

MODERN ART AND CIVILIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION, INDONESIA AND BEYOND

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There are many ways to approach the theme above proposed by the Conference Conveners. It is possible to focus exclusively on the art side, to try to show for example how modernity appears in Indonesian artworks. But this would be, let us be frank, the easiest and narrowest way. I consider indeed that it is possible to read in the arts not only the state of the society that produces it, but, adopting a broader historical approach, to see in the evolution of the visual art forms a mirror of the evolution of society and, beyond, of civilization in general. This is no novelty. Pierre Frankstel¹, in his groundbreaking studies of sociology of art, reads in the apparition of perspective and that of modern(ist) art important paradigmatic changes in European civilization.

The history of Indonesian painting in the last two hundred years offers an interesting field to study the phenomenon in a non-Western culture . What does the art produced by Indonesian artists during this period signify. To which extent their representation of the Indonesia of their day, in the two understandings of the word representation, denotes the mental state, if not necessarily of the society of their day, at least of their society in its coming. The task is daunting. It goes from Raden Saleh, whose work spans much of 19th century, to today's global Yogya artists who communicate more intensely with their San Francisco or Osaka's equivalents than with artists from Indonesian past or their own Indonesian contemporary colleagues. What do those artists and those in between reveal about the transformations undergone by Indonesian society.

RADEN SALEH: HARBINGER OF MODERNITY

Let us begin with Raden Saleh. (1807-1880)Of course, owing to the traditional Eurocentrist reading of art, is not usually considered an "important" artist. He was "just" a good, if minor "European" court and animal painter. He was appreciated for his painting, and for himself, but not for what himself and his painting meant.

They meant in fact a lot. Here was a young man, taken 'hostage' for political reasons away from his autochthonous aristocratic milieu and entrusted to a Belgian painter Payen, who in a matter of years, beginning with botanical drawings in Bogor, managed to cover a stupendous range of artistic knowledge. These skills, whatever Western art historians may say, put him on a par with the best European artists of the time. His presence and career were a political challenge. Even though his days, in the middle of the 19th century, were those during which universal humanism and socialist utopia were taking

¹ La réalité figurative : éléments structurels de sociologie de l'art (Paris, 1965)

shape, as revealed in the 1848 pan-European revolutions, they were also the heydays of colonial expansion – Java war 1825-1830; French invasion in Algeria (1831); Cipayé Revolt against the British in India(1858); sack of the Summer Palace by French and British troops(185)– and the days in which “scientific” racism was seriously discussed. So he was a political threat.

But it is not only politically that Raden Saleh is meaningful, nor is it even on account of his importance to the art world. It is for the qualitative cultural jump that is inherent to the system of form found in his work. He no less than single-handedly broke-- even though it was initially brought about by colonization-- the hold of traditional symbolist expression on Javanese culture and mentality. Before Raden Saleh, Javanese culture, like all pre-modern cultures, did not try to “understand” nature or society. Trying to do so was considered at best unnecessary, or at the worst, sacrilege. The order of things –of the universe and society—was deemed to obey to a divine design, and all “understanding endeavor”, i.e. all attempt at understanding in order to act upon things, was deemed contentious. To those born into this culture, especially if of aristocratic upbringing, the ultimate goal in life was not to “understand”, but to “merge the self into the Godly” (Manunggal Kawula Gusti). A complex set of cultural cum mystical symbols were devised for this purpose, in literature and the theatre world, especially in the puppet show theater.

With Raden Saleh, things took, for the first time, a new turn. How and Why? Because, once in Bogor, under the care of C.G.C. Reinwardt, the Dutch official in charge of research in Bogor, the very young man (10) was made to adopt and stick to an attitude of systematic knowledge, in the Western sense of the word. Having displayed talent for drawing, this talent was put to use in botanical drawings. But, then what were botanical drawings the sign of? The sign of Enlightenment, part of a systematic comparative documentation of the whole botanical world undertaken since the 17th century. Thus Raden Saleh found himself, in Bogor, at the heart of the “knowledge system” linked to the process of colonization. Under the care of his Dutch trustee, and then of the Belgian painter Payen, he quickly assimilated the rational processes of documentation and representation. His mind, originally shaped , during his early childhood, by the symbolic world of Javanese culture, became simultaneously shaped by the scientific approach of Western cultures. This evolution was confirmed and reinforced by the art studies he later took up in The Netherlands (1829). He received there the best possible academic training and from that time onward, until his return to Indonesia in 1852, worked as a professional painter of romantic leanings. Thus to him, reality was not simply something given, but something that could be studied and analysed with the knowledge tools of optics and anatomy.

