I was perhaps ten years old when I first laid eyes on the Sundelbolong, when she first grabbed hold of my mind and would not let go. I am still struggling to make sense of this vampire ghost. Just as she has haunted the outer limits of my imagination for many years, the Sundelbolong, this exquisite and horrifying creature of Indonesian mythology, has haunted the margins of both the Western horror canon and of writings on Indonesian cinema. This enigmatic and charismatic vampire ghost has been banished to the tortured margins for far too long. I present a textual analysis of the film *Sundelbolong* to argue that the figure of the Sundelbolong acts as a compelling presence within the Indonesian national imaginary. Released in the early 1980s, during the height of former President Suharto’s power, *Sundelbolong* occupies a space in which the gender ideologies of the New Order Indonesian government and the gender fantasies of the world of the vampire ghost are confronted with each other, with the Sundelbolong threatening to rupture the symbolic order with its grotesque fantasies of the feminine. I argue that *Sundelbolong* operates within a pattern of culture that negotiates between order and disorder and, as a fantasy of the feminine, offers the possibility of destabilizing the essentialist construction of women by New Order gender and state ideologies that structure them primarily as wives and mothers.

The powerful drive toward the restoration of symbolic order constitutes an important pattern within Indonesian cinema. Anthropologist Karl Heider and important Indonesian film theorist Krishna Sen acknowledge the centrality of order in national imagery and narratives. Heider in particular stresses order’s centrality, arguing that in a dialogue between order and disorder, order is ultimately restored. Indeed, Heider illustrates how this pattern courses through other Indonesian art forms like the Javanese *wayang kulit* or shadow puppets where the
negotiation between order and disorder is its “structuring dynamic” and “guiding principle.” Unlike Heider, who views the drive towards order in synchronic terms, Sen contextualizes conceptions of order as a response to the policies and regulations of the New Order government. Sen adds a feminist sensibility to this process of restoring order by exploring the dialogue between order and the representation of women in Indonesian films, asking, “when the woman is represented as powerful or vocal, to what effect and in whose interest is this strength mobilized in the text?”

In her investigation of woman’s place in dis/order and film narratives, Sen turns to realist genres such as romance films and dramas, where women figure prominently as protagonists. Absent from both Sen and Heider’s examination is a sustained consideration of horror in general, and the popular female vampire ghost sub-genre in particular. I argue that horror, infused with the rich potential to be transgressive and subversive, is a fertile genre for cultural analysis. Horror draws upon universal myths yet is punctuated with cultural specificities. As arresting haunting visions, female vampire ghosts consume and command much of the diegesis, centering questions of the feminine. With Indonesian censors paying scant attention to gender as a mode of social critique and with horror as a largely underexamined genre, it seems particularly apt to begin to untangle the disruptive web of gender and sexual politics that pulses through this very potent sub-genre during the Suharto regime of the 1970s and 1980s.

The Indonesian horror film must be wrenched away from its status as a cult fetish object and must be examined on its own terms, with its peculiar coterie of characters drawn largely from Indonesian folk legends. Such a culturally specific inquiry can in turn help dislodge horror studies’ tendency of Western-centrism. The Indonesian female vampire ghost in particular offers a novel perspective into the re-reading of the seductive, fanged, primarily male Western vampire. She is born of oral legend, she is both ghost and vampire, and unlike her male Western counterpart, who must infect his victim with his bite in order to create another, the vampire ghost’s transformation is a matter of probability and determined by her manner of death. This vampiric dialogue culminates in a cross-cultural mélange that places Indonesian horror cinema within a global circulation of horror images, icons and conventions. It situates these texts along a specific national register, showcasing the very local struggles with modernity and exposing the contested terrain of gender and sexuality within 1980s New Order Indonesia.

The Pantheon of Vampire Ghosts

The Sundelbolong is but one iteration within a wider pantheon of female vampire ghosts that thrive in myths and legends across Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia. A brief account of these figures and some of the ancient beliefs that surround them is essential, especially given Western critics’ general unfamiliarity with the traditions of the Indonesian vampire ghosts. The Sundelbolong’s genealogy intermingles with that of the Pontianak, Langsuyar, and the Penanggalan. The origin myths of these vampire ghosts are diverse and at times, contradictory, because these myths were culled from rich oral traditions that spanned many different regions within Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula and as such are subject to a plethora of recastings and re-imaginings.

