Indians and National Television in Indonesia: Behind *the Seen*

by

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary institution.

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Maria Myutel

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Abstract

This is the first in-depth study of the critical power of the Indian (Sindhi) ethnic minority in modern Indonesian public culture. The research is a close examination of the success and dominance of the Sindhi community in the production of popular dramas for national television in Indonesia. Despite several decades of Sindhis' control over media production, scholars have ignored the significant influence of this South Asian community on contemporary Indonesian culture, economy and politics. Moreover, previous research has emphasised either unilateral dominance of the state over selected minority groups or resistance of minorities to state power, largely oversimplifying the existing relations between ethnic minorities and nation-state. Highlighting the collaborative nature of interaction between the Sindhi community and the Indonesian state, in the media production industry in particular, the study sheds light on the previously unknown aspects of ethnic politics in post-independence Indonesia and moves beyond the issues of assimilation or discrimination central to many existing studies of minority-majority relations. Likewise, in the midst of increasing scholarly interest in the Islamisation of modern Indonesia, the study serves as a reminder of unsettled ethno-racial tensions that continue to define the distribution of political, economic and social power in Indonesia.

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Abbreviations

AIF	*Asosiasi Importir Film*, Association of Film Importers
ANTV	Andalas Television
BMA	Bombay Merchant Association
FFI	*Festival Film Indonesia*, Indonesian Film Festival
FTV	*Film Televisi*, Television Films
GMIS	Gandhi Memorial International School
IKJ	*Institut Kesenian Jakarta*, Jakarta Institute of Arts
JIS	Jakarta International (Intercultural) School
KFT	*Karyawan Film dan Televisi*, Union of Film and Television Employees
KPI	*Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia*, Indonesian Broadcasting Commission
LSF	*Lembaga Sensor Film*, the State Censorship Body
MD	MD Entertainment
MGS	Mahatma Gandhi School
MMTC	Multi Media Training Center
PARFI	*Persatuan Perusahaan Film Indonesia*, Indonesian Film Artists Union
PH	Production House
PKI	*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, Indonesia's Communist Party
PPFI	*Persatuan Perusahaan Film Indonesia*, Indonesian Film Producers' Union
PPN	*Partai Persatuan Indonesia*, National Unity Party
PT	*Perusahaan Terbatas*, Private Limited Company
RCTI	Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia
SARA	*Suku, Agama, Ras, Antar golongan,* Ethnicity, Religion, Race and Inter-groups, an acronym used for issues which can cause social unrest
SCTV	Surabaya Citra Televisi
Sinetron	*Sinema Eletronik*, Electronic Cinema, a certain genre of television programs
SK	*Surat Keputusan*, Decree

TNI	*Tentara Nasional Indonesia*, Indonesian National Army
TPI	Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia
TV	Television
TVRI	Televisi Republik Indonesia
UU	*Undang-Undang*, Laws
VHS	Video Home System
WNA	*Warna Negara Asing*, Foreign Citizens
WNI	*Warga Negara Indonesia*, Indonesian Citizens

Note on Interviews and Spelling

All interviewee names are pseudonyms. The real names are mentioned only under the statements which are taken from publicly accessible sources, like newspapers, magazines, books or websites.

Interviews conducted in English are quoted verbatim. Interviews conducted in Indonesian language are translated by the author.

Throughout the thesis I use the spelling "Sindh" for the Sindh region as per Sindh Law Amendment Bill 2012. The spelling "Sind" will be used only in citations.

Introduction

This thesis is an in-depth study of the critical power of the Indian (Sindhi) ethnic minority in modern Indonesian public culture. It examines the success and dominance of the Sindhi community in the production of popular dramas for national television in Indonesia in the period between the 1990s and the early 2010s. Based on the research of national production culture, I argue that ethnicity remains an important category of social stratification in contemporary Indonesia despite significant political and social changes during the recent decades. At the same time, I emphasise the complexity of ethnic politics in Indonesia by revealing the previously unknown aspects of ethnic relations between the minority group (Sindhi) and the nation-state.

The main research period (1990–2013) falls into three important periods of modern Indonesian history: the last decade of the New Order regime (1990–1998), the Reform period (*Reformasi,* 1998–mid-2000s) and the Post-Reform era (mid-2000s–2013). This was a time of significant change on a global scale: the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, economic liberalisation in China and India and their increased global influence, the rise of Islam and growth of new nationalisms, the global economic crises of 1997–1998 and 2008, and revolutionary changes in media and communication technologies, just to mention a few. All of these global processes had a significant impact on Indonesia as a nation-state and the everyday life of Indonesians, their self-positioning and imagining. These changes initiated shifts in local, national and global identities, and caused their realignment and reconfigurations in line with the emerging global trends and shifting centres of power.

In Indonesia, with the growth of Islamism or post-Islamism tightly linked to nationalism, ethnic and racial differences, real or imagined, might seem to be fading away. Religious affiliations are rapidly taking the dominant role in shaping social relations. Researchers of contemporary Indonesian politics (Aspinall 2011; Menchik 2014; Horowitz 2013) have pointed to low ethnic mobilization of the Indonesian electorate and the general "weakening of ethnic politics" (Aspinall 2011:289). The scholarship on social conflict and violence emphasises the rapid growth of conflicts

based on religious, not ethnic differences. If in previous decades civil unrest was either explicitly or implicitly racist, in the post-Reform period social tensions more often occurred at moments of religious intolerance.

The shift towards religious identities does not, however, mean that previously existing ethnic tensions have been settled. As Heryanto points out, "Whilst racial tension has been pushed aside, it remains largely unresolved and can resurface and erupt whenever an effective trigger is present at the right moment in the future" (Heryanto 2014:162). In such contexts an examination of the role of ethnic imagery in contemporary Indonesia has retained its topicality and urgency. Deep understanding of relations formed along ethnic and racial lines with knowledge of their development and transformation is one of the keys to tackling social problems in Indonesia.

Ethnic politics in contemporary Indonesia is a developed field of academic research that attracts the attention of scholars from various disciplines, be it political science, law or cultural studies (Chauvel 2010; Subianto 2009; Nordholt & Van Klinken 2007; Heryanto 1997b; Sen 2006; Klinken 2003). Scholars have traced the causes of ethnic politics to the colonial past of Indonesian history and examined the contexts that led to mobilization of ethnic identities. Equally important is the research that challenges ethnicity as given, fixed and singular, by pointing to its nature being fictitious (Anderson 1987:3), "fragmented, ambitious and unstable" (Heryanto 1998:95).

There are, however, certain gaps in research on ethnicity and ethnic politics in Indonesia. First is the preponderance of research examining ethnic conflicts and violence (Aspinall 2009; Davidson 2008; Wilson 2008; Sidel 2006; Bertrand 2004; Heryanto 1998), leaving the examples of peaceful coexistence and interethnic cooperation understudied. There is little research that pays attention to interactions that form, and by the same action, annihilate racial and ethnic differences at various levels (Nordholt 2011; Strassler 2008; Heryanto 2014; Ruppin 2015).

The focus on violence, discrimination and marginalisation has resulted in prioritising certain ethnic minorities, often at the expense of others. The imbalance is particularly obvious in the case of minorities of so-called "foreign origin", as for several decades Indonesians of Chinese descent have remained the main focus of researchers

from various disciplines studying ethnicity in Indonesia.[1] The exceptional scale of policies aimed at "othering" Indonesians of Chinese heritage, which in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's words created "foreigners who are not foreign," (Toer 1998:54) certainly justifies serious academic interest. At the same time, focusing solely on Chinese Indonesians without considering other ethnic groups with similar historical backgrounds, such as Indonesians of Indian, Dutch or Arab origins, has the potential to oversimplify the overall process of ethnicity construction in contemporary Indonesia. In other words, the imbalance in academic research presents only a part of the story, albeit a very significant one.[2]

By putting Indonesian Sindhis in the centre of my research I offer a way to look at Indonesian ethnic politics from a new angle. The story of Sindhis in Indonesia is neither a story about assimilation and integration, nor about discrimination, marginalisation, or violence. Sindhis, who see themselves and are seen in Indonesia as Indonesians of foreign descent, or simply Indians, *orang India*, have a placid life being able to take the best of two countries, Indonesia and India. The analysis of (self)-positioning of Sindhis in Indonesia reveals a complex nature of interaction between minorities and the nation-state and presents the ethnic politics of the nation-state towards minorities in a new light.

Thus, I argue for a more nuanced account of ethnic politics in contemporary Indonesia, where the relations among the minorities and the Indonesian nation-state and its society are not seen as either/or relationships: either as working towards nation-building or against it; as contributing to nationalism or being a threat to it. Approaching minorities' existence and ethnic politics only from this perspective considerably oversimplifies the complexity of Indonesia's past and present. It also ignores the embeddedness of Indonesia and its population in various global networks that influence

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[1] For example, Indonesians of Chinese descent attracted attention of historians (Coppel 1983, 2002a. 2002b; Wilmott 1961; Cribb 2001a, 2001b, 2002), political scientists (Mackie 1976, 2005; Bertrand 2004; Purdey 2006), cultural anthropologists (Strassler 2008; Hoon 2008, 2009), cultural studies scholars (Heryanto 1998, 2006, 2014; Budianta 2000), gender and media studies (Sen 2006), researchers of law (Hooker 1986, 2002), business (Dieleman 2007), literary studies (Chandra 2015), etc. These are just a few examples of a diverse and well-developed field that focuses on the Indonesians of Chinese descent.

[2] Some research was done on Jews in Indonesia – Reid (2010), Hadler (2004), Ricci (2010); Dutch Indonesians – Van der Veur (1960), Taylor (2009), Hewett (2015); Arabs, mostly Hadrami, – De Jonge (1993), Jacobsen (2009), van der Kroef (1953), Mobini-Kesheh (1999).

the position of minorities within the state. To put it differently, there is a wide spectrum of relationships where full assimilation or alienation are just two extremes. In most cases it is not an either/ or relationship but a complex mixture of sentiments, grounded in different historical experiences of individuals, communities and the nation.

I chose national television content production, and to be more specific, production of *sinetron*, or Indonesian soap opera, as the site for the examination of relationships between the Indonesian Sindhi community and the Indonesian nation-state and society for several reasons.[3] First of all, *sinetron* production is the only industry that Indonesian Sindhis are centrally involved in, which organisation and products have a direct impact on the formation of Indonesian national identity. Other industries where Sindhi community members have a strong presence like textile manufacturing, for example, play a less obvious role in nation-building. Meanwhile, the organisation of media production as well as the products of media industries, including *sinetron*, significantly influence national identity at various levels. Importantly, during the main research period (1990–2013) Indonesian Sindhis were not simply involved in *sinetron* production but largely controlled the industry. Second, as the production of local soap opera, or *sinetron,* directly depends both on the national audience, its preferences, desires and imagination of self as a nation, and on the regulatory frameworks of the nation-state, *sinetron* production is the zone of the most intense interaction between an otherwise exclusive Sindhi community and Indonesian society and the state. In *sinetron* production neither the nation-state nor the national audience can be ignored. Last but not least, on a more general level, in Indonesia, as in many other countries, television is often at the core of constructing social reality. In fact, production and the maintenance of social order were defined as the main aims of Indonesian television from its inception in 1962. Despite significant changes over the years, in contemporary Indonesia television remains the most powerful site of reproduction of hegemonic culture. By focusing on production, I do not claim the superiority of production over representation and reception. I am fully aware of the dangers of "productivism" as a research framework, which treats media industries in isolation from broader political, social and cultural contexts. On the contrary, the value of studying production culture is precisely

[3] *Sinetron* is a short form of *sinema elektronik* meaning any film produced on electronic media. Most often, *sinetron* is translated in English as soap opera but, in fact, it is an umbrella term for television programs of various genres, such as drama, legend, mystery, teenage drama, etc., and formats, like series, serial, short series and films for television (Irawanto 2013:51).

that production cultures "interface, shape and are shaped by discourses and struggles manifesting outside of the strict bounds of studio lots and executive suites" (Johnson 2014:50).

It is important to emphasise from the very beginning what this thesis is not about. It is neither a comprehensive study of the Indian (nor even the smaller Sindhi) community in Indonesia, nor it is a study of ethnic minority media practices. I am interested not in the Indian community as such or the media that community members produce for their own consumption, but rather the processes through which a specific community of Sindhis comes into intense interaction with the Indonesian nation. In fact, there is no Indian Indonesian community as such. Indians residing in Indonesia are spread across the archipelago, and are largely self-divided based on their cultural and economic background. The first major divide is between local and expatriate Indians. Although in the 2000s some interaction started to take place, in general Indian nationals and local Indians, citizens of Indonesia, find little in common and rarely mingle with each other.[4] As for the local Indian community, as well as being geographically divided (mainly between Sumatra and Java islands), there are two interdependent factors, language and class, that keep Indonesian Sindhis, Sikhs, Tamils and smaller groups, apart. Although local Sikhs, Sindhis, Tamils and others do meet in temples and share celebrations of pan-Indian festivals (Holi, Diwali), the sense of common, shared pan-Indian identity continues to be rather weak.

Moreover, this is not a study of representation of an Indonesian Sindhi minority group in media texts. While close reading of texts for examining social relationships and reproduction of the hegemonic order proved to be a valuable method, it is not very useful when applied to Indonesian Sindhis. First, Indonesian Sindhis, and more broadly Indian Indonesians, while being "behind the scenes", are absent from the television texts: during a long history of Indonesian television there were only a couple of programs with either actors of Indian descent or characters portraying Indonesians of Indian descent. Although Heryanto (1997) and Sen (2006) showed that the absence of minorities in literary and cinematographic texts can reveal almost as much about ethnic politics as their presence, using such an approach as a point of departure in the analysis

[4] I will reflect on the changes in the community and strengthening of pan-Indian identity in the first chapters.

of relationships between Indonesian Sindhis and the nation-state can cause misinterpretation. Analysis of absence or silence can make a helpful contribution to the understanding of ethnic relationships only if and when some previous knowledge about the relationships between an ethnic community and the state is present, as it was in the case of Chinese Indonesians. When the larger context remains to be explored, such an approach can be misleading.

1. Existing Scholarship on Sindhis and Media

Throughout my research I was guided by a very concrete question: why and how was a highly exclusive group of Indian Indonesians able to dominate the mainstream cultural production in the nationalist state of Indonesia for more than twenty years? The existing academic literature provided no answer to my question. Although the sources do refer to the fact that Indonesians of Indian descent have a strong presence in film and particularly television production, the reasons behind this phenomenon are left unexamined. Of course, the presence of minorities in national cultural production is not unique to Indonesia with Jews in Hollywood being the most obvious other example. At the same time, given the long history of complex ethnic politics in Indonesia, the lack of scholars examining the involvement of Indian Indonesians in the national media industry is rather intriguing and deserves certain attention.

I argue that the scholars researching culturally distinctive communities and media in Indonesia largely overlooked the topic because of the applied frameworks: "For how our questions are asked powerfully affects the answers we get—the 'facts' we think our research has established" (Downing & Husband 2005:25). First, as I already mentioned, most researchers paid attention to tensions, not collaboration, between ethnic communities and the nation-state. As Sindhis, and, more generally, Indian Indonesians, largely experienced no targeted marginalisation and discrimination, scholars paid little attention to the Indians residing in Indonesia, and Sindhis in particular. Those few researchers who did examine Indians residing in Indonesia either assessed the degree of their assimilation or looked at distinctive features of local Indian communities (Mani 1993a, 1993b, 2008; Thompson & Adloff 1955; Arora 1982; Thapan 2002). In both cases the frameworks did not allow scholars to examine the involvement of the local Indonesian Sindhi community in national television

production. Similarly, in media studies, another possible pathway into the analysis of relationships between Indian Indonesians and the nation-state, it was mainly the nationalist approach to media as well as preferences given to the moments of representation and perception that led to the exclusion of Indian Indonesians from the analysis. In addition, a general lack of in-depth knowledge of the global Sindhi community was another hindrance to understanding the processes standing behind the involvement of Indian Indonesians in the Indonesian cultural production.

The scarce literature on Indians in Indonesia mainly addresses the question of integration of Indians into Indonesian society. As such, the involvement of Sindhis in national media production is just evidence of gradual integration that requires no further examination. The first reports on the Indian migrants in Indonesia date back to the early 1950s and showed almost no integration (Kondapi 1951; Thompson & Adloff 1955). Analysing minority problems in Southeast Asia in the mid-1950s, researchers Thompson & Adloff (1955:64) concluded that "with few exceptions, Indians have taken all their customs with them to Southeast Asia; they do not identify themselves with the local people, nor adopt their dress, nor intermarry with them. They live as foreigners far more rigidly than do the Chinese." Writing twenty years later, Arora (1982:121) stated that little had changed and Indians largely keep themselves away "from the mainstream of the socio-cultural life of the Indonesians." Mani (1993a:122) identified some increase in interaction and even pointed to the contribution of Sindhis "to the development of the Indonesian language and arts via the film industry." In sum, production of national media was treated as just one of the criteria which researchers could "tick" to show growing integration.

A more recent approach to minorities in the nation-state, diaspora studies, which started to gain momentum in the early 1990s, also did not explore the mediated relationships between the minority groups and the Indonesian state. Although the diaspora framework does consider relationships of the dispersed communities with the host societies and countries, it first asserts the boundaries between the nation and ethnic groups.[5] Furthermore, diaspora studies direct most attention inwards, to the group self-identification, the practices within the diasporic communities and their relationships

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[5] For diaspora studies theory see, for example, Cohen (2008), Dufoix (2008), Vertovec (1997), Safran (1991), Tölölyan (1996, 2007).

with the lost motherland. Research on Indians in Indonesia as members of the global Indian diaspora was undertaken by two scholars, Mani (2008) and Thapan (2002). Both of them did mention the involvement of Indian community members in the national media production but did not examine it any further. Thapan (2002), who focused exclusively on the Sindhi community in three major settlements of Hindu Sindhis (Manila, Hong Kong, and Jakarta), did mention that the involvement of Jakartan Sindhis in national media production is a unique feature of Sindhis in Indonesia, compared to other Sindhi communities in Southeast Asia. But precisely because the media production business of Sindhis was unique, it did not fit well into the general picture of the Sindhi diaspora, and was generally not of interest for Thapan. Mani (2008) also did not examine production of films and television programs targeting the national audience, because this practice was not aimed at maintaining the ethnic and cultural distinctiveness of Indians in Indonesia.

Another kind of literature, the literature on Indonesian media, overlooked the subject due to its nationalist approach to media and film, and television in particular. Another reason is a general lack of knowledge about Indians in Indonesia. The existing assumptions prevented media scholars from seeing the presence of Indian Indonesians in national film production as an example of local community interaction with the national media space, rather than as the random success of certain individuals of foreign origins. In brief, there are two underlying assumptions about Indian Indonesians that seem to be influencing the way Indian Indonesians are mentioned in media literature. They are either considered well integrated, probably on the grounds of the long history of the influence of Indian culture on Indonesia (Sen 2006), or they are seen by researchers simply as foreigners (Barkin 2004; Rakhmani 2014; Biran 2001). The highly exclusive lifestyle of Indian Indonesians, and Sindhis in particular, probably contributed to the image of them as foreigners, even though they are born and brought up in Indonesia and hold Indonesian passports.

The scholarship on Indonesian cinema, which preceded research on Indonesian television, excluded Indian Indonesians from research agendas on nationalistic grounds. As was well demonstrated by Barker (2011), Indonesian historiography presented Indonesian cinema as *film nasional* (national cinema), understood as "*pribumi*, idealist and nasionalist" (Barker 2011:39). From the 1960s to the 1990s the New Order ideologists constructed the history of cinema in line with "dominant ethnonationalism"

(Barker 2011:39). Such a project largely meant the exclusion of "foreigners" (Indonesians of Dutch, Chinese and Indian descent) from history based on their "foreign" ethnicity and race. Prominent Indonesian critics of local cinema mentioned Indian Indonesians only as featureless "financiers" (Said 1982:100), decision-makers with lack of taste (Said 1982:102) and hunger for money (Biran 2001:220), who copied American and Indian movies for the sake of making quick money. According to the ideologists of *film nasional*, Indian Indonesians were bound to play these roles by "virtue of their race" (Barker 2011:39).

Non-Indonesian scholars of Indonesian cinema (Hanan 2010; Sen 1994b; Heider 1991) also felt an impact from the *film nasional* framework and largely overlooked the role of the filmmakers, who were not *pribumi* and who produced films that could not be described as idealistic and nationalist. For example, Krishna Sen (1994b), who made one of the most significant contributions to the study not only of cinema but more broadly of Indonesian media, advanced the argument that all Indonesian cinema and media in general is political. In such a framework, filmmakers who were involved in making commercial rather than idealist cinema fell outside of Sen's scope of research. In other words, the experiences of Sindhi producers who saw themselves as making popular films, rather than as building a nation or challenging the existing order, were not included in Sen's study. Later, when Sen (2006) explored the nature of the absence of Indonesians of "foreign" descent, mainly Chinese Indonesians, from cinema historiography, Indian Indonesians again fell outside of her research interest. Here the predominant view of ethnic communities in the nation-state, either as integrated or as victims of discrimination by the state, had an impact on her research. Sen mentioned that Indians and Arabs were "by all accounts relatively more integrated into Indonesian society" and "thus the issue of exclusion might be less significant" (Sen 2006:175).

Barker (2011) was probably the first and until 2016 the only researcher of Indonesian cinema who pointed to the fact that the involvement of Indian Indonesians in Indonesian film industries goes beyond financing second-rate films. He saw Indian Indonesians as being among the main drivers of the new cultural economy of the Indonesian film industry, which, as he argues, in the post-Reform era is based on popular culture, not the idea of nationalism, indigeneity and idealism. For the most part, however, he equated the experiences of Chinese and Indian Indonesians in the film industry. He argued that, through much of Indonesian film history, Chinese and Indians

were not only marginalised by ethno-nationalist criticism, but also had limited economic opportunities in Indonesia (Barker 2011:257). Such a view is again rooted in a framework that sees ethnic minorities only as either integrated or marginalised. As my research shows, although both Chinese and Indian Indonesians had a similar experience of being completely removed from the history of national cinematography, they have more differences than similarities. Using the same framework for the analysis of the involvement of Chinese and Indian Indonesians in the media production considerably oversimplifies the reality.

As for the emerging field of television studies in Indonesia, it was mostly the lack of knowledge and the existing stereotypes about the Indian Indonesians among media scholars that prevented researchers from examining and explaining the success of Indian Indonesians in commercial *sinetron* production. In 2001 Biran pointed to the fact that the reasons for the dominance of Indians in commercial television remain unknown. He suggested that probably the ability of Indians to negotiate with the broadcasters was the main reason for their success (Biran 2001:249). While Biran points to an important aspect in commercial television industry, he fails to explain why non-Indians did not have these negotiation skills, which makes Biran's reasoning essentialist. The researchers of commercial television (Ida 2010; Barkin 2004; Rakhmani 2014; Loven 2008; Ida 2006; Kitley 2004) never fail to mention one Indian Indonesian (Sindhi) producer, Raam Punjabi, and usually ascribe his success in the industry to his personal qualities and skills. Rakhmani (2014), for example, largely attributes the emergence of the commercial *sinetron* industry to Punjabi and calls it the "Punjabi effect". The lack of knowledge about a very exclusive community of Sindhis, which lay behind the success of Raam Punjabi, did not allow scholars to see a bigger picture and the larger forces involved in commercial *sinetron* production. Raam Punjabi was not the only producer of Indian descent who can be credited with the establishment of *sinetron* production as a strong industry. As I show in chapters Three and Four, the strong presence of Indian Indonesian producers in the national television industry is a result of work performed by the whole Sindhi community through myriad of transnational connections that linked Indonesian media not only with India (as most often stated) but also with Hong Kong, the Philippines, Singapore, the USA, the UK, Latin America and other financial and creative world centres.

Last but not least, previous research that used television as the major site for exploring social realities in contemporary Indonesia (Kitley 2000, 2004; Loven 2008; Wardhana 1997, 2001; Hobart 2001, 2006; Aripurnami 1996; Ida 2006, 2009, 2010; Nilan 2001; Sunindyo 1993) mostly gave preference to the representation and reception moments of cultural circulation, largely leaving production out of academic scrutiny. While Indian Indonesians stand behind a large proportion of Indonesian mainstream *sinetron*, they tend not to express their complex cultural identity on screen. Although Indonesian *sinetron* does include certain elements of Indian film and television aesthetics as well as an aesthetic of wealth and luxury, the constituent markers of Sindhi "self", these elements are not prevalent in *sinetron* texts. In most cases Indonesian *sinetron* is a derivative of global cultural forms where Bollywood aesthetics is just one among many. Moreover, the characters depicting Indian Indonesians are almost non-existent. Thus, the absence of explicit markers of Indian Indonesian identity in *sinetron* texts probably explains why many researchers overlooked the presence of Indian Indonesians in mainstream television production. Those few researchers who paid attention to production of *sinetron* (Barkin 2004; Ida 2006; Rakhmani 2013) were caught in the framework based on the dichotomy of national / foreign, seeing the presence of Indian Indonesian producers as simply foreign. For example, Barkin (2004, 2014) and Rakhmani (2013, 2015) continuously call Raam Punjabi a foreigner.

2. Challenging Existing Scholarship

This thesis makes a contribution to three main bodies of scholarship. First, it adds to the field of Indonesian studies, and ethnic politics in particular, by bringing to the fore the previously unexamined relationships between the Sindhi community, a subgroup of Indian Indonesians, largely known in Indonesia as a minority of "foreign descent", and the Indonesian nation-state. It presents a story of co-optation between a culturally distinctive community and the highly nationalistic state. The research offers a detailed account of practices that Sindhis have used to reproduce themselves as members of an exclusive Sindhi community on local and global levels. At the same time, these practices have formed the core of national media production. Moreover, by examining ethnic relationships during the particular historical moment when researchers tend to focus more on religious identities (especially after 2001), my analysis serves as

a reminder of other complex social distinctions that are at play in Indonesia and, more broadly, in the Southeast Asian region.

Along with presenting new historical material, the thesis also looks at minorities of "foreign descent" within the Indonesian state from a new angle. In my research I take into account not only the policies of the state towards minorities but also the imagination of community members who aspire to reproduce themselves as a culturally distinctive group. Such a perspective allows us to see that the relationships between minorities and the Indonesian nation-state are far more complex than the relation of either assimilation (inclusion) or marginalisation (exclusion). This approach goes beyond an either/or vision of the position and role of culturally distinct minorities of "foreign" descent which were previously seen as either posing a threat to the nation-state or contributing to its formation. In seeing Indonesians of Indian descent as neither solely Indonesians nor solely Indians, I hope to contribute to the literature that argues that

> a group's self-identification … is not natural or inevitable, but neither is it simply invented, adopted, or imposed. It is, rather, a positioning which draws upon historically sedimented practices, landscapes, and repertoires of meaning, and emerges through particular patterns of engagement and struggle. (Murray Li 2000:151)

In other words, this thesis contributes to the scholarship on social relations in Indonesia by showing that although ethnicity is surely a fiction, a product of history, not a biologically produced marker of identity, it is nevertheless a reality. The fiction of ethnicity (Heryanto 2014) lives through "idioms, ideologies, narratives, categories and systems of classification and racialized ways of seeing, thinking, talking and framing claims" (Brubaker 2004:168).

This thesis is also the first ethnography of *sinetron* production houses, one of the main players in contemporary Indonesian media industry. Although several researchers have paid attention to production practices of commercial television (Barkin 2004; Ida 2006; Rakhmani 2013), they neither scrutinised the ethnic structuring of the television industry, nor did they examine the complex organisation of national television in Indonesia. By exploring how ethnic imagery features in national television production

practices and processes this thesis makes a contribution to television studies in Indonesia, which is still in its nascent stages.[6]

Second, this research also contributes to media studies, in particular to the "relatively miniscule" scholarship on race and ethnicity in media production (Downing & Husband 2005:48; Hesmondhalgh & Saha 2013). Compared with the considerable body of scholarship on ethnicity and race in moments of representation and perception, not much attention has been given to the role of ethnicity and race in production routines. Often the research on representation and perception ignores the considerations of practitioners: their desires, sentiments and aspirations. It is often forgotten that media practitioners are not just simple tools in the hands of power holders. "Producers' experiences of production matter, and so do the quality of their working lives" (Hesmondhalgh & Saha 2013:182). I would also add that the quality of their lives outside of work matters just as much. Culture formed within the microcosm of production studios has an impact on the texts produced and influences possible readings (Levine 2001). My research provides examples of how the desires and sentiments, aspirations and insecurities of media practitioners as individuals and as community members have direct impact not only on the media texts but on the development of the whole television industry. My data confirm that media products are formed by *many* "existing practices and discourses surrounding race and ethnicity" (Hesmondhalgh & Saha 2013:183).

In addition, my research makes a contribution to the emerging scholarship on gender in Indonesian media by offering a critique of the current analytical frameworks used for understanding of gender in cultural production. My study of Sindhi female media practitioners and their role in Indonesian cultural production reveals gaps and weak points in academic approaches to gender, ethnicity and national media production. More specifically, it shows that the emerging literature on women in media production is influenced by the nationalist, elitist and patriarchal nature of the existing scholarship.

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[6] Major research on various aspects of Indonesian television is done by Kitley (2000, 2004, 2008), Barkin (2006, 2014), Hobart (2001, 2006), Nilan (2001, 2008), Rakhmani (2013, 2014), Wardhana (1997, 2001), Armando (2011), Aripurnami (1996), Sunindyo (1993), Alfin & Chu (1981), Loven (2008), Ida (2006, 2009, 2011), Sen (1994a), Sen & Hill (2000), Hendriyani (2011), Hollander et al. (2009), Sudibyo & Nezar (2013).

At the same time, the study of media, and, more specifically, television production in a non-Western context, adds to the understanding of media organisation and its embeddedness in historical and cultural experiences. The analysis of relationships formed within the industry of content production for commercial television reveals dynamics that are not typical in the Anglo-American realm, where most media studies are conducted. This additional data obtained in a non-Western environment enriches our understanding and theorising of the media (Moeran 2001:10). Moreover, my research provides data which contributes to understanding of the processes that constitute ethnicity and race. Research on ethnicity and race in media production undertaken in the Western contexts has demonstrated dominance of a "white" majority over "non-white" minorities and "unequal access to the means of cultural production" (Hesmondhalgh & Saha 2013:183). It has also pointed to the tendency of the ethnic and racial minorities to commodify their ethnicity and race. My research shows that interethnic relationships may have different dynamics in non-Western contexts. For example, in Indonesian context, "white" producers, or producers from the West, played a marginal role in mainstream cultural production. The ethnic majority (Javanese) also had relatively little say in the production process of the most-watched television programs. Moreover, the Sindhi minority made no attempts to create economic value out of stereotypical representation of their own ethnicity and race. In other words, my research adds to the project of "de-Westernising media studies" (Park & Curran 2000).

The study of television production outside of the "Anglo-American orbit" (Park and Curran 2000:9) is growing but is still small compared with the vast studies done in the Western context. Moreover, studies focusing on race and ethnicity in media production outside of the Western world are rare. The important exception is the work of Ganti (2012) and Kwek (2011). Ganti examines how the images of Indian audiences held by the producers of Hindi movies construct Indianness as "traditional, conservative and prudish" (Ganti 2012), which adds to the reproduction of Western superiority over Indian backwardness. Kwek looks at how media professionals working for Malay-language television produce Malayness and participate in "defining, deploying, transforming and indeed constituting their 'ethnicities' in their production practices" (Kwek 2011:196). My thesis seeks to contribute to this body of literature, which examines two aspects: how ethnicity features in media production and contributes to

social reality; and how commercial production is formed by historically discursive practices.

Third, by bringing two sets of literature together (ethnic relationship in Indonesia and media production) this thesis contributes to the field which emerges at the intersection of media and Asian studies. Using the methods as well as the object of study (production culture) developed in the Western context helped me bring to the fore the complex relationships between a tiny minority and a large nation-state, relationships which previously escaped the academic scrutiny both of regional and media specialists. Moreover, the intersection of the research frameworks reveals the complex nature of the relationships between the culturally distinct community and Indonesian society. In addition, the analysis of a largely *unseen* and impenetrable world of media production sheds light on the power hierarchies emerging in the region, where the West seems to be receding and now playing a marginal role.

Last, this study adds to the scholarship on the global community of Sindhi traders by examining their everyday life in Indonesia and, most importantly, their practices in the business, which is very unusual for the Sindhi entrepreneurs, of producing national media. My case study presents previously unknown material on how involvement in national cultural production influences a transnational community of traders and their understanding of self and the nation, a concept largely unknown to the Sindhi community prior to their forced dispersal across the globe. It poses questions about the future transformation of global, transnational communities in the midst of growing nationalism in the region.

3. Introducing the Sindhis and History of Ethnicity in Indonesia

Originally from Sindh, the former territory of British India, at present a part of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Hindu Sindhis are dispersed across the globe and constitute one of the wealthiest and most well-connected trading communities in the world. Sindhis usually claim Indian identity but do not mix with other Indians and maintain a very exclusionist, endogamous way of life (Markovits 2000). Some other distinctive features of Hindu Sindhis include absence of the traditional four-tier caste system with most Sindhis being traders. Their religious identities and affiliations are

fluid (the Hinduism of Sindh was heavily influenced by Buddhism, Sikhism and Sufism), and they have an overall indifference towards politics (Markovits 2000).

Although Sindhi traders established their first contacts with the archipelago in the late nineteenth century, the formative years of the Sindhi community in Indonesia fall in the 1950s when, following Partition, Hindu Sindhis were forced to turn their temporary residence into permanent settlement. Within a short time, the community established several institutions to preserve their distinct ethnocultural identity. The Bombay Merchant Association, a business association exclusively for Sindhis, and Gandhi Memorial School with English as a medium of education and Hindi/Sindhi as elective subjects, played key roles in maintaining and strengthening Sindhi identity in Indonesia, in Jakarta in particular. Following an uneventful settlement, in the 1960s and 1970s Sindhis renounced their British India passports, obtained Indonesian citizenship, picked up spoken Indonesian and developed a love for Indonesian cuisine.