Raden Saleh, for this reason, represented a cultural shift. The point is not to know whether his style was naturalist (Kusnadi 1977: 152) or romantic (Dermawan 2001: 43), or whether it retained Eastern features, but to fully grasp the importance of the cultural shift embodied in his art. From Raden Saleh onward, Indonesian art will be heir both to the Javanese value system of symbols, that gives precedence to religion over reason and to the collective over the individual and to the Renaissance system of knowledge. It will be hybrid.

In any case, Raden Saleh's hybridity was definitely modern: he painted portraits that underlined the individual personality of his models, not their 'role' or 'power' as in traditional Javanese iconography, with his highly coded system. He also painted landscapes as landscapes, i.e. as 'objective', knowledgeable, decipherable space, very different from the unequally "charged" and often mythical localities (ashrams, forests etc) of Javanese literature (Serat Centini) and puppet show theatre.

This modernity had a political side. Commentators, particularly Indonesian ones, have underlined the presence of very 'Javanese' political messages in the artist's works, for example in the paintings "Antara Hidup dan Mati" (Between life and Death) and "Penggankapan Pangeran Diponegoro" (The Capture of Prince Diponegoro). One can indeed talk of the local side hybridity in the content of the message. But this hybridity is also very modern: if one looks at the various characters featured in "The Capture of Prince Diponegoro", what does one see : pride in the prince attitude, sadness in the attitude of his followers, arrogance in that of the Dutch. ; there is no reference to religious faith or to magical power. In fact the picture presents a psychological treatment of a political scene which is not different in nature from that of European political artists of the same generation, for example Delacroix in his famous painting "La Liberté Guide le Peuple" (Liberty Guiding the People). In short, apart from the visual innuendos mentioned above, Javanese in spirit and nationalist in thematic content, one is fully in the field of modernity and rationality.

Even though Raden Saleh was shortly arrested in relation with a peasant revolt in Tambun, Bekasi, he was never involved in politics. He was certainly aware of politics, but in a European sense: he had witnessed in 1830—when Belgium gained its independence from The Netherlands, and even more so during the 1948 Pan-European social and national revolutions—that political transformation did not issue from mystic *sakti* power, but from social transformations and 'people's power'. But he was alone, among his people, to think so, and therefore could not 'connect' with the call to faith or magic of rebellious peasants, be they from Bekasi or elsewhere. Like art, politics was to him, rational. He was probably, owing to European experience, aware of the rising wave of nationalism throughout the world, and was himself subjected to some sort of nationalist feelings, but he was also alone in Java and Indonesia to view it in modern terms—other than revolt, in terms of space, organization. He was therefore unable to display it in the political field and thus formulated it instead in his art works.

In fact, Raden Saleh was so modern that he was socially, and probably politically as well, isolated. Observators, like the Comte de Beauvoir 1866, talks of a Raden Saleh living a European life and talking, in German or in stuttering French, about French art, English landscapes and his memories from his European life (Lombard, 1999: 112), and all the time, like he had done during his long European stay, dressed like a Javanese prince. His dressed epitomized his inner contraction: sticking to a national identity he was a harbinger of, but to which he could give no political formulation.

MOOI INDIE: ENTRENCHING MODERNITY

Raden Saleh was a unique phenomenon. He had no heir to take over both modernity and art modernity at the point where he had left it. As he was unique, his contribution, now recognized as paramount, did not lead to a movement. Either in art, or in politics.