J. Gordon Melton, for example, has found points of comparison between Greek mythology’s Lamiai and the Langsuyar. In Melton’s origin myth for the Langsuyar, the Langsuyar is a woman whose baby died at childbirth. Shocked by the death of her child, the Langsuyar “clapped her hands and flew away into a nearby tree.” Folk legend says that the Langsuyar has a hole in her neck which she uses to suck the blood of children. Unlike vampires in the Western canon, whose transformation depends on a bite, a woman’s transformation into the Langsuyar occurs either when she gives birth or in the forty day period after childbirth during which the woman is considered unclean, thus intimately
intertwining the supernatural and monstrous capacities of the Langsuyar with feminine procreativity and fertility.\textsuperscript{12}

In certain regions of Malaysia and Indonesia, the Langsuyar takes shape in the figure of the Pontianak, which is often described as the ghost of a still-born child.\textsuperscript{13} In other areas of the Malay Peninsula, she has been characterized as the ghost of a woman who died at childbirth.\textsuperscript{14} The Pontianak remains one of the best known vampire ghosts to appear on film with the release of \textit{Pontianak} in 1957 by Cathay-Keris, a key studio during Malaya’s golden studio period of the 1950s. Cathay-Keris released four other Pontianak films to popular acclaim (\textit{Dendam Pontianak} [1957], \textit{Sumpah Pontianak} [1958], \textit{Pontianak Kembali} [1963], and \textit{Pontianak Gua Musang} [1964]). \textit{Sumpah Pontianak} was also Cathay’s first film to be released in CinemaScope.\textsuperscript{15}

The Sundelbolong of oral tradition originates from Java. According to legend, a woman is transformed into a Sundelbolong when she commits suicide while pregnant; in the various re-tellings of the story, the pregnancy is almost always a result of her rape by one man or a group of men. The Sundelbolong entices her hapless male victims to their deaths with her long, thick black hair and flowing, white nightgown.\textsuperscript{16} In contrast to the irreversible vampirism of Western traditions, both the Sundelbolong and the Langsuyar can be transformed back into mortal human form and reincorporated into the community life of village society, after the enactment of ritual mutilations. A large nail hammered into the head of the Sundelbolong instantly transforms her into a beautiful woman who will bring much luck and riches, either to the man who performs the deed or to the one who marries her.\textsuperscript{17} The Langsuyar, on the other hand, can rejoin the living community if her hair and nails are cut off and placed within the hole in her neck.\textsuperscript{18}

The Penanggalan is perhaps the most horrifying of the vampire ghosts. There are many myths surrounding her creation, some of which include the image of a woman who engages in the black arts and learns how to fly. During her flight, her head and neck separate from her body, such that her head and neck are attached only to her entrails, which she uses to suck the blood of babies and women during childbirth.\textsuperscript{19}

The figures of the Penanggalan, Pontianak, Langsuyar, and Sundelbolong are characterized “vampire ghosts” within a sub-category of “ghosts” because, unlike ghosts and spirits, these vampire ghosts suck the blood of their victims. Authors like Mohd Taib Osman have conflated the myths and imagery of the Langsuyar with the Penanggalan, illustrating the changeable nature of the vampire ghost. According to Osman, the Langsuyar is the ghost of a woman who dies at childbirth and who assumes the shape of a head with entrails dangling from it; her vampiric nature manifests itself when she sucks the blood of women during childbirth.\textsuperscript{20}

While spirits and ghosts are both classified under the term \textit{hantu}, spirits and ghosts differ in their origins. Spirits are not necessarily human and can include nature spirits, guardian spirits of places, and the familiars, while ghosts are souls of the dead and therefore of human origin.\textsuperscript{21} A ghost can be malevolent or benevolent, depending on the manner of its death and the power of its \textit{semangat}, which is the energy, soul, spirit, life force or manna that pulses through animate and inanimate objects,\textsuperscript{22} according to fundamental principles of animism, the Old Indonesian belief system which existed before the introduction of Hinduism (pre-7th Century) and prior to Indonesia’s conversion to Islam (pre-14th Century).\textsuperscript{23} Intrinsic to all objects, animals, and people, the \textit{semangat} does not disappear upon death, but rather manifests in a different source. All objects and living beings can gain and lose a certain measure of their \textit{semangat}. If a woman, for example, is transformed into one of the vampire ghosts, her \textit{semangat} would be especially powerful because of the intense wave of negative energy emerging out of her violent and untimely death.