In the early 2010s there were no more than 10,000 Sindhis permanently residing in Indonesia, which makes them a tiny minority in a population of more than 250 million across the archipelago. Indonesian Sindhis remain Hindu with only a small number converting to Christianity. That means that Sindhis are a "double minority" in a largely Muslim population of Indonesia. The majority of Indonesian Sindhis (6,000–8,000) reside in Jakarta where they outnumber other communities of Indian descent, such as Sikhs and Tamils.[7] Economically, Sindhi families belong to the upper middle class. In the words of one respondent, "there are only rich and not-that-rich Sindhis". Raam Punjabi, the most famous Sindhi businessman and media magnate, was mentioned by Forbes magazine as one of the 150 richest Indonesians for several consecutive years.[8]

While most Indonesian Sindhis built their fortune in trade business specialising in textiles, several families branched out of the traditional business milieu and carved a niche for themselves in Indonesian media industries, first in cinema (since the 1950s) and later national television (since the 1990s). Thapan, who researched the Sindhi

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[7] Other places with a high number of Sindhi residents include Bandung, Surabaya, Yogyakarta, Malang.

[8] For example, in 2011 Raam Punjabi was listed number 136, net worth US$94 million, and in 2012 was listed number 141, net worth US$92 million.

diaspora in three major cities of Sindhi settlement in Southeast Asia, Manila, Hong Kong and Jakarta, asserted that "should the Sindhis withdraw from the region completely, it would not impact on the national economies" (Thapan 2002:44). While this might be true in the case of the textile business, this statement does not apply to media production: Sindhi producers are largely credited with the establishment and development of commercial soap opera production, one of the main industries of the Indonesian media landscape since the early 1990s. In other words, Sindhis played and continue to play a very large economic and cultural role in Indonesian media production, in particular popular entertainment. It should be mentioned that Sindhis are the only Indian Indonesians who are involved in media production. Other communities (Sikhs, Tamils, Punjabis) are present in other sectors of the Indonesian economy.

Over the century-long history of Sindhi presence in the Indonesian archipelago tensions between Sindhis and other communities or the state have largely been absent, with just a few reports of anti-Indian violence registered during the war for Independence. In general, Sindhis feel comfortable and call Indonesia home. And home, as Ignatieff (2001) pointed out, is about feeling safe. The Singhvi report on the Indian Diaspora in Southeast region prepared by the High Level Committee in 2002 concluded that "they [Indians residing in Indonesia] do not seem to have any major grievances as such" (Singhvi Report 2002:256).

Falzon, whose research is the only anthropological study of the global Sindhi community, stated that Sindhis can be called a caste, an ethnic group or a cultural community depending on the context:

> Hindu Sindhis may be seen and in fact see themselves as a caste; equally, they may be described as an ethnic group. To some extent, description depends on the context within which it is being made. Thus in India, where caste is one main signifier of difference in the politics of identity, groups such as the Sindhis may define themselves as castes (even as they say that 'caste is no longer important'); in Britain on the other hand, where the discourse of identity and difference revolves around terms like '(multi-) culturalism' and 'ethnic communities', the 'caste' may become a 'culture' or a 'community'. (Falzon 2004:229)

Based on my interviews, I can say that in Indonesia Sindhis see themselves primarily as a racial group, whose roots are traced to British India. Non-Sindhi Indonesians also see Sindhis primarily as an ethnic, or more generally as a racial group rather than seeing them as Hindus, for example. It should be mentioned that while "race", or *ras* in Indonesian language, often emerged in my interviews, in particular in my interviews with Sindhis, the terms which are usually taken by researchers as an equivalent of "ethnicity" (*suku bangsa, warga keturunan, grup etnis*) were used rarely. In most cases, non-Sindhi Indonesians referred to Sindhis simply as *orang India* (Indian people).

Seeing cultural differences and framing them in racial and ethnic terms is rooted in the modern history of Indonesia. Ethnicity as a category of social classification is a product of the colonial past, a "powerful fiction" (Heryanto 2014:163), created to justify political, social and economic inequalities. In post-colonial Indonesia the racial and ethnic classification was not abolished. On the contrary, its use was enhanced. Race and ethnicity turned to be one of the major instruments of power and nation-building.

Prior to categorising a highly complex and hybrid population of the Indonesian archipelago into smaller separate (ethnic) categories, the Dutch colonisers first introduced a more general, racial division of the population. This major division based on skin colour, language, culture, habits and "morals" was used to justify why "public burden could never be distributed equally between Europeans and Indonesians, neither the profits, nor the advantages" (Fasseur 1994:33). In the 1830s one of the architects of The Cultuurstelsel (Cultivation System[9]), J.C. Baud, stated that "language, colour, religion, morals, origin, historical memories, everything is different between the Dutch and the Javanese. We are the rulers, they are the ruled" (Fasseur 1994:33). In other words, skin colour and "culture", or the alleged absence of it, were used to vindicate the existing equalities.

This racial differentiation was consolidated in the legal system. The Constitutional Regulations of 1854 divided the population into two broad (racial) groups: "Europeans and those equated (*gelijkgestelde*) with Europeans" and "the Natives, and those equated (*gelijkgestelde*) with them. Those equated with the Natives

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[9] Cultivation system is the Dutch government policy of the mid-nineteenth century (abolished in 1870) which required the Dutch East Indies population to provide 20 per cent of village land for producing crops for export.

were Chinese, Arabs, Japanese and others" (Coppel 2002a:133). There is disagreement whether "Foreign Orientals" was a distinct category from the mid-nineteenth century, or became so much later. According to Coppel, the term "Foreign Orientals" as a separate legal category was introduced much later, in the early twentieth century. Meanwhile, Fasseur stated that "Foreign Orientals" can be counted as a separate category since 1855 because, while in criminal law they were subject to native courts, in private law they were treated as Europeans (Fasseur 1994:37). In any case, it seems that treatment in European courts under private law was the only difference between Foreign Orientals and natives in the late nineteenth century. There were no other special rights or privileges for those assigned to the category of "Foreign Orientals".[10]

Gradually racial distinction was introduced not only in taxation and law but also in all other state systems. According to colonial legal and administrative systems, Europeans had material and symbolic privileges while Natives and Foreign Orientals experienced restrictions and limitations in many ways. For example, even though at the beginning of the twentieth century access to primary and tertiary education was open to all, racial segregation remained the rule (Fasseur 1994:42). Access to education for the Natives was also complicated by insufficient knowledge of Dutch, the main medium of primary and tertiary education. Moreover, Europeans had more freedom of movement compared to the natives (Fasseur 1994:42). In most cases Natives (with the exception of the local aristocracy) were at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

As for Foreign Orientals, their position was ambivalent and subject to change. If during the nineteenth century Foreign Orientals were by and large equated with Natives (with private law being the only difference), during the first decades of the twentieth century Foreign Orientals as a separate category became more pronounced. In 1925 Article 163 of the Indies Constitution put "Foreign Orientals" as a group separate from Natives (Fasseur 1994:40). At the same time, several categories of people "who came from the states in which substantially the same family law was observed as that which held good in Holland" (Hooker 1986:246), like Americans, Argentinians, Australians, Turks, Siamese and others who were ascribed to Foreign Orientals, were included in the category of European. As Fasseur points out, such a change meant that "the expression

[10] Europeans preferred dealing with Chinese merchants and wanted to settle disputes with them in European courts. For more on this see Fasseur (1994).

'European', already watered down by the *Japannerwet* of 1899, lost its purely racial connotation" (Fasseur 1994:40).[11] In other words, since 1925 the ascription of the category "Foreign Orientals" was not based on skin colour and culture. Basically, Foreign Orientals was a residual category for everyone who was not classified as either Europeans or Natives (Hooker 1986:261) and comprised people of different skin colour, origins, religion and culture. Thus, in late colonial times the main differentiation of the population changed from racial to a more complex differentiation.

Along with major racial divisions, the colonial administration was involved in a process of a more detailed classification of the vast population of the Dutch Indies, based on a category narrower than race, i.e. ethnicity, which "certainly...existed first and foremost in the minds of Europeans" (Anderson 1987:3). The ethnic classification aimed to facilitate tax collection (Anderson 1987) and enhance political prestige (Fasseur 1994:34). The Dutch defined ethnicity based on the place of birth and such social factors as language, customs and habits (Klinken 2003:69). In the late nineteenth century colonial administration singled out several ethnic groups (e.g. Sundanese, Javanese, Madurese), "each with their own languages, cultures and literary traditions" (Goebel 2015:40). The work of missionaries also contributed to "naturalizing ethnicity as a category of personhood" (Goebel 2015:30): to evaluate the success of conversion within the territories assigned to them, missionaries created descriptions of languages, which were previously indistinguishable, and assigned them to a named ethnic or tribal group (Errington 2001). As a result, the census undertaken in 1930 showed sixteen ethnic groups, plus Chinese and others (Suryadinata et al. 2003:12).

Despite the distinctions made by the colonial administration at various levels, in everyday life people did not adhere to the prescribed boundaries. Recent studies (Heryanto 2014; Schulte Nordholt 2011; Ruppin 2015; Strassler 2008) show intensive interaction among people of various cultural backgrounds in colonial Indonesia. Schulte Nordholt discussed the active participation of the indigenous urban middle class in the cultural life of the colony. Being denied political citizenship, they were nevertheless "cultural citizens of the colony" (Schulte Nordholt 2011). While examining the emergence of movie-going in Colonial Indonesia in 1896–1914, Ruppin argued that

[11] Japanese were moved to the category of Europeans in the late nineteenth century for purely political reasons. For more see Fasseur (1994).

movie picture venues were spaces where interactions occurred across ethnic boundaries (Ruppin 2015). Strassler used amateur and professional photography as an illustration of "the complex dialogues among ethnic Chinese photographers, Dutch colonizers, and Javanese and other *pribumi* (indigenous) populations" (Strassler 2008:401). Sen (2006), Setijadi-Dunn & Barker (2010), Heryanto (2014) explored how Indonesian cinema was born out of intensive communication between different communities of various backgrounds. In sum, the research on everyday life in the late nineteenth—early twentieth century shows active collaboration and interaction among people of diverse backgrounds in all sorts of activities, be it business or leisure, politics or culture. In these interactions the differences were not only reproduced but also challenged.

Ethnicity and race proved to be an enduring category when, after gaining its independence (self-proclaimed in 1945, internationally recognised in 1949), Indonesia did not abolish the racial and ethnic classification but largely relied on it for the formation of the nation-state. As Elson's analysis of the early nationalist movement showed, "the early Indonesian thinking about nation and citizenship …developed a peculiar and tenacious sense of Indonesian race" (Elson 2005:159). The nationalist government of Sukarno continued to use the categories similar to the Dutch classification of the population. Although the Constitution of 1945 proclaimed that all Indonesian citizens have the same legal rights and obligations in law and government, the constitution differentiated between citizens who were native-born Indonesians, or *orang-orang bangsa Indonesia*, and citizens of different nationality or race, or *orang-orang bangsa lain* (Coppel 2002b:144), with the latter resembling the category of "Foreign Orientals" of colonial times.

Thus, after independence Indonesia largely retained the racial and ethnic categories inherited from the colonial administration. The logic behind the distribution of material and symbolic benefits was, however, reversed. The natives, or *pribumi*, Indonesia *asli*, who had almost no privileges during the colonial times (with the exception of the aristocracy) were, by affirmative action, put at the top of the social hierarchy. The status of *pribumi* guaranteed economic, political and social privileges, while Indonesians of foreign descent as well as foreigners were often deprived of basic rights. Importantly, descent, its foreignness or indigeneity, was deemed the main constituent of identity.

During the New Order regime (1965–1998) the politics of ethnicity reached a new level of complexity. On the one hand, the New Order proclaimed "unity in diversity", a harmonious coexistence of diverse groups and communities. On the other hand, the state strictly controlled the limits of cultural expression in public space, approving some forms while prohibiting others. The New Order regime introduced SARA, an acronym of *suku, agama, ras dan antar golongan*, usually translated as "ethnicity, religion, race and intragroup relations", which encompassed the issues not to be addressed in public. In Hill's words, SARA refers to "anything deemed seditious, insinuating, sensational, speculative or likely to antagonise ethnic, religious, racial or class tensions" (Hill 2006:45). Silencing discussion of these issues did not eliminate but, on the contrary, reinforced divisions along ethnic and racial lines. The racist dichotomy between *pribumi* and non-*pribumi* Indonesians, as well as ethnic distinctions between Javanese and other groups were continuously reinforced by state laws and regulations and perpetuated in official language (Aguilar 2001). Ethnic politics became the main instrument of legitimating power.

The experiences of Chinese Indonesians during the New Order is particularly illustrative. Indonesians of Chinese descent were "singled out...for special treatment" (Coppel 2002b:146), being constructed as the Nation's Other. Political instability or economic stagnation was explicitly linked to and explained by the "foreign" ethnicity of Chinese Indonesians. As a "national problem", Indonesians of Chinese descent were subject to forced assimilation, which goal was never to be achieved, as the state needed Chinese Indonesians for the justification of its power: "Chinese identities are never totally to be wiped out. They are carefully and continually reproduced, but always under erasure" (Heryanto 1998:104). Discrimination towards Chinese Indonesians was particularly sophisticated because it was not only a discrimination against but also "discrimination for", when a selected number of Chinese Indonesians was given almost unlimited economic privileges (Heryanto 2004:30).

It was only after the collapse of the New Order regime that the official division of the Indonesian population into *pribumi*, or authentic Indonesians, and non-*pribumi*, not real Indonesians, was eradicated from the legal system. By the Presidential Instruction 26/1998 Vice-President B.J. Habibie abolished the racist *pribumi* and non-*pribumi* division. A new Citizenship Law (No.12/2006) introduced eight years after the collapse of the New Order regime, "stipulated a redefinition of the term 'indigenous

Indonesian', *'pribumi'* or *'asli'*, to include all Indonesian citizens who have not assumed foreign citizenship" (Hoon 2006b:4).

Despite official eradication of ethno-racial categories, the division between "true Indonesians" and those of "foreign descent" persisted in public discourse through the early 2010s. By the time legal changes were introduced, a century-long reinforcement of the racial and ethnic divide of the population on the administrative, legislative, and judicial levels resulted in the internalization of these categories by the population. Importantly, while the *pribumi*/non-*pribumi* dichotomy was officially abolished, the classification of the population based on their "descent" was not. Moreover, the terms "race" and "ethnicity" continue to be used in official, semi-official and everyday communication.

A short note on the local, Indonesian terms, which are usually translated from Indonesian to English as ethnicity and race, is in order. With "race" the situation is rather clear: the Indonesian language incorporated the English word without significant change. As for ethnicity, it is a bit more complex, because there are a number of local terms, which researchers usually take to be the equivalent of "ethnicity": *suku bangsa, grup etnis, warga keturunan*. *Suku bangsa* (tribe) is the most common official term to differentiate cultural differences. In the past it was applied only to so-called indigenous groups, to *pribumi*, which Indian, Chinese, Dutch and other Indonesians of descent do not "qualify" for. Since the Reform period in censuses *suku bangsa* has been used for all Indonesian citizens, but in colloquial speech it would rarely be applied to Indian Indonesians. *Grup etnis* is usually used interchangeably with *suku bangsa* but not as often as the latter one. There is also the semi-official term *warga keturunan*, which is typically translated as "[Indonesian] citizen of foreign descent", and this is usually the category used for Indian, Chinese, and Dutch Indonesians, who supposedly have transnational connections.

In the 2000 census when the question of ethnicity was requested for the first time since 1930, all Indonesian citizens had to identify their *suku bangsa* (but not *ras*,

or race).[12] In 2010 the census included the category of *suku bangsa* again, and the census collectors were issued with the following instructions:

> Ethnicity (*suku bangsa*) is the ethnic group and culture which a person inherits. In general, ethnicity follows the paternal line (father/men), but there are some ethnic groups which follow the maternal line (mother/female) such as the Minangkabau.
> Even though there is this "rule", there may still be some situations where a person has difficulty in deciding his ethnicity. For example, there are often difficulties when people of different ethnicities marry and even more so when different ethnicities have been mixed for several generations. In such cases, the ethnicity of a household member is whatever he thinks it is. Of course, a person usually leans toward an ethnicity in which he feels most comfortable. One measure is the cultural traditions which he/she follows most often. If the respondent "is confused", the enumerator can point him/her (with the respondent's permission) in the direction of his father's line, grandfather's line and so on. [p.122]
> Indonesian citizens are those who are native Indonesians and those who are foreign born but have become Indonesian citizens.[13]

From this abstract it is clear that ethnicity remains an important category for the state and is associated primarily with descent. Although its constructed nature is acknowledged ("ethnicity is whatever he [the respondent] thinks it is"), the descent or inheritance, traced mostly through the male parent, should "come to the rescue" in the case of uncertainty. Moreover, despite admitting possible confusion caused by diversity, the census reinforces the idea of ethnicity as "fixed, singular and mutually exclusive" (Hoon 2006a:82). At the same time, it is possible in contemporary Indonesia to be officially identified as an Indonesian citizen and an Indian (but not Indonesian Sindhi): Sindhis are not recognised as a separate ethnic group like, for example, Javanese or

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[12] Although ethnicity was one of the main instruments of power in post-colonial Indonesia, the question of "ethnicity" was excluded from the questionnaires until 2000 to avoid ethnic tensions.

[13] Instructions for census collectors, official translation, available at https://international.ipums.org/international-action/variables/group/ethnic (last accessed 5 Apr. 2016).

Acehnese, but fall under a more general ethnic category of Indians (Other similar groups include English, Korean, Malaysian, Dutch, etc.).

In other official documents there is a lack of consistency in using the terms which could be translated as "ethnicity" and "race". For example, the Copyright Law of 2002 (Law 32/2002) used *grup etnis/suku bangsa* and *ras*, but in the most recent edition of the Copyright Law (Law 28/2014) these categories were abandoned. There is mention only of Indonesian and foreign citizenship. Meanwhile, the current Broadcasting Law (Law 32/2002) as well as reports prepared by the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission, a state institution regulating television content, continue to use *suku bangsa* and *ras*.

In short, in contemporary Indonesia ethnicity remains an important identity marker at various levels and in different contexts. Categorizing and judging people based on their real or imagined foreign descent is the norm. In colloquial language the difference between "authentic" and "non-authentic" Indonesians is bluntly expressed as *orang kita* (our people) and *orang sana* (people from there).

4. Methodology

The ethnographic data for this research was collected in 2013, in Jakarta, the centre of national television production as well as the centre of Sindhi community life. To examine the relationships of the Sindhi community with society at large and the state through media production I mainly relied on the methods developed in media anthropology. In-depth interviews, group discussions, participation in the production meetings, and ethnographic field observation of people, spaces (offices and film sets) and events (press-conferences, community celebrations, award ceremonies) constituted the main sources of my ethnographic research. I also made use of various promotional materials produced by the production houses, press-releases or news updates on the corporate internet sites. These "self-reflective" materials (Caldwell 2008:1) helped me to grasp the views of the owners of production houses about themselves, the industry and power relationships within it. It should be mentioned that unlike Hollywood and even Bollywood, the Indonesian media industry is rather "stingy" and produces a very small amount of such materials. Even the websites of most production companies in

2013 were usually "under construction" with very little information available for the public.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were an invaluable source of information about how people talk about themselves and others, and what kinds of real or imagined barriers they have to deal with at work and during their leisure time. Interviews were also the main source of information on how the *sinetron* production industry was established and run during the research period. To get a comprehensive picture of social relations formed in the media production industry I talked to media practitioners occupying different positions in the industry. I interviewed gaffers and producers, heads of TV stations and junior program acquisition managers, drivers and writers, media observers (academics, bloggers, media activists), state officials regulating television content (*Lembaga Sensor Film* (LSF), the State Censorship Body) and members of various media institutions controlling and monitoring the television industry (*Komisi Peniyaran Indonesia* (KPI), or Indonesian Broadcasting Commission, and AC Nielsen). Other groups of interviewees comprised Sindhi community members, who were not directly involved in media production, as well as non-Sindhi Indians living in Indonesia permanently or temporarily (expatriate Indians). The interviews with the latter group helped me to get a sense of how the Sindhi community positions itself within the local Indian communities and, more broadly, Indonesian society. The views of Sindhi community members of media practices helped me to see the business of national television production from different angles. Data obtained through semi-structured interviews were complemented by participant observation during various community-organised events, such as the Miss India Indonesia beauty pageant, weddings, and fashion shows, as well as celebrations of pan-Indian festivals.

My personal identity markers played a particularly important role during my fieldwork. As a Caucasian Russian "single" female researcher representing Australian academia, living in a very expensive residential complex, I found many doors were open to me.[14] At the same time due to certain stereotypes attributed to these identities, importantly not separately, but always in conjunction (white female, Russian female, single female), it was sometimes difficult for me to gain access to certain people or

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[14] I was perceived as single because my family (husband and two children) did not join me during my fieldwork.

localities. For example, as a "white" woman I could easily gain access to most of the exclusive media events (press-conferences, promo events) just because of my skin colour and gender. At the same time being a "single" Caucasian woman was often a limitation in several practical matters. For instance, I found that my attendance at late night *sinetron* shootings sent the wrong messages to my respondents. Meanwhile, my upper-class identity (due to my expensive accommodation and skin colour) combined with Australian residency helped me build rapport with local Sindhis, for whom economic wealth and English proficiency are among the main markers of one's worth. They also facilitated my access to the wealthy expatriate Indian community. As for non-Sindhis, in particular media practitioners, my identity as a "Russian researcher" was most valuable. By virtue of being Russian, I was assumed to be highly knowledgeable of the rich literary and cinematographic traditions of Russia. Overall, self-ethnography was another source of data on power relations in Indonesia shaped around race and ethnicity and its intersection with class and gender.

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The thesis is divided into two main parts. The first part (chapters One, Two and Three) provides historical and cultural background on the Sindhi community in Indonesia to prepare readers for the main discussion on the relationships between Indonesian Sindhis, society and nation-state as they unfold and develop within the production culture of national television. As very little is known about the Sindhi community in Indonesia's past and present, this background is necessary to understand the discussion that follows. The second part (chapters Four, Five and Six) goes on to analyse the television industry from the 1990s to the early 2010s and examines the role of ethnic imagery in shaping relationships within the national television industry.

Chapter One starts with the description of migration and settlement of the Sindhis in the period between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and then covers the experiences of Sindhis during the revolutionary period and the Sukarno and Suharto eras. It moves on to a discussion of how, despite the prevalence of anti-foreign sentiments in colonial and post-colonial Indonesia, Sindhis have retained a privileged position in Indonesian society throughout the twentieth century. I pay particular attention to the key role of the Gandhi Memorial School in securing for Sindhis this privileged position in Indonesia.

Chapter Two gives a sense of the Sindhi community in Jakarta during the main research period (1990s–2013). It discusses the identity and the main practices used by Indonesian Sindhis to reproduce themselves as members of a distinct global community of Sindhi traders. I argue that despite the gradual loss of several important cultural markers, such as Sindhi language and Hindu religion, "Sindhi-ness" remains an important identity and continues to have a direct impact on many aspects of the personal and community life of those Jakartans who can and want to trace their origins to the Sindh region. I focus on three main aspects that Sindhis see as the core of their identity: business/trade activities; social hierarchy within the community based on occupational distinctions; and gender ideology of the Sindhi community in terms of expectations based on sex that Sindhis impose on community members.

Chapter Three is transitional and pursues two objectives. First it provides a historical account of the first steps of Sindhis in Indonesian media industries. It presents new historical data on the involvement of Sindhis in film distribution and production, and discusses the impact of Sindhi community involvement on the development of the local film industry. Second, the chapter examines the reasons behind the successful entrance of Sindhis into the business of content production for national television. I present a brief analysis of the political economy in the historical moment of the industry when commercial television began in Indonesia. I argue that in the late 1980s Sindhis were the only producers who could rely on well-functioning, ethnic and kinship-based systems to manage capital and human resources to run television production. These systems as well as a combination of external factors, which weakened competitors, allowed Sindhis to pioneer the emerging field of content production for commercial television and dominate it in the following decades.

Chapters Four, Five and Six constitute the core of my thesis. Chapter Four examines how ethnic imagery features at the so-called "industry level" (Lotz 2009). I argue that the commercial television industry developed due to the interplay of several distinct economic forces. In other words, it did not develop according to some general, universal economic determinants. Adopting the argument of Yanagisako (2002) that desires and sentiments constitute the forces of production along with physical means and techniques, I examine how the sense of "corporacy" (Falzon 2004) among Sindhi businessmen as well as the priority given by Sindhis to self-employment and

supervision of business over its growth have shaped the development of commercial television content in the industry.

Chapter Five comes down to the level of social relationships formed within the *sinetron* production houses. I argue that in the period between the 1990s and the early 2010s ethnic imagery was the main factor that defined the distribution of symbolic and material capital within production houses. I pay particular attention to the fact that the social hierarchy is built on ethnic imagery constituted by two different cultural frameworks and historical experiences. One is based on the Sindhi occupational distinction rooted in the caste system of South Asia, while another can be traced back to the Indonesian colonial experience.

Chapter Six adds the category of ethnicised gender to the analysis and looks at the experiences of Sindhi women in the *sinetron* production industry. The presentation of previously unreported data on the involvement of Sindhi women in Indonesian *sinetron* production provides the basis for a critique of the existing frameworks which have been used to discuss the position of women in media and, more generally, cultural production in Indonesia. I argue, that despite significant contributions to the scholarship on contemporary Indonesia, the existing scholarly approaches to gender and ethnicity in Indonesian media do not challenge, but, on the contrary, reproduce the nationalistic and patriarchal social order.

Finally, the Conclusion returns to the main theme of the thesis. It sums up the experiences of Sindhi ethnic community in media production and draws conclusions about the complexities of ethnic politics in Indonesia. I also discuss the nature of the most recent changes in the community and in media production, and suggest directions for future research.

Chapter 1

Sindhi Migration and Settlement in Indonesia

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I introduced Indonesian Sindhis very briefly. I mentioned that merchants from Sindh established their first contacts with the trade centres in the Indonesian archipelago in the late nineteenth century. Since then they occupied several niches in the economy of Indonesia, mostly in textile trade and media production and distribution businesses. I also pointed out that the relationships of Sindhis with local population of Indonesia and the state were largely very peaceful.

This chapter presents a brief historical overview of a century-long interaction between Sindhis and colonial and post-colonial Indonesia covering the period between the late nineteenth and the late twentieth centuries. Using academic literature as well as oral history accounts, I discuss the nature of Sindhi migration to the archipelago as well as the process of settlement and community consolidation. Along with tracing the century-long history of relationships between the Sindhi community and Indonesia, which to the best of my knowledge has not been done previously, this chapter pursues another goal. Throughout the chapter I emphasise that conscious efforts of Sindhis to set and reproduce cultural boundaries with the non-Sindhi Indonesian population have met no particular resistance from the state or society. In other words, in case of Sindhis, the state did not see cultural differences and "foreignness", whether imagined or real, as a threat to nation-building process.

The chapter is divided into two major sections: the first section is organised chronologically following the traditional periodisation of the Indonesian history based on the political regimes. I start with the late colonial times and finish with a brief discussion of the Reform era. In the second part I focus my discussion on Gandhi Memorial School as the main institution of nurturing a sense of distinct community. I

also view the experiences of Sindhis in a broader context of ethnic politics in Indonesia to underline the fictitious nature of threat associated with "foreign descent".

2. Sindhis in Colonial Indonesia

While the first merchants from the Indian subcontinent (largely from Gujarat) reached Indonesian peninsula in the fourteenth century, if not earlier, Sindhi traders "discovered" the Dutch East Indies archipelago only in the late nineteenth century. British conquest of Sindh in 1843 boosted trade activity of Sindhi merchants opening new horizons for trade. Most Sindhis who started trading in Java were from Hyderabad,[15] and belonged to *bhaibands,* literally "brothers", a *jati* of Hindu Sindhis from a lower social strata, who were concentrated in the commercial sector.[16] The first Sindhi firms Wassiamul Assomull & Co in Surabaya and K.A.J. Chotirmall & Co Ltd in Jakarta were established in the late 1870s. The success of Chotirmal family, who expanded their trade business from Java to Singapore, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Yokohama, Shanghai, Tsintao, and Port Arthur (Mani 1993a:101), encouraged other Sindhi traders to try their luck on the Dutch East Indies shores. The Sindhi language still reflects the success of Sindhi traders on Java in the saying "Whoever goes to Java comes back very rich". Moreover, the word "Java" is used as a verb meaning "spending very lavishly" (*java tho karain)*[17] (Thapan 2002:25).

In the 1930s the contacts between Sindhi merchants and Javanese trade centres, Surabaya, Semarang, Malang, Batavia, later known as Jakarta, intensified. An increasing number of Sindhi merchants started exploring the opportunities to establish

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[15] There was another network formed in Sindh with the base in Shikarpur. For historical differences between the Hyderabadi and Shikarpui networks see Markovits (2000).

[16] Although Hindu Sindhis do not have a four-tier caste system and form one caste, known as *lohana*, there are still some inner divisions, i.e. *amils* and *bhaibands*. "Basically the distinction in Sind was *amils* = educated = service as different from bhaiband = uneducated = business" (Falzon 2004:33) Education meant "knowledge of Persian and the affairs of court and revenue matters" (Falzon 2004:35). For more on the inner divisions within the Sindhi community see Falzon (2004:32–35) and Markovits (2000:46).

[17] Interestingly enough, a similar saying is mentioned by A.Mani, but in regards to a group of Gujarati traders: "If one goes to Java, he is presumed to be lost. If he returns, he will bring enough to last for seven generations (as told by Gujarati traders in Jakarta)" (Mani 1993a:96).

their trade businesses on a more permanent basis. Many Sindhi traders visited home, Hyderabad, only once a year, spending most time of the year on Java or Sumatra. Despite that, the Sindhi mode of living could be best described not as migration, but circulation (Markovits 2000:5). Neither people, nor goods or finances were permanently concentrated in one locality. On the contrary, they were constantly moving between Hyderabad, the network centre, and other parts of the world.

The family history of Raam Punjabi, probably the most famous Indonesian Sindhi, and "raja *sinetron*" (king of Indonesian soap opera), is in many ways a typical example of Sindhi merchant business trajectory and lifestyle back in the 1930s and the early 1940s. The father of Raam, Jethmal Tolaram Punjabi, came to Surabaya as a shop assistant in 1933 following the advice of T.D. Kundan, the leader of the local Sindhi community, who described the city as a very lively place, full of traders and customers (Endah 2005:4). On his arrival Jethmal was struck by the number of Sindhis residing in Surabaya and it "immediately felt like home" (Endah 2005:4). Despite that, his home was still in Hyderabad, which he visited every year. The wife of Jethmal, Dhanibhai Jethmal Punjabi, whom he married during one of his visits home, continued to live in Hyderabad for the first five years of the marriage. She moved to Surabaya in the late 1930s when Jethmal left his boss and started his own business selling carpets from India, Persia and Iran for local and colonial elites. Jethmal like many other Sindhi traders, was proficient in several languages including Dutch, English and Indonesian and skilful in treating his customers with due respect, and he ran his business well. His family, which by 1943 had eight members, with five out of six children born in Surabaya, had a placid life.

Colonial administration classified Sindhi traders as Indians, along with other settlers from the Indian subcontinent, who, apart from their place of origin, had little in common among them. The category of "Indians" unified an extremely diverse group of people with different economic, social and cultural backgrounds. In 1930 The East Indies census showed that there were "27,684 Indians, of whom 12,684 were born in India and among whom the men outnumbered the women by a ratio of 2 to 1" (Thompson & Adloff 1955:122).[18] The report also showed that most Indians stayed in

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[18] As mentioned in the Introduction, ethnicity was defined based on the place of birth and such social factors as language, customs and habits (Klinken 2003:69).

Java and Sumatra (25,638) with around 2000 scattered widely through the outer provinces. It also documented the differences between Indians in Sumatra and Java: "On Java, most of the Indians were small shopkeepers, while on Sumatra many were to be found in the plantation areas of Deli as coolies, drivers of motor vehicles, cattlemen, and night watchmen" (Thompson & Adloff 1955:122). According to Mani, Sumatra hosted around 20,000 Indians, most of whom were Tamil Chettiars working on tobacco plantations (Mani 1993b:60), which means that around 5000 resided in Java, where traders from Sindh constituted the majority, with other merchant communities coming from Punjab (Sikhs) and Gujarat.[19]

Despite being categorised as one group, migrants from the Indian subcontinent did not mingle with each other, being separated along linguistic and religious lines. As Mani stated, "there was no common identity among various groups coming from British India" (Mani 1993a:104). While for business matters Sindhis interacted with people of different origins (who, however, largely belonged to the elites), outside of trading activities, the life of Sindhis was limited to their own community. Sindhi men took wives only from Hyderabad, with intermarriages being unknown. They followed religious and cultural rituals and spoke Sindhi (and in some cases Hindi) at home. It should be mentioned that such a lifestyle was not unique to Java but was maintained by Sindhis in other places where they conducted trade activities (Falzon 2004, Markovits 2000, Thapan 2002). In those quite rare cases when Sindhi merchants brought their families with them, their children went to schools established and run by the community, where English was the medium of education, and Sindhi or Hindi was taught as a compulsory subject.

Being categorised as Indians, Sindhis were part of the residual legal and administrative category of "Foreign Orientals", which after 1925 was clearly separated from the "Natives". That meant that Sindhis and natives were subject to different laws—while natives were tried in "the second-class" Landraat courts, Sindhis were subject to *Raad van Justitie,* the court which settled the disputes between Europeans (Fasseur 1994:43). Moreover, as Foreign Orientals they had more freedom of movement. Although it seems that the Dutch administrative system did not make any

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[19] Two other groups who came to Indonesia not as indentured labourers were Punjabi Sikhs and Gujarati traders (Mani 1993b:103).

formal distinction between the indentured labourers and free traders from the Indian subcontinent, Dutch patronised Sindhis, a wealthy community that supplied colonial elites with textiles and luxury goods (carpets, embroidery, wooden and ivory carvings). For example, in Surabaya, one of the main trading centres in colonial Java, the leader of Sindhis was assigned a title of *Hoofd der Indiers* (head of the Indians) and given an authority to issue visas for the newcomers. In other words, the economic well-being and global connections secured Sindhis a higher status in colonial Indonesia.