Yet, by the time of his death, things had started changing, the Ethical Policy, announced in 1870, led to the opening of schools for indigenous people. These schools were based on the same principles as those that had governed Raden Saleh's education: drawing was analytical, history non mythical. At the same time, new images were introduced by imported magazines; a new local imagery was created. Hence, a new, modern-educated indigenous milieu appeared. Newspapers were launched in Malay, followed by a new, non-mythological literature. Little by little, new, trans-regional and trans-ethnic links were being created. Meanwhile the Boxer War in China, the Jose Rizal revolt and American intervention in the Philippines, the Russo-Japanese war in Siberia as well as the Dutch' continued expansion in the archipelago (Aceh, Bali) led to a slow crystallization of political opinion among the newly educated circles. In 1908 Budi Utomo was created. The ideas of national emancipation, socialism, women's education were flowing in and, meeting socially receptive milieus, taking root into the country.

Raden Saleh was a unique case and therefore had no immediate successors. It is only at the turn of the century that appeared the next generation of Indonesian painters, the product of the broadening of education encouraged by the ethical policy: Wakidi (1889/1890), Abdullah Surio Subroto (1879-1941), Mas Pirngadie (1875-1936), and many, less known ones. All these artists, like most Western artists of the era, used a naturalistic approach that depicted nature and people's life in an idealistic manner. Much criticism has been voiced against this art, beginning with nationalists such as Soedjojono in 1936. In Soedjojono' eye, these artists only depicted a Mooi Indie (a Pretty Indonesia), with "romantic or picturesque and sweetish subjects," but they failed to take account of the "the sugar factories and the emaciated peasant, the motor cars of the rich and the pants of the poor". A more recent criticism, which viewed Orientalism (Edward Said: 1979) as a tool of colonialism interest, has added up fuel to the denigration of the style.

YET, A FEW IMPORTANT CULTURAL POINTS CAN BE UNDERLINED.

- The direction taken by Raden Saleh was confirmed. Painting was to be rooted almost exclusively on Western techniques and the Western analytical system of form. There was no room left, unlike in East Asia and Vietnam, and with the important exception of Bali, for an original transformation of the local system of form into something new.
- Corollary to this transformation were others changes already noted about Raden Saleh: an end of collective symbolization accompanied by an emphasis on rational, individualized knowledge both in technique and representation (portraits). As if, to borrow Denys Lombard's wording (1999: 174), Indonesian art were "cut from its roots".

One can indeed criticize the Indonesia Mooi Indie artists for having been pawns in the Dutch colonial power play. One does not find in their works any allegorical criticism of the Dutch of the kind Raden Saleh inserted in his works. But the turn of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th was a time of economic and social transformation and, yes, "progress" of such range and importance (education, press, women's role, transportation) that a new consciousness, still vague, not yet fully national, was just beginning to coalesce into the organisations that were soon to turn into nationalist movements. If Kartini was no independence activist, so why should one reproach to Mooi Indie artists what we don't reproach to this "mother" of the Indonesian women's movement?

Indeed, the Mooi Indie artists, including the numerous lesser ones who were invading the markets, were part of the coalescence under way: more than Raden Saleh, they inscribed the landscapes and sceneries of the country in people's memory. They contributed creating for those people an imaginary "idyllic" space of beauty and prosperity that continued in its own modern way the idea of a land "gema ripah loh jinawi" (fertile prosperous and powerful) by which one used to describe an ideal kingdom. Through them, the future Indonesian national space started existing in real images even before it was dreamed politically possible.

THE PERSAGI: MODERNITY AS A TOOL OF CULTURAL SOVEREIGNTY

The movement of colonialism-induced socio-economic change and cultural transfer of Western notions and knowledge was to take a turn that put it on its head: Colonialism created an ideologically "Westernized" class that claimed for itself and the indigenous masses the kind of "people's power" Raden Saleh had seen the European crowds wrest in 1848 from their kings and foreign rulers. But times had changed. To the call of liberty had been added that of justice, now fostered, in the 1920s and 1930s, by trade-unions and the illusory dreams of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution.