The Sundelbolong, Penanggalan, Langsuyar, and Pontianak populate a mythological landscape that is both vibrant and dynamic. They
are embedded within a pantheon of ghosts, spirits and familiars and embody a double-necessity—both ghost and vampire—denied to their masculine Western counterparts. These fluid vampire ghosts of oral folklore are “retentions of Indonesian animism” and their powers of seduction and strength lie in their virulent semangat.24 I explore the figure of the Sundelbolong as envisioned in the film Sundelbolong (Rapi Films, 1981) in order to examine how this vampire ghost disrupts the notions of femininity authored by the Indonesian New Order. I focus specifically on her transformation into a vampire ghost, the duality of her position as vampire and ghost, her striking physicality, and her extremely potent semangat.

**Sundelbolong: Abjection and Transgression**

*Sundelbolong* depicts the sad tale of Alisa and her eventual transformation into the much feared figure of the Sundelbolong. Opening credits claim that the film’s portrayal of the Sundelbolong is gathered from the legends of “our nation,” a move which insistently weaves the Sundelbolong into the fabric of the Indonesian national imaginary. The film’s introduction of the Sundelbolong exhibits the very essence of abjection, defined by Julia Kristeva as that which “disturbs identity, system, order” and “does not respect borders, positions, rules.”25 As she turns her body to display her back, we see the Sundelbolong’s rotting cavernous flesh, her hollowed out back teeming with quivering maggots. The Sundelbolong’s putrid and decaying back does not respect the border between the inside and the outside of the body. The interior processes of digestion, for example, are exteriorized to graphic effect. In a particularly grotesque scene, the famished Sundelbolong arrives at a food stall and asks in a commanding monotone voice for two hundred sticks of *satay* (small kebabs on a stick). She devours them at inhuman speed, then drinks boiling soup that bubbles in a large pot. Her back slowly turns towards the screen, and we see that which—in an ordered universe, where boundaries are respected—should not be seen. Chunks of *satay* drop and pile on the cement floor; some pieces dangle, caught between the folds of rotting flesh. The soup sloshes and drips through her gaping back, drenching the ground beneath her. Maggots and worms continue to slither there, oblivious of the meat and soup rushing past them.

The Sundelbolong, a “hollowed bitch,” possesses a monstrous womb, a putrid cavity which is “no longer closed, smooth, intact... it may tear apart, open out, reveal its innermost depths.”26 What this monstrous womb reveals is the very disruptive and transgressive potential of the Sundelbolong to destabilize the pervasive gender and state ideologies of Suharto’s New Order government. Joanne Sharp has argued that “symbols of nationalism are not gender neutral but in enforcing a national norm, they implicitly or explicitly construct a set of gendered norms.”27 Sharp’s project of interrogating gendered national identities and critiquing Benedict Anderson’s phallocentric imagined community is a useful reminder of the need to strip away both implicit and explicit gendered norms of Indonesian conceptions of nationhood and national identity.

These gendered norms operate most explicitly in State Ibuism and more implicitly in the Pancasila, two reigning cultural and political ideologies promoted by the New Order government of former President Suharto. State Ibuism—or “state motherhood”—is manifested along various economic, political, and cultural registers, placing women in a hierarchy that assigns greater value to her status as wife and mother than to her individuality and agency.28 The Pancasila was promulgated by President Soekarno in 1945, the year of Indonesia’s birth as a nation-state, and revolves around five main principles which include a belief in one powerful God and the importance of an ideology of national unity.29 Although God is not gendered within the Pancasila, it is an implicit assumption that this God is masculine, and by the 1980s, Suharto was recast as the ultimate and all-powerful Bapak or father. Under this ideological program, it was implied...
that national unity would be achieved if women would continue to operate as wives and mothers, striving to maintain the integrity of the Indonesian family.

In Sundelbolong, the prevailing imagery of Suharto’s idealized wife/mother employed in the service of nationhood is systematically subverted through the actions of the avenging vampire ghost. It is Alisa, before her transformation into the Sundelbolong, who exemplifies the attributes and qualities of New Order wife. After the credit sequence, the film flashes back to Alisa, before her transformation into the Sundelbolong, who is introduced in a suburban residential setting, wearing her wedding kebaya, surrounded by a procession of wedding guests and a doting husband. When her chivalrous sailor husband, Hendarto, carries her over the threshold into their home, the film explicitly signals Alisa’s entrance into the symbolic order as dutiful New Order wife.

