Reformasi and underground

After May 1998, the bid to introduce reform was felt in every possible field. The spirit of Reformasi instigated a negotiating and redefining of all kinds of issues, and the term reformasi was rather ubiquitous. All types of groups and organizations were inspired to use the word in their names. Nor did it stop there. The popularity of the slogan cast a wider net and spread to advertisements in which everything was transformed into a product of reform: ‘reformation apartments’ were on sale; special reformation religious journeys to Mecca (*umrah reformasi*) were promoted, and special offers for office space were advertised as a ‘Reformation Package’ (Van Dijk 2001:208-9). Indonesian cinema was not immune to Reform and various changes inevitably occurred at that time.

In the first chapter I discussed mainstream New Order film mediation practices and discourses which disclosed the politics of representation and imagination of Indonesian communities. This chapter is its antithetical image in that it presents post-Soeharto alternative, underground, or, as Gotot Prakosa (2005:3) has called them in English, ‘side-stream’ channels of film mediation practices and discourses. This is not to deny that also under the New Order alternative film productions and underground or side-stream modes of distribution and exhibition did exist. In the 1980s, experimental short films shot with 8 mm video or 16 mm film cameras were produced under the banner of ‘street act cinema’ (*sinema ngamen*), and ‘guerilla film’ (*film guerilla*). Such films were taken from one district to another and screened on walls, or sometimes bed sheets, which explains one of the nicknames given the cinema movement: ‘drying [laundry] cinema’ (*sinema jemuran*). ¹ Because this type of film existed outside mainstream channels for film production, distribution, and exhibition, however, it barely ever received a mention in Indonesian media.

After the resignation of Soeharto, side-stream cinema cultures and practices had the chance to gain visibility. The rise of new, alternative film genres and channels of distribution and exhibition transformed discourses on representations and imaginations of Indonesian communities. Many discourses, which were connected to comparable concerns in Third Cinema theories, evolved around themes of domination and resistance in post-Soeharto film mediation practices and society. Third Cinema theories addressed discourses on political and economic domination, and the global distribution of power of neo-colonialist First Worlds over Third Worlds. The theories on Third Cinema will be further explained below. In this chapter, I refer to Third Cinema on two different levels. In the first two sections, I allude to Third Cinema because comparable concerns were part of the post-Soeharto mediascape. In the third section, I broaden the analysis of discourses and use of Third Cinema theories. Here I connect discourses on representations of dominance and resistance to other post-Soeharto alternative channels of film distribution and consumption: side-stream film festivals and pirated Video Compact Discs (VCDs).

Reformation in film production: kuldesak and film independen

The voice of an old man singing a song recalls the time of the struggle for Indonesian Independence; it is a song of pride, hope, and great expectations for the future.² His singing is accompanied by an image of the Indonesian flag, the symbol of the nation’s pride and glory. Yet, the flag is not blowing bravely and proudly in the wind, but is flapping weakly around the flagpole—a symbol of the confusion and disappointment of so many in an unstable Indonesia three years after President Soeharto had resigned. This shot was the last scene of the short independent, or indie, film Kepada yang terhormat titik 2 (To the esteemed:). The film was produced by Dimas Jayasrana and Bastian, students at the Jenderal Soedirman University in the rural town of Purwokerto, Central Java. It had its premiere there on 18 January 2002. The film shows how the common people of Purwokerto perceived their municipality. It captured urban life, and deliberately added a gritty touch by showing an impression of the lives of street vendors, street children, and farmers. At the end of the film, an old peasant recounts that throughout his life those

² Part of this section was published in Inside Indonesia (Van Heeren 2002).