As Foreign Orientals and as newly arrived, Sindhis were similar to the so-called *totok* Chinese, literally "full-blooded" Chinese. Unlike *peranakan* Chinese, a "mestizo Malay speaking group", whose descendants came to Indonesia centuries back, *totok* Chinese started arriving in Indonesia in the late nineteenth century and "tended to maintain a more exclusively Chinese milieu, often bringing wives from China rather than intermarrying with local women" (Strassler 2008:401).[20] But this resemblance between Sindhis and *totok* Chinese is in fact illusory: class as well as nature of migration distinguished Sindhis from the recent Chinese migrants. Although Sindhis spent most of the time in the places where they had their businesses, their families and their homes were still in Hyderabad. Sindhis had no intention of settling in Indonesia on a permanent basis. They were temporary sojourners. As such, they did not seek positions in colonial administration and focused on trading activities. As Bonacich pointed out, this "sojourner mentality" led to a particular pattern of political behaviour that did not facilitate integration with the host society (Bonacich 1973). Furthermore, unlike the recent migrants from China, who were mostly of lower social strata, "with no social and other ties to the upper echelons of Javanese and European society" (Strassler 2008:415), Sindhis were a prosperous community, well-connected to the colonial elite through the nature of their business.

Overall, during Dutch colonial times the relationships of Sindhis with colonial elites were mutually beneficial. The business of Sindhis was profitable and their lifestyle was comfortable, as is evident in the increasing number of Sindhi traders coming to Java and other islands from the 1930s. Meanwhile, the colonial administration valued the relationships with well-connected self-sufficient merchants

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[20] More on the distinction between the mestizo *peranakan* Chinese and the full-blooded, more exclusive *totok* Chinese. For more see Skinner (1963), Suryadinata (1992).

who did not challenge the established order. They were temporary sojourners, whose relationships with the local population and administrations were mainly those of traders and customers. Equally important was the status of Sindhis as free and wealthy traders, which distinguished them considerably from the indentured labourers from the Indian subcontinent working on the Dutch plantations as well as from recent migrants from China. These differences in the nature of migration, economic position (class) and connection to the elites made the experience of Sindhis in the colonial Dutch Indies barely comparable with the experiences of other Indian migrants as well as other Foreign Orientals.

3. Sindhis during Revolution

The arrival of the Japanese in Indonesian archipelago in 1942 did not have a serious impact on the Sindhi community. Most Sindhis continued to stay in Indonesia and even prospered during the Japanese occupation. It was the end of the Japanese rule and the Indonesian Revolution in 1946 that brought "a major disruption" to the constant growth of the Sindhi community (Mani 1993a:105).

Although most Sindhis stayed away from the political life of colonial Indonesia, my sources show that some members of the community sympathised with the Indonesian independence movement and even became involved into the revolutionary struggle by taking the position of mediators between the colonial power and the local revolutionary forces.[21] For example, in Surabaya, the above mentioned T.D. Kundan, the Sindhi community leader in the 1930s–1940s, became the middleman and interpreter between the Indian troops, sent by the British to restore order after Indonesia proclaimed its independence in August 1945, and the local revolutionary leaders. The Indian reporter PRS Mani called Kundan "the main ambassador between us [Indians] and the local leaders, with whom he is extremely popular".[22] Although to the great disappointment of Kundan the negotiations did not prevent "a bloody punitive sweep

[21] "The PRS Mani Collection," Open Publications of UTS Scholars, https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/research/handle/10453/28084 (last accessed 21 Apr. 2016).

[22] "The PRS Mani Collection," Open Publications of UTS Scholars, https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/research/handle/10453/28084 (last accessed 21 Apr. 2016).

through the city" (Ricklefs 2001:267), the government of Independent Indonesia highly appreciated the role of T.D.Kundan in the negotiation process: "When he died, the Indonesian government accorded his funeral full state and military honours" (Mani 1993a:102).

Many Sindhis, however, left Indonesia for good, or so they thought. Their businesses, oriented towards colonial and local elites, were severely damaged by the Independence war. Overall, Java was not safe. But when Sindhis returned to Hyderabad, Sindh, they found that their home had turned into a very dangerous place as well. The decision of the British India elites to split the territory of British India along the religious lines caused unprecedented violence, which struck many regions of the subcontinent. In Sindh brutal riots broke out in January 1948 (Markovits 2000:278) and forced Hindu Sindhis to flee Hyderabad en masse. According to some records, approximately "1,200,000 non-Muslim refugees from Sind and Baluchistan had entered India" (Markovits 2000:278), with only one-fourth of them being non-Sindhis, mostly Punjabis, Gujaratis, and Rajasthanis. Most Sindhis settled in India but quite a large percentage relocated to places where they previously traded. In Southeast Asia Hong Kong, Philippines and Singapore attracted several thousands of Hindu Sindhis.

The exact number of Sindhis who entered Indonesia between 1948 and 1953 is unknown, but Markovits's estimation showed around 3500 people (Markovits 2000:278). In 1953 Indonesia officially announced the end of "the open door policy" practiced by the Dutch and established a quota for each country, with applicants from India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon allocated a quota of 1000, including wives and children (Thompson & Adloff 1955:123).[23] As the priority was given to those immigrants who had previously resided in Indonesia and to "those whose services were needed by the country", it is possible that Sindhi families continued to arrive in Indonesia after 1953. The number of Sindhi community members stabilised by the late 1950s at approximately 8000 and has not increased significantly since then. Many Sindhis came to Indonesia through Singapore where they were given temporary accommodation for several months. As my respondents recalled, most friendships and partnerships that lasted for many years were formed during those months spent by Sindhi refugees in Singaporean barracks.

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[23] In comparison, the quota for migrants from China was 4000.

The Partition of British India was the most important event in the process of (re)shaping the Hindu Sindhi community. Temporary sojourners for generations, they finally had to acquire a more permanent status and reconsider the concept of home. Before Partition, no matter how far the business matters would take Sindhi merchants, Sindh was always the centre of the global network where major decisions, business and private alike, were made. After Partition the community, previously linked by and through region and locality (Markovits 2000:6), re-emerged in its new form of Sindhayat, with Sindhiness being equated with "translocal, adaptive, and cosmopolitan" (Falzon 2004:64). Since the 1950s, the Sindhi trade network has turned into a community with a more pronounced cultural and religious identity, which was rigorously reproduced through its two most fundamental networks: business and family (Falzon 2004:64).

4. Sindhis during the Sukarno Era

The (re)settlement of Sindhis in Independent Indonesia went smoothly. Most migrants had previously stayed in Indonesia or had relatives and friends who were familiar with the place and facilitated the settlement. Moreover, they usually had some savings which helped them during the initial years.[24] India strongly encouraged the new migrants to settle in Indonesia (and other countries in the region) as it was struggling to accommodate the enormous number of Hindu refugees. During his visit to Indonesia in 1951 Nehru "preached unity of his fellow countrymen, and identification of their interests with those of the country in which they lived" (Thompson & Adloff 1955:62). In 1954 a newly appointed Indian ambassador urged Indian businessmen, mostly Sindhis, to hire Indonesians to allow them to benefit from the Indian experience in commerce and to assure "Indonesian friends... that the Indian business community is doing something worthwhile in strengthening Indonesia's economic position" (Thompson & Adloff 1955:123).

Indonesia, which had amicable relations with India in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, welcomed post-Partition migrants and granted them permanent resident

[24] My respondents told me that their parents were able to bring with them some jewellery and precious stones, which they could sell in case of financial difficulties.

status. It also provided them with the opportunity to help their relatives in India by increasing quotas for remittances: "Indonesia ... eased the application of its monetary restrictions to resident Indians, who were the chief source of income for Hindu refugees from Pakistan (Thompson & Adloff 1955:69). In comparison, foreign Chinese in Indonesia were banned from sending the remittances during the first years of Independence (Willmott 1961:74). In 1956 Sukarno, addressing the convention of all Indian Business associations from various parts of archipelago, expressed appreciation for the work of the conference and encouraged cooperation "between the Indian nationals and the Indonesian people" (Mani 1993a:108). In other words, Indian migrant businessmen, the majority of whom were Sindhis, were welcomed by the Indonesian state as Indians, as foreign nationals. There was a call for cooperation, but no pressure from the state officials to assimilate into Indonesian society.

From the early years of their permanent settlement Jakartan Sindhis worked to preserve their cultural identity by forming associations and institutions. In 1947 Sindhi elders established Bombay Merchant Association, the central business association of the community, whose membership was strictly limited to the Sindhis.[25] The name of the organisation was not random but reflected the deep affection Sindhis felt for India, with Bombay seen as the quintessence of Indianness. Such central importance of Bombay is explained by the administrative history of the region (during colonial times, from 1843 to 1936, Sindh was part of the Bombay Presidency, or Province) and the commercial importance of the city in contemporary India.

The founders of the Bombay Merchant Association saw its primary aim in "fostering the spirit of love, understanding and brotherhood and providing the best possible education to the children of the community."[26] Indeed, the establishment of the community school, the Gandhi Memorial School, followed soon, in the 1950s. Along with business and educational organisations Sindhis took care of the places of worship,

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[25] One of the community members, Suresh Vaswani, in his interview with Tempo magazine in 1996 formulated this exclusiveness of Bombay Merchant Association (BMA) very bluntly: "BMA is for people of Sindhi descent, not anyone else." Interview is translated from Indonesian by the author. "Bombai Merchant Association Belum Mati", Tempo Magazine, http://www.library.ohiou.edu/indopubs/1996/05/04/0019.html (last accessed 7 Apr. 2016).

[26] "Gandhi Seva Loka," Sindhishaan the Voice of Sindhis, htttp://www.sindhishaan.com (last accessed 4 Apr. 2016).

renovating the existing temples and building some new ones, including the second *gurudwara* in Pasar Baru, Central Jakarta, and Shiv Mandir in Pluit, North Jakarta.

This is not to say that Sindhis walled themselves off from non-Sindhi society. In business Sindhis were in constant interaction with all kinds of people. Pasar Baru, the place where most Sindhis settled in Jakarta in the 1950s, became well known as an Indian market offering quality textiles for all tastes. In the late 1950s Sindhis restored their connections with the economic elites (local officials and foreign embassy staff) by supplying them with luxury goods through "mail order" business. As the economic situation in the country was deteriorating, many goods were in deficit. Meanwhile, Sindhis were able to bring most of the items to Indonesia by mobilizing their community connections with Singapore and Hong Kong. In the late 1950s and the early 1960s this "mail order" business helped quite a few Sindhi businessmen to improve their economic status. It also connected them with the Indonesian upper class. Moreover, several families broadened their connections with non-Sindhis when they tried their luck in the film importing and distribution business and established partnerships with local filmmakers (to be discussed in Chapter Three).

It should be mentioned that during the first decade of independence Sindhi children were also exposed to a wide social circle. Gandhi Memorial School, established by the community, was only for primary level, and for secondary education Sindhi children attended other private schools with English as a medium of education. One of the senior community members shared her memories with me:

> I went to a Chinese school in Glodok as it was English speaking. And then I moved to a Convent school, Regina Pacis...It was a proper Catholic school run by nuns where nuns still wore those white robes... Bible was a compulsory subject for us but I need to say that there was no attempt to convert us.... We had a lot of Chinese friends there, Indonesian friends. But when I was in high school there was a regulation that Indonesians had to go to Indonesian schools. At that time I still had Indian citizenship so I could stay. A year after I graduated even people with permanent residence had to go to national schools with Indonesian language. (Sheeja, Indonesian Sindhi, second generation, personal communication, 22 Feb. 2013)

The regulation that Sheeja refers to was issued in 1957, when the government, following the proclamation of the state of emergency, severely limited foreign-language schools and instructed Indonesian citizens to transfer to Indonesian-medium schools (Willmott 1961). Three years later, a Regulation of 1960 (Regulation No.48/1960) made it illegal for both Indonesian citizens and permanent residents to attend schools with the medium of education other than Indonesian. The "side effect" of this law and lack of reinforcement resulted in isolation of Sindhis from the Indonesian society and I will discuss it later in the chapter.

The last several years of the Guided Democracy regime (the early 1960s) was the period of most instability that Sindhis experienced during the entire history of their settlement in Indonesia. The anti-Indian demonstrations first took part in 1962 and are usually referred to as the "Sondi affair".[27] Stage-managed by Sukarno, young nationalists held protest marches in the streets of Jakarta and attacked the Indian Embassy (Brewster 2011:223). According to Lubis, a prominent figure in the Indonesian public sphere, who wrote memoirs about everyday life in Jakarta in the 1950s–1970s, after those demonstrations Indian traders from Pasar Baru (predominantly Sindhis) closed their shops for some time and removed the word "India" from sign-boards reading "Martabak telor India" (Martabak from India) (Lubis 2008b:98).[28] In September 1965 Sukarno instigated another series of anti-Indian protests. This time the protests took place not only in Jakarta, where an angry mob attacked the Indian embassy and dozens of Indian shops, but also in other major cities with a significant number of Indians (Semarang, Surabaya, Surakarta). In addition to violent attacks, the government froze monetary transactions of Indian businessmen and took their property (Arora 1982:124; Mani 1993a:109). According to Mani (1993a), the Indian community

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[27]I found different accounts of the "Sondi (or Sondhi) affair". For example, Mani mentioned that the protests were triggered by the actions of the Asian games official, Sondi, an Indian, who "admitted Taiwan and Israel to the games, overruling Indonesia's objections. Everywhere in Jakarta, Indians were sneered at as Sondi, though no physical threat was used" (Mani 1993a:108). Firman Lubis stated that anti-Indian protests were triggered by the unfavourable comments of Sondhi about the preparation of Indonesia for the Asian games (Lubis 2008b). In his autobiographic book, Raam Punjabi also mentioned the episode of 1962. In his version, it was the victory of the Indian team over the Indonesian one during the Asian Games that provoked anti-Indian expressions (Endah 2005). When put together, these versions tell more about the narrators and their cultural affections than about the actual causes of the protests.

[28] *Martabak telor* is a type of a stuffed pancake common in India, the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

"averted any damage" to its members only due to the close connections of the prominent community members with the military.

In both cases the anti-Indian protests should be understood in the context of the Cold War. In 1962 the dispute between India and China over the Himalayan border turned into a military conflict, the Sino-Indian War. Meanwhile, "the growing radicalism" of Sukarno drew Indonesia closer to communist China as Sukarno was seeking support against the "neo-imperialist" West (Brewster 2011:223). The staged anti-Indian expressions were organised to show support for China in the escalating military conflict of 1962. In 1965 the anti-Indian protests were triggered by the Indo-Pakistani war, which broke out in August 1965. The Indonesian support of Pakistan, expressed in the supply of submarines, missile boats, MiG fighters and support crews (Brewster 2011:223), was Indonesia's response to the active support of India for the creation of independent Malaya and advocacy of a continuing security role of Great Britain in the region (Brewster 2011). The presence of British power in Southeast Asia was a serious constraint on Indonesia's ambitions to establish hegemony in the Southeast Asian region.

In the late 1965 the Guided Democracy regime, which in the early 1960s was characterised by "economic chaos" (Dick et al. 2002:191), largely unresolved social issues, inherited from the colonial times, and the "unprecedented national prominence" of the Indonesian Communist Party (Cribb & Ford 2010), came to an end. The period between October 1965 and March 1966 is one of the most crucial and violent moments of contemporary Indonesian history. The massacres of 1965–1966 that followed the alleged Communist coup on October 1, 1965, were executed with "generous assistance from the US government and other leading world advocates of liberal democracy" (Heryanto 2006:3) and formed the basis of the New Order's authoritarianism and state terrorism (Heryanto 2006). State-sponsored violence that lasted for five months claimed the lives of at least 500,000 Indonesians.[29] Most victims of state-sponsored genocide were associated with Indonesia's Communist Party, or PKI (Cribb & Ford 2010). In the public imagination—with help of the Western propaganda—PKI became closely linked

[29] For more on the Indonesian genocide of 1965–1966, see, for example Cribb (2001a, 2001b, 2002), Heryanto (2006), Zurbuchen (2002), and the special issue of Inside Indonesia, edition 99, Jan-Mar 2010, http://www.insideindonesia.org/edition-99-jan-mar-2010 (last accessed 25 May, 2016).

with communist China and this linkage played a particularly important role in shaping the ethnic politics in Indonesia in subsequent decades.

5. Sindhis during the New Order

The "New Order" regime, established by the army general Suharto, in contrast with the rule of his predecessor, Sukarno, was the time when Sindhis grew socially and economically strong not only as individuals but, most importantly, as a community. Sindhi businesses, educational and religious institutions strengthened and prospered. At the same time, the community grew increasingly exclusive. Overall, my respondents from the Sindhi community had very good memories of the 1970s and 1980s.

The increased wealth and well-being of the Sindhi community under the New Order can be attributed to a number of factors, which had a lot to do with the overall improvement of the economic climate in Indonesia due to the privatisation and liberalisation of the economy and the oil boom. The laws of the late 1960s reversed Sukarno's hostile policies towards foreign investors and private enterprises and gave incentives for the development of private businesses (Dick et al. 2002:206). For the Sindhi community, which, in Falzon's words, is "synonymous with business", the favourable economic conditions were among the main factors of community well-being. The growing economic opportunities encouraged Sindhis to apply for Indonesian citizenship. Most of the community members gave up their Indian passports in the period of unprecedented economic growth of Indonesia—in the 1970s. Those Sindhis who decided to retain their foreign passports were also able to do business in Indonesia: they moved from trade to textile manufacturing which was open to private, particularly foreign, investors to encourage exports (Dick et al. 2002).

India-Indonesia relationships played a significant role in increasing and securing the well-being of Sindhis in Indonesia during Suharto's rule. On a practical level, Sindhis became the main facilitators of aid that India offered Indonesia immediately after the change of the regime in 1965. The aid was in the form of a substantial loan (US$100 million) in Indian goods like paper, chemical, steel, bicycle parts. According to H.M. Mahtani, one of the senior community members, the Indonesian officials did not know what to do with all these goods and approached Sindhi community members

asking for help in marketing them.[30] Indonesian officials turned to Sindhis because the latter were well known in the Jakartan elite circles for their ability to supply goods, which were difficult to obtain. As a result, Sindhis became the key contacts for businessmen from India, who wished to explore investment opportunities in the Southeast Asian region. By the early 1980s Indian companies had invested more than US$200 million to Indonesia. Most of those joint ventures were between Gujarati entrepreneurs from India and Sindhi businessmen in Indonesia (Mani 1993a:113).

At the level of international politics, and in the context of the Cold War in particular, the strategic position of India between two major powers, the USA and the USSR, was also favourable to the stable position of Sindhis, as well as other Indian migrants, in Indonesia. Mistreatment of the trading community which maintained close relationships with India would not have worked in favour of Indonesia and its position in the global arena. Although the relations between Indonesia and India during the late 1960s and the 1970s were not as amicable as back in the 1950s, it was in the interest of Indonesia to maintain neutrality with India. India was seen by the US and the USSR as an important player in the Cold War (Mastny 2010:65). In the 1970s when India's political ideology and economic policies started to diverge significantly from that of Indonesia, drawing closer to the Soviet Union than the Western powers (Jha 1996:392), Suharto, who had close connections with the Western bloc, did not escalate frictions with India. In words of Mastny (1996), during the Cold War Indonesia and India "created a model of mutually beneficial realpolitik" (Mastny 1996:50).

In daily life, Sindhis felt there was nothing wrong in retaining their Sindhiness while residing in Indonesia (Mani 1993a:122). Sindhis preserved their religious identity and made continuous efforts to keep Sindhi and Hindi as the main community languages. The business, educational, social and religious institutions established and patronised by the Sindhis grew strong during the New Order period. The Gandhi Memorial School in Jakarta with English as the medium of education not only remained open during Suharto's rule but grew significantly: from a small community school offering only primary-level education, it turned into one offering secondary and high school education, with an annual enrolment of more than 1500 students. The social,

[30] "Sindhi Business Tycoons in Indonesia," Sindhishaan the Voice of Sindhis, htttp://www.sindhishaan.com/article/personalities/pers_09_02a.html (last accessed 7 Apr. 2016).

cultural and religious life of Sindhis was vibrant, with festivals, cultural celebrations, and entertainment programs organised throughout the year.[31] In Jakarta the celebrations usually took place on the Gandhi School premises, in temples, community hall (*Graha Sindhu*, acquired by community in 1973) or expensive hotel ballrooms, and were limited to the community members and Jakartan elites. These events were not open to the public at large, and were never taken to the streets. I would argue that the reason for its closed nature had to do more with the wish of the Sindhi community to keep their festivals and celebrations exclusive, than with restrictions on their cultural expressions. The fact that similar exclusiveness is maintained by Sindhis in other parts of the world, and was practiced in Indonesia until the early 2010s, long after the New Order regime collapsed, supports my argument.

As institutions reproducing Sindhi identity strengthened, the interaction of Indonesian Sindhis with non-Sindhis became more limited. If for business matters Sindhis continued to intermingle with non-Sindhi Indonesians, mostly Chinese Indonesians, in non-business spheres the interaction was minimised. From the 1960s most Sindhi children attended Gandhi Memorial School and thus stayed out of touch with the non-Sindhi and more broadly, the non-Indian Indonesian community. Women also generally limited their social circle to the Sindhi community.[32] So since the late 1960s Sindhis grew increasingly exclusive towards all other ethnocultural communities in Indonesia and focused on re-creating and maintaining the lifestyle of pre-Partition Sindh as they remembered and imagined it. They managed to preserve their lifestyle to such an extent that Sindhis from Hong Kong or Manila often referred to the Jakarta Sindhis as too conservative, inward looking, even "backward" (Thapan 2002:84).

Meanwhile, the attitude of non-Sindhi Indonesians towards Sindhis was also increasingly ambivalent. On the one hand, according to my Sindhi community respondents, Indonesians were friendly and accepting:

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[31] Quite curiously, during the New Order several Indian cultural festivals did get banned in Sumatra. A ban on the celebration of Thaiputsam, a Hindu festival celebrated mostly by the Tamil community, was imposed in Medan in 1973. According to Mani (1993b), the ban was, however, not the initiative of the state but requested by the Hindu Temple leaders themselves as they did not want to emphasise any cultural and religious differences and stood for total integration of Tamils into Indonesian society (Mani 1993b:80).

[32] For a detailed description of women's everyday life and communication in Jakarta see Thapan (2002).

> So when I first came here [from the Philippines] I was thinking—oh my God! They like Indians. I see movies on TV, I hear songs on the radio. Totally different world. There [in Philippines] people ignore you, look down on you… Here [in Indonesia] they respect us as human beings. (Rohini, Indonesian Sindhi, personal communication, 5 Mar. 2013)

This acceptance, however, had limits. Sindhis were accepted and welcome by Indonesians only as foreigners, not as locals. In everyday encounters Sindhis were constantly reminded of their differences with the local population through the "foreignising gaze": "Here [in Indonesia] it's automatic—when people look at you, they look at you as you are a foreigner" (Reena, Indonesian Sindhi, personal communication, 6 Mar. 2013). Such treatment was, however, not much of a concern for Sindhis, who put a lot of effort into reproducing their differences. One of my respondents summarised her experience in the following way:

> You know, everywhere I go I feel I am different but different in a good way…I feel I get more respect. People notice me more. I feel special. I don't need to try hard to get attention. (Aditi, Indonesian Sindhi, personal communication, 30 Jan, 2013)

In other words, distancing was as much the result of Sindhi community efforts to preserve their cultural distinctiveness as it was the outcome of continuing racialisation of Indonesian society. The legal and administrative practices of dividing people based on their skin colour, language and other social characteristics, introduced by the colonial power to pursue political aims, were gradually incorporated into the everyday lives of common people. In daily interactions viewing and interpreting social reality through the prism of ethnic imagery became the norm.

6. *Reformasi* Period (1998–mid-2000s)

The end of Suharto's rule in 1998 had no direct effect on the life of Indonesian Sindhis, their relationships with the Indonesian nation-state and their positioning in society. It was mostly the global changes of the 1990s (the rise of India, both as an economic power and centre of cultural production, and the global economic crisis of

1997–1998) that impacted the sense of the communal subjectivity. While Sindhiness remained the core of self-definition, from the early 1990s Pan-Indian identity slowly emerged as another important identity marker, which then resulted in an increasing interaction between the Sindhi community and other Indian communities in Indonesia, both local and expatriate. As for local affairs, it was mostly the reform of the Indonesian educational system that had a significant impact on the gradual opening up of the Sindhi community.

Of course, the downfall of Suharto's rule in 1998 and outbreak of violence caused anxieties among the community members. The collapse of the New Order regime was triggered by the global financial crisis of 1997–1998 and the mechanisms of the international market but it had deep roots in Indonesian political and social history (Eklöf 1999, Vatikiotis 1998). In the early months of 1998 social tensions and unrest instigated by the rapidly increasing unemployment, inflation and food shortage turned into large-scale violent riots across the country, with "individual disputes spreading into bloody conflict between ethnic or religious groups" (Budianta 2000:118).

When riots broke out in Jakarta in May 1998 Sindhi families felt very insecure and many waited out the turbulent days in the neighbouring countries (mostly, Singapore). Those who stayed remembered that

> it became a little shaky as we were not sure where we stood. Would they [rioters] look at us as *pribumi*—no; as representatives of Chinese—not really.... I live in Sunter so all my neighbours are Chinese, and a couple of Indians left and right around there. And we had to shut our gates. All guys stood outside the whole night with golf sticks, cricket bats. I remember [that] my mom wrote something in Sindhi because Sindhi [script] is very close to Arabic and stuck it outside of our door. I think there was some fear. (Sandesh, personal communication, 1 Feb. 2013)

It took Sindhis only a day or two to realise, that, in the words of my respondent, "there were no orders to target Indians", which reassured Sindhis of their safe position in Indonesia, despite their "foreign descent". Indeed, the research on the 1998 violence confirms that the riots were state-orchestrated and explicitly targeted Chinese Indonesians. Angry mobs in various parts of Jakarta simultaneously attacked Chinese-

owned shops, retail centres, shopping malls, police headquarters, and Soeharto's children's affiliated businesses (Budianta 2000:119, Bertrand 2004:67). There were also many cases of the harassment, mass rape, molestation, and killing of Chinese women and girls (Budianta 2000:200). In Heryanto's apt words, the riots of 1998 were "one of the worst cases of state-sponsored violence" (Heryanto 2006:29). As for the Sindhi community in Jakarta, it was neither considerably reshaped, nor severely traumatised by the riots. In fact, my respondents often did not remember the exact year of those events, with some mentioning 1997, while others guessed 1999 or even 2000.

The major transformation that the community came through during the Reform period was the loss of Gandhi Memorial School as the core institution, the breeding ground of the community self-identity. In 2003 the law which prohibited Indonesian citizens to attend schools with the medium of education other than Indonesian was abolished. The change of the legislation speeded up the process of community transformation and exposed Sindhis to a wider community of locals and foreigners residing in Indonesia. I will now move to the discussion of Gandhi Memorial School, its role in shaping the Indonesian Sindhi identity and the impact of the educational reform on the positioning of the Sindhi community within the nation-state.

7. Gandhi Memorial School

Gandhi Memorial School was founded in the early 1950s by the Bombay Merchant Association, to cater for the needs of the community members, who believed in the importance of English-medium education.[33] As one of my respondents put it: "One thing that they [the British] left India with is the English-medium schools. And that is something, I think, all Indians are proud of" (Aditi, Indonesian Sindhi, personal communication, 30 Jan., 2013). Along with English as the medium of education, the School also followed the Indian curriculum, used textbooks from India, and included Sindhi, Hindi (and sometimes Punjabi) as extracurricular subjects. The School principal and teachers were also mostly recruited from India.

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[33] The exact year of school establishment varies from source to source. Thapan mentions 1947 (Thapan 2002:151), while Mani says 1953 (Mani 1993a:117).

From its establishment, Gandhi Memorial School took the central role in Sindhi community life and became the key institution of community reproduction and integrity. Although it was not the first school established by the Sindhis in Indonesia, Gandhi Memorial School in Jakarta turned out to be the main educational institution for the Indonesian Sindhis for more than thirty years (1960s–1990s). It contributed immensely to the process of community consolidation in the Indonesian capital.[34] Gandhi Memorial School was the place where children born to the Indonesian Sindhi families would become conscious of their distinct cultural identity and the privileges associated with it in Indonesia.

In the 1950s the School provided only primary-level education and the community did not feel the urge to turn the school into the main educational institution for its children. During the first decade of independence good quality English-medium secondary and high school education was easily accessible for the residents of Indonesia. The existing educational system was not controlled by the state and was basically a continuation of that of the Dutch with many private schools offering their services (Suryadinata 1978:23). The only novelty after the Revolution was the introduction of the term "alien schools" for the schools with a medium of education other than Indonesian. During colonial times, schools teaching in English or other languages were considered simply "as another kind of Indonesian private schools" (Suryadinata 1978:23).

In 1958 Gandhi Memorial School turned into an institution providing all-level school education and obtained the status of an Embassy school. The rapid development of Gandhi School into the main educational institution of the community was the result of the increasing control of the government over "alien schools" due to the growing anti-foreign policies of the state. In 1957, by a special decree, the government urged Indonesian citizens and residents to move to national schools with Indonesian as the medium of education. For globally connected Sindhis, the prospect of losing English-medium education was daunting. To keep the School functioning, the School board of directors, comprising the members of Sindhi business association (Bombay Merchant Association), transferred the authority over the School to the Indian embassy, a fact not

[34] About the role of school in transmitting values, inculcating culture and reproducing culture and class see Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), Willis (1977), Levinson and Holland (1996).

officially acknowledged by the Embassy until now (the early 2010s). Thus, in the late 1950s Gandhi Memorial School acquired an ambiguous status of an Embassy school while being at the same time funded and managed by a local trust, the Gandhi Memorial Foundation, established by Bombay Merchant Association specifically for School financing.

The School operated in this semi-legal status for more than thirty years, providing English-medium education for the predominant majority of the Indonesian Sindhis. Not only was the School status rather ambiguous, but the enrolment process was also against the law. As mentioned, in 1960 the Regulation No. 48/1960 made it illegal for both Indonesian citizens and permanent residents to attend "alien schools". The latter were defined as private schools that used foreign language as a medium of instruction (any language other than Indonesian) and/or followed a foreign curriculum. Gandhi Memorial School, which used English as a medium of instruction and followed the Indian curriculum, obviously fell into the category of an "alien school". By 1960, when the Regulation No.48 came into force, many Sindhis of school age were either Indonesian permanent residents or citizens by birth.[35] Despite that, for the whole period when the Regulation No.48 was in force (until 2003), children of the Sindhi community were able to attend the School. For example, in 1978 at least twenty per cent of the total number of enrolled students (approximately 1500) had Indonesian citizenship (Mani 1993a:118). [36] Such a breach of the laws by the Sindhi community did not attract the attention of the Indonesian government. The state officials turned a blind eye to the School's existence.[37]

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[35] According to the Law on the Citizenship of the Republic of Indonesia (Law 62/1958), a citizen of the Republic of Indonesia is (among other options): "persons born within the territory of the Republic of Indonesia who have not acquired the nationality of the father or mother at the time of their birth and as long as they do not acquire the nationality of either their father or mother" (Law 62/1958, Article 1, (i)). This point was dropped in the latest law regulating Indonesian citizenship (Law 12/2006).

[36] Based on my interviews, I conclude that two other schools founded by the Sindhis, Nehru Memorial School in Bandung and the Sarasvati School in Surabaya, were stricter in terms of enrolment. According to my respondents from Bandung, parents usually kept Indian citizenship for their children so they could study in an English-medium school. After graduation they applied for the Indonesian citizenship.

[37] The exact reasons of why the state continued to ignore such breach of the state laws is unknown. It is however well known that corruption has been a long-standing problem in Indonesia from top to bottom (Robertson-Snape 1999; Henderson & Kurcono 2004), and might

The early 1990s marked the end of the era when Gandhi Memorial School was the core institute for shaping and maintaining Sindhi identity as exclusive and privileged. In 1991 the school became a "national plus school" which meant that it used the Indonesian curriculum and replaced English with Indonesian language, with only some selected subjects (math, science and literature) taught in English. Importantly, as a national plus school it was open to non-Sindhi Indonesians.

The change in the School status is usually attributed to the financial mismanagement and internal conflicts in the Sindhi community. By the late 1980s the Gandhi School was not a small community school but a fully-fledged business making big profits. Power struggles over the School ownership between the principal and the board of directors took several years and were taken to the Constitutional Court. During litigation the quality of education decreased drastically. Seeing the overall decline of the Gandhi School in the late 1980s to the early 1990s the parents started exploring other educational options. While most still preferred Indian education and sent their children to schools in India, some chose newly established private Christian schools in Indonesia (for example, Pelita Harapan, which was established in 1993). With Sindhi community members leaving the School, the management changed the School status to national plus to be able to keep enrolment numbers up.

The new Law on Educational System (Law 20/2003) in Indonesia, which annulled the regulation prohibiting Indonesian citizens from studying in international schools, made it possible to end the decade-long dispute over School ownership and to reform School education by officially splitting it in two: Gandhi Memorial International School (GMIS) and Mahatma Gandhi School (MGS). After the split, the board of directors was able to get back the students from the Sindhi community who looked for a high quality English-medium education. Both GMIS and MGS are still run by the Sindhi business association (which in the 1990s changed its name to *Gandhi Seva Loka*[38]). But the schools pursue different goals and target different segments of society,

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serve as a possible explanation of the continuing operation of Gandhi School during the New Order.