She does not complain when her husband is called away on a nine month naval assignment; Alisa understands his commitment and promises to remain faithful and true to their love. The picture of their union is romanticized and idealized, as seen during their professions of love, which is both bittersweet and idyllic, with strains of romantic music on the soundtrack. After her husband’s departure, Alisa pines longingly for him, trying to inhale his essence when she smells the shirt which she dutifully embroiders with his monogram. Alisa plans to contribute to the household income by parlaying her sewing and embroidery talents into a possible career, which suggests a measure of independence that might seem at odds with a reading of her as ideal New Order wife. But while Alisa seems to be contributing economically to the marriage, she frames this earning potential within her role as wife: she claims that this work would keep her so busy that she would not miss her husband.

Alisa’s easy transition to New Order wife and dutiful seamstress belies her sordid past. Through a series of Hendarto’s flashbacks, we learn that Alisa was a prostitute and Hendarto, her john. When they first meet, Alisa sports a short, afro-like wig and wears a form fitting Western-style outfit, signifying her remove from national symbols and ideals. In the following scene, Hendarto approaches Alisa with a chaste white-laced nightgown. She sits smoking on the couch as he places the nightgown against her and removes both her cigarette and wig. He slowly teases her hair loose from its tight bun to reveal its length and luster. Hendarto thus systematically removes the signifiers that exclude her from New Order ideals. When they pose for their wedding photograph, there is a picture of holy Mecca in the background. Hendarto seals this tender moment by planting a pointedly chaste kiss on Alisa’s forehead. Objects of Western decadence and sexual transgression, like cigarettes and Alisa’s provocative mode of dress are erased, replaced by the chaste nightgown. Alisa is now a pure, faithful New Order wife who exists as an extension of her

Maria Menado in Pontianak Kembali (1963)
husband. Her wantonness, a threat to the symbolic order in its challenge to principles of monogamy, is silenced. She no longer occupies the paradoxical space of the prostitute, where she is traded as an object for male pleasure, yet is offered by her role a measure of autonomy and economic power not available to New Order wife and mother.

Alisa’s second transformation—from dutiful New Order wife into the Sundelbolong—is a dramatic and horrific one, and the process underscores the vulnerability of women who are positioned within a social structure that binarizes her function as either doting virtuous wife or degraded object of sexual traffic. When Alisa turns to Mami, an older female acquaintance, for help in her sewing business endeavor, Mami’s patron Rudy urges Alisa to model for him. Alisa’s refusal leads to a heated argument, culminating with Rudy calling Alisa a prostitute. Mortified, Alisa slaps Rudy and rushes out of the boutique. On her way home, Rudy has his henchmen manufacture a lure to distract and kidnap her. During her abduction, Alisa struggles to get away; her once tightly bound hair is loose and flowing, echoing her hysteria and sense of dislocation. She begs to be let go, clinging desperately to Mami, whose stony face and sullen tone clearly indicate that her aid depends on Alisa returning to Mami’s brothel and re-assuming her role as prostitute. Alisa refuses; Rudy orders his henchmen to bind and gag her. She is then brutally gang-raped by Rudy and four of his thugs.

The rape and defilement of Alisa’s body is a catalyst for Alisa’s initial move away from the symbolic New Order. She can no longer lay claim to the status of pure and faithful wife, and her role as dutiful “mother,” inscribed in a state-sanctioned matrimony, is undermined as well. Instead of bearing the child of her husband, Alisa is forced to carry the child of her rapist to full term. Desperate at the thought of disappointing her husband, Alisa attempts to end her pregnancy, though she appears nonplussed when she begins to bleed between her legs. Her maid urges Alisa to see the doctor, but she is content to lie on the bed and let her fetus slip out from within her; the fetus, however, remains resolutely within her womb.