The artists that appeared during this period were not like the lonely Raden Saleh; they were not either like the Mooi Indie artists, early beneficiaries of an education inspired by the Dutch ethical policy. They appeared up when education broadened to ever wider circles, when organizations, while growing in their members' numbers, were formulating even more nationalistic demands. And they were doing so using the very humanistic and socialistic references Dutchmen were also claiming as theirs. So nationalism, such as promoted by Indonesian artists, and likewise by most Indonesian politicians of these pre-war and pre-independence times, had a "universalist" Western hue to it.

So, when Soedjojono, Agus Djaja and others set up the PERSAGI in 1936, they did not wish to return to the old, pre-colonial days. Nor did they criticize the technical borrowings from Western art done by their predecessors. Already cognizant of the evolution of Western art since the end of the nineteenth century, they blatantly borrowed from it its newly acquired freedom toward the academic system of form, to turn it into an instrument of their own political demands. A classical case of cultural borrowing, assimilation, and original re-invention--a phenomenon well known to historians and sociologists. But the modern Indonesian art thus created was very

different indeed from its Western modernist model. Whereas Western modernists –from the late 1860s to the 1920s-- were primarily concerned by issues of “form” (representation, color etc) modern Indonesian artists were mainly concerned by content, and not just any content. When they borrowed from Western modernism its freedom of formal expression, it was to better gloss, in their works, about social justice, liberty and, ultimately, independence. Art thus became a tool of politics, and artists political actors, something previously unknown in Indonesian history. Indonesian modernist art was born. History has further taken note: the Indonesian artists from the Persagi generation were all supporters of the nationalist movement not only before, but also during world war II, as well as during the war of independence (1945-1949). During this struggle, many of the Persagi generation artists took refuge in the Indonesian Republic’s stronghold of Yogyakarta, where they churned out, among other works, posters of support to the national struggle.

Having taken their part in the “modern”, international struggle for emancipation, independence and justice, Indonesian artists could now go back to their cultural, albeit modernized roots. They did so in several ways:

- Contrary to Mooi Indie artists and to the Dutch and Western artists of the 1930s, who tended to emphasize the ethnic exoticism and thus ‘difference’ of the people they depicted in their works, the Persagi artists (Soedjojono, Agus Djaja, Affandi, Hendra Gunawan etc) and their immediate successors (Srihadi Sudarsono) underemphasized ethnicity to underline, usually in an expressionistic way, the common features of the little people. They “imagined” and thus created in their works, an “Indonesian little people.” This nationalist-cum-social(ist) slant was in tune with the nationalist policies of the day, strongly influenced by socialist rhetorics. One finds this not only in the paintings of the struggle period, (1945-1949), but throughout much of the Sukarno presidency (1945-1965) (Henk Ngantung, Amrus Natalsya, Djoko Pekik).
- Their sovereignty recovered and “announced” in their works, the Persagi artists ipso facto ceased being awed by the West --of which they had adopted and adapted techniques and ideologies—and started digging up into the surviving corpus of ideas, images and especially symbols, from their own Indonesian traditions. There are too many examples of such artworks to be mentioned here. Cultural sovereignty was therefore recovered – under a system of form no anymore perceived as “alien”.
- Yet, this recovered sovereignty was not without facing its own challenges. If the first wave of Indonesian modernism, in the 1930s, mainly expressionistic, was still figurative and enabled an easily readable translation of the “little people’s sufferings” and Indonesian nationalism, the second wave, more radical, influenced by cubism and, later, abstraction, was less liable to the expression of local identity. This led the critic Trisno Sumardjo to qualify the art school of the ITB Bandung as a “Laboratorium Barat” (Western Laboratory). Of course, this second wave of Western modernism reintroduced foreign influences into Indonesian art, which is why they were protested, but it was not long before these influences were “reinterpreted” at the light of local symbolism. The most famous example in the matter is the painter Srihadi Sudarsono. Included in the 1954 “Laboratorium Barat” polemic, he was less than ten years later producing cosmic-inspired horizons inspired by Javanese tradition, but formally derived from American minimalism. Today, fifty years later, most abstract painters still proclaim the Indonesian-ness of

their non-figurative works. A whole school of Balinese modern art rests, to this day, on the symbolic, Hindu-Balinese reading of abstract looking artworks. Color dualism, right-left, is said to symbolize the *Rwabhinna* complementariness of the opposites; a whirling of colors is said to symbolize the cosmic movements.