[38] Bombay Merchant Association changed its name to *Gandhi Seva Loka* in the early 1990s. In the interview with Tempo on 4 May 1996, one of the senior community members gave the following explanation: "We changed the name because we are Indonesian citizens, so why do we have to use a foreign name?" The name alteration serves as another evidence of gradual changes in the community self-positioning, or self-perception in Indonesia,—from the

including but not limited to the local Sindhi community and Indian nationals. As an international school, GMIS mainly targets foreigners residing in Indonesia (mostly Indians, but also other nationals from South and East Asia) and upper middle-class Sindhis. It follows the Indian, UK and International Baccalaureate curricula and patterns of education, and offers Hindi, along with French, Indonesian and Mandarin, as a second language. Most teachers in GMIS are expatriates, with many coming from India, including the principal. GMIS is in the business of producing global citizens, for whom Indianness is just another, albeit significant, component of identity. Pan-Indian festivals constitute an important element of the school life but such celebrations are just some among many others. Meanwhile, MGS is a national plus school largely targeting "not that rich Sindhis" and other middle-class Indonesians. For example, in 2013 Sindhi community members constituted less than 40 per cent of the enrolled students, with the majority being Chinese Indonesians. As a national school, MGS offers education in the Indonesian language with a few subjects being taught in English. The school recruits several teachers from India but local staff outnumber the expatriates.

Law 20/2003 also increased the number of educational options for Sindhis and contributed to the gradual weakening of the community ties. Prior to 2003 the only English-medium school, in which local Sindhis, Indonesian citizens, were able to enrol (even if illegally) was Gandhi Memorial School. After 2003 Sindhis could choose from a wide number of options, depending on their financial capacities as well as cultural preferences. Quite a few Sindhi families enrolled their children in Jakarta International School or other schools offering non-India specific English-medium education.

Thus, although the Reform era did not trigger the transformation of the Sindhi community's position within the nation-state and its exposure to non-Sindhi communities, it did contribute to it. The Law on Educational System (Law 20/2003) made it possible for Sindhis to choose not only between Indonesian or Indian education (or since 1991 Indonesian Indian or Indian). In their choice of schools, which is also an identity choice, Sindhis could now be Indian Indonesians or Indonesian Sindhis (MGS), global Indians (GMIS or other similar Indian schools in the world), or global (read

community of temporal residents to Indonesian citizens. "Bombai Merchant Association Belum Mati", Tempo Magazine, http://www.library.ohiou.edu/indopubs/1996/05/04/0019.html (last accessed 7 Apr. 2016).

Westernised) citizens (Jakarta International School or other similar schools).[39] And in these choices, class became a much more overt issue: wealthy Sindhi parents chose GMIS and in fewer cases other international schools while "not that rich" Sindhis sent their children to Mahatma Gandhi "national plus" school.[40]

The thirty-year period of Gandhi Memorial School operation under the protection of the Indian Embassy (1960s–1990s) has had a tremendous impact on the community self-consciousness as well as its relationships with the local population. First, it reinforced the exclusive nature of the Sindhi community and underlined the higher social and economic status of its members compared to the local non-Sindhi population. Moreover, as admittance to School was based not on citizenship but on ethnicity (and then class) it clearly put Sindhi ethnicity above Indonesian citizenship. Sindhiness, a "foreign" ethnicity, was then the marker of distinction as it ensured access to a high quality English-medium education in Indonesia, not overseas: an opportunity not available to any other citizens of Indonesia. Second, English medium education and the preservation of Hindi and/or Sindhi languages as medium of communication turned into an additional tool of Sindhi community (self)-exclusion and boundary maintenance in Indonesian society (to be discussed in chapter Two). In addition, while for Indonesian residents Indonesian language or *Bahasa Indonesia* was the medium of education, for Sindhi children this language was mainly reduced to the means of communication with people of lower social rank, like maids and drivers. Third, its special status (as a Foreign Embassy school) excluded Gandhi Memorial School from the realm of national education, which meant that it was free from the obligation of creating a "good Indonesian citizen", the main goal of the national educational system since the 1960s (Parker 2002:3). Overall, I argue that despite its focus on Indianness, and more specifically Sindhiness, Gandhi Memorial School did not simply shape just Indian cultural identity as Mani suggested (Mani 1993a:123). The School did more than that: it created, continuously reproduced and cultivated the dual identity of Indonesian

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[39] In 2014 all International schools in Indonesia were renamed to Intercultural so JIS stands for Jakarta Intercultural School.

[40] In 2000s the number of schools offering English-medium education increased drastically. English-medium education became a very profitable business. Some Sindhis, independently from the Sindhi business association, established new schools—Universal School (est.2000), Mahatma Gading School (est.2004).

Sindhis, more broadly formulated as Indian Indonesian identity. This identity allowed Sindhis to stay local and global at the same time, to belong without feeling obliged.

8. Sindhis in a Broader Context of Domestic Politics

When viewed in the broader context of domestic politics in Indonesia, the secure and stable position of the local Sindhis in post-colonial Indonesia might look puzzling. As discussed in the Introduction, the categories of ethnicity and race constructed by the colonial power were not abolished in post-colonial Indonesia. On the contrary, they were reinforced (in inverted form). The "natives", *pribumi* or *Indonesia asli* (real Indonesians) were, by the affirmative action, put at the top of social hierarchy while foreigners and those designated as such on the grounds of their descent, real or imagined, were increasingly deprived not only of privileges but often of some basic rights. During the first decade of independence, anti-foreign policies had an impact on all spheres of life—from economics to education and entertainment.

Although Suharto, who seized power in 1965, abandoned the anti-foreign stance in economic policies and reforms, he continued to rely on the rhetoric of foreignness as the threat to nation-building in domestic politics. The main enemy of the state was to be found not outside but inside the nation-state. Through policies and regulations as well as official and semi-official speeches, the state presented any non-singular identities, and "foreign descent", or *warga keturunan*, in particular, as the main threat to building a prosperous homogenous Indonesian nation. Despite the fact that *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), the official motto of Independent Indonesia, was actively promoted by the state officials, the expression of cultural differences was under the tight control of the state and largely restrained for the sake of the nation-making project. In Tania Murray Li's words, "under Suharto the national motto 'unity in diversity' and the displays of Jakarta's theme park, Taman Mini, presented the acceptable limits of Indonesia's cultural difference" (Murray Li 2000:149). In short, the New Order regime is not a period of Indonesian history renowned in academia as a period of ethnic and religious tolerance, a period when distinct minorities could prosper and feel secure.

It is well known that the Indonesians of Chinese descent—due to their alleged foreignness and connections to communist China (see earlier in the chapter)—were

subjected to the Forced Assimilation program. The program was implemented in such a way as to never reach its proclaimed goals (Heryanto 1998). On the one hand, for the sake of building one homogeneous nation, the government shut down Mandarin-medium schools, banned the use of Chinese names, language and script, and restricted cultural celebrations.[41] On the other hand, the state continued to reproduce Chineseness through the introduction of identity cards with special codes for "Chinese" descent, and an obligation for Chinese Indonesians to obtain additional proof of their Indonesian citizenship (*surat bukti kewarganegaraan*, a letter serving to prove citizenship). Moreover, Chinese Indonesians were "virtually barred from the civil service and the military, especially top positions" (Bertrand 2004:66) and erased from literary (Heryanto 1997) and media texts (Sen 2006). The "Otherness" of Chinese Indonesians was repeatedly emphasised in official terminology which used *Orang Cina* when referring to Chinese Indonesians (Aguilar 2001:505). The preferential treatment of several businessmen of Chinese descent was just another side of the same coin, a "discrimination for" (Heryanto 2004:30).

Meanwhile, as shown in the previous sections, for the Sindhi community which put a lot of effort into reproducing themselves as a culturally distinct community, the New Order period was a time of prosperity and stability. Although Taman Mini contained no sign of the presence of Indians as part of the Indonesian nation, the majority of Sindhis in Indonesia were granted Indonesian citizenship and were not subject to any forced assimilation. They did not have to change their names or carry special identity cards confirming their citizenship.[42] They were able to attend the Embassy school, organise Sindhi language classes for their children and celebrate cultural and religious festivals.

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[41] Schools with Chinese languages as extracurricular subjects were permanently closed in 1975. For the first decade of the New Order several schools were still operating under *Sekolah National Projek Khusus* ("Special Project National Schools"). Only for a rather short period of seven years (1968–1975) a limited opportunity of learning Chinese at school as a foreign language was available for alien Chinese. For more see Suryadinata (1978).

[42] Those few Sindhis who did change their names into more Javanese-sounding names did so voluntarily and for various reasons. For example, Thapan found that non-Sindhi Indonesians found it difficult to remember and pronounce original Indian names so some Sindhis chose to alter the names (Thapan 2002:33) For example, Madhu became Manu, Dalpat—Dilip, Ladharam—Lasmana, Samtani—Samtono My respondents also mentioned a few cases when Sindhi businessmen changed their names to hide from tax collectors.

Juxtaposing the experiences of Sindhis and more broadly Indian Indonesians with the experiences of Chinese Indonesians goes far beyond the scope of my research and deserves research on its own. The two (amorphous) communities of Chinese and Indian Indonesians have more differences between themselves than similarities. The point that I want to make here is that the case of Indonesian Sindhis demonstrates particularly well that "foreign ethnicity" or "foreign descent" in Indonesia was not univocally a euphemism for marginalised or discriminated.

The absence of discriminatory state policies targeting Sindhis, and more broadly Indians, in Indonesia, did not, however, mean that they were perceived by the non-Sindhi Indonesians as equal compatriots. In public imagination, heated up by the rhetoric of foreignness and foreign descent as a common threat to nation-building, Indian Indonesians, in many ways, did not differ much from Indonesians of Chinese descent. In other words, while not being targeted by the discriminatory state policies, Indonesian Sindhis could feel the secondary repercussions of those policies. For example, as mentioned in the Introduction, Indonesian producers of Indian descent were excluded from the history of national cinema precisely on the grounds of their foreign descent. By the end of the New Order, a century-long entrenchment of racial and ethnic divide resulted in the normalisation of these socially constructed categories. Race and ethnicity became one of the primary markers of identity and as such they had to be fixed and singular, "existentially 'given' and conceptually unproblematic" (Heryanto 1998:95).

9. Conclusion

In this chapter I presented an overview of migration and settlement of Sindhis in Indonesia. I showed that although the first contacts of Sindhi merchants with Indonesia can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, the permanent migration of Sindhis took place only in the mid-twentieth century, with most Sindhis acquiring Indonesian citizenship in the late 1960s–1970s. Prior to Partition (1947) the nature of Sindhi migration to Indonesia (as well as other parts of the world) was not permanent but temporary—traders were constantly moving between their homeland in Sindh, manufacturing centres in Middle East and South and East Asia, and localities in Java

and other islands where they sold goods to colonial elites. It was only after Partition that the status of Hindu Sindhis changed from foreign traders to permanent settlers.

Sindhis in Indonesia formed a strong community. This was the result of their own efforts to preserve and reproduce a cultural distinctiveness which gave them access to the global network of people, goods and finances. It was also a "side effect" of state regulations targeting certain groups of people, who were seen as potentially posing a threat to political power. The position of Sindhis was also influenced by the international relations of Indonesia with other countries in the region as well as the position of Indonesia and India vis-à-vis the two global powers, the USA and the USSR. Overall, the relationships of Indonesian Sindhis with post-colonial Indonesia were formed by a number of factors where self-identification at the local and global levels, official categorisation and the collective work of imagination and remembering played equally important roles.

In my discussion of the historical experiences of Sindhis in Indonesia I paid particular attention to Gandhi Memorial School, the centre of Sindhi community life. I aimed to show that although the idea of a community school emerged from the community itself, it was also the state reform of the educational system as well as state neglect of law infringement that turned the School into the main institution of reproducing the Sindhi community as exclusive and socially and economically superior. I also emphasised that the Reform period contributed to but did not trigger the slow transformation of the Sindhi community from highly exclusive to more outward looking. In the end I emphasised that the analysis of the relationships between the state and the Sindhi community adds another layer of complexity into ethnic politics of Indonesia. For Sindhis "foreign descent" and minority status was not a marker of discrimination against (or for). Indonesian Sindhis, who saw themselves and were perceived by non-Sindhi Indonesians as culturally different, were neither subject to the forced assimilation, nor restricted by the state in their economic, social and cultural activities.

In the next chapter I will discuss the community of Indonesian Sindhis as I saw it during my fieldwork in Jakarta in 2013. I will pay particular attention to several features of community life through which Indonesian Sindhis continue to reproduce themselves as culturally distinctive. In other words, I will demonstrate how the decades

of settlement, the accumulated global and local experiences of the Sindhi community is manifest in their everyday life in Jakarta.

Chapter 2

Sindhis in Jakarta in the 2010s: The Reproduction of Sindhiness

1. Introduction

The previous chapter covered a history of migration and the process of settlement of Sindhis in Indonesia in the twentieth century. It paid particular attention to the nature of interaction between the Sindhi community and the state, and introduced the community rather briefly, describing it mainly as a network of global traders, characterised by translocality and mobility (Falzon 2004:240). The chapter also discussed several institutions, in particular Gandhi Memorial School, that played a key role in producing and reproducing the cultural identity of migrants from Sindh during the first forty years of their settlement in Indonesia.

This chapter presents a snapshot of the Sindhi community as I saw it in 2013—a local ethnic minority group, which is at the same time a part of a global Sindhi network. I show that the community in Jakarta has a well-pronounced Sindhi identity and distances itself from other South Asian communities, local or expatriate alike. The community reproduces itself through a number of practices, like endogamy, Hindu rituals, which remain an important part of life even after conversion to Christianity, and non-interference in local politics. The main discussion will, however, focus on business, the core of Sindhiness. For Sindhis, business defines the goal of life, the social status as well as gender roles and relationships. Despite constant changes, the community members continue to structure their lives in accordance with values formed before Partition and idealised after it.

Overall, this chapter serves as a background for chapters Four, Five and Six, which provide a detailed account of how the Sindhi concepts of business ownership, social stratification and gender became interwoven into the practices and processes of

national media production. As my thesis is not the study of the Indonesian Sindhi community *as such*, this chapter is not a comprehensive account of the community life. My goal here is to present and discuss only those ideologies and practices which have played a constitutive role in reproducing Sindhiness in Jakarta and maintaining membership in global Sindhayat, and have had a significant impact on the production culture of national media.

I base my description on the ethnographic data collected during my fieldwork in Jakarta in 2013. In addition, I use Thapan's book (2002) on the Sindhi diaspora in three major settlements in Southeast Asia—Hong Kong, Manila and Jakarta. To the best of my knowledge (as per 2016) Thapan's research is the only study of Sindhi community in the region. The fifteen years that separate my study from that of Thapan help trace the recent changes as well as identify the core practices that resisted them. I also use the materials of Falzon (2004), the only anthropological study of the global Sindhi community after Partition. Incorporating his data in my research helps to underline the fact that the Jakartan community is a part of a global ethnic network of Sindhis.

2. Sindhiness as an Identity

As Falzon states, Sindhiness is the product of Partition: "In pre-Partition Sind, 'Sindhayat' ('Sindhiness') did not exist as a separate marker of identity—all the Hindus of Sind were Sindhi. Outside of Sind, however, Sindhiness suddenly became an identity as distinct from those of the peoples living around the displaced Sindhis" (Falzon 2004:38). Dispersed around the globe, Hindu Sindhi traders started to consider themselves belonging to "the same ethnic group or caste sharing a number of common characteristics" (Falzon 2004:38) including translocality, mobility and cosmopolitanism. The latter, as Falzon underlines, should be understood as "dispersal, interconnectivity, adaptability and…a culturally-open disposition", where the process of collective community imagining takes the world as "spacial metaphor" (Falzon 2004:66). Falzon also argues that despite the absence of such a thing as "Sindhi business"—Sindhis adapt to the laws and regulations of a particular locality by developing practices in response to local contexts—the connectivity of their local businesses through kinship and ethnic networks, in fact, constitutes Sindhiness (Falzon 2004:185). In other words, while each individual acts as a private entrepreneur "through

self-seeking economic choices", the fact that he (or she) is a part of a wider group of people, a cosmopolitan community of Sindhis, has a significant impact on his (or her) individual business practices (Falzon 2004:188).

Thapan argued that, compared with Sindhis in Manila and Hong Kong, "Sindhis in Jakarta have a very pronounced Sindhi self-identity rather than an Indian one" (Thapan 2002:151). In 2013 the situation has not changed drastically in this respect. Sindhis in Jakarta have a very strong sense of community that brings the community together, in terms of numbers, shared interests and aspirations, as well as everyday practices. All my respondents mentioned that there were around 8000 Sindhis living throughout Indonesia and this number seems to be quite accurate. The 2006 edition of Sindhi Directory, a telephone and address book that lists the Sindhi community members and their businesses, has 1532 entries. This includes Sindhis staying in major cities like Jakarta, Bandung, Cirebon, Jogyakarta, Surabaya, Medan, and Denpasar with the majority (1330) mentioned as residents of Jakarta.[43] As most of these entries are under the names of male entrepreneurs, it can be concluded that together with wives, children and in many cases elderly retired parents, there are at least 6000 Sindhis permanently living in Indonesia. Moreover, given that some community members might not be mentioned (those staying in smaller urban centres like, for example, Malang, and those who are not private entrepreneurs) and families often having more than two children, the number of 8000 seems to be quite close to reality. Sindhis in Indonesia, and more specifically in Jakarta, differentiate themselves culturally not only from the so-called *pribumi* Indonesians, but also from other local Indian communities, like local Sikhs, Punjabis, Marwaris and expatriate Indians. Although local and expatriate Indian communities do meet on different occasions, the communities lead quite separate lives maintaining distinct lifestyles. The Sindhi community constitutes itself as an exclusive community vis-a-vis local Indonesian population as well as the local and expatriate Indians.

The Sindhi community maintains its unity and reproduces its boundaries through several practices, which take material and non-material forms. First of all, as mentioned above, the community members are listed in the Sindhi Directory, a catalogue issued by the Sindhi business association, *Gandhi Seva Loka* (the former

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[43] There are also two entries under the name of an island (Sulawesi), not urban centres.

Bombay Merchants Association) every two years. It targets only Indonesian Sindhis and "makes no attempt to associate with any non-Sindhi, domiciled or expatriate" (Thapan 2002:152). Every issue of the Sindhi Directory opens with an introductory word of the head of *Gandhi Seva Loka*, which reminds the Sindhi community of the common ancestry and shared culture as well as loss of homeland due to the traumatic events during the Partition of British India. In the 2006 edition, Shyam Rupchand Jethnani, then the president of *Gandhi Seva Loka*, underlined that Sindhis were "peaceful, hardworking, hospitable and cosmopolitan in outlook" (Sindhi Directory 2006:22). Moreover, he quite elegantly linked the Sindhis' present achievements to Indian cultural heritage: "The entrepreneurial skills, brotherhood and perseverance, went a long way in bringing...success. The qualities instilled from the civilisations of Mohan-Jo-Daro and Indus Valley, have distilled through time and aided it [Sindhi community] to emerge stronger, economically and educationally" (Sindhi Directory 2006:22). Partition and the fact that Sindhis, in the words of my respondents, are "people without homeland", did feature in my interviews, especially in the interviews with the second generation of migrants. I argue, however that nostalgia and trauma are not what keeps the community together. It is mostly the present, not the past, the everyday practices, the expectations and taboos that form a strong sense of community in Jakarta as well as other parts of the world.

Endogamy is one of the main practices that reproduces Sindhiness. The search for a future spouse is done on a global scale but marriages within the local, Indonesian, Sindhi community are also common. Although the number of marriages "out of the race", as Sindhis usually put it, has increased compared with the previous decades, intermarriages are still uncommon. Most intermarriages are predominantly between Indonesian Sindhis and Chinese Indonesians. Marrying a *pribumi* is very rare. Moreover, out of these intermarriages a union between a Sindhi man and non-Sindhi woman is much more common than otherwise. Several Sindhi girls mentioned to me that their parents stated very bluntly that they would not allow their daughters to marry outside of community, especially to marry a *pribumi* Indonesian. According to my respondents, in case of marrying out of community, Sindhis usually lose their access to the community resources. For Sindhis, brought up with the idea that money is the ultimate measure of one's worth, the prospects of being left without financial support from the community make intermarriages not particularly appealing.

Life after marriage is also guided by certain unwritten rules. It is the woman who is expected to move to her husband's house, which often means moving countries if a marriage is between Sindhis from a global, not local community. Again, based on his multi-sited ethnography, Falzon concluded that "patrilocality is a strict rule among Sindhis", and girls are raised with the idea that eventually they would become a part of another family (Falzon 2004:81).[44] A man moving to his wife's place is still seen as a disgrace, and is socially acceptable only in the situations when the wife's family is exceptionally well established in a local business. Moreover, staying with parents or in-laws (as a joint family) remains common among Indonesian Sindhis.

In Jakarta Sindhis are not only supposed to marry within the (global) Sindhi community but they are largely expected to limit their social networks to it. For descendants from Sindh, the community remains the main social unit. This, of course, has a lot to do with the Gandhi Memorial School where most friendships are formed. My observations suggest that those Sindhis who graduated from other local schools (still very few) usually make friends with a rather diverse group of people. For example, Raam Punjabi sent his children to the Gandhi Memorial School only for primary education. His children continued their secondary education in a private Christian school (Pelita Harapan School). As Raam and his wife explained to me, they chose Pelita Harapan School intentionally so their children would have friends outside of the Sindhi community and know Indonesian language well. They knew that their children would be "working in this [Indonesian] environment" and wanted them to be well-prepared for the future.

Nevertheless, even when schooling takes place outside of the community Sindhi friends would often constitute the main social network. The role of parents in advising on a circle of friends has a significant impact on young Sindhis. Many respondents mentioned to me that families highly recommend not to "hang out" with local Indonesians:

> I studied in Australia I hung out with everyone—Indonesians, non-Indonesians. I was free to do that but as soon as I come back here I still have to answer to my parents. And they have already imprinted in me—you have to hang out with this

[44] It is a Sindhi custom to call unmarried women "girls" and unmarried men "boys". For more, see Falzon (2004:81).

> sort of people [Sindhis]. When I hang out with people from Sindhi community my parents are much more relaxed. (Sujay, Sindhi community member, fourth generation, personal communication, 18 Feb. 2013)

The attitude of parents often causes resentment among the younger generation. But despite the protests, the parental recommendations largely define the choice of friends.

Sindhi identity is also reinforced by the continuing observance of Hindu practices and rituals. Many Sindhi families have a devotional corner at home and in their offices. The temples are well maintained and well attended. In fact, the number of temples in Jakarta has grown over the years. Religious gatherings, known as *satsangs*, take place every week. In addition to that, Sindhis are behind all major events offering spiritual training for the wider Indian community (local and expat Indians) in Jakarta.

At the same time, Sindhis maintain the fluidity of beliefs and largely remain open to religious influences they were not exposed to before Partition, like Christianity. In fact, quite a few members of the Jakartan community converted to Christianity.[45] In most cases, the conversion does not prevent Sindhis from observing Hindu rituals and celebrations. Thapan's research showed that "ethnic and cultural identity is given greater importance than the religious one" (Thapan 2002:203). In 2013 I came across several cases that illustrated the tendency of religion to outweigh ethnocultural identity. Several Sindhis who converted to Christianity mentioned to me that they preferred their children to marry a Christian non-Sindhi than a non-Christian Sindhi, but a Christian Sindhi was a definite preference. In case of religious intermarriages, which, with almost no exception, happen only between Hindus and Christians, the community organises two ceremonies, one in a church, and another in a temple, while the reception is usually turned into a big Bollywood-inspired party. At the same time, while conversion to Christianity has become quite common in Jakarta, conversion to Islam, the religion of the majority of the Indonesian population (approximately 86 per cent of Indonesians state Islam as their religion) is very rare. During my fieldwork I heard of only one such

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[45] For a detailed account of Sindhis and Christianity see Thapan (2002:198–223).

case. The story was extraordinary in many respects, and it was easy to conclude that conversion to Islam was indeed an exception.[46]

In addition to observance of Hindu rituals, the sense of community is reproduced through several cultural practices and events, such as Sindhi talent night held in Sindhu house (*Graha Sindhu*). The event is conducted mainly in Sindhi language and as a result is limited to the community members. Other cultural events celebrated by the broader Indian community, like Deepavali (Diwali), Holi, and Dussehra also add to the reproduction of Sindhiness because the festivals' organisation is primarily in the hands of the Sindhi community.

Indifference towards local politics, another feature of the Sindhi community across the world with the major exception of India, also characterises Sindhi community life in Jakarta. Overall, the community continues to stay away from Indonesian politics and avoids being affiliated with any political force or political party. Intentional non-interference in local politics does not, however, mean that Sindhis are not connected to the power holders. On the contrary, based on my interviews, I can conclude that Indonesian Sindhis maintain good relationships with several organisations that have a significant impact on Indonesian political, economic and social life, like the Indonesian army (TNI) and Muhammadiyah, a highly influential Islamic organisation. When describing Sindhis in London and Malta, Falzon stated that the political affiliations of Sindhis are instrumental: "When you're in trade, you need to be able to get things done" (Falzon 2004:77), and it certainly applies to Sindhis in Jakarta. Sindhi connections help the community in their business activities and in private matters. For example, during the 1998 riots in Jakarta (discussed in chapter One) some Sindhis who stayed in a residential complex in the town centre (near Gambir) managed to get a land tank to guard the gates for the duration of the social unrest.

In general, the behaviour of the community members in Jakarta largely conforms to the description given by Falzon: "To most *bhaiband* traders the encounter with politics seldom goes beyond a donation to charity, or a word with the local politician at a Diwali ball" (Falzon 2004:78). Sindhi have neither formed any political party based on their ethnic identity nor stood as a united front in support of political

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[46] As mentioned in the Introduction, the Hinduism of Sindhis was heavily influenced by Sufism so some elements of Islam have been incorporated in Sindhi beliefs and practices.

leaders during the elections. The only exception was the case when Sindhi community leaders on behalf of the local Indian community publicly expressed their support for the candidate pair of Fauzi Bowo (Fauzi)—Nachrowi Ramli (Nara) during the Mayor elections in Jakarta in 2012. The director of Gandhi Memorial International School, Suresh G. Vaswani, told the local Jakarta newspaper that as many as ten thousand nationals of Indian descent would give their support to the pair of Fauzi—Nara because "the leadership of Fauzi Bowo for the last five years was satisfying. The nationals of Indian descent got safety and comfort in their business activities."[47] I assume that the community was anxious about the possible changes, which could take place if Fauzi's political opponent, the much more popular Joko Widodo, won the elections. Fauzi Bowo and Nachrowi Ramli were the representatives of the elites of the old, New Order regime, during which the Sindhi community prospered, partially due to their connections with the power holders. Most probably Sindhi elders wanted to maintain the existing state of affairs.

3. Business as the Core of Life

Endogamy, religious activities and political affiliations are, however, subordinated to one major constitutive practice of Sindhiness—doing business. Falzon stated that the Sindhi community is "synonymous with business" and for Jakartan Sindhis business is certainly the main identity marker. A Sindhi is brought up with the idea that business is what defines life and to be a real Sindhi one needs to be in business. Business is not just about earning one's living. Making money is as much a social and cultural as it is an economic practice. By and large business defines all aspects of Sindhi life and relationships within and outside the community. In Falzon's apt words, Sindhis "see themselves and are seen as a business community that has perfected the practice of moneymaking to a fine art. Among Sindhis, wealth and business acumen are seen as the key elements of a person's worth" (Falzon 2004:189).

In 2013 the majority of Sindhi males in Jakarta were private entrepreneurs. Moreover, as often happens, the stereotype about Indians in Jakarta largely corresponds

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[47] "Komunitas Keturunan India Dukung Fauzi–Nara," Berita Jakarta, last modified 29 June, 2014, http://www.beritajakarta.com/2008/id/berita_detail.asp?nNewsId=49664 (last accessed 13 May, 2014).

to reality: most Sindhis are in textile export-import business. With economic and political change in the second half of the century (discussed in chapter One), many Sindhis diversified and expanded their businesses in the textile trade by going into textile manufacturing and tailoring. Quite a few left the traditional niche entirely and tested themselves in new businesses like banking, media distribution and later media production (to be discussed in detail in chapter Three). According to Thapan (2002:133), Indonesian Sindhis pioneered these businesses in Southeast Asia. In the late 2000s Sindhis started investing in property—an important change in the Sindhi community because after Partition Sindhis were reluctant to invest in real estate. All Sindhi businesses in Indonesia, be it textile trade, banking, media production or real estate, are not bounded by the national borders but are integrated in the global economy predominantly through the global Sindhi network. As Falzon pointed out, testing oneself in different businesses and "exploring as many lines [of business] as possible in as many places as possible" (Falzon 2004:147) is a common feature of Sindhi business practices.

To be a true Sindhi it is not enough just to be in business—one has to own a business. According to my respondents 90 per cent of Sindhi businesses are family owned. The ownership of the company has the ultimate value and prestige within the community. The business, most often established by family members, usually does not outlive the second generation. As soon as one of the partners feels ready to start his own enterprise he branches out. Usually the splits happen during the most successful period of the business (Falzon 2004:224). And in most cases the new company established after the split of business occupies the same niche and becomes a serious competitor in the market. The desire to be "your own boss" makes the relationships within the community highly ambiguous: on the one hand, Sindhis are in constant competition with each other, which, as Falzon mentions, can often be described as a "zero sum game"; but, on the other hand, Sindhis collaborate with each other uniting "in the face of a 'common adversary'" (Falzon 2004:236), a competitor from outside of the community. The feeling of "corporacy" (Falzon 2004) defines the development of the economic niches occupied by Sindhis and will be discussed in more detail in regards to *sinetron* production business in chapter Four.

The ownership of a business (or better, several businesses, not necessarily related to each other) and financial success do bring respect and prestige to the

community members but only when this success is exhibited. To be socially accepted and respected in the Sindhi community it is not enough to quietly accumulate money in bank accounts and be a trustworthy business partner. One needs to constantly offer material evidence of earned profits. The demonstration of wealth is primarily aimed at the community itself, because for a Sindhi entrepreneur the community is "intrinsic for being and thinking". The community "forms the universe within which he [Sindhi businessman] grows, undergoes socialization, learns the ropes of his business, establishes his own enterprise, hires employees, receives credit, lives as a householder and plays a culture role" (Thapan 2002:41). In other words, community is the main source of all sorts of support, be it social or financial. Constant display of wealth serves as collateral and helps attract capital in the case of financial difficulties (an inevitable part of business) or expansion of business. In general, Sindhis prefer borrowing from fellow Sindhis on short notice and avoiding formalities with banks (Thapan 2002).

It is important to underline that demonstration of commercial success is deemed by the Sindhis the main way to gain social respect and prestige within the community. Money and social prestige are inseparable entities. Money brings prestige, and an "individual's worth and prestige" is measured in money (Falzon 2004:190). Most business and social practices are guided by the need to demonstrate commercial and thus social success and prestige. For example, the recruitment system of Sindhi companies is to a great extent shaped by this need to demonstrate prestige. Sindhi companies have a long tradition of hiring fellow Sindhis to the most important positions in the company.[48] While Sindhis usually justify the need to hire Sindhis to look after business operations by trust and some "special skills" that only Sindhis possess, it is mainly social prestige that stands behind the practice of allocating higher managerial positions in the company to the community members. As Markovits puts it, "what better way to display one's wealth and enhance one's prestige in such a mercantile society than to offer jobs to scions of poorer families in the community" (Markovits, 2000:235). Moreover, hiring a fellow Sindhi is a sign of the company's financial solvency because

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[48] For a detailed account of Sindhi business practices in the two centuries (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) prior to Partition see Markovits (2000).

most Sindhis come from quite wealthy families, and even as employees they expect salaries that are considerably higher than the salaries of the local non-Sindhi workers.[49]

Along with the abovementioned business practices, financial success is exhibited through conspicuous consumption of luxury items, such as expensive watches, handbags, jewellery, cars and even planes (!).[50] In the words of my respondent, "Sindhis scan you for brands". Throwing lavish parties is another way to show success and social prestige, which then again is usually converted into material capital. Although community members are aware of the fact that the expenditures on parties often exceed the actual income of party hosts, the parties are nevertheless considered as a rather accurate way of estimating one's prosperity and thus "one's worth". Once, when I asked a member of Sindhi community whether, according to her, *sinetron* production was a more profitable business than textile trading, she replied that as *sinetron* producers were organising very expensive parties she assumed they were doing much better than those in textile business: "No textile trader would throw such parties" (Meera, Indonesian Sindhi, personal communication, 8 Feb. 2013). Indeed, for the past several years, the most extravagant Diwali parties in Jakarta were hosted by Raam Punjabi, "the king of soap opera". According to the attendees, the cost of Raam's parties could go beyond a couple of million US dollars. In Raam's case, it seems like his parties did, more or less, correspond to his profits—for several consecutive years Raam Punjabi was mentioned among the 150 richest people in Indonesia.[51]

Sindhi wedding parties are a competition in opulence. Many of my respondents complained that weddings can take up to several days because each family tries to outdo the other in wedding extravaganza. Five-star hotels of Jakarta and Bali are the most common venues for the Sindhi weddings, with the richest members organising wedding celebrations in other countries covering transportation and accommodation expenses of

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[49] For example, in 2013 an Indonesian shopkeeper assistant would get around US$200, while a Sindhi would ask for at least US$1000.

[50] The promo video of MD Entertainment, owned by the Indonesian Sindhi, Manoj Punjabi, starts with the shot when Manoj steps out of his private jet. The video can be viewed on the MD Entertainment corporate website: www.mdentertainment.net (last accessed 20 Apr. 2016).

[51] "Dafter Orang Indonesia Terkaya," Indonesian Company News, https://indonesiacompanynews.wordpress.com/daftar-150-orang-terkaya-di-indonesia-versi-globe-asia/ (last accessed 16 Jan. 2016).

their guests. Most weddings are arranged in accordance with Indian tradition as it gives more opportunity to exhibit one's opulence. Wedding attire, accessories, decorations as well as dowries are purchased in India. In some cases, Sindhis invite Bollywood stars to attend wedding receptions or other important events like birthdays or wedding anniversaries. For example, Manoj Punjabi, another successful media producer, invited Shah Rukh Khan for his 40th anniversary.