Finally, Alisa seeks a doctor to perform an abortion. As a patriarchal extension of the State, the doctor serves to impose and regulate the New Order’s definitions of wife and mother: he will perform an abortion only if it is medically necessary, and he chastises Alisa when she admits that the child is not her husband’s. The doctor urges her to be accountable for her actions, arguing that since the baby has not sinned, Alisa should not be afraid. Confronting Alisa, he asks how many times she tried to perform her own abortion; distraught and tearful, Alisa admits to five attempts. The doctor, horrified, barrages Alisa with questions of how she did it. Alisa tearfully replies, “in many ways.” Admonishing her angrily, the doctor declares she had committed a great sin and proclaims she will pay the price with a deformed child. Stricken by these reproofs, Alisa returns home, haunted by images of grotesque babies
that are a product of her violated womb and destructive thoughts.\textsuperscript{30}

Alisa’s situation thus dramatically articulates a misogynistic double bind: she is a bad woman for having been raped, and a bad mother because she chooses to abort her baby, subverting her New Order defined roles as wife and mother. In a particularly disturbing sequence, Alisa is bombarded with the shrill cry of babies. She tries to run away, but runs into another baby, superimposed next to the first. Alisa’s fears about giving birth to a deformed infant are fantastically realized when a door creaks open to reveal a child with scars on its face and what appear to be missing fingers. The shriek of children continues to build as she looks down to see three babies at her feet, one of which has a grotesque discoloration on its buttocks. Visibly distraught, she runs into another room to find four babies wailing on the floor. The fragmenting of Alisa’s fragile psyche is visually performed in the fracturing and monstrous multiplication of the previously stable cinematic image: several babies’ heads encircle her, creating a prism-like effect in which she is literally entrapped by the monstrosity of motherhood and procreation. When she comes face to face with an encephalitic baby, Alisa is finally unable to stand the onslaught of these images of her aberrant progeny. In slow motion, she flees from the piercing, ululant shrieking; with hair flowing she crashes through the glass door. In one last desperate act, Alisa commits suicide by gouging out her back, removing the fetus. Alisa thus transforms into the Sundelbolong, the “hollowed bitch.”

Unlike Alisa’s earlier transgressions of New Order femininity, where she was “rescued” from the marginality of prostitution and initiated into role of wife, Alisa’s violation of acceptable femininity in her role as the Sundelbolong cannot be as easily covered over. The Sundelbolong appears as an extraordinarily blatant breach of national ideals of womanhood, defined so narrowly as wife and mother. As a vampire ghost, with her hollowed out back underscoring the absence of her womb, Alisa is no longer capable of reproductive function, one of the essential components of State-defined femininity. Additionally, the Sundelbolong seeks to avenge the wrongs inflicted upon her body and psyche by summoning her virulent \textit{semangat} to mete out her punishment on her brutal rapists. With her castrative powers,\textsuperscript{31} she enacts her own system of justice where the State’s official powers (inscribed with a misogynist double-standard) failed her: the rape trial found her attackers not guilty because of Alisa’s former status as a prostitute. In these multiple ways, the figure of the Sundelbolong violently performs the rupture of State Ibuism and the Pancasila’s rigid tenets.

The Sundelbolong as femme castratrice is a vampire ghost to be reckoned with. She methodically hunts down her rapists and Mami, the madam, luring the rapists by appearing to them as various enticing and alluring women. In one sequence, the Sundelbolong is an extremely curvaceous woman wearing a low-cut top, with
the first few buttons undone. She invites one rapist into a room with white walls. He soon learns that this woman is Alisa the Sundelbolong. She transforms into a corpse, clad in her white death shrouds, to torment him. What appears to be a room is now transformed into four white bricked walls. There is no door, no way to escape; the rapist is trapped in this tomb-like structure. At first, he is alone, but as some bricks begin to fall away, he sees the Sundelbolong, staring at him from the outside, floating upside down. She kills her rapist by hurling her tombstone, impaling him; the bricks of his tomb crumble on top of him.

As the Sundelbolong, Alisa’s earlier procreative power as wife/potential mother is made monstrous and is turned against her oppressors. She reveals her awesome reproductive powers not in creating a baby, but in replicating her arms into dismembered, rotting phallic weapons with which she kills the men. One rapist is impaled by her hand; another is strangled. The symbolic resonance of her supernatural regeneration of flesh resonates in other ways too, destabilizing the gendered norms of the New Order. State Ibuism defines women explicitly as “appendages and companions to their husbands, as procreators of the nation, as mothers and educators of children, as housekeepers, and as members of the Indonesian society—in that order.”32 Here, Alisa moves from functioning as her husband’s appendage to the Sundelbolong who uses her appendages to attack her tormenters, refusing to be contained by the terms of New Order gender ideologies.

