Post-colonial histories, common people, and commercial frameworks

The New Order can be construed as a neo-imperialist or neo-colonialist regime (Anderson 1990; Sen 2003). Particularly in the period immediately after the resignation of President Soeharto, discussions began to emerge in the world of film which addressed concepts of post-colonialism in cinema. This chapter examines a variety of post-colonial discourses and discourse practices in film after the eclipse of the New Order. The guiding theme is Fairclough’s premise (1995:52) that all ongoing changes in society and culture are expressed in the media’s diverse and conflicting shifts in discursive practices. I analyse the way in which, after the stepping down of President Soeharto, new post-colonial discourses and imaginations of society were reflected in film discourse practices. I explore the emergence of alternative genres and try to pinpoint the continuations in particular modes of engagement, the dominant representations of topics which are part of the central discourses in a society, and the practice of framing films, which continued to survive during Reformasi. As argued by Fairclough (1995:65), the discursive practices of an unsettled society are on average variable and unstable, while the discursive practices of a conservative and established society are unitary and conventional. Using this argument, I will examine variations and continuities in representations of Indonesian history and society during the traumatic yet exciting times of Reform.

COUNTER-HISTORY: CHANGES AND CONTINUITIES IN POST-SOEHARTO MODES OF ENGAGEMENT

In the euphoric atmosphere of Reform that prevailed after the resignation of President Soeharto, attempts were enthusiastically
made in all kinds of fields to adapt to changes in the socio-political conditions of the Indonesian nation or to set them in motion. Some debates addressed the problem of New Order historiography and the need to ‘set history straight’ (meluruskan sejarah).\(^1\) Hence dominant representations of New Order film history also came under fire. In addition to questioning the highlights in film history, several debates concentrated on New Order propaganda historical films. The contents and compulsory screening of the film *Penumpasan pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* in particular were targeted.

The excitement of Reform and the concomitant sudden freedom of expression generated new developments in discursive practices which inevitably involved the contents and mediation of films. Different film-makers, both professional and amateur, began to produce films in order to present new versions of history and society. In a short time, there was a rise in the production of documentaries. A large number of the new documentaries told alternative or counter-histories to those which unfolded under the New Order. Generally speaking, these documentaries tended to focus on the victims of Soeharto rule. Those who had suffered were given a platform to tell their stories about the atrocities committed under the New Order. Several non-governmental organizations, both foreign and domestic, aided in producing and funding these documentaries. The film *Kameng gampoeng nyang keunong geulawa* (Aryo Danusiri, 1999), for example, was supported by the Indonesian Institute for the Study of Human Rights and Advocacy Elsham, and his film *Penyair negeri Linge* (The poet of Linge homeland, 2000) by the Ford Foundation. The film *Perempuan di wilayah konflik* (Women in conflict zones, Gadis Arivia, 2002) was produced by the Yayasan Jurnal Perempuan (Women’s Journal Foundation); *Lahir di Aceh* (Born in Aceh, Ariani Djalal, 2003) was produced by the Tifa Foundation and Offstream Production; *Pena pena patah* (Broken pens, Sarjev Faozan, 2002) was produced by the Coalition of NGO’s on Human Rights in Aceh; and *Kado buat rakyat Indonesia* (A present for the Indonesian people, Daniel Indra Kusuma, 2003) was supported by the Centre for Democracy and Social Justice and the Indonesian Centre for Reform and Social Emancipation.

Besides documentaries, a few fiction films based on true stories of human rights violations were also produced. For example, the docu-drama *Puisi tak terkuburkan* (English title: *A Poet*, Garin

\(^1\) For more on the debates on the need to ‘straighten history’, see Schulte Nordholt 2004:11-2. Another comprehensive study on coming to grips with New Order historiography during reform is Zurbuchen 2005.