Charity activities also serve the goal of showing off one's worth to other community members, and as a result most donations of Sindhis go to India, and more specifically Bombay, "a city of Sindhi patronage... [and] investment" (Falzon 2004:96). In Jakarta most charity flows into the renovation of temples. For Sindhi businessmen charity is an investment of sorts: donations are not triggered only by the cause but also by the need to demonstrate family wealth. HS Dillon, the only Indonesian of Indian (Sikh) descent who established himself as a prominent politician and in 2013 was Presidential special envoy for Poverty Alleviation, expressed his worry about the behaviour of Sindhis in Indonesia:

> Sindhis have these decadent weddings spending a lot of money on themselves in order to outdo each other in lavishness...and yet they have to come up with the foundation to help the poor. I told them and I repeated it: look at the Chinese—they have a lot of money but at least they are trying to do something like Sampoerna foundation.[52] You Indians just make money. (HS Dillon, personal communication, 16 Apr. 2013)

Of course, there are exceptions. For example, PT Rapi Films (henceforth Rapi Films), one of the oldest production houses, provides free eye surgery for the Jakartan poor and distributes help during frequent floods. Many Sindhi women, including the wife of Raam Punjabi, Raakhee, are active members of women's charity organisations that work with orphanages and disadvantaged communities. Since 2013 the new management of Miss India Indonesia beauty pageant (an event that until 2007 had a strictly entertaining function in Sindhi community) made it a point to contribute to the Indonesian

[52] Sampoerna Foundation, or Putera Sampoerna Foundation, is a social business institution for corporate social responsibility programs. It was founded in 2001 by one of the richest Indonesians of Chinese descent, Putera Sampoerna.

community by collaborating with Indonesian NGOs, which help poor communities in rural Indonesia.

4. Social Stratification

Business structures the community life and relationships among community members. Although social stratification can be based on a number of factors, such as religion, education, and marital status, one of the major categories of social stratification is occupation. By and large Sindhis "classify themselves and others as being either 'businessmen' or 'in service'" (Falzon 2004:188). There are, of course, categories that do not quite easily fit into these broad groupings, such as the professions. Nevertheless, these two categories remain determining and are adhered to in media companies owned by Sindhis. Social distinctions based on occupation can be traced back to the caste system, a social institution of South Asia, which structures society in accordance with occupation, inherited rank, privileges and wealth.

The distinction between bosses and those "in service" is hierarchised because, as mentioned before, the self-employed are considered superior to the employees. According to Sindhi *bhaibands*, businessmen have knowledge, skills, connections and patronage, and thus, power, while those "in service" are much less competent and privileged. The distinction is applied to the society as a whole and is projected into the inner hierarchy of the companies headed by Sindhis, where the major dividing line is drawn between bosses and everyone else. The wide gap existing between employers and employees is rarely if ever crossed. The only way for those "in service" to move to the category of "bosses" is to set up their own business. Promotion to the top is not widely practiced in Sindhi businesses. The media companies are no exception in this regard and I will discuss social stratification within Sindhi-owned production houses in chapter Five.

The prestige associated with the status of the boss results in a situation where Sindhis very rarely remain employees. As mentioned above, those young Sindhis who are unable to start their own company usually join the company of other, more successful Sindhis. For the majority of Sindhis, however, working as an employee is never an ultimate goal but a stepping stone, a way to gain necessary experience, to

know the nuts and bolts of business and then become a boss oneself. After gaining all the necessary knowledge and experience, a Sindhi employee leaves the company and starts his own business, usually in partnership with his family members or by himself. Similar to the split between the partners, the resignation of the employee causes a lot of resentment for the company owners because former employees most often choose the same line of business and start competing with former bosses.

In the late 2000s and the early 2010s the path to company ownership became less straightforward than it was in the previous decades. Thapan (2002) mentioned that in the late 1990s most Sindhis went into business straight after graduating from high school. Getting a university degree was uncommon (Thapan 2002:39). In 2013 most younger Sindhis were not only after a higher degree in prestigious universities, but also after professional careers in international corporations. One of my respondents described the life trajectory of her son who after graduation joined the international banking sector instead of heading his family business:

> I had a lot of my friends asking: he is your only son so why is he not in your family business? We just let him. And later on he joined the family business. So he got into it himself—out of choice. But he works in a completely different way and style. This is what many children do nowadays. (Sheeja, Indonesian Sindhi, second generation, personal communication, 22 Feb. 2013)

From Sheeja's account it is clear that private entrepreneurship remains the primary goal for younger Sindhis, even if the way to achieve this goal has changed quite substantially.

4.1. Politics of Language

Language reinforces the gap between bosses and those "in service", and in general plays a key role in maintaining cultural boundaries and the position of Sindhis in the social hierarchy of Indonesia. Due to their involvement in global trade, Sindhis have been multilingual for generations and Indonesian Sindhis are no exception. As mentioned in chapter One, Sindhi traders residing on Java and other parts of colonial Indonesia were able to converse with their clients in several languages including Dutch and English, and were quick to pick up colloquial Indonesian. Nowadays, the main

languages of the Sindhi community in Jakarta are Sindhi, English, Hindi and Indonesian. Each of these languages has a different cultural and social value and is used accordingly in various contexts. It should be mentioned that based on my observations many Sindhis are not able to speak any language with native proficiency and often struggle to stick to one language in a conversation. The discussion below will follow the order of the language *importance* for the community *self-identification*, starting with Sindhi, the least spoken but the most culturally valued language of the community.

Sindhi is placed as the most important language of the community, as a core of Sindhayat.[53] The editorial comment in the Sindhi Directory includes a few lines where the loss of Sindhi language is linked with the loss of identity: "Our community will only survive if we keep our language alive" (Sindhi Directory 2006:22). Despite its importance, the attempts of the older generation to keep the language alive and pass it on to the younger generations have failed both at school and at the individual levels. While the third generation of migrants is still able to communicate in Sindhi, but has difficulties with writing and reading, the fourth generation experiences considerable difficulties speaking it, not to mention reading and writing. The lack of any interest in Sindhi language among the younger generation is deeply regretted by the community members:

> I speak Sindhi... I got it from my parents. Didn't learn it formally. My Sindhi is actually very bad which is sad. Because what will I teach my son? He speaks English, and Indonesian because he speaks with helpers and drivers. I'm interested in teaching him Sindhi. My parents talk to him in Sindhi but only for a few minutes and then they go back to English. So I think there is a case of missing identity for some. (Sandesh, Indonesian Sindhi, third generation, personal communication, 1 Feb. 2013)

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[53] Sindhi language belongs to the Indo-Aryan language group. It was influenced by Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian and Dravidian. It is primarily written in two scripts: Arabic-Sindhi and Devanagari-Sindhi. In many cases other scripts are also used "including Brahmi, the Gurmukhi alphabet, and an indigenous script simply known as Sindhi." "Sindhi Language and its History," Sibasis Mukherji, Language Division, Kolkata, Academia.edu, https://www.academia.edu/800843/Sindhi_language_and_its_history (last accessed 25 May, 2016). In Indonesia when Sindhis write in Sindhi language (which is quite rare), they use Sindhi Arabic script.

Another respondent, in response to my question about languages spoken at home, shared very similar concerns:

> All English. We don't speak Indonesian that much. But with maids, yes. Wife, kids all speak English. I was in Gandhi Memorial [school] and then higher education was in LA. My kids are here in an international school... What I'm worried is the Sindhi language. It's bad. It's our mother tongue. (Yogesh, Indonesian Sindhi, third generation, personal communication, 14 Feb. 2013)

Sindhi language is very important for the community not only as the language which reminds Sindhis of the cultural heritage, but also as a language that distinguishes Sindhis from other Indian communities in Indonesia and reproduces the sense of exclusiveness and uniqueness. It is also a "secret" language of Sindhi business and is used in the offices for confidential discussions. For example, one of the Sindhi employees in the *sinetron* production company put it this way:

> They [owners of the company] needed someone Sindhi because we can communicate in our language, because you know—it was very blunt from the beginning—he [the owner] needed someone to be honest with. [Film] production has a lot of loopholes, a lot of people are corrupt. He was having that problem and he asked me to join to be his right hand. (Nagesh, Indonesian Sindhi, executive producer, 17 Apr. 2013)

Sindhi language gives company owners and executives an opportunity to communicate in the office without concerns about leakage of sensitive data. Besides, being the language spoken only by the top executives, Sindhi reinforces the position of power and helps maintain the hierarchy within the company.

The second language that is important for the community self-identification is English – the medium of global business and, more generally, international communication. The fact that in the Indian and Indonesian contexts English proficiency is a marker of upper class is also an important factor for the Sindhi community. As mentioned previously, wealth and global connections are the constitutive features of Sindhiness. From my experience English is the most spoken language in the community. The educational institutions (Gandhi Memorial School, Nehru Memorial School in Bandug, etc) established by the Sindhis in Indonesia continue reproducing

English as the major language of everyday communication among the community members. English is often used in the Sindhi offices and here again the choice of language is not guided simply by communicative abilities. Most Indonesian Sindhis have a good command of spoken Indonesian and are able to express themselves in Indonesian with sufficient clarity. But because in Southeast Asian cultures power derives, to a certain extent, from prestige associated with English, the language of the wealthy West, English as a medium of communication is another way of reinforcing the existing social hierarchy where the top positions are taken only by local Sindhis, and lower positions are allocated to the local Indonesian staff. The use of English helps impose additional authority and is another way of demonstrating power and social status. In chapter Five I will give a nuanced account of power relations and the role of language in maintaining the social hierarchy in regards to media business.

Hindi language has gained value in the community rather recently, in the late 1990s, mostly due to the rise of India, Indian nationalism and the international popularity of Bollywood.[54] Although Hindi is not a language of everyday communication, many Sindhis, especially the younger generation, consider Hindi as an important identity marker, a sign of exclusiveness and in many cases cultural superiority. Hindi was often included in the curriculum of the Gandhi Memorial School. In 2013 it was offered as an extracurricular subject both in Gandhi Memorial International School and Mahatma Gandhi School. Often Sindhis pick up the language while spending time in India—in high school, colleges, or even during family and business trips. Seeing Hindi as a marker of pan-Indian identity and exclusiveness, community members try to promote it by organising Bollywood extravaganza nights. In fact, Hindi started to gain momentum not only due to the growing popularity of Bollywood but also due to the development of cable television, which was introduced in Jakarta in the mid-1990s. When cable television became available in Jakarta most Sindhi community members, especially women, switched from Indonesian television to Indian channels (Sony, Zee TV). In 2013 Indian soaps in Hindi seemed to be the most watched television programs in the Sindhi household. As for the office environment, Hindi is used on a daily basis only in those Sindhi companies that hire Indian

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[54]Like Sindhi, Hindi language also belongs to Indo-Aryan group and is heavily influenced by Persian language. Hindi is written in Devanagari script. It is the preferred official language of India. It is also the main language of films produced in Bollywood.

expatriates. The use of Hindi also adds to social stratification within the Sindhi-owned companies.

The Indonesian language (*Bahasa*) has an ambiguous status in the linguistic hierarchy of the community. On the one hand, ideologically, Indonesian language has the least value for self-identification of the community, which positions itself first and foremost as a unity of global traders with "cosmopolitan outlook" (Sindhi Directory 2006). As discussed in the previous chapter, Sindhis avoided studying in Indonesian language for more than 40 years. As a result, the majority of community members has no knowledge of formal Indonesian. On the other hand, *Bahasa* is the national language in Indonesia and the main language of everyday communication among Indonesian citizens, in Jakarta in particular. Its practical use is difficult to underestimate. Bahasa is needed to communicate with the state authorities and company employees, clients and domestic workers (maids, drivers, nannies). Moreover, for quite a few Jakartan Sindhis, Indonesian is the native language and the main language spoken at home, among family members. These are usually second and third generation migrants who moved to Jakarta from the provincial towns only at a mature age. As for more than 40 years (1960–2003) English-medium schools were closed for permanent residents and citizens of Indonesia, Sindhis who grew up and became educated outside of Jakarta, in small urban centres, had no access to English-medium education. Another group of Sindhis for whom Indonesian is a native language comprises "not-that-rich" Sindhis who started school after 1991, the year when Gandhi Memorial School replaced English with Indonesian as a medium of education. The middle-class Sindhis were not affected by this change in the educational system because they were able to afford English-medium education abroad (India, Singapore, etc). Thus, in the community Bahasa is still perceived as a language of the lower classes, with more practical than cultural value for the community.

The fact that Indonesian language is seen by the community members more as a practical tool than a part of their cultural identity can be illustrated by the gendered proficiency in Indonesian language. Based on my observations, Sindhi men usually have a much better command of spoken *Bahasa* than women. This happens because most Sindhis use Indonesian language not as a language of everyday social interaction but mostly in business, which is a male domain. For their businesses, men interact with quite a wide range of people outside of the Sindhi community, while Sindhi women

largely limit themselves to the Sindhi community and non-Sindhi elite circles where they can get by with English language. In other words, they do not have many chances to practice the language. Many women are able to live their whole lives in Indonesia with minimum knowledge of Indonesian, just sufficient to communicate with domestic workers. In addition, the gendered aspect of language proficiency and preferences has also to do with the fact that Sindhi girls often have to move countries after getting married. Such prospects make learning Indonesian less valuable for girls than boys, because boys tend to reside in the country of their birth. Girls, however, often marry Sindhis from another country and move to their husband's country of residence.

The Miss India Indonesia beauty pageant of 2013 illustrates the lack of Indonesian language skills among Sindhi girls well.[55] During the first rounds of the contest, demonstration of Indian and Indonesian gowns, and talent show, the participants were rather successful in demonstrating "the perfect blend of two cultures", i.e. cultures of India and Indonesia. However, during the last round, when the top five contestants (four were from the Sindhi community) had to answer the judges' questions, none of the girls, all born and brought up in Indonesia, was able to reply in Bahasa, even when judges insisted upon in. To the apparent disappointment of the judging committee, all the contestants responded only in English.

In sum, language remains one of the key tools in maintaining the cultural boundaries and social hierarchy within the Sindhi community as well as outside of it. It helps the community to define its position on both local and global levels. It reinforces the existing connections and indicates priorities for the future. Importantly, for the community members the future becomes increasingly varied—some link it more with Indonesia, other see themselves closer to India, or think more in terms of the global transnational community.

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[55] The Miss India Beauty pageant was held in Jakarta in 1995–1998 and 2003–2006. During those times the contest was run only due to the personal initiative of Mirchu Samtani, an enthusiastic member of the Sindhi community, and was open only to the Sindhi community consumption (a closed event). When Mr Samtani passed away in 2006, Indonesia stopped participating in Miss India Worldwide for a while. In 2013 the headquarters of the Miss India Worldwide pageant (based in New York) offered another Sindhi family (Tolani) to take over the organisation of the pageant. Shanti Tolani, country manager, was the winner of Miss India Indonesia in 1997.

5. Gender Ideology

Gender roles in the Sindhi community are also defined through business and business relationships. While to conform to the ideal of masculinity a Sindhi man has to own a company, to be a Sindhi woman means demonstrating the business success of her man (father or husband) through engaging herself with activities outside of immediate business practices. In other words, the best way for a Sindhi woman to show family prosperity is to leave business matters for the male members of her family and to keep herself busy with household as well as social and cultural matters, which are nevertheless all linked with business in one way or another. A Sindhi woman who is not working is a proof of her father's or husband's ability to provide for the family. But the demonstration of family wealth does not stop there. A Sindhi woman should organise her social activities in a way that would allow her to communicate the idea of the family's business success to other community members in the most expressive manner. As a result, most social activities of Sindhi women, be it luncheons, kitty parties, *satsangs* (religious gatherings) or card games, the favourite pastime of Sindhi women, are held in five-star hotels and other expensive venues. These social gatherings "constitute opportunities to show off costliest jewellery and best saris, and hence transmit knowledge about the wealth and prestige of their families" (Falzon 2004:85).

Similar to men, Sindhi women in Jakarta fulfil their gender obligations with diligence. While males centre their lives on business activities, Sindhi women structure their time around providing support for husbands, raising children, attending beauty salons and social functions. In the words of one respondent:

> most of Indian ladies here—what's their activities? I'm not trying to downgrade them but I'm telling you the mentality and the thinking. They are mostly playing cards. *Ramee* is [a card game] with money, with a small stick. It's their hobby. And I like that. And [there is] the Indonesian activity—*arisan*, and beauty salons. (Kumar, Indonesian Sindhi, second generation, personal communication, 8 Feb. 2013)

Sindhi girls are brought up with the idea that being a devoted wife and mother of a Sindhi businessman is the main goal in life. Most Sindhi girls in Jakarta marry in their early twenties. In 2013 the organisers of Miss India Indonesia beauty pageant had to

lower the age eligibility requirements to get enough participants for the competition. If the general age requirement of Miss India Worldwide is 18–27 years old, in Jakarta sixteen-year-old girls were allowed to apply because by the age of 23–25 most Indonesian Sindhi girls were already married and thus could not take part in *Miss* India Indonesia.

In the 2000s and the early 2010s before marriage Sindhi girls would often obtain a college degree and even a work experience in administration or finance in a family business, or in a company owned by a fellow Sindhi. But higher degrees and work experience mainly serve the purpose of finding a good (meaning wealthy) suitor, and increasing family wealth. After getting married Sindhi women usually quit their jobs and become full-time housewives and mothers, reproducing their Sindhiness through family and social activities.

Some ambitious and energetic Sindhi women might continue working and I will discuss several cases in regards to media business in chapter Six. But there are certain gender-based limitations. Women mostly join family businesses, acting as helpers and supporters of their fathers or husbands, not as business partners, and take responsibility for those aspects of business that are deemed compatible with "female nature". These include accounting, budgeting and administration, for they require neatness, attention to detail and minimal engagement with the outside world. Therefore, even if technically in business, a Sindhi woman rarely steps into the male territory that is primarily associated with business negotiations and, in some cases, production.

5.1. The Roots of Gender Ideology

The association of men with business and women with everything that is left outside of direct business operations, but contributes to its success, is a historical legacy of the times when commerce that required extensive travel was much more suitable for men than women. Sindhi businessmen rarely took their families with them on the business trips. In most cases women stayed in Hyderabad, Sindh, taking care of the children and at the same time exhibiting the success of their husbands' overseas business operations by wearing expensive saris and jewellery. Such demonstration of wealth was particularly important before Partition as the Hyderabadi community was the only source of financial support for Sindhi global business.

Partition had a profound impact on the distribution of responsibilities along gender lines. Migration resulted in the overlap of two previously spaciously separate spheres of business and family, male and female worlds. After Partition the families joined Sindhi businessmen in various locations. In most cases, right after migration Sindhis were rather constrained in financial resources and conducted business from their houses. Many women, often reluctantly, were drawn into business to take charge of managing finances (Thapan 2002:55). Female labour was, however, not acknowledged. Quite on the contrary, it was concealed because a working woman was, in the eyes of Sindhis, an indication of the weakness of male family members, of their inability to be businessmen and provide for the family.

The idea that a woman can work for self-fulfilment, not because she financially needs to do so, started to emerge in the Indonesian Sindhi community only in the 1970s. The change in perception was again an outcome of migration, which then resulted in reconsideration of the importance of education. In general, before Partition education for boys or for girls was not valued among Sindhi *bhaibands*.[56] After Partition Sindhis gradually realised that education was a form of capital, which was not only easily transportable across national borders, but also quite easily convertible into financial capital. Moreover, for Sindhis in Indonesia education turned into a profitable business. The changing attitude towards education and its value affected both sexes but changed the position of girls more drastically. Boys entered business with and without education. For women access to education was a door to the world outside the family.

Girls in the Jakartan Sindhi community first earned their university degrees in the late 1960s. At that time the families who supported their daughters in obtaining higher education had to deal with harsh criticism from the Sindhi community both in Indonesia and India, the major educational destination for Sindhi girls brought up in Indonesia. India had several advantages over other countries with English-medium education (the UK, the USA and Australia), like lower cost of education, shared cultural values and relative proximity to home. One of my respondents remembered that in the late 1960s her father, who insisted on the education of all his children regardless of their gender, eventually had to yield to community pressure and enrol his daughters in a

[56] It was the *jati*, the subcommunity, of *amils* that was educated. For more about different *jatis* in Sindh see Markovits (2000) and Falzon (2004).

domestic science department. But a few years later, in the early 1970s, the youngest girls in the family were able to pursue degrees in pedagogy.

It was this degree in teaching that triggered some changes at the level of perception in the Jakartan Sindhi society. In the 1970s several Sindhi women joined Gandhi Memorial School as teachers, and the fact that the school was a Sindhi enterprise facilitated their entrance into professional roles (Thapan 2002:61). The Sindhi community gradually stopped looking at a working woman as a disgrace to the family. Female work was, however, mostly seen as entertainment, as a way to "have some fun".

During my fieldwork in 2013, higher education and professional experience of Sindhi girls was not an exception but a rule. In fact, many Sindhi women were much more educated than Sindhi men. If in the 1960s higher degrees were seen as an impediment for marriage, in 2013 a university degree, or at least course certificates, was one of the necessary requirements for a girl of a marriageable age. In the twenty-first century educational degrees and salaries often feature in Sindhi matrimonial ads (Falzon 2004:216). At the same time, while the changes in education and attitude towards working women altered the criteria of what constitutes a good match for a Sindhi man, the idea that women are supporters but "never explicitly managers or decision-taker" (Falzon 2004:215) has not changed significantly. As discussed above, after getting married, women are not expected to pursue an independent professional careers.

The social expectations make it difficult for a Sindhi woman to have a successful career and to be a wife. Men avoid marrying career-oriented women as it immediately limits the opportunities to show off their success as an entrepreneur and thus their masculinity. During my fieldwork I met a few Sindhi women who were independent entrepreneurs or professionals working for non-Sindhi owned corporations, but they had never been married or were divorced.[57] For Sindhi women marriage is largely incompatible with independent professional career.

At the same time reversing gender roles in Sindhi society seems to be more difficult for men than women. While the community has gradually accepted women working for self-fulfilment, even if as helpers of the male members of the family, by

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[57] Divorce is still very uncommon in Jakartan Sindhi society.

and large it does not accept men who are not involved in money-making activity in one way or another. As I just mentioned, in Jakarta there are quite a few Sindhi women whose lifestyle and behaviour do not conform to the Sindhi ideals of femininity. They do not see marriage as the ultimate goal of their lives and aspire to build professional careers in various fields. For example, I met women who chose careers in such "male" domains as engineering and filmmaking (to be discussed in detail in chapter Six). Despite such deviation from gender norms, these Sindhi women are nevertheless active members of the community. They are not rejected. Meanwhile, Sindhi men who have no aspirations to do business, usually cease to actively participate in the Sindhi community life because they feel they do not belong and are not accepted there. For example, Dani (pseudonym), a Sindhi man who became an artist and actively rejects being associated with business world, withdrew from the Sindhi community life almost completely. Based on my observations, men who do not see money-making as the main goal of their life also tend to remain single or marry out of the community.

5.2. Beauty as Duty

As stated above, women demonstrate business success not only by leaving business matters to male members of the family and providing full support with family and household matters, but also by taking good care of their personal appearance. As Makrovitz mentioned in passing, "covering one's women in jewels and fine clothing was a preferred mode of displaying wealth among successful Sindwork merchants" (Markovits 2000:276). Women carry the most burden of constantly exhibiting family wealth because men are quite limited in their ways of showing wealth on their body. While men can exhibit their prosperity in a noticeable and mobile manner mainly through expensive suits, shoes, watches, and rings, women have many more means to "translocalise knowledge of one's worth" (Falzon 2004:253). In addition to clothing, the wealth can be conveyed through exquisite hairstyle, sophisticated make-up, bracelets, necklaces and earrings and, recently, plastic surgery on face and body, which are still more common among Sindhi women than men. Physical appearance is an investment on a daily basis and is discussed as such. Plastic surgery such as facelifts, breasts and/or buttock implants are not concealed but are a common subject of discussions during female social gatherings. Visits to beauty salons are a daily obligation of Sindhi housewives. Most of my female respondents mentioned to me that they would not wash

their hair at home but only in beauty parlours. Consider the Facebook status of one of the female community members:

> if u are a MOM like ME, attending weddings dinners bdays satsangs & managing home n kids n hubby , salons , kitchen & etc and live in Jakarta with D BLOODY CRAZY TRAFFIC !!! Pat urself twice!!! U r no less than a SUPER WOMAN!!! hahahahahaha.... i still manage to watch Ram Kapoor at midnite too!! (Aani, November 21, 2012 [facebook status update])

Visits to a beauty salon and cooking are listed next to each other, it is just a part of the household routine, not a way to indulge oneself on special occasions or to satisfy the requirements of corporate dress-code.

The idea that Sindhis have perfected business to a "fine art" is thus illustrated by the fact that expensiveness is an aesthetic category. In the Sindhi community beauty is measured monetarily. For Sindhis being beautiful means looking expensive and looking expensive means looking beautiful. Looking beautiful is not a gift from God as such but a matter of financial investment. The way Raam Punjabi described the beauty of his future wife, Raakhee, born Shanta Harjani, exemplifies the point well:

> She was very beautiful. Actually, extraordinary beautiful... It seemed like Shanta dressed up especially for me. The clothes were very pretty, made from the selected fabrics... When her body moved, I could feel a very nice fragrance. So I asked her, "What perfume are you wearing?" She smiled happily. "*Christian Dior*," was her answer. (Endah 2005:116–118)

While describing Raakhee's beauty, Raam focuses on the expensiveness of her clothes and perfume, not her physical features, her eyes or hair, for example.

6. Home and Homeland

The cosmopolitan and translocal nature of Sindhiness reveals itself not only through business and family practices, as well as linguistic skills and preferences, but also through the differentiation between home, homeland and place of residence. For

Indonesian Sindhis, regardless of their "roots and routes", Jakarta is seen as home. Meanwhile, India is referred to as homeland.

My respondents were very clear about the difference between homeland and home. India is homeland, cultural roots and heritage. It is "the cultural heart" of the global Sindhi community. Such attitude of Sindhis towards India is paradoxical not only because the land of Sindh was never a part of the present-day territory of India. It is quite contradictory due to the constant mixing of India as it is experienced with India of the imagination. For example, modern India is perceived as a place of commonsensical modernity where Sindhi women have more rights and freedoms than women in the Indonesian Sindhi community: "in Jakarta [Sindhi] people are so orthodox. Sindhis in India are so progressive. It's very interesting to compare. Here the community is so small. They still keep all these values" (Amrita, Indonesian Sindhi, third generation, personal communication, 22 Feb. 2013). At the same time, Sindhis send their children to Indian boarding schools and universities to introduce them to "traditional Indian values". Pre-wedding arrangements are almost unthinkable without several trips to India, where dowries and accessories are purchased. Yet Sindhi weddings resemble a scene from a Bollywood movie more than a traditional celebration from a particular region.

India is where Sindhis see themselves belonging, but in fact never fully do. During the trips to India (for family or business purposes) they know that they can blend with the crowd, something that never happens in Indonesia. But looking the same does not make them feel the same:

> for me India is going back to my roots, not for me to stay. I lived there for two years. I felt like a foreigner there because it was a different lifestyle. Indian pace was crazy, Indonesia was a bit slower. They [Indians] don't play basketball and soccer but I do. So for me it was a bit different. They like to sing and dance. I do dance but I don't sing. Guys are very energetic there, they participate in every social event. I have a different pronunciation of "t" and "d" and my Hindi is pretty much from the films, not the slang of the streets. (Nagesh, Indonesian Sindhi, third generation, personal communication, 17 Apr., 2013)

I used this long excerpt from the interview because it clearly expresses the instances that form this feeling of foreignness, of not fitting in.

On the other hand, Indonesia is home. In the interviews, Jakarta was always mentioned as a place to return to after a long travel or years of studying or working abroad, a place that is safe, comfortable and familiar: "I'm very used to living in Indonesia. I think I'm more Indian [than Indonesian]. But Indonesia is family, it's home" (Reena, Indonesian Sindhi, third generation, personal communication, 6 Mar. 2013). Another respondent talks about the meaning of Indonesia for her daughter in a very similar way:

> my daughter is married to an Indian with the Australian nationality so she could easily become an Australian citizen but she has chosen not to. She doesn't feel the need—she still considers Indonesia home. (Sheeja, Indonesian Sindhi, second generation, personal communication, 22 Feb. 2013)

While in this comment the link between the political citizenship and home is quite obvious, this is not always the case. Sindhis who have their family (here spouse and children) and home in Indonesia, hold the citizenship of another country (most often Singapore, the UK, the USA or Australia) and feel culturally close to India, are rather a norm than an exception.

The main point here is that the presence of real and imaginary India in the everyday life of Jakartan Sindhis does not make them less connected to Indonesia. What closer connection can one develop with a place than to call it home? As global traders, after Partition Sindhis developed very different relationships with a number of localities across the world: there is the lost land of Sindh, the imagined cultural homeland of India, places all over the world where Sindhis decide to raise a family, which would be called home, and place of residence with economic and political conditions favourable for successful business development.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Jakartan Sindhis continue to reproduce themselves as a clearly defined ethocultural community. Sindhiness defines most aspects of

community and private life. Choices of schools and colleges, life partners and friends, careers and hobbies, dresses and hairstyle, wedding celebrations and family gatherings, are all guided by the desire to confirm membership in this well-connected and wealthy community.

This is not to say that the community remains static. There are constant changes triggered by reforms in India and Indonesia, as well as changes in global politics and economics. Higher education is no longer disregarded, either for boys, or for girls; professional experience gained in transnational corporations is welcomed and integrated into family businesses; women get more opportunities to express themselves outside the family; social networks go beyond the immediate Sindhi community and are more diversified; in many cases religious and pan-Indian identities start taking over the Sindhi identity. The loss of Sindhi language with each consequent generation seems to be irreversible, despite constant reminders of its importance for communal unity.

At the same time, all these changes take place in line with a number of social conventions. Business is the central activity of the community members. Social hierarchies within and outside the community are built and based on occupation, with the status of "employee" having little prestige among fellow Sindhis. The success in money-making serves as the main proof of one's personhood. Even beauty is often assessed in monetary terms. Language remains one of the main tools of sustaining the privileged position of Sindhis in Indonesian society—the loss of Sindhi language, a marker of difference and cultural superiority, is made up for increasing use of English and Hindi, the languages that also represent economic and cultural capital. Gender roles are defined in its relationship to business activities: to be a Sindhi man one needs to be in business, while to be true to one's feminine nature, a woman is expected to stay away from it. In other words, after more than fifty years of settlement in Indonesia, Sindhiness is continuously reproduced by the community members as a distinct ethnocultural identity of Indonesian Sindhis. In the next chapters I will explore how the features and practices that constitute the core of Sindhiness become intertwined with the processes of producing content for national television in Indonesia.

Chapter 3

Sindhis and Indonesian Media prior to "*Sinetron* Era"

1. Introduction

The previous chapters introduced the Sindhi community past and present and discussed the main practices that keep the global community of Sindhis together. As emphasised, business, predominantly in trade, remains the core of Sindhiness. Although globally Sindhis are involved in different kinds of businesses, they tend to occupy particular niches in localities they have settled in after Partition. In Indonesia the great majority of Sindhis occupied the niche of textile trade. A few Sindhi families, however, branched off and established themselves in media businesses. Outside of India, Indonesia is the only country in the Asian region where Sindhis carved a niche for themselves in mainstream national media production.

This chapter traces the trajectory of Sindhis in the Indonesian media industry from the first instances of their engagement with the media business until their establishment in the commercial *sinetron* production business. The analysis of the historical context and the practices of Sindhi entrepreneurs aims to provide an answer to the following questions: why were Sindhis the first to respond to the demands of commercial television to fill the broadcasting hours with local soap operas; how were Indonesians of "foreign descent" able to carve a niche for themselves in the industry that supplies *national* television with local content?

I argue that Sindhi producers pioneered the industry of soap opera production for commercial television because they had quick access to financial and human capital facilitated by global ethnic and kinship networks. Other players aspiring to carve a niche for themselves in the emerging industry did not have a speedy access to such resources. The entrepreneurs of Chinese descent lost their connections to global ethnic networks due to the forced assimilation program. Foreign, mostly Western, producers

were restricted to operate in Indonesia by the investment, labour and migration laws. The reliance on the global Sindhi network for financial and human resources turned into a particularly serious advantage in the late 1980s–early 1990s, when the institutions (mostly state-owned) that supplied the television industry with necessary resources ceased to do so. The ability of Sindhis to mobilise ethnic networks allowed them not only to pioneer local soap opera production but to dominate it for nearly two decades (to be discussed in detail in chapters Four and Five). Therefore, I argue that the success of Sindhis in pioneering the *sinetron* business should be seen in the context of community practices at the local and global levels, and not so much as the outcome of individual efforts by certain personalities. In other words, the practices of Sindhi producers in Indonesian media businesses cannot be taken out of the context of global Sindhi community networks.

During my fieldwork I often asked my respondents, Sindhis and non-Sindhis alike, why, in their opinion, Sindhis were the first to enter the commercial television production business and to take the lead in it. The answers ranged from "risk-taking/love for money/trade business/passion for films is in Indian blood" and "Indians work hard" to "Indians buy television ratings" and "Indians are a mafia". A prominent Indonesian film critic, Misbach Biran, suggested that probably the ability of Indians to negotiate with the broadcasters was the main reason for their success (Biran 2001:249). While Biran points to an important aspect in the commercial television industry, he did not explain why non-Indians did not have these negotiation skills. Thus, Biran's reasoning is as essentialist as the above-mentioned explanations. Apart from being essentialist, these explanations do not take the historical moment into account. Prior to the 1990s Sindhis were present in the media industries for several decades but were not more successful than others. But in the 1990s, under the same political regime, they were able to take the leading positions, which suggests that the changes in the media industries could not be ignored in the analysis.