The Sundelbolong saves the most fearsome revenge for her lead attacker. With mad, shrill laughter, the Sundelbolong flies through the air, chasing him with a vengeance. When he pauses by a banana tree, glancing around furtively for her, the banana tree itself transforms into the Sundelbolong, trapping him.33 She multiplies into three, then five heads that glow green and swirl around the frame, echoing Alisa’s earlier nightmare where the babies encircled and entrapped her with their constraining limitations of femininity to motherhood. Here, in contrast, her generative power becomes an aggressive, rather than entrapping force: her supernatural self-regeneration horrifies her tormentor. Once again, the specifically feminine power to generate life, which in the New Order is rigidly defined to conform to patriarchal ideals of nationhood, in this episode of revenge are employed to obliterate her oppressor.

The Sundelbolong’s final act of defiance to the New Order unfolds in this same sequence. The Sundelbolong transforms herself into a skull, then into the dreaded Penanggalan, her entrails dripping as she chases down her attacker. Unlike the Penanggalan of folk legend, the Sundelbolong as Penanggalan does not suck his blood; instead, she manifests her ghost-like properties rather than her vampiric nature, changing again into the skull, attempting to bite him. When he is almost at the point of death, Alisa’s husband Hendarto, the police, and the Imam (the religious leader) arrive; Hendarto pleads with her to stop. In a move that would have been unthinkable for Alisa in her human form, the Sundelbolong defiantly ignores her husband’s orders and chokes the final living rapist to death. Refusing to listen to the patriarchal command of her husband (pointedly flanked by religion and the law), the Sundelbolong explicitly rejects the symbolic order which calls for a strict adherence and respect for the law of the father or “Bapak.”

In addition to the gendered visions of retributional power embodied by the Sundelbolong, the film also explores and ultimately undermines broader patterns of Indonesian culture on screen. In a sequence reminiscent of Carrie’s prom scene where Carrie’s menarche-induced telekinetic powers wreak havoc on her tormentors,34 the Sundelbolong turns instead to the pre-Islamic (prior to the 14th Century) Old Indonesian belief system of animism and semangat, a belief system that is at odds with Suharto’s New Order regime (beginning in the mid-1960s) and its pretensions toward economic and technological modernity. In an especially vivid scene, the Sundelbolong chases one of her attackers to the warehouse that was the site of her rape.
Channeling her *semangat*, she manipulates the car’s *semangat* with her fingertips, using it to crush her rapist. Significantly, the Sundelbolong in this film most frequently manipulates the *semangat* of products of modern technology, like cars (transportation), telephone poles (telecommunication) and steel (industry) to achieve her ends. Accessing an ancient mystical power, she turns the emblems and infrastructure of a modern state against itself and, importantly, toward the ends of a kind of justice that the system’s pretensions toward rationality do not allow. As an abject force, violating borders and order, the Sundelbolong foregrounds the inherent inconsistencies within New Order state ideologies, articulating the tension between modernity and Old Indonesian belief systems vying for articulation and resolution within the construction of a modern Indonesian nation-state.

Ultimately, the Sundelbolong is recuperated back into the symbolic order that she so desperately challenges, when her husband urges her to return to the spirit world. The film concludes with the Sundelbolong’s departure, amidst the Islamic prayers of the Imam. While one might read this closure of the Sundelbolong’s disruptive rampage as an ideological re-containment of the possibilities of defying the New Order’s rigid prescriptions for women, I would argue that the Sundelbolong’s haunting resonance and her transgressive monstrousness outlast the potential defusing of her power at the end of the film.

The Sundelbolong is an unruly abject figure that destabilizes both New Order gender and state ideologies. By harnessing her *semangat* and through her manifestations as a Penanggalan and Sundelbolong, Alisa provides an alternative to the state ideology of the Pancasila, offering the possibility of a syncretic Indonesian folk identity, albeit a conflicted one—like the identity of women within New Order Indonesia. The tension between dutiful wife and the needs and desires of an Indonesian woman is a source of conflict throughout and is never truly resolved. Alisa undergoes cycles of transformation and recuperations: a prostitute who is re-signified as wife, who then changes into the wild figure of the Sundelbolong, and who is ultimately silenced to maintain the integrity of New Order gender and state ideologies. Through processes of transcultural reinscription, *Sundelbolong* transforms the conventions of horror genres such as the rape-revenge film and icons such as the vampire ghost to problematize the essentialist construction of the national female body as ordered wife and mother. The vampire ghost sub-genre offers a compelling illustration of other ways to fantasize and imagine the feminine in Indonesia.

