East Jakarta, who was murdered when she was six months pregnant. She was found with her throat slit open, her head nearly severed from her trunk. Her soul wandered through the area in search of the person who had killed her and people from the village often encountered her ghost. All was well after an *ustaz* had prayed for her. She was then able to return to her world (*kembali ke alamnya*) in peace (Anugerah 2003). By June 2003, the producer of *Percaya nggak percaya* felt that his programme also required the prestigious assistance of a religious co-star. Initially the series had consisted of several parts, but now it was thought best just to maintain the *cerita misteri* section about people who had experienced a supernatural event. As a new development, the programme would no longer merely give a 'news coverage of mysteries' (*liputan berita seputar misteri*), but would also involve the participation of an Islamic paranormal medium, who would lead prayers and beseech permission and guidance from Allah before location shooting commenced. The participation of a paranormal medium on location as well as a break at sunset to observe the sunset prayer (*sholat Maghrib*) would be a hard and fast rule. It was felt that this would ensure that the production of the series would not encounter any hindrance from the spirits which it may have disturbed.⁴¹

The most extreme example of a marriage between horror realities and symbols of Islamic authorization was the horror reality show *Pemburu hantu* (Ghosthunters), which hit the screens in early 2004. In this programme ghosts were caught 'live' on screen. The concept of *Pemburu hantu* was based on the Hollywood blockbuster *Ghostbusters* (Ivan Reitman, 1984), a film about a team of men hunting down and catching ghosts. In *Pemburu hantu* this theme was applied in real life. People at home could call the television programme to report ghostly apparitions or some haunted place. The

40 'Misalnya untuk mengembalikan arwah penasaran ke alam baka dengan tenang membutuhkan bantuan kiai.' 'Dan memang jalan keluar yang baik tetap meminta pertolongan kepada Allah.'

41 'Tayangan bau mistik laku; Mahluk halus sering mengganggu', *Majalah Film*, (13-27)-6-2003.

Pemburu hantu team would then set out to investigate the place and, should they indeed be present, capture the ghosts or other supernatural beings and cleanse the place and its surroundings of 'negative energies'. After the ghosts had been captured, a sticker would be glued on a wall with the image of a ghost and the words 'under observation' (*dalam pengawasan*). If the ghosts had not re-appeared after a few weeks, this sticker was replaced by another sticker showing the image of a ghost crossed out and bearing the words 'free of ghosts' (*bebas hantu*). The slogans associated with the programme sounded like commercials for a detergent: 'Ghosthunters, the supreme solution for overcoming ghosts!' (*Pemburu hantu solusi jitu atasi hantu!*) and 'Ghosthunters: contact us, we'll come, and we'll cleanse [the place]!' (*Pemburu hantu; hubungi kami, kami datang, kami bersihkan!*).

The *Pemburu hantu* team consisted of four persons: the supernatural expert (a *dukun kejawen*, or Javanese magic specialist) Pak Hariry Mak, Ustaz Aziz Hidayatullah, a young *kejawen/santri* (Javanese mystic/Islamic scholar), Ki Gusti Candra Putih, and a painter, who drew portraits of the beings with his eyes covered. During the programmes the team prayed and invoked God's help several times before, during, and after the ghost hunt. Its members also asked for the 'interactive prayers' (*doa interaktif*) of the viewers at home, beseeching God's support (*doa restu*) to ensure that the mission would be brought to a safe conclusion. When their mission was accomplished at the end of the programme, in a final comment Ustaz Aziz would confirm the existence of supernatural beings and explain that this also is acknowledged in Islam, for their existence is described in the Quran.⁴²

The participation of religious leaders in *Kismis*; *Arwah penasar*; the observance of religious rituals in *Percaya nggak percaya*; the emphasis on the authorization of Islam and the power of prayer in the hyper-real *Pemburu hantu* series –all are reminders of the influence of the Code of Ethics. During the New Order, a *kyai* figured prominently as the appropriate authority figure or expert to restore order in horror films which dealt with public taboos as a means to evade censorship. While many New Order censorship regulations and guidelines for film production became obsolete during Reformasi, within a few years the *kyai* resurfaced to deal with supernatural issues, or to speak on behalf of ghosts and other supernatural creatures, in a new formula for the mystery television series. There was now a subtle difference. The re-instated participation of religious figures in post-Soeharto mystery television