To the best of my knowledge the existing literature on the Indonesian media and Sindhi community in Indonesia provides no answer to the question of why Sindhis pioneered the production of *sinetron* for commercial television. Although there is an awareness of the significant presence of the Indian Indonesians in media industries, and commercial television production in particular, information on producers of Indian descent and their role in the industries is sparse and mostly inaccurate and judgmental.

In general, the existing academic and non-academic literature on film and television industries in Indonesia mentions Indian Indonesians in one and only way—in connection to the commercial production of low quality media products (Anwar 1988; Sen 1994b; Biran 2001; Said 1982).

Kristanto (2007) and Barker (2011) are probably the only researchers of the Indonesian media who offer a different view on the role of the Indian Indonesians in media. Kristanto's catalogue of personalities in Indonesian cinema is so far the only source that provides factual and non-judgmental information on Indonesians of Indian descent in the Indonesian film industry (Kristanto et al. 2007). The catalogue has entries on Gope Samtani, Harris Lasmana, Madhu Mahtani, Raam Punjabi, Raam Soraya, Shanker RS, Sunil Samtani and KK Jiwat.[58] Many others, however, like Dhamoo, Gobind, and Manoj Punjabi, Chand Parvez and Ravi Bharwani, not to mention Sindhi female professionals, are not included.[59] Meanwhile, Barker is the first researcher to acknowledge the contribution of Indonesian producers of Indian descent to the Indonesian film industry. He mentioned that "Chinese and Indian producers consistently provided the funding for various films that went to win awards at the FFI [*Festival Film Indonesia*, Indonesian Film Festival] or came to be regarded as exemplars of *Film Nasional*" (Barker 2011:47). Although he does not expand on it, the mention of Indian Indonesian producers as contributors, and not as a negative force in national cinema, is a significant breakaway from the canons of national cinema narrative.

As for television, researchers of Indonesian television do mention one Indonesian of Indian descent, Raam Punjabi, acknowledging his entrepreneurial skills and dominance in the *sinetron* industry (Kitley 2004; Rakhmani 2014; Loven 2008; Ida 2006). By emphasizing his skills, they ascribe his success in consolidating his position in the national television industry to his personal efforts. Barkin (2004) suggested that Raam's success in the television content production business could be explained by his large financial investment in local production as well as his reliance on Bollywood and

[58] The earlier version of the same catalogue (Kristanto et al. 1995) included only a few names: Raam Punjabi, Shanker Samtani.

[59] Although Chand Parvez Servia is adamant in excluding himself from the category of Indian producers, as he calls himself Pakistani, from the perspective of Indonesians he is a producer of Indian descent. Moreover, from the statistic and census point of view, he also belongs to the category of "Indian", which includes immigrants from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, i.e. the former territories of British India.

telenovela-inspired formula. It is, however, not clear why other producers working in Indonesia had limited access to the funds and globally circulating formulas of soap operas.

In sum, the existing literature has no data on how Indian Indonesians entered media industries, how they run them, what, if any, impact their presence as individuals and members of an exclusive global community has had on media industries, and whether their experience in filmmaking helped them move from film to television industries. Moreover, there is no analysis of the conditions in the media industries in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, which could help us understand why producers of Indian descent were in an advantageous position to secure a niche for themselves in the emerging business of content production for national television. By tracing the trajectory of Sindhis in the Indonesian media industries from the late 1950s to the early 1990s when Sindhis pioneered the television production industry, this chapter fills the existing scholarly gap on the Indonesian media industries and contributes to the literature on diversity of cultural production in Indonesia. It also sheds light on the interrelationships between the Indonesian nation-state and ethnic groups through media production during the period preceding commercial television.

This chapter proceeds with a historical account of Sindhis' involvement in media industries in Indonesia during the period between the late 1940s and the late 1980s, and a brief summary of the major impact of Sindhis on the local film industries. In the second half of the chapter I provide a detailed analysis of the television industry in the late 1980s when the state opened up television for private investment. I discuss the possibilities and limitations that were caused by the liberalisation of the national television and examine how different players in the market were able to negotiate their position in the emerging industry of television content production. I pay particular attention to financial and human capital available in the market and argue that the reliance of Sindhis on the global ethnic network for financial and human resources gave Sindhi businessmen a serious advantage over competitors. The fast access to alternative sources of capital enabled Sindhis to respond quickly to the changing demands of the media market in the early 1990s, when other institutions providing media industries with financial and labour capital became weak and inefficient.

2. Sindhis in Media Industries before the "*Sinetron* Era" (the 1940s–the early 1990s)

Sindhis became involved in the film business in the late 1940s, soon after they permanently settled in Indonesia following the Partition of British India in 1947. "It all started because back in the days the Indian community had entertainment. Part of it was films. They [the members of Indian community] imported films for community and then it became commercial" (Nagesh, Indonesian Sindhi, producer, personal communication, 17 Apr. 2013). The first Indian films were imported to Indonesia in the late 1940s.[60] During the next several years the number of imported Hindi films grew exponentially. In 1950 there were 12 titles, but in 1954 the number rose to 74 and in 1955 to 184.[61] Although Indian films still constituted a small portion of all imported films with American and Chinese products having the lion's share of overall imports, the increasing number of Hindi films shows a growing interest from the audience. Such interest could possibly be explained by the fact that Hindi films were new to the Indonesian audience and very different from American and Chinese products, which dominated the theatrical space in the 1930s, the late 1940s and the early 1950s. (During the Japanese occupation of 1942–1945 all films from the US and other Allied countries were banned.) Moreover, the ongoing "Westernisation" probably increased the interest of Indonesians in "Oriental" goods, including Hindi films. As Markovits pointed out

> The development of a mass market for culturally specific goods is one of the consequences, perhaps unintended, of the growing standardization of consumer tastes the world over. In particular, it created a niche for goods which could be perceived as 'different'... (Markovits 2000:23)

Along with importing, Sindhis went into the distribution and exhibiting business.[62] Sindhi families owned *bioskop*s, or movie theatres, in the big urban centres on Java,

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[60] A.Thapan (2002) mentioned 1949.

[61] In comparison, in 1950 there were 660 American and 78 Chinese titles imported to Indonesia (Sen 1994b).

[62] The business strategy of controlling the whole chain from import to exhibition was common not only among Sindhi traders (Markovits 2000) but also Chinese Indonesians. The latter were in the Indonesian film industry since the beginning of the twentieth century, and controlled not

such as Malang, Surabaya, Bandung and Tasikmalaya. Sheeja, one of the senior members of the Sindhi community, recalled her parents being in the film importing, distribution and production businesses in the 1950s:

> When we were growing up our Indian community—I would say 90 per cent were in textile... Then in 1955 there were a lot of Indians in film business. In 1955–1956 there was a movie *Tiga Dara*...And there was one more, I think a copy of Hindi movie. ...My father also had a film office. They sponsored one or two productions. But mainly [they were] into importing and distributing...It's one of the businesses that Indians were into since the time they came—textiles, sporting goods and movies...I have photographs in our office when we used to have Diwali prayers in the office and you can see the background—it's all film posters. (Sheeja, Indonesian Sindhi, personal communication, 22 Feb. 2013)

Most probably it was the local Indonesian producers who encouraged Sindhi businessmen to sponsor local production of films, especially those which were planned as a joint production between Indonesian and Indian filmmakers. Seeing the increasing popularity of Indian movies among the Indonesian audience, local producers were looking for a way to capitalise on it. Salim Said quoted Djamaluddin Malik, a prominent Indonesian producer, saying: "If the audience wants Indian films, we'll give them Indian, until they get bored" (Said 1982:42). Malik had experience and expertise in film production but lacked funds and access to the Indian film industry, which, in his opinion, could increase the chances of producing a commercially successful copy of a Hindi film. Partnership with the local Sindhis looked promising in that respect: Sindhis were recent migrants, who maintained close connections with their family members across the globe, including India. Moreover, Sindhis were usually well-versed in English and/or Hindi, the language(s) essential for communicating with Hindi film professionals. In 1956, with help of GH Sawlani, a local Sindhi, Malik brought a production team from India.[63] The crew, consisting of an Indian director and scriptwriter, BK Raj, as well as 12 technicians from India, produced a copy of a Hindi

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only film import and production but also distribution and exhibition (Sen 2006; Setijadi-Dunn & Barker 2010).

[63] GH Sawlani was an active member of the Sindhi community in Java and had a strong Indian identity. Most probably he came to Indonesia before the Partition as during the Japanese occupation GH Sawlani was a volunteer for the Indian National Army sent from Java to Malaya (Mani 1993b:105).

film under the Indonesian title *Djandjiku* ("My promise", 1956), the film mentioned by my respondent Sheeja (pseudonym). Curiously enough, the film failed to attract the Indonesian audience. A year later, in 1957, Malik collaborated with GH Sawlani and the Indian production crew for another project *Sendja Indah* ("Beautiful twilight", 1957) but most probably it was another flop because after 1957 Malik and GH Sawlani never worked together again.[64] The reasons for the commercial failure are unknown. It is possible that watching Hindi films as foreign, exotic products was an enjoyable experience, but watching Indonesian actors performing in accordance with the canons of Hindi movies was awkward, and thus not appreciated by the audience.

Another film, *Tiga Dara* ("Three maidens", 1956) which, according to Sheeja, was sponsored by the Sindhi businessmen, turned out to be a great hit. Unlike *Djandjiku, Tiga Dara* was written and directed by the local filmmaker, Usmar Ismail, officially the founding father of *Film Nasional*, or Indonesian national cinema. It should be mentioned that the catalogues and scholarly literature on the Indonesian cinema bear no traces of financial support of *Tiga Dara* by the Sindhis. Usmar Ismail is usually mentioned not only as a director and scriptwriter but also a producer of the film. Despite the silence of the historical sources, it seems likely that Sindhis sponsored the production and even became involved in the creative process. *Tiga Dara* was a musical—an unusual genre for the Indonesian cinema in general and for the director Usmar Ismail in particular, since by 1956 he had made himself a name by directing epic dramas.[65]

In general, the names of Sindhis who sponsored local production in the 1950s – 1960s remain largely unknown. Partially this is because some Sindhis who sponsored several productions did not stay in business for long. Partially it is because in the 1950s and the 1960s Sindhis were still foreign citizens and could not register businesses under their own names. Apart from GH Sawlani, the 1950s Indonesian cinema archives keep

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[64] In one of his interviews Malik made some very unflattering remarks about Sindhi business practices (Arora 1982).

[65] The works of Usmar Ismail included such dramas as *Darah dan Doa* ("The Long March", 1950), *Enam Djam di Jogja* ("Six Hours in Jogya", 1951) and *Lewat Djam Malam* ("After the Curfew", 1954). Usmar Ismail did produce several comedies *Harta Karun* ("Hidden Treasures", 1949), *Krisis* ("Crisis", 1953), *Lagi-lagi krisis* ("Crisis Again", 1955) but never before *Tiga Dara* he worked in the genre of musical.

the name of one other Sindhi producer—KK Jiwat. During the late 1950s KK Jiwat (Jiwat Kemchandani), together with a local partner, established PT Bola Dunia, a production house (henceforth PH) that played a key role in facilitating the establishment of other Sindhi families in the film production business: "all these people [Punjabi, Soraya, Samtani] learnt from Bola Dunia" (Nagesh, Indonesian Sindhi, former executive producer, personal communication, 17 Apr. 2013).

In the late 1960s the second generation of Sindhis, those who were either born in Indonesia or came to Indonesia at a very young age, started to enter the film import and production industries, relying on the credit from family and Sindhi community members. Their entrance into the film business was facilitated by a number of factors, including weak competition and state regulations encouraging film import and later production of local films. The lack of competition in the film importing business was the result of the political situation in the country. In the first half of the twentieth century the major players in the film importing and production businesses were migrants from China. They laid the foundation of Indonesian cinema, acting as financiers and distributors as well as directors and cameramen (Sen 2006:171). By and large, Chinese Indonesians drove the Indonesian film industry until the mid-1960s, with a short break during the Japanese occupation when most Chinese businesses were closed (Setijadi-Dunn & Barker 2010:26). In the mid-1960s Chinese Indonesians were again forced out of the business. This time it had to do with the tragic events that followed the coup of 1965 marking the end of Sukarno's rule (discussed in chapter One). The violence that broke out after the coup was one of the biggest genocides in modern history and cost the lives of at least 500,000 Indonesians.[66] Although the violence of 1965–1966 should not be seen simply as anti-Chinese (Cribb 2001b), the massacres carried in the name of purging Indonesia from the communist threat, largely associated with China, had a severe impact on the Chinese Indonesians. When political order was somehow restored, it took Chinese Indonesians who survived the massacres some time to re-establish themselves in businesses including film distribution and production. As Sen put it, in 1965 the film industry "purged itself of the left's influence" (Sen 1994b:57). This means that people whose opinions, practices, or simply descent

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[66] The exact number is still debated by the historians. For more see Cribb (2001b).

could make state officials suspicious of their allegiance to Communism ideology, were banished from the film industry.

At the same time, the new government, realising that "Indonesian people, stressed with the political situation, needed cheap and simple entertainment" (Endah 2005:107), lifted all restrictions on film imports, introduced by Sukarno in 1964 as a part of this anti-American campaign. The abolition of the ban on imported films and absence of serious competition made film importing a particularly lucrative business. Raam Punjabi, the future King of Soap Opera, and Manu Sukmajaya (Madhu, or Manoo, Mahtani) started importing films from the US and India in 1968.[67] The Samtani brothers, Shankar and Gope, established their company, Rapi Films, the same year. Harris Lasmana (Haresh Ladharam), later one of the key figures in Cinema 21 business, entered the industry in 1970. [68] Several Sindhis got involved in production as executive producers without establishing their own companies. For example, Sabirin Kasdani joined Rapi Films as an executive producer.

In the late 1960s and the early 1970s from the importing business young Sindhis went into film production. In the official interviews for various local newspapers, magazines and TV shows, Sindhi producers usually explain their interest in production by their passion and love for cinema and, in some instances, the desire to improve the poor quality of the national cinema.[69] Although the producers' sentiments and their passion for quality cinema should not be dismissed as empty rhetoric, the government regulations aimed at boosting local production probably played the major role in the Sindhis' decision to go into production. In 1967 the government introduced Ministerial Decree No71 (SK 71), which imposed a flat levy for each film imported into Indonesia to build a fund available for local production (Sen 1994b:57). Samtani brothers produced their first film, *Air Mata Kekasih* ("Lover's tears", dir.Lilik Sudjio) in 1971.

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[67] Manu started as a booker for Eastern Indonesia and then moved to the importing business in Jakarta. He produced his first movie in 1976 (Kristanto et al. 2005:282).

[68] Harris Lasmana went into importing business in 1970 and started producing in 1976 with Nusantara Films (Kristanto et al. 2005:210).

[69] The discourse of improving the quality of national cinema was most probably a result of subsequent reflective thinking of Sindhis and their attempts to inscribe themselves into the *film nasional* narrative. It was not the driving force behind their decision-making at the beginning of their career in film production business.

Punjabi followed suit in 1972 with his technically innovative film *Mama* (dir.Wim Umboh, scriptwriter Sjuman Djaya). Raam's name was not mentioned in the credits as his production company, PT Indako, was registered under the name of his business partner's wife, an Indonesian national Maria Gultom (Endah 2005:110). In 1972 Raam still held an Indian passport (he became an Indonesian citizen in 1976), and according to the existing legislation could not register his company under his name. Another regulation, issued in 1975, in a way "forced" production on the importers: in order to get a licence to import five films the importer needed to sponsor one local film (Endah 2005:147). Manu Sukmajaya and Harris Lasmana made their first films in 1976. Manu sponsored the production of the film directed by Sjuman Djaya, *Si Doel Anak Modern* ("Dul, A Child of Modernity"), while Lasmana produced two films in cooperation with director Arizal, *Janji Sarina* ("Sarina's Promise") and *Doktor Firdaus* ("Doctor Firdaus").

Jointly in the period between the 1970s and the 1980s Sindhi producers maintained an annual level of production at around 10–15 titles. Samtani's Rapi Films and Punjabi's companies produced two to three titles per year.[70] KK Jiwat, Madhu Mahtani, and Harris Lasmana released at least one title each year. When a new generation of Sindhis, i.e. Ram Soraya (Raam Lalchand Pridhani), Shanker/Shankar RS (Shanker Ramchand Shamdasani) and Chand Parvez Servia joined the production industry in the 1980s, the total number of films released by the Sindhi producers went up as the newcomers maintained a similar and often higher level of annual production.[71] Raam Soraya, for instance, produced at least four titles per year. These numbers show that in the 1970s – 1980s the films released by the Sindhis constituted quite a significant part of the overall annual production of local films: during some years the titles released with the financial support of the Sindhis made up to a quarter of the total annual production. For example, in 1981 out of 72 titles registered in the film database

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[70] PT Indako/Panorama Films (1974–1979) and later PT Tiga Cakra/Parkit films (1979–1990).

[71] Similar to the previous generation, prior to going into production, Raam Soraya, Chand Parvez and Shanker were in other film-related businesses, like import (Raam Soraya) and exhibition (Chand Parvez). It should be mentioned that Chand Parvez Servia, whose parents came to Indonesia from Sindh, does not associate himself with the community of local Sindhis, for whom Hinduism and links to India are important identity markers. Chand Parvez is a Muslim and refers to himself as an Indonesian of Pakistani descent.

20 were made by the Sindhi producers. In 1982 15 films out of 50 were made with the sponsorship of the Sindhi businessmen.[72]

More important is, however, not the quantity but the popularity of films produced by the Sindhi producers among the Indonesian audience. Such films as *Romi dan Juli* ("Romeo and Juliette", 1974, Rapi Films) *Jaka Sembung* ("The Warrior" 1981, Rapi Films), *Catatan Si Boy* ("Boy's Diary", 1987, Bola Dunia), *Makin Lama Makin Asyik* ("The Longer, The Cooler", 1987, Soraya Intercine) *DKI Warkop* series (1979–early 1990s, Parkit Film/Bola Dunia), *Petualangan Cinta Nyi Blorong* ("Love adventures of Nyi Blorong", 1986, Soraya Intercine), featuring such mega stars as Suzanna, Meriam Bellina, and Roy Marten, were among the most popular titles of the 1970s–1980s. According to "The Brief Cultural History of Indonesian Cinema" published by the Ministry of Education and Culture:

> there was time in the history of Indonesian cinema when everything was (almost) picture perfect. That was the 1970s and 1980s. Glamorous movie stars, legendary directors, and memorable movies delighted the critics and thrilled movie goers who flocked to the theatres by the hundreds of thousands. (Joris 2012:86)

It is important to emphasise that Sindhi producers worked not only in the genres of teen romances, slapstick comedies, and category B films as often assumed. Throughout their career in film business Sindhi producers collaborated with such key figures of national cinema as Teguh Karya, Sjuman Djaya, Wim Umboh, Arifin Noer, Slamet Rahardjo, Christine Hakim, Jenny Rachman, Deddy Mizwar, and Rano Karno. Sindhis' decisions on whom to work with were based on the tastes of the audience, not the status of the filmmakers/actors in the *film nasional* framework (discussed in the Introduction). For Sindhi producers "good film" meant a film watched and appreciated by a large number of people. Meanwhile, in the *film nasional* framework "good" meant ideologically correct and nationalistic. These two definitions of "good" coincided in the late 1970s and the early 1980s when the viewers flocked to cinemas to watch historical dramas, which then made Sindhi producers interested in sponsoring history-based films. In other

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[72] My calculations are based on the data available at www.filmindonesia.co.id (last accessed 23 May, 2016).

words, Sindhi producers were not strangers to the moral categories of "good" and "bad". They simply defined "good" differently.

As global traders, Sindhi producers imagined their audience not only within the national borders but transnationally. From the mid-1970s Sindhis started exploring other Asian markets, initially only as official distributors of Indian and American films. The first contacts that Sindhis established in Asia were in Hong Kong, Manila, Singapore and Bangkok, the cities with the largest Sindhi communities in the Asian region. [73] Sindhi connections facilitated the penetration of the local markets in the region. From the late 1970s Sindhis started using established distribution networks to sell Indonesian films. In 1988 Rosihan Anwar, a famous Indonesian film journalist, pointed out that channels of sales and distribution of Indonesian films in Asia

> are not generally known to the lay man. It is strictly a commercial transaction between individual businessmen on both sides, based on the law of supply and demand. Probably the conduit is what is often referred in Jakarta as the "Singapore connection" and the "Bombay connection". What it means exactly one does not know. (Anwar 1988:8–9)

These unknown Singapore and Bombay connections were the global ethnic networks that Indonesian Sindhis relied upon in their business operations, including film import, production and distribution.

The familiarity with the tastes of the international audience through the distribution business allowed Sindhi producers to tailor Indonesian films for the international market. Horror and action genres, often labelled by critics as "cult" or "exploitation movies" (Imanjaya 2009), turned out to be in most demand internationally. Capturing the overseas market with other genres proved to be extremely difficult. Indonesian action and horror genres appealed to the international, mostly Western, audience because they looked "a lot more exotic" than films of similar genre from Japan or Hong Kong. They had "less predictable" but solid and simple stories where good would usually win over bad (Imanjaya 2009:148). Most importantly, Indonesian films "were not trying to be clever or 'postmodern'. They just wanted to

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[73] The Sindhi community of Hong Kong is probably the largest in the region and accounts for at least 7500; Singapore—5000; Manila—4000; Thailand—1000 (Markovits 2000:281).

entertain" (Imanjaya 2009:148). Probably the Samtani brothers were the first producers to release Indonesian action films on the international market.[74] These films were produced by a local crew and with local artists. In the early 1980s the Punjabis came up with several action films, a copy of the popular American action film "Rambo". Punjabi's films differed from other films of the Sindhi producers because the leading role was given to the New Zealand actor, Peter O'Brien. Casting a foreigner for the leading role was, according to Punjabi, a response to the criticism that he received from his foreign colleagues in the distribution business. According to the foreign distributors Indonesian actors, especially males, were "not pleasant to look at" (Endah 2005:175). To capture the international audience Raam was advised to go with "a more Western look". Raam followed the advice and cast Caucasians or in some cases *Indos* (Indo-Europeans) for the leading roles.

In the late 1980s Sindhi producers fully re-oriented the film production business towards the international video market. Such a business move was necessary because the political and economic interests of the ruling elites made distribution and exhibition of the local films in Indonesia almost impossible. The popularity of movie-going in the 1970s and 1980s caused rapid monopolisation of the market with only three associations controlling the whole film importing business (one association for European-American films, one for Chinese Mandarin films and one for Indian and other Asian films). These associations were headed by cronies of Suharto, Sudwikatmono, Suharto's cousin, and Benny Suherman, and were under the direct control of the Ministry of Information. Importantly, some members of these associations, including Suherman and Sudwikatmono, were also the owners of the cinema chain known as Cinema XXI, or Cinema 21. As a result, the movie theatres gave priority to the imported rather than locally produced films. By the late 1980s the production of films for local exhibition was in stagnation.[75]

Meanwhile, the international VHS (Video Home System) business was expanding and the demand for exotic and cost-effective "filler" titles grew rapidly

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[74] The first movie released by Rapi Films on the international market was called *Primitif* ("Primitive", released in Indonesia in 1978, globally—in 1980) followed by *Pengabdi Setan* ("Satan's Slave", 1980/1982) and *Ratu Ilmu Hitam* ("The Queen of Black Magic", 1981/1983).

[75] For more on difficulties in local film production and distribution during the late 1980s, see Barker (2011).

(Imanjaya 2009:146). To increase the appeal of Indonesian titles in the international market Sindhi producers started collaborating not only with foreign actors but also with international production crews:

> My dad always wanted to go to the foreign market. But we realised it was difficult with Indonesian directors because they don't understand how foreigners like the movies. So we found one director David Worth who worked with Jean Claude van Damme... And we brought him to Jakarta. We shot three movies with him. (Sunil Samtani, Indonesian Sindhi, owner of Rapi Films, personal communication, 14 Feb.2013)

Shot in Indonesia but with help of international crew, the films mentioned by Sunil did very well in the international VHS market and were sold to many parts of the world including Eastern Europe and Latin America. The Punjabi brothers made a step further and went into co-production with Hollywood companies, which resulted in production of two films, *Jakarta* (1987) and *Java Burn* (1988), with the later released internationally under the title "Diamond Run". These films offered the international audience an updated, or an upgraded, version of popular Indonesian action: it was Indonesia viewed through foreign lenses because the production crew and the main actors were from the US.[76] The local Indonesian actors, as well as Indonesia itself, featured only in secondary roles.

To summarise, the contribution of Sindhi producers to the Indonesian film industry was substantial. In the 1950s they introduced Indian films to the local market and acted as financiers of local production for a large number of films of various genres. From the late 1960s onwards Sindhis increased the production of popular films. Indonesian viewers started to go to the cinemas to enjoy not only foreign but also local films. The international ambitions of Sindhi producers had a significant impact on the local media industry in the period between the 1970s and the early 1990s. In response to the demands of the international audience, Sindhis contributed to promoting Indonesian films abroad and developed the Indonesian horror genre as a distinct brand of

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[76] Together with the partners from the US film industry Raam Punjabi produced two films: *Jakarta*, directed by Charles Kauffman, screenplay by Robert Chappell, leading actors – Chris Noth and Suzie Pie; and *Java Burn*, director and scriptwriter Robert Chappel, leading actors— Peter Bodzek and Peter Fox.

Indonesian cinema.[77] Moreover, Sindhis gave an opportunity for Indonesian film practitioners to work together with crews from overseas. Although international collaboration in the film industry was common in the first half of the twentieth century, in the post-colonial period it was discouraged. Sindhis re-introduced joint production as a common practice. Lastly, Sindhis normalised casting of *Indos*, Indonesians of European descent, in locally produced films.

In the remaining part of the chapter I continue to follow Sindhis as they navigated the Indonesian media industries. I examine how liberalisation of television changed media industries. Particular attention will be paid to the state of financial and human resources available for those who wished to establish themselves in the rapidly growing market of television content production. I will show that the financing and human resource management systems that existed in the Indonesian television industry prior to liberalisation were unable to support the rapidly growing television industry. In such a situation only those players who had access to alternative sources of financial and human capital were able to successfully enter the industry and retain their position in the market.

3. Television and Sindhis in the late 1980s–the early 1990s

Although Sindhis were able to stay in the media business by orienting themselves towards the international market, it was clear that the local film production and distribution was rapidly dying. While trying to stay in the cinema business by producing films for the international market, Sindhis continued to look for other opportunities available locally. The liberalisation of the television industry opened up new possibilities. The Punjabi brothers opened a branch focusing solely on production of soap opera (*sinetron*) for commercial television in 1990. The Samtanis and Shankar SK started making *sinetron* in 1993. Raam Soraya produced his first soap opera in 1996. Overall, Sindhi producers were the first to offer locally produced *sinetron* to commercial television, and below I examine the circumstances that allowed them to do so.

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[77] Whether increase in production of horror films is a positive or a negative development for the Indonesian film industry is another question.

The late 1980s marked a new era for the Indonesian television industry. On 20 October 1987 the government legislated "to establish a pay TV service for Jakarta and environs (*Menteri Penerangan* No.190A 1987)" and a week later "TVRI nominated Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia (RCTI) as the provider of the first commercial television service in Indonesia" (Kitley 2000:224–225). This was the official end of a more than twenty-year state monopoly of the television space (1962–1987).

Prior to liberalisation, television, as the main tool of nation-building, was by and large under the control of the state. The state was able to provide the industry with financial support and human resources. During the first years (the 1960s) TVRI had a "curious status", resembling nongovernment, non-profit organisations, and a government agency at the same time (Kitley 2000:34; Armando 2011:74). Gradually, however, TVRI grew fully financially dependent on the state. In 1980 the staff of TVRI (around three thousand people) were turned into public servants on the payroll of the Department of Information (Kitley 2000:36–37). In 1981, with a total ban on advertisement (present on TVRI since its inception), TVRI lost its last opportunity to attract funding independently from the Department of Information. Television content fell under full control of the state—both ideologically and financially.

Similar to the financial system, the management of television cadres during several decades preceding the 1990s was also in the hands of the state. The state, through various institutions, took care of the education, distribution and re-distribution of human resources. The preparation of technologically savvy cadres was provided by the government or semi-government educational institutions like *Institut Kesenian Jakarta* (Jakarta Institute of Arts, henceforth IKJ), *Universitas Indonesia* (University of Indonesia), *Institut Seni Rupa* (Institute of Fine Arts) and Multi Media Training Center (MMTC) in Yogyakarta.[78] In addition, TVRI had its own recruitment and training system. In the 1960s and 1970s TVRI sent its employees abroad, to the UK, Germany and Japan. But with the gradual increase of state control, the TVRI management established its own courses to prepare "well-rounded communication professionals" (Alfian & Chu 1981:46) trained to produce politically correct and engaging programs.

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[78] IKJ was first financed by the Governor of Jakarta. MMTC was established in 1984 with technical help from Japan. It mostly specialised in preparing cadres for television (Anwar 1988:12).

The distribution and re-distribution of human labour in the media industries was performed by such professional organisations as *Ikatan Karyawan Film dan Televisi* (Union of Film and Television Employees, henceforth KFT),[79] *Persatuan Artis Film Indonesia* (Indonesian Film Artists Union, henceforth PARFI), *Persatuan Perusahan Film Indonesia* (Indonesian Film Producers' Union PPFI), *Assosiasi Importir Film* (Association of Film Importers, AIF). Although officially independent, these organisations were, in fact, under control of the state. For example, KFT was established by the filmmakers as a non-political organisation to set standards and regulate work relationships in the industry. But in 1976 the state designated KFT as the only legal professional organisation and made its membership compulsory for everyone wishing to work in the industry (Sen 1994b:56). Everyone who wanted to produce a film had to obtain an approval from the members of KFT. Such mechanism helped the state to exercise control over production by keeping the filmmakers with oppositional views out of the industry (Sen 1994b:56).

When the media industries experienced some faults in the human resource supply system, the state-related organisations were usually able to fix them. For example, in the mid-1970s TVRI faced a serious shortage of production personnel. With the growing demand for locally produced dramas as well as the increasing pressure from the state to convey government messages to the audience, TVRI faced the problem of small numbers and insufficient professionalism of its staff in the drama department—one of the main departments responsible for the production of propaganda-charged programs called TV-plays, or *sandiwara*. The shortage was especially obvious in the producing/directing, scriptwriting and acting units (Alfian & Chu 1981:50). The TVRI management solved the problem by asking the members of KFT to work for television. In that way, such prominent figures of *film nasional*, and also the founding members of KFT, as Teguh Karya, Arifin C.Noer, Riantiarno Putu Wijaya, Asrul Sani, Arswendo Atmowiloto, Alex Zulkarnain and others became frequent guests on TVRI in the 1970s and the early 1980s (Sunindyo 1993:136). Meanwhile, PARFI extended a helping hand to the acting department. In short, in the 1970s–1980s television was under full control

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[79] KFT was organised by "the most highly paid and highly skilled professionals, the 'creative forces'" (Sen 1994b:55). For more on KFT and other professional associations during the New Order see Sen (1994b).

of the state. The state provided television with funds and managed human capital required for local production.

Opening the television industry to private investment (the late 1980s) meant that the state ceased to be the only resource for financial and human capital. The responsibility for local production was allocated to the private television stations (with the only exception being the news programs, whose production was still fully in the hands of TVRI, the state-owned television station). While the state was still trying to control television content ideologically (through the Censorship Body), it was unable and unwilling to provide rapidly growing commercial television with financial support and trained staff.[80] In the post-oil boom economy (the early 1980s), the state had no extra resources to allocate for production of television content.

The liberalisation of the television industry was not a result of the gradual growth of the economy but an act of political despair. As Sen pointed out, when Suharto finally sanctioned commercial television, there was "no state monopoly left in the nation's television industry to give up" (Sen 1994a:123). The loss of the powerful grip of the state over television space was mainly a result of two processes: growing dissatisfaction from all sectors of society with the didactic tone of television programs and development of technology (Sen 1994a; Kitley 2000). Technological change (video, spillover transmission and transnational satellite) facilitated the access of an audience weary of the television propaganda of TVRI to alternative entertainment (Kitley 2000:217). Each year an increasing number of Indonesian viewers had access to foreign programs. Sanctioning of commercial television was an emergency measure taken by the authoritarian regime in its attempt "to woo the national audience back to a national media space with a different kind of television than the government was seen to be capable of providing" (Sen 1994a:123). At the same time, the state was pressured by the local economic elites and international companies, which saw big potential in commercial television as an alternative form of entertainment as well as advertising. (From 1981 onwards the state prohibited advertising on state television and this regulation, a victory of politics over economics (Sen 1994a), created a significant hindrance for big corporations to reach targeted markets).

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[80] Within a period of seven years there were five new free-to-air national television stations operating in Indonesia. RCTI was established in 1987, SCTV—1990, TPI—1991, AnTV—1993, Indosiar—1995.

During the first years of television liberalisation, private television stations were not pressured by the state to show local content and mostly relied on imported programs. Curiously enough, many of these programs were supplied by Sindhi businessmen, who quickly mobilised their global connections with the leading media distributers, mostly in Latin America and India, to provide commercial television stations, TPI in particular, with a steady supply of cheap programs. The state turned a blind eye to the preponderance of imported programs on private television stations because the imported programs did their main job—they brought the Indonesian audience back to national television space. In addition, the distribution of licences for commercial television among Suharto's family members and cronies put Suharto into a position when he had to balance his political and economic interests.[81] He was personally interested in the profitability of the television business, and with canned imported programs, television was on the right track: canned programs were very cheap but attracted a lot of advertisements. But from the ideological point of view the preponderance of imported programs with "foreign values" was not exactly in Suharto's interests. After a few years of foreign product dominance, the state began pressuring private stations to restore the allocation of no less than 70 percent of broadcasting time to the local programs (as was required for TVRI).

To satisfy the state requirements to air local programs and to minimise the risks of possible failure to produce popular shows, television stations allocated local production to the independent producers. In the early 1990s the commercial TV stations still showed no intention to spend money on local production and training of their own staff. Local production was expensive and labour intensive and thus risky, while imported programs were cheap and fuss-free. According to my respondents, in the early 1990s the average price of a one-hour canned program was around US$200–300 plus insignificant expenses for translation/subtitling. Meanwhile it was impossible to produce any program locally for this amount of money.