THE NEW ORDER: TAMING OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION AND EXTOLMENT OF TRADITION

- Within this context of Indonesian appropriation of modernism, the evolutions that took place were partly determined by political events. First, after 1965, after the army crushed the communist party and affiliate organizations, Suharto came to power, and the social(ist) side of Indonesian art-- which had appeared in the 1930s as part of the *Persagi*-- found itself, when not altogether outlawed, at least marginalized. The artists could not freely "talk" anymore about "the little people", i.e. about the social issues of the days. Thus, both wittingly and unwittingly, spurred by the regime's cultural engineering, they made works the content of which was tamer, while their formal aspect was emphasized. This development took place in two directions:
- One the one side, and mainly among *Yogya*'s based artists, there was a tendency to extol local traditions, which was done in an increasingly decorative manner, by focalizing on the iconic signs of the culture concerned (*Widayat*, *Surono*, *Abas Alibasyah*). This tendency was accentuated by the fact that for the 20 years that followed the 1965 events the market was mainly foreign, and Bali-based. One also witnessed a parallel tendency by artists to underline the exotic side of their subjects--A far cry from the emphasis on Indonesian-ness put by their *Persagi* predecessors.
- On the other side, and mainly from *Bandung*-based artists, there was a more formalist trend, which went along the introduction of new foreign inputs: abstraction, minimalism etc (*Ahmad Sadali*, *Sunaryo*, *Popo Iskandar*, *Mochtar Apin*).

With time the two trends eventually merged: *Bandung*-trained artists, such as *Srihadi* already mentioned above, introduced ethnic themes in their highly 'formal' works. Meanwhile *Yogya*'s young artists became increasingly open to foreign stylistic influences—like abstract expressionism in the late 1990s. Many Balinese artists used abstract-looking constructions to express their Balinese-ness (*Nyoman Erawan*, *Wayan Sika*).

Ironically the political emphasis on tradition, hence on the local, by the New Order Regime, was not unrelated to politics in which foreign Western influences played a prominent role in the context of the Cold War (1945-1989).

THE SENI RUPA BARU MOVEMENT: THE VOICE OF DEMOCRATIZATION

Launched in 1974, and led by a group of artists from *Bandung*, the *Seni Rupa Baru* movement (New Art Movement) re-introduced politics into the content of Indonesian art through borrowings from the West—namely *Pop Art* and *Conceptual Art*. Ironically, these movements were devoid of political content in their lands of origin. The *Seni*

Rupa Baru thus promoted internationalization to address local and, often political issues, with the wide use of local symbols for this purpose.

Yet, Nyoman Nuarta's hollowed out faces generals, Jim Supangkat's modern-dressed Ken Dedes, and other works of similar ilk introduced a politics of a different kind. Unlike social realism, which denoted a clear communist or far-left political choice the Seni Rupa Baru simply questioned the regime's control over culture and politics. Thus its main contribution was to re-introduce plurality both in arts and politics. Its main artists, and later followers such as Dadang Christanto and Semsar Siahaan, became important actors in the democratic awakening that was little by little taking hold over the growing Indonesian middle-classes. They were the voice of a sophisticated middle class demanding reform rather than revolution.

TODAY'S GLOBALIZATION

Following the Seni Rupa Baru, the Indonesian art world became, for the next decades, relatively plural. Many artists carried on with the Suharto days' decorative-exotic manner focused on local tradition; others, usually village born, uncovered aspects of their traditional memory through the use of modern creative techniques (Nasirun, Djirna); others still explored the encounter of tradition and modernity in mixed mediums, (Heri Dono); others, in a subdued hyper-realist manner, started becoming critical of society (Dede Eri Supria) etc.