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NOTES


2 I borrow the term “fantasizing the feminine” from the anthology edited by Laurie J. Sears. (*Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia* [Durham: Duke University Press, 1996]).


5 Sen, 135. Sen however, does not believe that this sense of order belies an Indonesian core. Rather, Sen situates this sense of order within a particular historical moment in the film industry and within the policies of a particular political structure—the New Order government (161).

6 Ibid., 136.
Sen focuses primarily on the prostitute film as an example of a genre that deviates from the traditional model of Indonesian femininity. She does discuss the horror genre as another deviant model, but does not delve much deeper than this description: “Some processes of corruption of female nature...can be reversed. But when a woman’s sexuality is aroused outside the sphere of monogamy, it signifies a crisis for this symbolic world. One mode of dealing with this...is through the witches and female ghosts in horror films. The woman is raped or seduced and then left by a man. In revenge she turns to evil in the sphere of the supernatural, either as a ghost haunting men who hurt her or as a witch torturing her previous tormentors with her magic until the right man, a religious figure, usually a devout Muslim, exorcises the evil spirit and kills the woman” (144). I seek to explore and expand upon this horror genre more fully here. Salim Said (Shadows on the Silver Screen: A Social History of Indonesian Film [Jakarta: The Lontar Foundation, 1991]) another central Indonesian film theorist, also does not provide sufficient examination of the Indonesian horror film.

8 Sen, 149. Stephen Gladwin in a forthcoming article, “Witches, Spells and Politics: The Horror Films of Indonesia,” (forthcoming in Fear Without Frontiers: Horror Cinema Across the Globe, Steven Schneider, ed.) acknowledges that Indonesian horror films were very much concerned with the “political satire” and cultural critique of President Suharto’s New Order government, of which Sundelbolong is a powerful text. According to his abstract posted on the Internet, Gladwin’s argument is similar to Sen’s and my own in that during the 1980s, women were attempting to “discard their roles as signifiers of fertility and submission” and that some of the demons and malevolent figures within Indonesian horror films were drawn from Indonesian folklore and mythology. He and I both argue for the viability of Indonesian horror as a genre that can critique the former regime of President Suharto.

9 Suzzanna, who portrays the Sundelbolong is a seductive cult actress of the 1970s and 1980s. Much scholarly work still needs to examine Suzzanna’s cult status, persona, and her large body of work that includes Ratu Ilmu Hitam (Queen of Black Magic, 1979) and Beranak dalam Kubur (Birth in the Tomb, 1972).

11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., 390.
14 Osman, 86.
17 See Malam Satu Suro, another film starring Suzzanna.
18 Melton, 389.
19 Ibid., 390.
20 Osman, 86. See also Leak (Mystics in Bali, 1981) directed by H. Tjut Jalil. Jalil’s body of work includes Dangerous Seductress (1992) where he is credited as John Miller and Pembalasan Ratu Pantai Selatan (The Revenge of the South Seas Queen 1988).
21 Ibid., 81-89.
22 Ibid., 78-79. For Osman’s discussion of the differences between animism and animatism, see pages 86-88.
23 Dr. Sharon Siddique, personal interview, 1997.
24 Osman, 75-89.
28 Suryakusuma, 101.
29 Ibid., 94.
30 Creed discusses this phenomenon in her chapter on the monstrous womb. She outlines the relationship between a mother’s desires/fantasies and the creation of deformed offspring (45-46).
31 Ibid., 123.
32 Suryakusuma, 101.
33 The banana tree carries particular significance in the local folklore and superstitions as a home for spirits or ghosts. In adopting and re-inscribing tropes from non-Indonesian films (in this case, the globally dominant Hollywood genre film), Sundelbolong is engaged in a process of “transcultural reinscription,” in Marsha Kinder’s words, wherein national and international media imagery and narratives collide, intermingle and are thus transformed. (For an extended discussion on the politics and processes of transcultural reinscription in another context, see Marsha Kinder, Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993]).