Thus, in the early 1990s the state requirement to broadcast locally produced programs and the reluctance of private TV stations to get into local production created opportunities for small independent entrepreneurs to enter the emerging industry of

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[81] Bakrie, the founder of AnTV (1993), was the only media businessman who was not particularly close to Suharto personally. He was, however the head of *Golkar*, the ruling party.

content production for national television. Within a couple of years there were hundreds of PHs trying to establish themselves in the rapidly growing and highly promising business. However, with no support from the "traditional" sponsors—the state and television management—the aspiring producers had to look for other resources of financial and human capital.

It should be mentioned that for independent producers, production of TV series/serials was an obvious choice to grasp a niche in television production—if successful it could guarantee a stable income. Both locally produced series (TV-plays, or *sandiwara,* since 1985 called *sinetron*) and foreign serials were the favourite programs of the Indonesian audience from the late 1970s (Alfian & Chu 1981; Kitley 2000). At the same time, of all television programs, production of TV series/serials required the most financial and human capital. Along with the high production cost of each episode, the production required a large initial investment because of slow financial turnover in the Indonesian television industry. According to the heads of sinetron PHs, commercial television stations usually paid PHs not upfront but only six months after the first episode was aired. Television management explained the delay in payment by the late payments from the companies that advertise their products during commercial breaks, the main source of revenue for commercial television.[82] Such payment schemes means that for at least six months PHs had to use their own money to keep supplying TV stations with episodes. So in the 1990s, when each *sinetron* title was aired once a week, PHs needed to self-finance at least 24 episodes. With the production cost of one episode varying from US$10000 to US$30000, the initial investment would be at least US$240000. In most cases, however, TV stations would pay PHs only a year after the first episodes had been aired, which means that the initial investment could easily be half a million US dollars.[83] Along with substantial financial investment, production of *sinetron* also required a large number of professional staff. If quiz shows, for example, could be done with a minimal number of professional staff, mostly technically trained, production of *sinetron* meant the coordination of a large number of

[82] My respondents often expressed suspicion over such delayed payments and suggested that the stations put money into use to generate more income for themselves before paying PHs back.

[83] The production costs and the terms of payment were provided by my respondents—production house owners, employees and television program directors.

creative and technical media practitioners. As I show below, neither financial nor human resources were easily available in Indonesia in the early 1990s.

3.1. Financial Resources

With the absence of state and private television support, banks and private savings were the only two other possible sources of financing available within the national borders. It turned out that local banks, whether state or private, refused to give loans for production of television content. Production for commercial television was a new, and thus a financially risky undertaking. Banks did not want to bear risks in case producers were unable to sell their product to television stations. Most aspiring *sinetron* producers were from the film world and had no personal connections to the financial institutions, which in the Indonesian context, was often useful to secure a loan. Even well-respected personalities of the film industry failed to raise money with local monetary institutions. For example, Rano Karno, a famous actor, was not able to obtain a loan from the bank to finance the production of *Si Doel Anak Sekolahan* ("Educated Doel"), and eventually had to sell his belongings (car, his wife's jewellery) and mortgage his house to raise funds for production (Loven 2008:77).

Out of all producers trying their luck in the emerging economy, Sindhis had the most financial sources to rely on due to their community network. First, Sindhis were able to get financial assistance from their fellow Sindhis across the globe. For example, throughout his career in media business Raam Punjabi was able to mobilise the financial support of Sindhi community members residing in Singapore, the US, India and Philippines.[84] Other Sindhi producers also relied on their international connections to secure the funds for local production.[85] It is important to underline that as such financial support was in the form of personal loans, from one businessman to another, it

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[84] Most examples that I give in this chapter refer to Raam Punjabi because Raam was quite open about his business practices in his autobiographical book *Panggung Hidup Raam Punjabi* ("Autobiography of Raam Punjabi") (Endah 2005).

[85] During my fieldwork I often heard that the media production business in Indonesia (as well as India) was a money laundering machine for the global Sindhi community. As production business in Indonesia has a lot of unregistered financial transactions and operates with large sums of cash, it is possible that these rumours might have some grain of truth in it. But I have no "hard" evidence to support these rumours.

did not require long formal procedures (as in the case of obtaining loans from the bank). In other words, by mobilising their transnational connections Sindhis were able to accumulate substantial funds in a short period. Moreover, as the transactions were made through private (not corporate) accounts, they were not subject to tax

In addition, Sindhis, unlike most other players, were able to secure loans from the local banks, again thanks to the community connections. As a rule, Jakartan Sindhis borrowed from three local banks—Bank Swadesi, Bank Rama and Bank Subendra. All these banks had direct links to the Sindhi community. Bank Swadesi was run by the Sindhi family (Chugani).[86] Bank Rama had close links with the Jakartan Sindhi community through Mohanlal Harjani, the stakeholder in Bank Rama. As for bank Subendra, it was owned by Sudwikatmono, who had close business relations with Harris Lasmana's and Fulwani families.[87] Ethnic community connections were important here not only, or not so much, because of trust. As discussed in chapter Two, for Sindhis, monetary transactions within the community have an important social aspect. Giving a loan and paying it back are the ways to demonstrate wealth, and thus, social prestige within the community. This social aspect made it easier for Sindhis to obtain loans from the abovementioned banks. Moreover, from the practical point of view, for most Sindhi producers *sinetron* production was not their only business, but just one among many.[88] Thus, the banks took less risk issuing credit for the Sindhi businessmen (compared with other aspiring *sinetron* producers, mostly former filmmakers) because they could return their money even if the *sinetron* turned out to be a flop.

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[86] "Profil Komisaris", Bank of India Indonesia, http://www.bankswadesi.co.id/main.php?hal=management&lang=1&chl=1 (last accessed 6 Nov. 2015). In 2007 the bank was acquired by Bank of India. As per 2015, Chugani family members retain executive positions in the bank.

[87] Harris Lasmana (Haresh Ladharam) was a partner of Sudwikatmono and Suherman in Production (Nusantarta Films), import and distribution (Camila Nusantara Films), exhibition (Cinema 21) businesses.

[88] For example, Raam Soraya has business in spare parts. The Punjabis and Samtanis invest in property. Samtanis also have several other businesses (mining, restaurant, etc).

3.2. Human Resources

Human resources available on the local market were scarce and largely unfit for the rapidly changing media industry. Those entrepreneurs who relied on the locally available human resources found themselves non-competitive. As liberalisation of television was mostly a political decision and not the natural development of the market, local professional and technical training lagged "far behind the boom in television capacity" (Kitley 2004:143). In addition, commercial television posed new demands on the industry professionals. It required a new set of professional skills and a new mindset, which the existing system of human resources supply proved unable to provide. Educational institutions, such as IKJ and TVRI courses, continued to prepare media professionals in accordance with old requirements and within the timeframes that could not satisfy the new, rapidly expanding market. Neither the number of graduates, nor the skills the graduates acquired during their training, were able to satisfy the demands of five national television stations set up within the span of a few years. Film professionals available on the market in the early 1990s due to the stagnation of the film industry could not save the situation. Although many of them did end up working for commercial television, they had to come through a rather long process of re-qualification, as their skills in filmmaking turned to be quite useless in production of commercial television programs.

In the 1990s the disparity between the technical skills available on the labour market and the technical skills required for the production of content for commercial television was glaring, particularly in the drama department. For example, scriptwriters, both with film and TVRI backgrounds, lacked the skills of constructing narratives around commercial breaks. Although present on TVRI for the first decade, since 1975 the advertisements had been allocated a special slot within the television schedule and did not interrupt the flow of the programs, which means that for almost two decades preceding commercial television, the stories for TV were constructed similar to feature films, as a single piece of narrative. Moreover, neither television nor film screenwriters had the skills to create "cliff-hangers", a plot device used to convince the audience to return to the program after breaks, short or long. As one of my respondents, with training and experience in filmmaking admitted that

> for TV you have to go through some adaptation process. The main thing is—you can't bore audience between commercials. In TV it is only dramatic things. It's a bit tiring for those who are not ready for this. (Budi Susanto, Indonesian scriptwriter, personal communication, 1 March, 2013)

In addition, Indonesian film scriptwriters were trained to work individually. They understood scriptwriting as an individual artistic endeavour and tried to approach it as such, refusing to work in teams. Writing individually always ended in fast burn out: "they [film scriptwriters] got exhausted very quickly...they couldn't come up with a new idea every week" (Budi Susanto, Indonesian scriptwriter, personal communication, 1 March, 2013). Meanwhile, television writers, who had some experience working in teams, were unprepared to develop complex stories. TVRI *sinetron* had simple plots to facilitate transmission of government messages to the audience—the main goal of TVRI soap operas. Each serial introduced the audience to one important idea only.[89] In contrast, the aim of commercial television is to keep the audience entertained, so stories should have convoluted plots.

Along with scriptwriters, other members of production crews also lacked the skills required for production of commercial entertainment programs. Film directors and directors of photography (DOPs) had to adapt to frequent close-up shots in soap operas. Moreover, film directors lacked skills to "build", or "establish", strong characters within a few episodes. For actors, especially senior ones, commercial television was more of a mental challenge: they "regarded the new medium with suspicion and showed lack of interest in commercial projects" (Loven 2008:48).

Moreover, state institutions preparing cadres for media production industries had no production management courses in their curriculum: "In IKJ they only talk about art. The courses are all about creativity. But they don't teach about production. But it is important—how to raise money, how to understand the market" (Prasetyo, Indonesian *sinetron* director, personal communication, 12 Feb. 2013). As in the 1960–1980s the

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[89] For example, *Losmen* ("The Inn", the early 1980s) served as an example of correct female behaviour in a Javanese society. *Serumpun Bambu* ("Bamboo Clump", 1987), sponsored by the department of transmigration, provided information on opportunities in transmigration areas, *Keluarga Rahmat* ("Rahmat's Family", 1987) and *Jendela Rumah Kita* ("The Window of our Home", 1990) promoted *gaya hidup sederhana* (a modest lifestyle) (Aripurnami 1996:251).

state-controlled organisations took most responsibility for production process training for such positions as deemed unnecessary.

Similar to technical training, the ideological, or rather mental preparation provided by the state educational and training institutions was also out of date. Film and television graduates continued to evaluate the quality of media products based on the binaries perpetuated by the ideologists of *film nasional*: "good" meant national, idealistic and educative, and "bad" was equated with foreign, commercial and entertaining. For example, in IKJ students were watching only classics of world cinematography, generally understood as European art-house cinema. Popular, commercial cinema, including Bollywood was not just ignored but, according to my respondent, banned by IKJ.

The idea that good media products should first and foremost entertain, not educate, was particularly challenging for the "old-school" media practitioners—they could not see the television audience as clients whose tastes and desires had to be served. Most filmmakers and television workers imagined their audience as a locally oriented, homogenous, childlike nation, in constant need of nurture (Kitley 2000). Moreover, film professionals positioned themselves higher than their imagined audience. They saw themselves as part of international elites. One scriptwriter with background in film recalled that

> one of the things I was criticised by Wicky [Olindo, *sinetron* producer of Sindhi descent] was that my dialogues didn't sound like Indonesian, more like English translations. Maybe because I imagined it in English first. Then I tried to blend, I tried to read daily newspapers, the cheap ones, [those] for bus drivers, for *tukang* [unskilled worker]. (Budi Susanto, Indonesian scriptwriter, personal communication, 1 March, 2013)

The graduates of IKJ and similar institutes spoke a different language from their audience, in literary and figurative sense. They were on a mission to lift the Indonesian audience up to some imagined intellectual and aesthetic standards. Meanwhile, TVRI workers pursued the goals of teaching the viewers how to behave according to the expectations of the state (Aripurnami 1996). These attitudes towards the audience turned out to be useless for commercial television, the main function of which was to

serve the audience and "deliver" to the ultimate television clients, international corporations.

Sindhi producers and production managers did not entirely rely on the state-supported institutions for human resources. The problem of acute shortage of directors, editors and scriptwriters was solved by recruiting overseas labour—a practice that Sindhis had applied in the film industry since the 1980s. If for film production Sindhis mostly relied on the creative labour from the USA, for local *sinetron* production Sindhi producers mobilised their connections with India. The job interviews with editors, directors and scriptwriters took place in India, where most Sindhi families had offices and/or company representatives. Although the choice of Indian professionals could be explained by the low cost of their labour, cultural considerations did play an important role in the hiring process. As a person in charge of overseas recruitment in one of major Sindhi PHs told me:

> there are no other foreigners [in *sinetron* production] as it's easier for producers to communicate with Indians. They [Indian professionals] are used to the mess, less expensive, less methodological. So common factor plays its role. (Prashant, Indian national, producer, personal communication, 7 March, 2013)

Professionals from India were a perfect match for Sindhi producers—they were experienced but affordable, spoke English and Hindi, the "power" languages of production (see previous chapter), but could also learn Indonesian quickly. They were hardworking but also quite relaxed about rules and regulations (in comparison with the professionals coming from the "Western" culture). Although directors and other members of production crews from India were not Sindhis, their recruitment was facilitated by the ethnic (Sindhi) connections with the producers in Bollywood. It should be mentioned that bringing media professionals from abroad required knowledge of the labour and migration laws. As Indonesians with extensive experience in local media production, Sindhis were familiar with the existing restrictions and regulations and the ways of evading them if necessary. In many cases, Sindhis would bring foreign labour on tourist (not working) visas, and workers from India would usually have no objection to this. Moreover, Sindhis would bring to Indonesia only a few members of the production crew—mainly directors and editors. Scriptwriters were mostly working remotely, from India, sending their scripts by fax and email. In comparison, PHs

managed by Westerners (to be discussed later) would bring more staff, including top management, and follow the laws and regulations, which meant significant expenses for work permits. All of these expenses would then contribute to a higher price for the end product.

Overseas creative workers hired by Sindhi producers fulfilled two duties—they worked in their immediate roles as directors, editors, scriptwriters, and also trained the local staff. *Sinetron* production houses owned by Sindhis became the main training centre for commercial media practitioners. Most *sinetron* directors, editors, scriptwriters, make-up artists, and production designers who by the 2000s were well respected in the media industry received no formal education. They were trained "on the spot" by their overseas colleagues.

Furthermore, Sindhi producers (with the Punjabi brothers pioneering this practice) found a new way of casting and training future *sinetron* actors. Although for the recruitment and training of actors Sindhis relied not on their global ethnic networks, but kinship, their casting strategy deserves some attention. This strategy illustrates the point that Sindhis have "perfected the practice of moneymaking to a fine art" (Falzon 2004:189) particularly well. When Raam and Dhamoo Punjabi established their *sinetron* PH, PT MultiVision (henceforth MultiVision), they offered the leading roles in *sinetron*s to models who featured in the advertisements produced by their older brother, Gobind Punjabi.[90] After securing the consent from the models, Raam approached international companies, the clients of Gobind, and offered them the opportunity to sponsor the *sinetron*s that featured the "face" of their company. As a result, Raam was able to offer TV stations a full package—a *sinetron* with sponsors attached. The MultiVision package was particularly appealing to the commercial stations because other local PHs or producers would usually offer TV management only a pilot episode or a general idea of the future program, asking TV stations not only to finance the future production but also to look for sponsors to fill in commercial breaks.

The working scheme, facilitated by the family connections, was a win-win situation for all major parties involved. For the TV channels, collaboration with MultiVision meant stable, fuss-free revenue. The multinational companies benefited

[90] Gobind Punjabi founded advertising production company called Sentra Mega Kreasi in 1990.

from the partnership with MultiVision as the models representing their products appeared on screen for half an hour, the usual length of one *sinetron* episode in the 1990s, not just 20–30 seconds. Most importantly, for the leading roles in their *sinetron*s, MultiVision got pretty models, carefully selected by the well-trained marketing teams of multinational companies. MultiVision could be sure that the audience would find the stars of the *sinetron* highly appealing.[91]

For managerial positions (executive, line producers, heads of department) Sindhis relied on community members, as they did in other businesses. Ability to recruit professional managers, capable of understanding the market, preparing and controlling the production budgets, also placed Sindhis above their competitors in terms of human resources. In non-Sindhi PHs the positions of executive and line producers were often held by the director or scriptwriter, due to the absence of any professional training for such roles. In Sindhi-owned production studios these positions were taken by the professional traders, members of the Sindhi community, who saw themselves in the entertainment business serving the tastes and desires of the audiences.[92] Sindhis had learnt the nuts and bolts of the trading business since school age, helping their parents in the shops and required no special training in finance, budgeting and customer support. As for creative decisions, the Sindhi producers usually left them for the production team.

In sum, the ethnic connections of Sindhi businessmen facilitated their access to alternative sources of human and financial capital. Non-Sindhi local producers, mostly former filmmakers, had no connections to monetary institutions, which could allow them to secure loans for local production. Lack of financial resources and international connections with television industries also limited non-Sindhi Indonesian in their capacity to bring foreign media practitioners, who could cover the "creativity gap" (Kitley 2004) in the local market.

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[91] Along with offering exclusive contracts to the models featuring in ads, Sindhi producers also cast people from the streets and provided them with several weeks of training in acting and grooming. These actors usually featured in the secondary roles, at least during the first several episodes.

[92] For example, on the organisation of the production company owned by the so-called *pribumi* actor-turned-producer, Rano Karno, see Loven (2008).

Theoretically, however, Sindhis were not the only entrepreneurs in Indonesia with an interest in media business who could rely on the global networks for supply of financial and labour capital. Chinese Indonesian producers as well as producers from the USA, UK and Australia appeared to have equal if not better chances in this business. I would argue, however, that those entrepreneurs who could possibly have mobilised their transnational networks to obtain financial and human capital were either restricted by the state from doing so, or had no interest in the relatively small, subsidiary, business of television content production.

Indonesians of Chinese descent, who had been present in the media production industry since the beginning of the twentieth century, could possibly have drawn on transnational ethnic and kinship networks. Indeed, research on the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia shows that they did rely on transnational connections in the first half of the twentieth century. For example, Dieleman pointed out that during the initial stages (in late colonial and early post-colonial Indonesia) Liem Sioe Liong, the most powerful and successful Indonesian businessman of Chinese origin, relied on transnational diasporic and kinship networks to develop his business (Dieleman 2007:124). It is a well-known fact that the cosmopolitan connections of ethnic Chinese producers helped build the film industry in Indonesia during the first half of the twentieth century (Sen 2006, Setijadi-Dunn & Barker 2010). Strassler's study of photography in colonial and early post-colonial Indonesia offers an elaborate account of how recent Chinese migrants used their "cosmopolitan imaginings and transnational linkages" (Strassler 2008:428) to develop the craft of photography.

But in the late 1980s for many Chinese Indonesians the opportunities for speedy mobilisation of the ethnic connections were constrained as a result of the discriminatory regime towards Chinese Indonesian businesses introduced by Sukarno, the Forced Assimilation program of the New Order (discussed in chapter One) and suspension of diplomatic relationships between China and Indonesia for more than twenty years (1967–1990). Meanwhile, those few Chinese Indonesians who were "discriminated for" (Heryanto 2004) and had seemingly unrestricted access to various global financial and labour sources, including those available through ethnic and diasporic connections, showed no interest in the subsidiary niche business of television content production. They sought after larger businesses—the ownership of media platforms and, as mentioned before, film distribution and exhibition businesses. The family of Liem Sioe

Liong (also known as Sudono Salim) was eventually granted (1995) a TV broadcasting licence, the last licence issued during the New Order regime. Benny Suherman, another Suharto crony of Chinese descent, was one of the owners of Group 21, a group with a monopoly on the film importing, distribution and exhibition. The only Chinese Indonesian who established himself in the *sinetron* production business was Leo Sutanto, who started his media career in Cinema 21 and maintained good relationships with the most powerful businessmen of the New Order regime, including Sudwikatmono, Suharto's cousin, Benny Suherman and Salim's family.

Meanwhile, foreign, mostly Western, production companies that showed interest in the developing media market in Indonesia and had funds and human capital at their disposal could not compete with the local Sindhi businessmen for other reasons. First of all, television content production was on the negative list for investment, which meant that foreign companies were not able to operate in the Indonesian market officially. This restriction did not mean that foreign companies or at least individual foreign producers were not present in Indonesia. Quite a few Westerners did try to carve a niche for themselves in the emerging television industry, but found it very difficult for a number of reasons. First, in the late 1980s–early 1990s Indonesia did not have any legal framework regulating broadcasting of commercial stations. Moreover, although the Copyright Law was introduced in Indonesia during the colonial times (Antons 1991), it was not put in practice, and lack of law enforcement caused a lot of frustration among foreign media professionals (Kitley 2004). Complex labour and migration laws added another layer of complexity for (foreign-owned) PHs that wished to bring professional staff from the UK, the USA or Australia. In addition, expatriates from Western countries usually asked for high salaries, which significantly increased the price of the end product and made it largely non-competitive against the cheap products of Sindhi-owned PHs. All of these factors resulted in the "marginal role of white Westerners in the content industry" (Barkin 2004:chap.2).[93]

[93] Although Barkin (2004) documented the marginal presence of media professionals from the West (the USA, the UK and Australia), he did not offer any analysis of such situation.

4. Conclusion

This chapter provided a brief chronological account of Sindhi community members' involvement in Indonesian media industries between the late 1940s and the early 1990s. It showed that the involvement of the Sindhi community in media businesses was at first motivated by personal interests—the desire to maintain close cultural links to the lost homeland. In the 1950s and then the late 1960s Sindhis, due to the favourable socio-economic and political conditions, turned their love and passion for films into business. The 1970s–1980s was a formative period for the Sindhi-owned film companies when Sindhis gained experience in media production and established important networks in media business both at the national and international levels. The interest of Sindhi businessmen in the international market had a significant impact on the local Indonesian industry. It made locally produced films a part of the global market at each "moment" of cultural circuit (Johnson 1986): production (collaboration with the international crew); representation (casting *Indos* and Westerners for major parts in Indonesian films); and perception (international audience consuming Indonesian films).

This chapter also analysed why Sindhis were able to pioneer the *sinetron* production industry. Along with the experience that Sindhis gained in film production in the 1950s–1980s, the ability of Sindhis to mobilise finance and labour through community networks allowed them to be the first to grasp the opportunities when television was open to private investment. The access to global financial and labour resources facilitated by ethnic and kinship networks gave Sindhis a significant advantage over their main competitors in *sinetron* business—local (*pribumi*) filmmakers and producers from the UK, the US and Australia. The utilisation of global community networks for the recruitment of the overseas labour, the organisation of knowledge transfer and training of the production staff "on the spot", as well as the familiarity with the major trends in international media, became the distinctive features of the Sindhi-owned *sinetron* PHs. In the following chapters I will discuss how these and other Sindhi business practices contributed to shaping the *sinetron* production industry in the early 1990s and the early 2010s.

Chapter 4

Commercial Television Industry: the Sindhi Element

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the period preceding the "*sinetron* era" (the 1990s–), which in many ways predefined its establishment. I offered a brief political economy analysis of the television industry and then paid particular attention to the factors that facilitated the entrance of Sindhi businessmen into the national television industry. I argued that the ability of Sindhis to draw on the global networks for financial and human capital, without any active support from the state, was the key factor that helped them carve a niche in a rapidly transforming national television industry.

This chapter examines how the practices through which Sindhi businessmen reproduced themselves as members of an exclusive ethnic community influenced the development of the national television industry. First, I show that the sense of "corporacy" (Falzon 2004) among Sindhis, the desire to protect the business niche from non-Sindhi outsiders, had an impact on the industry development as it limited the number of players in the market. The lack of competition was one of the reasons for the uniformity of end products. Second, the desire of Sindhis to be self-employed, to own a company, kept *sinetron* production as a separate industry with a certain degree of autonomy from television stations. This relative autonomy from the television broadcasting industry, which also meant autonomy from the state (the state legislation regulated broadcasting but not production), allowed *sinetron* producers to offer innovative products, such as *sinetron* Ramadhan, which rapidly evolved into a particular genre of *sinetron*, *sinetron Islam* (Islamic soap opera), also often referred to as *sinetron religi* (religious soap opera).

To account for the culturally differentiated economic practices among major television industry players (television stations and *sinetron* production studios), I draw

on the work of cultural anthropologists, in particular Yanagisako (2002). In her sophisticated and elegant study of Italian family firms running the silk production industry, Yanagisako argues for bringing culture back to the analysis of capitalism. She shows that people engaged in "economic action" can have various motives and subjectivities because labour and capital are never abstract, but "accumulated, invested, dispersed, and reproduced through historically specific cultural processes" (Yanagisako 2002:5). In other words, she sees capitalism as "a complex and uneven historical process that entails heterogeneous capitalist practices shaped by diverse meanings, sentiments, and representations" and proposes to talk about "diverse capitalist practices" (Yanagisako 2002:7) instead of one homogeneous capitalism. In her study Yanagisako uses the words "desire" and "sentiment" instead of value, ideals and goals, to blur the differences between mental constructs "originating outside the body and internalized by means of ideological enculturation and actions instigated by physical yearning" (Yanagisako 2002:11). The terms "sentiments" and "desires" understood as "forces of production" (Yanagisako 2002:11) help me point to the fact that the commercial television industry in Indonesia operated not under some general, universal, impersonalised economic laws, but was guided by several economic practices, with one of them being introduced by the Sindhi community.

Previous research on Indonesian television paid little attention to the fact that economic actions are culturally and historically conditioned and as such not homogeneous. Political economy analysists, cultural studies and media and communication scholars did focus on different forces that shaped the development of the television industry but they seem to agree that economic determinants behind media production and organisation are homogenous. To put it differently, the researchers largely assumed that all players of the media market engage in the same "economic action" in pursuit of the same goals (Yanagisako 2002:5). People, companies, and the state are driven by desire for accumulation of profits, they strife for conglomeration through mergers and buying up, and seek opportunities for both vertical and horizontal integration of businesses.

Political economy analysists (Lim 2012; Sudibyo & Patria 2013; Ida 2011; Hollander et al. 2009) singled out two major forces that shaped the development of Indonesian television since its liberalisation—the state and the market. During the New Order all power was concentrated in the hands of Suharto's family members and

cronies. After the collapse of the New Order, power shifted towards the economic elites whose corporate interests dominate the current media landscape (Lim 2012:1). In 2013 media ownership was concentrated in the hands of only thirteen groups: "the state (with Public status) and twelve other commercial entities" (Lim 2012:1). The latter were mostly the old players from the New Order era, who had no desire to give up their power (Sudibyo & Patria 2013:259). From a political economy point of view, the economic elite was engaged in a unified economic action in cooperation with the state, which collaborated with the media conglomerates by tailoring the laws and regulations to benefit the latter (Sudibyo & Patria 2013).

It is important to mention that political economy analysis did consider the personal sentiments and desires of major media players, especially during the New Order period, when power was in the hands of Suharto's family members and cronies. For example, Sudibyo and Patria point to "an interesting episode of sibling rivalry within the First Family", which refers to the television licence distribution among Suharto's children (Sudibyo & Patria 2013:262).[94] Personal sentiments also affected the policy making process in 1996–1997, when Suharto's children "more collectively this time, persuaded their father to reject a draft law on broadcasting" (Sudibyo & Patria 2013:262). The demands of Suharto's children were, however, based on desires to further expand their businesses, and thus were no different from the interests of corporations or the state. It was all about expansion, conglomeration, and horizontal and vertical integration.

Cultural and media studies scholars (Kitley 2000; Sen & Hill 2000; Sen 1994a, Rakhmani 2014) have contributed to the field of Indonesian television studies by emphasizing the fact that the television industry is not only a product of political and economic, but also various discursive forces. For example, Kitley (2000) who pioneered the field of Indonesian television studies, argued convincingly that nationalism and developmentalism stood behind the growth of television during the New Order. Moreover, he pointed to the fact that advances in technology had a major impact on the

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[94] Bambang Trihatmojo, the son of Suharto, was the first to obtain the licence for the commercial TV station, RCTI. During the initial years RCTI's broadcasting was limited to Jakarta. When Bambang's sister, Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana, got a licence for another TV station, TPI, with permission to rent the TVRI transmitters to broadcast TPI programs nationally, Bambang became jealous and pushed his father to allow RCTI to broadcast nationally (Sudibyo & Patria 2013).

industry liberalisation (Kitley 2000). Sen (1994a) suggested that along with political and economic interests of the ruling elites, as well as technological revolution, the development of television was shaped by the desire of the audience for new forms of entertainment, as the audience grew increasingly weary of the didactic tone of the state television. Rakhmani, one of the few researchers who has analysed the Indonesian television from a media studies perspective, examines how the growth of commercial Islam contributed to the transformation of the television industry. She states that "different operating dominant ideologies in the production process of *sinetron religi* influence their content in different ways" (Rakhmani 2014:106). Thus, Rakhmani attributes the differences in production organisation to religious and ideological differences, not differences in economic practices. To sum up, researchers who have looked at the commercial television from the media and cultural perspective, emphasise the importance of a broader cultural context when discussing media organisation and production, but tend to separate economic actions from cultural, ideological and social actions.

To reveal the impact of Sindhis as a community on the television industry, I consider economic and cultural actions as a unified force. I find such an approach particularly important in the case of Sindhis because for them business means much more than economic prosperity. Commercial success is the major part of social and cultural identity both on personal and community levels. To be a Sindhi, a member of the exclusive network of global traders, one must succeed in business. Thus, in this chapter I aim to shed light on one more force that has shaped Indonesian television and to provide a more nuanced account of media industry organisation.

2. Sindhis and the Capitalist System

Sindhis have been a part of the global capitalist system for generations, operating "with a certain degree of independence vis-à-vis European capital, although not in opposition to it" (Markovits 2000:24). Although Sindhis were integrated into the global economy, it did not mean that they run their businesses in line with "universal" capitalist rules. In many ways their business practices and priorities were different from what is assumed to be universal by those scholars who mainly centre their research on

the Western realm.[95] Hindu Sindhis organised their businesses based on the resources available in the region as well as in response to changing political conditions. The closing of the opium trade throughout Sindh, the redistribution of land, the establishment of British domination in the mid-nineteenth century all had direct effect on Hindu Sindhis. These historical changes gradually limited business opportunities for Sindhis and forced them to explore opportunities outside the province (Markovits 2000:50–56).

When overseas trade became the main way to generate income, Sindhis had to come up with business strategies which would guarantee quick returns with minimal investment and risk. As a result, businesses requiring long-term investments were not attractive for Sindhi traders. Development of businesses into big corporations was also not practical. Sindhis were always aware of the risk of losing their businesses due to the changing laws in regards to foreigners in the localities that they established trading relations with. In case of commercial success, Sindhi traders preferred expanding their businesses to other localities rather than investing in further development of the company in the same locality. Although Sindhis showed interest in vertical integration (control over the whole chain from production to distribution), horizontal integration of business (increasing production of goods and/or services) in one locality was not their priority. Offering new products and services requires time and additional investment, which Sindhi traders often did not have at their disposal. One more specific feature that Sindhis developed as a group of global traders over a century-long period of overseas trade was a strong sense of "corporacy" (Falzon 2004), which helped Sindhis to protect their business niche from outsiders, i.e. non-Sindhis.

The Partition brought major changes to the organisation of trade business in the Hindu Sindhi community. The acquired status of permanent migrants pushed Hindu Sindhi traders to readjust their business strategies to the new conditions. But, as is well known, the process of adaptation to the changed environment can take several decades. In many ways, Sindhi businessmen, especially the first and second generation of migrants, continued drawing on the experiences and sensibilities of their fathers.

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[95] On the universal (read Western) laws determining, for example, media production and organisation see Golding & Murdock (2000), Bagdikian (1997).

2.1. "Corporacy"

Sindhi's sense of "corporacy" had a major impact on the way the commercial television industry developed in Indonesia over the years. After Sindhi producers established themselves in the national television industry, they began guarding their niche. Such protection of *sinetron* business from non-Sindhi competitors was among the main reasons why the industry was conservative and rather difficult for newcomers to penetrate. Although the sense of corporacy does not define particular business practices (practices may vary from place to place), it can be called a sort of Sindhi business ethics. As Falzon put it, "Sindhi sociality and business may be very variable phenomena, according to the conditions that obtain in the various locations of settlement, yet certain processes are at work that make group corporacy a factor to be reckoned with" (Falzon 2004:8).

Corporacy should not be understood as an unconditional mutual support of community members. In fact, Sindhi businessmen are engaged in ambivalent relationships. On the one hand, they prefer doing business with each other. As a rule, expansion of business to another locality, be it within or beyond national borders, starts from contacting a local Sindhi community. On the other hand, Sindhis are in constant competition with each other because they tend to stay in the same business niche. For example, in Hong Kong Sindhis are in manufacturing garments and electronics, in the Philippines retail trade and money lending, in Indonesia it is textile and luxury goods trading. Branching off into another field is rare. Thus, when ready to start their own business, Sindhi employees establish themselves in exactly the same business as their former bosses. Similarly, after splitting a partnership, former partners become each other's main competitors. Although competing with former employers is the most common practice in the Sindhi community, it always causes tensions among community members and in some cases the parties have to settle disputes in court.

At the same time, Sindhis join hands when a non-Sindhi competitor tries to enter "their" niche:

> Cooperation and zero-sum competition are equally common and often articulated in similar ways between Sindhis because they are two sides of the same coin: corporacy... Brothers may split the family business and go their

> separate ways once their father dies, cousins may spend sleepless nights worrying over credit, and a Sindhi wholesaler may take a Sindhi retailer to court, but it is often the case that members of a family or fellow Sindhis unite in the face of a 'common adversary'. (Falzon 2004:236)

In Indonesia Sindhi businessmen demonstrate a very similar behaviour. They are each other's most serious competitors but as my respondents often put it, "their brotherhood is strong". Despite fierce competition, "Indian producers", as my non-Sindhi respondents categorised them, usually come together when a new player starts posing a threat to their business acumen. "They fight each other but if there is a new production house they'll fight against it together" (Danang, director of the major television station, personal communication, 23 Apr. 2013).