42 For a detailed description of an episode of *Pemburu hantu*, see Arps and Van Heeren 2006.

series implied a discourse about the supernatural which diverged from those discourses circulating during the New Order. In addition to the rise in reality TV, the socio-political climate of Reformasi set in motion a questioning of past dominant discourses of New Order rule. To unravel the authoritarian dogmas of the New Order, a widespread call for 'facts', 'truth', and 'authenticity' resounded. The search for post-Soeharto versions of the facts, realities, and truths of Indonesian society also impinged on mystery television programmes. Moreover, there were commercial grounds for such a call: reality shows cashed in on people's beliefs in the supernatural. In this setting, everything claimed to be true in horror infotainment programmes needed proof that it was 'real' and not caused by mere camera tricks or special effects. For example, a senior lecturer in criminology at the University of Indonesia in Jakarta, Prof Dr Tb Ronny Rahman Nitibaskara, proposed that in order to refute the idea that whatever occurred in the mystery programmes was fictitious, these programmes should be subjected to an analysis by an assembly of *ulama* and experts from different disciplines.⁴³

Hence, the use of religious and other authorities in the new formulas devised for the mystery television genre during Reformasi functioned to authenticate what was shown on television as real. The tendency to define and authenticate the mysterious as part of present-day reality shifted the previous New Order boundaries, which had determined where the real and supernatural in Indonesian society should be placed and how they should be understood and exploited. In that sense, the *kyai* in horror reality shows after Reformasi challenged those discourses which rejected the mysterious as part of modern Indonesian society, marking possible new forms of imagining contemporary society. Nevertheless, the participation of religious leaders and the observance of religious rituals were presumably also re-instated to ward off anticipated objections by mainly Islamic groups, which may have felt disturbed, had the mysterious been allowed to hover undefined and uncontrolled. As such, the presence of a *kyai*, combined with an Islamic medium and religious observance on set as an integral part of these programmes, was intended to permit and legitimize the new themes in horror infotainment. Reminiscent of the old practices of evading censorship under the New Order, the use of these religious figures and symbols can once again be perceived as a safeguard enabling producers to show everything which might be construed as problematic, and still get away with it.

43 'Mengapa tayangan mistik digemari?', *Republika*, 12-4-2003.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I examined the Indonesian horror genre as a forum for the representation of constituents of the nation and the formation of national identity. I showed that the genre itself, as well as certain formats and formulas employed in it, represented and imagined specific audiences and communities. New Order discourses about horror films produced for the cinema argued that the genre represented, first, the Indonesian film industry and Indonesian peoples, who, as part of Eastern culture, were close to mysticism. Second, horror films were seen as a genre for the lower classes and rural communities, because the films were screened mostly in rural or lower-class cinemas. Third, because of the *deus ex machina* formula which employed the intervention of a *kyai*, horror film was gradually equated with *film dakwah* and Islamic communities. When horror films were produced in another format, for the medium of television, and reached broader Indonesian audiences other connotations began to arise. The emphasis shifted to different ways of imaging and imagining the supernatural and rational in Indonesian society and raised the discourses about the horror genre to another level.

From this new perspective, discourses about the horror genre sought to find acceptable forms of representing the supernatural on Indonesian television without interfering with New Order conceptions of how to image and imagine the modern Indonesian nation. Mystical films or television series faced opposition if they did not reflect certain sanctioned formulas and dominant discourses about development and the rational – or reality based on Islamic teaching – of how to imagine the supernatural in New Order society. For example, in 1998 Minister of Information Hartono proscribed these series so as not to ‘cause a rift in our nation with items which contest religion’. During fierce debates about mystery films, the definition of acceptable modes of representation of the supernatural and reality was discussed. Reformasi implied changes in both senses. The first shift occurred in the link between certain film formats and formulas and certain imagined audiences or communities. Changes in horror film formulas altered the specific association of horror with lower-class, rural, and Islamic communities. Several horror films produced for the cinema demonstrated a new freedom of expression among film-makers. In many cases the changes heralded the exit of the *kyai*. Also, a number of new Indonesian horror films were now screened in top-end cinemas, signalling that horror was no longer a genre confined to the lower classes only.

The second change could be found in the discourses of how to imagine the supernatural as part of Indonesian society. During Reformasi, television began to produce horror programmes according to new formulas. Within a few years new horror 'reality shows' or infotainment programmes emerged. These presented the supernatural as part of the everyday life of Indonesians. Such programmes contested the New Order discourses which had defined the mysterious as a realm outside reality. However, even though horror reality shows altered discourses about the supernatural, in due course old modes of representing the mysterious emerged again in some of the new television formulas. Personified by the *kyai*, past representations regained ground in an altered discourse. The *kyai* was an unrivalled asset in the exploitation of the supernatural in Indonesian audio-visual media. He increased the realism of horror reality shows and warded off censorship at the same time. I further explore the combination of commerce, censorship, and Islam in post-Soeharto media in the next chapter.