Yet, as time passed, and especially after the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998, a period characterized by the rapid diffusion of the internet, it was manifest that important transformations were under way. New mediums, such as installations, performances and video-art production, were taking a heretofore unimaginable of prominence, relegating painting to a secondary position within the avant-garde. References to national and local identity, when still present, took a new meaning. The market, meanwhile, changed scope and direction. It now rested mainly on national instead of Western collectors, but these collectors were eager for Indonesian art to obtain international recognition from the great auction houses and international dealers now increasingly active in the region. The national determinants of the art world were shrinking in importance.

Such developments raise paramount question? Are global factors becoming determinant. Is taste, in particular, going to be dictated by international players? If so, are we going to see a narrowing in the range of art production to adapt to what is "iconically" acceptable by the international art market. Is this market going to be remain essentially Western, and, if not, to which extent can it mirror non-Western traditions. Such are the issues.

In fact, this internationalization process is already under way. In contemporary art, there still is a memory side, that of artists from post-traditional, mainly Asian or African societies, who talk as individuals, in a variety of modern or post-modern artistic languages, of their society's lost or disappearing collective memory. Their presence was brought to the fore 23 years ago in Musée Pompidou's "The Magicians of the Earths," and they remain active. But, apart from this exception, new contemporary art is not anymore based on the expression of the artists' subjectivity, be it ethnic or not. It mainly

rests on a meta-questioning on issues such as gender, identity, memory, media iconization etc, that may be exposed by artists in their local manifestation(s), but the awareness of which is now global.

In his challenging *Contemporary Art, a very Short Introduction*, Stallabrass argues that the apparent diversity and hybridism of international contemporary art “produces homogeneity, as [it] encounters the sanctioning of the marketplace. The concern shown by contemporary art for local non-Western cultures is fake, he insists: the “local” content is filtered and ultimately “measured by the reviews it receives and the sales it accomplishes in the market ... this tends to produce an art that speaks to international concerns.” This implies, as feared above, that acceptance of non-Western contemporary art by the international art market is dependent on its ability to yield to Western/global conceptions and prejudices. All art that does not suit the expected criteria is discarded. Ipso facto, large chunks of “local” art goes unheeded.

INDONESIA AND BEYOND: HIBRIDATION AND NARROWING OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Let's go back to the Indonesian historical process. The direction taken in the last two hundred years is clear. Colonization and post-colonization have led to an ongoing and now accelerating cultural hybridization that can be summed up as follows:

- In the times of Raden Saleh, Westernization –analytical thinking and individualization—was still an individual phenomenon, in the present case compelled by force for political reasons upon a gifted youth. Raden Saleh was aware of his conundrum, but could not do anything about it apart from expressing an allegorical resistance in his works.
- In the Mooi Indies days, Western influence became more entrenched. In spite of the political domination attached to it, it was by and large viewed as progress (cf Kartini). The Mooi Indie painters, naturalist in their style, contributed to the construction of an imaginary national space, which preceded the apparition of national awareness.
- In the 1930 down to the 1950s, the Persagi artists, members of a new educated urban elite, definitively gave up traditional techniques and symbolism and adopted Western modernism, which they transformed into a tool of social awareness and political emancipation. Indonesian-ness, in art and politics, was expressed in the cultural language of now international, but Western-invented modernity: sovereignty, justice. In the art the emphasis was on an “Indonesian little” man. In the post-independence years, local symbolism was often inserted within an expressionistic or semi-abstract system of form.
- In the post-1965 years, as social(ist) art was banned, the emphasis shifted to an eulogy of Indonesian national and ethnic traditions. Owing to political constraints and to a tourism-based market, this art became increasingly decorative and exotic in spirit.
- The 1974 Seni Rupa Baru followed up on the Persagi's tracks. The Seni Rupa Baru artists “borrowed” the techniques of Pop Art and Conceptual Art to raise again, in their own way, Indonesian political issues. With Seni Rupa Baru, Western influences re-entered in force the field of the arts.

- Since then two trends are dominant, both qualified as contemporary: the individual rehashing of traditional memory on the one side, and the systematic meta-questioning of global themes such as identity, media images, gender etc. In both instance recognition is given only to the artworks that can gain iconic acceptance at the global level.

Things have not been different at the international level. Reason has everywhere, albeit in varying degrees, displaced the primacy of belief; and the individual that of the collective. This has led, in the arts as in other field, to the narrowing of cultural differences and to the apparition of a "modern" global cultural language: The motor of this engine has been West-driven capitalism, now supported by a whirling of images and messages and taking an overwhelming global dimension as its everywhere penetrates all aspects of economy, social life and symbolic systems.

Modernism, during the 20th century, picked up elements of mainly African and Asian (Japanese) art to question and reshape the system of form inherited from European Renaissance; this system was then transferred, without its original questioning, to all other traditions of the world. In some places it destroyed, in others, it transformed the local system of form and symbols, but it eventually created an aesthetics that later became largely trans-national, albeit based on a Western model. To this day the hybridization of traditional local memories under the impact of such modernism continues taking place.

In Indonesia, modernism, once introduced through colonization, was "manipulated" to successively: put forward political demands –sovereignty to the Dutch and social justice to newly independent Indonesia; underline the greatness (*keadilan*) of local traditions under Suharto; democratize the military regime (Seni Rupa Baru). In some instances, of course, it gave birth to a genuine personal expression and, today, it gives an increasingly hybrid, inter-local character to global artistic expression.

Today, in spite of the highly fashionable and repeated affirmation of local national and ethnic identities, one is compelled to admits that there is a narrowing in the range of symbols and alternative aesthetics available in the international art world. As images and cultural themes circulate wildly from one extremity of the earth to the other one, the only ones that are eventually integrated within the global corpus are those best in tune with the codes of the dominant aesthetics, that of the capitalist West. But such integration is not to be mistaken with full recognition. Borrowed local elements do enrich the latter's hybridity, which gives an illusion of genuine global multi-culturalism, but they lose in the process their meaning and singularity. Contemporary hybridity veils the loss of meaning of borrowed symbols. The more there is hybridity, the more the mincing cultural machine of global, West-inspired capitalism is destroying all genuine diversity and all true singularity.

Is there an alternative? Some would like to think so, entertaining the idea that as new economic powers rise to the fore –China, India, Brasil, perhaps Indonesia—they will challenge the cultural dominance of the West, and their symbols and images will partially displace those of the West. A ideal world multi-culturalism of sorts? There is such a possibility of course, but to me, it is a remote one. I think that the capitalist

mincing machine will remain the same: it will produce a structurally identical culture of narrowing hues. Our future global culture will be like minced meat, for which it is nearly impossible to know whether it has been minced from a Balinese, Frisian or Charolais cow. Only its sauce may be different.

A precedent of sorts is expounded in Frederic Martel's "Mainstream",² a global sociological study of contemporary media (cinema, TV and music studios). One of the core arguments of the writer is that, even though countries like Egypt, Brasil India and China have indeed built their own entertainment industries, the local originality of their productions tends to shrink as structurally modern, American type love-stories and conflicts tend to replace them.

The challenge is daunting. A truly positive globalization should ideally enable the free circulation of local, intact symbols from equally valued and non-hegemonic cultures, issuing from anywhere in the world and gaining acceptance anywhere. Artists from Oman should thus be able to enrich themselves from singular images and symbols borrowed from Lesotho to inform artists and publics from Vladivostok or Lumajang. But the definition of such an ideal globalization also expounds its impossibility. The circulation of images and symbols is subjected to the economic rules of capitalism, which distorts them and creates hegemony... The solution to the problem is beyond the range of art.

How will culture be like 200 years from now. It will probably be hybrid, uniform and boring. But who knows? People will perhaps sing again Old-Javanese kakawins, delight in the reading of the Finnish Kalevala epic and rediscover the art of the long-disappeared Kamchatkans, when not admiring Ubud village art. Let us hope.

² Frederic Martel: *Mainstream*, Enquête sur cette culture qui plait à tout le monde. Flammarion, Paris 2010. This study, made in 30 countries with 1200 interviews, has not yet been translated in English.