It was, however, quite difficult to gather data on the concrete practices that Sindhi producers used to protect the *sinetron* production niche from the outsiders. Although media practitioners found it necessary to point to "Indian brotherhood" as a major obstacle to *sinetron* industry development, they were reluctant to share what this "brotherhood" actually did to hinder industry growth. "Price wars" were mentioned most often. According to my respondents, Sindhi producers sell *sinetron* to TV stations at prices much lower than the production cost. While predatory pricing kills off small PHs, it does not affect Sindhi producers, who, as discussed in the previous chapter, can maintain the operation of their businesses by drawing on financial sources through ethnic networks. Moreover, in many cases Sindhi producers are able to recover their losses from side (or, often, main) businesses. As discussed earlier, most Sindhi producers have other businesses, not related to the television industry, like property, manufacturing business, restaurants, etc. Along with dumping, there were rumours about bribing the rating-measuring body (A.C. Nielsen) and influencing vote counting for television awards. According to Barkin who did his ethnographic research of television stations in the early 2000s, the rumours that Raam Punjabi "had paid off A.C. Nielsen for ratings" (Barkin 2004:chap.2) were widespread in the industry. It is, however, difficult to say whether other Sindhi producers adopted this strategy or not. Some aspiring *sinetron* producers complained that Sindhi entrepreneurs intimidated the newcomers psychologically or even physically, especially when the aspiring *sinetron* producers offered new ideas or formats.

In one way or another, the Sindhi entrepreneurs were very effective in protecting the *sinetron* production niche from non-Sindhis. During the period of 1990–2013 there was only one non-Sindhi producer, Leo Sutanto, who became a serious competitor to the Sindhi dominance.[96] All other PHs that emerged during the mid-1990s and early 2010s and managed to occupy strong positions in the market were splits from the major productions owned by the Sindhis, MultiVision in particular. StarVision (est.1995) was established by Shanker RS, the executive producer of MultiVision who partnered with Chand Parvez, an Indonesian of Pakistani descent (in other words, the descendant of immigrants from Sindh, who practiced Islam). PT MD Entertainment (hence MD) was established as a result of the split (2003) between two founding partners, the Punjabi brothers, Raam and Dhamoo. PT Screenplay (est.2010) was founded by the former employees of MultiVision, Wicky Olindo and Sugdev Singh. Mega Kreasi (est.2013), one of the major suppliers of FTVs (*film televisi*, of television films, a subgenre of *sinetron*), branched off from Rapi Films. As one of the top *sinetron* producers put it bluntly: "There are so many players now—3000… But the real performers are five, out of which four are owned by Indians and one is owned by a Chinese" (Indonesian Sindhi, personal communication, 7 Feb. 2013).

The professional trajectory of Leo Sutanto is quite similar to the Sindhi *sinetron* producers. Leo entered the media industry in 1969, when Benny Suherman, at that time the owner of Sejahtera Films, needed a translator from Mandarin language to help with an Indonesian—Taiwanese co-production. Leo worked with Benny Suherman for more than twenty years, being involved in many aspects of film importing and production. In the 1980s he served as General Manager of Cinema 21 until he decided to work independently. Leo tried to establish himself in *sinetron* production from the mid-1990s. He first worked in partnership with Ilham Bintang, *Raja Infotainment* (King of entertainment) but their production studio, Era Mandiri Graindo, did not do well. Leo then tried to work with a number of other (non-Sindhi owned) PHs, like Indika Entertainment and Prima. Although these productions had some success in the *sinetron* market, they were not strong enough to compete with MultiVision, Rapi, Soraya and StarVision, the leading *sinetron* PHs of the 1990s.

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[96] There was another competitor, Rano Karno, whose *sinetron Si Doel Anak Sekolahan* ("Educated Doel", 1994–2006) retained the top positions in television ratings for a decade. Karno's production was, however, in production of one single show. It was not an industry player in the full sense. For more on the Karno's production studio see Loven (2008).

Leo's business in *sinetron* production took off only in 2003 and this was no coincidence. Leo founded a new company, PT SinemArt (henceforth SinemArt), right after Dhamoo Punjabi, the founding partner of MultiVision, the dominant *sinetron* PH of that time, left the company to establish his own production business, MD Entertainment (henceforth MD). Television stations, which grew weary of MultiVision dominance, used the split and weakening of MultiVision to their own advantage: SCTV allocated all hours of MultiVision to the newly established MD. Meanwhile, the new owner of RCTI, Hary Tanoesoedibjo, offered all MultiVision's hours to Leo Sutanto, who through Cinema 21 business was well-connected to the Indonesian media moguls. With television slots already reserved for him, Leo was in a way "destined" to success. Without the split, MultiVision would most probably be able to protect the niche and retain its leading positions, as it had done for more than a decade (1990–2003).

Within a very short period, both newcomers, SinemArt and MD, became the top players in the *sinetron* industry. The reshuffling in the *sinetron* industry allowed television stations to regain control over their programming schedule. Previously television stations were under the "dictatorship" of PHs, MultiVision in particular. Raam Punjabi "controlled advertisers and made sure MultiVision *sinetron*s were not aired simultaneously by competing stations" (Rakhmani 2014:439). After the split between the Punjabi brothers, the decision-making power shifted to television management. Since 2003 television stations gradually regained control over the content of the shows, the allocation of slots and the choice of advertisers. Moreover, since 2003 television stations started working with *sinetron* PHs on a "cash and carry" basis, when PHs transferred all rights for *sinetron* to television stations (Rakhmani 2014:439–441).

The emergence of a new strong player, a non-Sindhi, in the *sinetron* industry became possible only with the direct support of the television stations. Importantly, the story about this industry reshuffling was usually told to me in ethnic/racial terms. In brief, the narrative went as follows: "Television bosses, mostly Chinese, hated to be dictated to by the Indians. So Chinese TV management helped a Chinese producer to counter Indian dominance." Whether ethno-racial sentiments were indeed at the core of the TV management decision-making is certainly questionable. But the fact that media practitioners saw the events through an ethno-racial prism and then retold the events in such a way confirms that ethnicity and race continued to be the main categories of social stratification during the research period.

The emergence of the new players in the *sinetron* industry did not, however, bring drastic changes to television content. SinemArt and MD did move away from telenovela and Indian soaps and introduced derivations of Korean drama targeting a younger audience compared to the previously targeted housewives (Rakhmani 2014:440). But these changes were rather shallow and superficial. The shows produced by the newcomers did not introduce new themes or debates. SinemArt and MD stories were the same melodramas and teenage romances presented in new packaging. A decade of dominance of the Sindhi-owned PHs (MultiVision, Soraya Intercine, Rapi Films, StarVision) had formed the taste of the audience. Equally important was that these PHs trained a whole generation of media professionals. When Leo established SinemArt, he relied on the workforce available in the market, and most qualified specialists were trained by MultiVision. He continued to headhunt staff from MultiVision and other Sindhi-owned PHs throughout the late 2000s and the early 2010s.

The example of the show *Dunia Tanpa Koma* ("The World without Commas", henceforth DTK) confirms the fact that reshuffling in the industry did not revolutionise the content. In 2006 Leo Sutanto tried to go beyond copying Korean and Taiwanese dramas. He invited the acclaimed Tempo journalist and novel writer, Leila Chudori, to write an innovative scenario which addressed socially important topics, and cast top film actors in the drama (Tora Sudiro, Wulan Guritno, Surya Saputra, Slamet Rahardjo, Dian Sastro, Luna Maya). The story of DTK revolved around journalists who investigated a drug syndicate in Jakarta. DTK was one of the most expensive series in the history of Indonesian television and took seven months to finish the first season (14 episodes). [97] Despite, or maybe precisely because of its novelty, the show had very low ratings and television refused to extend the contract for a second season.

In sum, the sense of "corporacy" among Sindhi *sinetron* producers considerably limited the competition in the market, which led to a poor variety of end products. It also contributed to the formation of the audience taste. Of course, the lack of variety was also a result of risk-aversion strategy used by the television management

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[97] In 2006 the cost of one episode was around US$8000 while the usual production cost would be around US$2000–2500. "Hikayat 'Dunia Tanpa Koma' Menuju Titik," Ade Irwansyah, Writer's Cut, last modified 18 July, 1997, http://adeir.blogspot.com.au/2007/07/hikayat-dunia-tanpa-koma.html (last accessed 23 May, 2015).

(Rakhmani 2014; Barkin 2004). But television strategy alone does not fully explain the stable success of only a very small number of *sinetron* PHs and the absence of newcomers.

2.2. Sentiment of Independence

Along with the sentiment of brotherhood, the sentiment of independence, the desire of Sindhi community members to be self-employed, also significantly influenced the development of the television industry. First, the sentiment of independence stood behind the relatively autonomous nature of *sinetron* industry from television stations, and, as a result, from the state: the state had the legal power to regulate broadcasting but had considerably less power over production. Such relative independence from the state, or the indirect relationship between *sinetron* PHs and the state, resulted in the production of the most ground-breaking product in the history of the national television of Indonesia—*sinetron* Ramadhan*,* which evolved into a more general genre of *sinetron religi* (religious *sinetron*). Second, prestige associated with self-employment, and lack of prestige associated with contract wage-labour, was one of the reasons why Indian Indonesians did not appear on the national television screen.

The development of soap opera production into a rather autonomous and strong branch of the media industry is not an automatic outcome of television liberalisation. Local production can be done by the private television stations, which in industry terms is known as "in-house production", or by freelance producers who mobilise financial and human capital as well as production facilities on a project basis. As discussed in the previous chapter, during the initial years of commercial television, production of local soap operas was indeed a random practice of individual producers. Sindhis were, however, able to turn random production practices into routine by drawing on the international pool of funding, human capital and creative ideas. S*inetron* production quickly grew into a full-fledged industry, with estimated turnover of hundred million dollars. According to Rakhmani, in the mid-2000s "between US$352 million to US$1 billion has been spent on the production of *sinetron*s in Indonesia" (Rakhmani 2014:441).

From the economic point of view, as soon as the *sinetron* business started to bring big profits it should have been bought by the media conglomerates. The

acquisition of *sinetron* production businesses by private television stations seems particularly logical in the Indonesian case because during the first decade of commercial television (1990s–2003) *sinetron* producers largely took control over the television schedule. Television stations executives found this dependent position very annoying (Rakhmani 2013). Despite that, there were no cases of acquisition of PHs by the television stations. *Sinetron* PHs did establish close and in many ways exclusive relationships with the commercial television stations, but they were still independent, mostly family-owned businesses, not subsidiaries of the major media conglomerates. Drawing on the analysis of the Western industries, Hesmondhalgh (2013) argues that the continuing presence of small media companies in the West can be explained by a number of factors: new media technologies, the rise of a discourse of entrepreneurship in the economy as a whole, easier access to venture capital and the overall increasing role of marketing (2013:209-210). I argue that in the Indonesian context the persistent presence of relatively small but strong companies can be explained by the sentiments of independence among Sindhi businessmen. In other words, while sense of "corporacy" protected the industry from the potential competitors, desire to stay independent protected the *sinetron* industry from being absorbed by the media conglomerates.

As PHs are not part of the television stations, and are not owned by them, the laws and regulations on television do not apply to the production studios directly.[98] The existing laws regulate broadcasting, not production as such. From the legal point of view, it is television stations that are directly responsible for the content, while PHs are responsible only indirectly. In case of a complaint about inappropriate TV content, the responsibility for the breach of the existing regulations falls first and foremost on the television stations, not the actual producers of the content, which in most cases are independent, not "inhouse", production studios. In other words, the legal responsibility for the content lies with television station executives, not the owners of the PHs. In this way, the relationships between the state and the PHs are mediated through the television stations. This situation is the legacy of the times when both production and broadcasting were in the hands of the state and the need to regulate production and broadcasting processes separately did not exist.

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[98] Prior to 2002 the laws on television industry were issued by the Ministry of Information and from 2002 onwards—by *Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia*, or Indonesian Broadcasting Commission, henceforth KPI.

The relative independence of the *sinetron* production industry from the television stations, and from the state legislation, especially during the first decade (1990s), had quite an (un)expected result. In 1998 MultiVision made *sinetron* Ramadhan, a product which revolutionised the television industry in several ways. First, *sinetron* Ramadhan became the first *Islamic*-themed *prime-time* show, with "Islamic ambience" expressed through the narratives, emphasis on prayer and devotion, as well as such aesthetic aspects as costume (Ida 2009). In *sinetron* Ramadhan, pious characters wear Muslim dress (*busana muslimah*) and cover their heads with veils (*jilbab* or *kerudung*) for women, and caps (*peci*, and for particularly devoted Muslims who went on *hajj*—*topi haji*) for men.

Image 1. A Still from *Sinetron Doaku Harapanku* ("My Prayers, My Hopes")[99]

A family is reading Quran: Mother is wearing *kerudung*, father is wearing *peci*, while the son is wearing *topi haji*, which is probably a gift from one of the relatives who came from Hajj, an Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca.

During the New Order the state television promoted a secularised representation of the Indonesian nation and religiously themed programs took a minor part of the television schedule (Rakhmani 2013). Moreover, none of the officially recognised religions was given an obvious priority in TV programming. As Rakhmani pointed out, "secularisation" and "symbol wielding" were "fundamental traits for TVRI under New Order's single state television system (1965–1989)" (2013:31). Even after the introduction of commercial television, the programs, often the local adaptations of foreign programs, were stripped of any religious symbolism. In other words, in the

[99] From "Sinetron Ramadan Jadul Ini Pasti Buatmu Kangen!", KapanLagi Network, last modified 14 July, 2014.http://www.kapanlagi.com/showbiz/sinetron/sinetron-ramadhan-jadul-ini-pasti-buatmu-kangen-1000ce-1.html (last accessed 1 Aug. 2016).

1990s television stations, which were under the direct control of the state, were very cautious of making Islam a mainstream popular culture.

Meanwhile, private, independent productions, such as MultiVision, could afford to experiment with the *sinetron* content. This independent status of *sinetron* PHs also provided television stations with some freedom of manoeuvre—in case of public or state outrage television executives could blame PHs, playing on the ambiguity of responsibility implied by the laws regulating television content. It turned out that RCTI, the first television station to broadcast *sinetron* Ramadhan, did not have to accuse MultiVision of breaking the taboo on mainstreaming Islam. The show *Doaku Harapanku* ("My Prayers, My Hopes", 1998–2000) was "a tremendous success in the ratings from its first week...followed by an onslaught of copy-cat programs from every major station" (Barkin 2014:13). Equally important was the fact that "the program's success called into question the wisdom behind the industry's long standing avoidance of such themes" (Barkin 2014:13) with television producers left wondering whether it was time to break other unspoken rules that constrained production. In other words, in the 1990s television stations, which were under direct control of the state, would not have initiated *sinetron* Ramadhan as a primetime, mainstream program of national television, despite growing Islamisation.[100] The relative autonomy of the *sinetron* PHs, however, considerably speeded up the process of mainstreaming Islam into the Indonesian pop culture.

Sinetron Ramadhan had impact not only on the content but also the production process as it introduced "stripping" (everyday broadcasting and production) to the Indonesian television industry. [101] Unlike other TV shows of the 1990s, produced to air once a week, the episodes of *sinetron* Ramadhan were shown every day throughout the holy month. For a couple of years, "stripping" was just a mode of broadcasting during the month of Ramadhan but with the increased competition among free-to-air television stations (with five new national TV stations founded between 1998 and 2003), stripping became the dominant mode of *sinetron* production. In order to keep audiences loyal to the channel, television stations pushed *sinetron* PHs to come up with new episodes

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[100] On the rapid Islamisation of Indonesia see, for example, Heryanto (2014), Rakhmani (2013).

[101] Stripping is not a know-how of the Indonesian television industry but was first used on Indonesian TV during the production of *sinetron Ramadhan*.

every day throughout the year. The stripping mode of production resulted in a significant decrease in *sinetron* quality because of the limited time for each production stage (one day instead of three or four days). For media practitioners, the adoption of stripping became the major milestone in the history of national television. Television industry workers usually refer to two major periods—before and after stripping (not before and after the fall of the New Order regime).

Another consequence of the desire to stay self-employed was the absence of Sindhis on the screen. For Sindhis wage labour (including acting, presenting) that cannot lead to business ownership bears little value. For example, one of the Metro TV top executives shared with me: "I hired one Indian presenter but he didn't last long, less than two years, because they [Indians] rather do business than be employees. So it's their own desire to stay away" (Gita Brataseno, personal communication, 1 Feb. 2013). In addition, the low income of the Indonesian television artists/presenters makes this occupation even less appealing in the eyes of Sindhis. In brief, it is not the profession of actor or presenter as such that is not respected, but the status of being an employee and small wages that make these professions unappealing for Sindhis.[102]

Of course, the image of the audience held by television management also had an impact on the absence of Indian Indonesians from the screen. Television management continued to reproduce the dichotomies between locals and foreigners, with Indian, Chinese, and Arab Indonesians seen as the latter. Consider the account of a Sindhi who had an aspiration to work for local advertising:

> If the program is local, they [producers] can't use me even though I speak Indonesian. They want to associate the product with home… Gudang Garam [multinational company] can work with that but most other companies—Oreo, Kacang Garuda can't choose [someone] too Indian, *bule* [Caucasian], or Chinese. (Nagesh, Indonesian Sindhi, personal communication, 17 Apr. 2013)

Very similar sentiments were voiced by the television station senior manager:

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[102] To date (2016) there was only one *sinetron* in the history of Indonesian television where Indian Indonesian characters were played by the local Indians, a sitcom *Keluarga Raj* ("Raj Family", 2011), written, directed and produced by a non-Sindhi Indonesian, Aris Nugraha. The show did not gain much popularity.

> It has to be [a] local [face]. We are attracting the local market... Number one—I don't see any Indians trying to be actors. There are probably one or two who tried but none of them made it. The same with Chinese. There are one or two who tried to come in. They became popular but not popular enough. TV artists and film artists are dominated by Indonesians and a few *Indos*. In the past there were quite many *Indos* but now not any more. I think trends change. You know when *Meteor Garden* was a hit then the Chinese look was a trend, then Korean look. (Head of television programming, personal communication, 11 Apr. 2013)

From the account above it is obvious that the absence of Indian Indonesians on the national screen is a combination of several factors. Sindhi, or more broadly Indian, community members do not show interest in being on the Indonesian screen. But at the same time, television stations imagine the audience as not being interested in a look that is not local, meaning not indigenous. Most importantly, my respondent clearly formulates the idea that Indians would not be seen as locals. In making comparison between Chinese and Indians he then implies that, similar to Chinese Indonesians, the local popularity of Indian Indonesians can grow only if the Indian look becomes a global trend.

In sum, the sentiment of independence had a major impact on the development of the commercial television industry in Indonesia and its products. The desire of Sindhi producers to stay self-employed enabled *sinetron* to develop as a separate industry, relatively independent from the state. Such autonomy and orientation towards commercial success meant that *sinetron* PHs were more tuned to audiences' wishes than to state requirements and prohibitions. This relative autonomy stood behind the rapid mainstreaming of Islam into Indonesian popular culture. In addition, the same sentiment limited the representation of Indian Indonesians on screen. At the same time, the desires of Indonesian Sindhis as individuals and as community members do not remain fixed but change based on the context. In the remaining part of the chapter I will examine the case of MD which serves as a good example of how Sindhi businessmen alter their business practices and priorities as they navigate the national media industries.

2.3. The Case of MD Entertainment

As with most Sindhi companies, MD was established by a father and son. And again, as with most Sindhi businesses, MD was a result of the split between the partners. In 2003 the founding partner of MultiVision Plus, Dhamoo Punjabi, together with his son, Manoj Punjabi, an employee in the same company, left MultiVision to start their own *sinetron* production business. A year earlier Manoj got married, and his social status obliged him to think of his own business, to make that step from being "in service" to becoming a boss. The split between the partners, Raam and Dhamoo, occurred at the peak of MultiVision success when the company produced 60–70 per cent of the total soap opera titles aired (Loven 2008:49). The split is difficult to explain from a "universal" economic point of view, as it contradicts the logic of continuous growth and consolidation of business. From the Sindhi perspective, however, such course of events is logical, even natural. For Sindhis the ability to run a company, no matter how small it might be at the beginning, bears most prestige.

The organisation of MD business was also done in line with the canons of Sindhi practices. In the interviews Manoj likes to emphasise that he started his company from zero:

> I planned everything from the very beginning…The majority of people whom I hired were new to the field [of *sinetron* production] so MD Entertainment had to train them... So I did not take people who were available in the market. I created the market and this is much more difficult.[103]

It turned out, however, that Manoj did not invent anything new, as he claimed. Quite on the contrary, in terms of human capital he relied on the same sources and organisational structure that was already in place in MultiVision and other PHs owned by the Sindhis (Rapi Films, Soraya Intercine). For the executive positions he hired Sindhi community members, mostly his classmates from Gandhi Memorial School. For the creative team he invited professionals from India. He did give the whole structure some formal, or corporate, gloss, by assigning fancy titles to certain positions and making the

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[103] "Pemerintah Tidak Mendukung Film & Televisi," Sindo Weekly, last modified 13 March, 2013, http://www.sindoweekly-magz.com/artikel/1/ii/7-13-maret-2013/indonesia/163/pemerintah-tidak-mendukung-film--televisi (last accessed 28 Apr. 2014).

recruitment process more professional. For example, instead of going to India himself, as Raam Punjabi or Raam Soraya did, Manoj put an expat Indian, a former Bollywood scriptwriter, in charge of hiring people from India. Although it is true that those Indian nationals who came to work for MD were new to Indonesia, they were no novices to soap opera production. On the contrary, they were seasoned professionals previously working for the biggest television productions in India, like Ekta Kapoor's Balaji Telefilms. MD did provide training for the newcomers, but, in the words of my respondents, it was "very superficial". The "trainees" were showered with simplistic images of the Indonesian audience, so the expatriate scriptwriters, directors, and editors had to find their own sources to understand the Indonesian audience, its preferences and dislikes.[104] In sum, Manoj and Dhamoo organised the MD production process along ethnic and linguistic lines, which is a very common way of business organisation in Sindhi companies (to be discussed in detail in chapter Five).

But the case of MD is also important because it shows not only how Sindhi business practices are replicated generation after generation, and from one business to another; the case of MD is also a good illustration of how Sindhi entrepreneurs modify their businesses to fit local environments. If in terms of organisational structure MD was a typical Sindhi company, in business development it followed a route unusual for Sindhis. As MD grew, it started offering new products and services. MD built shooting studios and trick rooms, set up an animation studio and established its own television channel (MD channel). In comparison, MultiVision continued to expand its business in a "Sindhi way"—establishing similar businesses in different localities. Since the late 2000s MultiVision is not only a film distributor but also producer of local feature films and television programs in Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. Moreover, MultiVision continued to retain control of the whole business chain: from distribution to exhibition, investing in movie theatres across the archipelago as well as in some other countries in the region. Meanwhile, MD stayed focused on developing production facilities (TV Channel is not a major product offered by MD).

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[104] According to one of the MD scriptwriters from India, for him the best insight into the Indonesian reality were two travelogues written by V.S. Naipaul, the British writer of Indo-Trinidadian descent: "Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey" (1981) and "Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among the Converted Peoples" (1998).

MD also differs from other PHs owned by the Sindhis, as Manoj has adopted the rhetoric of nationalism, promoting his company as national first and only then as global: the company promo video states that MD is "*Indonesia's* first integrated global media and entertainment company". The video features major figures of Indonesian political, religious and social elites praising Manoj for his contribution to *national* media industries.[105] Habibie, the former president of Indonesia, called Manoj the "Indonesian newest icon" who "is representing all of us, who has the honour and also the responsibility to carry the flag". Unlike in the 1960s–1990s the expression of nationalist sentiments is not the necessary prerequisite of success in contemporary Indonesia. For example, Sunil Samtani, the owner of Rapi Films, another prominent player in the *sinetron* (and film) industry, does not find it necessary to appeal to the nationalist sentiments: "My [Indonesian] passport is just a formality. We are Indians. Our relationship with Indonesians is business-oriented."[106]

3. Conclusion

This chapter explored how cultural differences (seen as ethnic differences) featured at the industry level, shaping the relations among the major players in the media production market: private television stations, PHs and the state. I argued that business practices of Sindhis, their actions as ethnic community members, have had a marked influence on the development of the commercial television industry. In other words, the Indonesian television industry was shaped by several cultural/economic practices, rooted in various historical experiences. At the same time, while the industry was transformed in accordance with the desires and sentiments of Sindhi entrepreneurs, Sindhi businessmen also adjusted their business strategies as well as their identities to the local environment.

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[105] The persons featuring in the MD promo video (2012) included Habibie, the former president of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, then Indonesian president (2004–2014), Dr Ishadi SK (head of Trans TV), Prof Dr. H.M. Din Syamsuddin, (Chairman of Muhammadiyah, one of the two main religious organisations in Indonesia), and Oesman Sapta (industrialist, leader of one of political parties, PPN, *Partai Persatuan Nasional,*).

[106] "Sindhi Kinds of Indonesian Entertainment," Pallavi Aiyar, The Hindu, last modified 24 Aug. 2013, http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/sindhi-kings-of-indonesian-entertainment/article5052949.ece?css=print (last accessed 2 Sept. 2013).

The presence of autonomous *sinetron* productions, which owners kept a certain distance from the state, its political and economic elites, created more space and freedom for experiment with media content. Introduction of *sinetron* Ramadhan as a mainstream cultural product was the major outcome of the relative autonomy of *sinetron* production. At the same time, the desire to protect the *sinetron* niche from newcomers and the sense of "corporacy" shared by the Sindhi producers constrained industry development by limiting competition in the market.

I also showed that the major players in the industry interpreted differences in business practices as well as power relations in racial terms. The major reshuffling in the industry was seen through the prism of racial tensions. Moreover, the absence of Indian Indonesians on the national screen was the result of ethnic/community sentiments of Indonesian Sindhis as well as the imagined sentiments of the Indonesian audience about home and nation, the local and the foreign. Television management continued reproducing the discourse of foreignness of Indian, Chinese, Arab or Dutch Indonesians. The next chapter will focus on how ethnicity features within the production culture of individual PHs. I will discuss the PHs' social hierarchy, which is formed and maintained by the "racialized ways of seeing, thinking, talking and framing claims" (Brubaker 2004:168).

Chapter 5

Ethnicity and Social Relations in

Indonesian Television Production Houses

1. Introduction

The previous chapter looked at the formation, development and transformation of the *sinetron* production industry between the early 1990s and the early 2010s. I argued that to a great extent the commercial *sinetron* production industry in Indonesia operated, expanded and was transformed according to the logic of the Sindhi business practices. The desires and sentiments of Sindhis as individuals as well as the members of an ethnic community played a significant part in shaping *sinetron* as a separate industry, with its own practices and processes, its own production culture.

This chapter takes a closer look at the production culture within the *sinetron* production houses (PHs) and examines the role of ethnic imagery in social relations. I argue that in the case of the Indonesian *sinetron* industry the social relations and distribution of symbolic and material capital in the period between the 1990s and the early 2010s depended on ethnicity, as it was imagined and constituted by two rather distinct cultural frameworks. The social hierarchy of PHs was shaped first by the Sindhis' views of social relations, according to which all people (Sindhis and non-Sindhis alike) are categorised based on their occupation. And second, the hierarchy was defined by the division into locals and foreigners, of foreign ethnicity and nationality, two major categories Indonesians have continued to use for social identification since the Dutch colonial rulers introduced ethnicity as a classificatory grid for censuses (Anderson 1987:3).

Previous research on film and television has shown that production culture is shaped by the social and cultural context (Saha 2013; Mayer 2011; Dornfeld 1998; Davila 2002; Ganti 2012; Ortner 2013). Social hierarchies and the "material practices"

of commercially driven films and television industries are not universal across the globe but are deeply imbedded in culture shaped by historical experiences (Ganti 2012:176). Meanwhile, social relations within production studios can be seen as a microcosm of a larger society. Analysis of power relations and the distribution of material and symbolic capital in production culture can offer a commentary on wider social trends.

In the USA (1990s–2000s), for instance, privileges and distinctions in the media industry are distributed based on a division known in professional jargon as the above/below-the-line distinction, which in Ortner's words is "clearly and visibly a class divide" (Ortner 2013:208).[107] The below-the-line personnel are largely working classes, while above-the-line staff represent social and economic elites. The class nature of this divide is obscured by the terminology used by observers, researchers and cultural industry professionals alike who call the labour of above-the-line workers creative, in contrast to the technical labour of below-the-line employees. Creative professionals include directors, producers, writers and actors, while technical labourers are operators, editors, grips, etc (Caldwell 2008:38).[108] The director of photography is included in the above-the-line category by some while excluded by others.[109] The labels of "creative" and "technical" imply that the distinction is rooted in the nature of the tasks media workers perform. Matt Stahl, however, argues that the "line" and the different privileges associated with designations of "creative" and "technical" do not, in fact, "flow naturally from differences in the tasks media workers do and the kinds of skills they bear" but are "sedimented in the institutions, organisational forms and workers' self-

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[107] Throughout her work, Ortner uses class as the main analytical tool to help her explore the changes in American society. She neither questions the validity of class as an analytical category nor redefines it. In general, she draws on "an eclectic blend of different Marxist perspectives—political economy, Frankfurt school, Birmingham/British cultural studies, and a kind of Marxist-inflected feminism" (Ortner 2013:11).

[108] There are also "unregulated and nonsignatory sectors (assistants, agents, reps, clerical)" (Caldwell 2008:38).

[109] The ambiguous position of directors of photography, known as DOPs in the social hierarchy proves the relativity and "constructive" nature of division into creative and technical workers. Caldwell, however, explains that that inclusion of DOPs into the above-the-line category is the result of the changing nature of the professional tasks performed by the DOPs, i.e. "speed shooting" and "hyperproduction", ibid. (Caldwell 2008:229). Thus, Caldwell suggests that the distinction is also based on particular tasks. Some tasks do require more technical skills than others but difference in the tasks should not serve as a justification for unequal working conditions—the main thesis of cultural anthropologists arguing for abolishing the existing hierarchised division between "creative" and "technical" labour.

understanding" (Stahl 2009:54–55). Material and symbolic benefits are the result of historical struggle between industry groups. Upper classes find themselves in a privileged position in this struggle while the working classes with their labour being "the structuring absence" are considerably disadvantaged in most cases (Mayer 2011). By examining the production culture of media industry, American scholars are able to provide an analysis and critique of the class configuration of contemporary American society.

In the Bollywood film industry the major divide is drawn between the male stars and everyone else (Ganti 2012:208).[110] The top male actors are accorded the best working conditions, which are in contrast with those of the rest of the cast and crew. More importantly, male stars have the power to initiate projects, which puts them at the top of the Bollywood social hierarchy, higher than producers and directors. The importance of gender distinctions in Bollywood production culture corresponds with the prominence of gender distinctions in other spheres of life in Indian society.

This chapter shows that in Indonesia in the period of the 1990s and early 2010s, ethnic imagery continued to play a vital role in everyday routines of *sinetron* production. I will first discuss two social hierarchies that stem from two different cultural experiences, but have ethnic imagery at their core. I will then move to discussing production practices to illustrate how these social hierarchies get manifested in the everyday life of production companies. Lastly, I examine how the social hierarchy formed around ethnic imagery is challenged from within, mainly through contestation over authorship.

2. Occupation and Foreignness: Dual Distinction

The dual distinction in *sinetron* production culture based on occupation, on the one hand, and on foreignness, on the other, is rooted in two different historical and cultural experiences. For Hindu Sindhis, the production house owners as well as *sinetron* executive producers who are originally from South Asia, the institution of caste

[110] Gender aspect is important in American media production as well, but is not the prime aspect structuring the social relations. See, for example, Ortner (2013, chapter Six) on the gender aspect in Hollywood and independent film industries.

defines most social relations. Meanwhile, local Indonesians, who classify people into locals and foreigners, follow a social system based on ethnicity, introduced in the archipelago during the Dutch colonial rule. Despite different histories and cultural contexts, these two views of social hierarchy merged almost seamlessly to form a rigid social structure in the leading *sinetron* production houses in Indonesia.

Prior to a detailed discussion of the above-mentioned distinctions, I need to make some general remarks about the people who worked in the PHs owned and run by the Indonesian Sindhis in the period between the 1990s and the early 2010s. During the researched period the personnel of PHs was ethnically diverse. The posts of department heads were occupied by the members of the local Sindhi community. The positions of directors, scriptwriters, and editors were mostly allocated to the overseas professionals, predominantly from India. Out of the total number of PH employees, expats usually constituted up to 10–15 per cent. The rest of the staff was Indonesian, from Jakarta, the centre of mainstream *sinetron* production, or other parts of the country. To understand power relations in the Indonesian PHs it is important to keep this short description in mind.

2.1. The Occupational Distinction

As discussed in chapter Two, "by and large most Sindhis classify themselves and others as being either 'businessmen' or 'in service'" (Falzon 2004:189). There are of course categories that do not quite easily fit into these two broad groupings, such as the professions, but these two remain nevertheless determining. The distinction between bosses and everyone else is reproduced in the *sinetron* production business. In the context of media production, from the point of view of Sindhi producers, there is no big difference between actors or gaffers, directors or dolly pushers. All of them are service providers, no matter how different these services might be in nature. Services of some industry workers, like *sinetron* stars, foreign directors and scriptwriters, do imply higher fees and certain distinctions and privileges. But higher salaries do not lift production workers beyond the imaginary line separating bosses from the rest of the industry practitioners. The latter are still "in service". In other words, from the point of view of Sindhis, the major difference is not between middle class intellectual or creative labour,

and working class manual labour, but between those who manage themselves and others, and those who are managed.

To some extent, this division between bosses and everyone else is similar to the division between employer and employee fixed by the Western copyright law, although I do not believe that the cases are identical. As was mentioned, the occupational distinction is rooted in the caste system of South Asia, a social institution structuring society in accordance with occupation, inherited rank, privileges and wealth. Unlike the distinction between employer—employee, in which the main difference is economic, i.e. "an ability to use capital to employ or contract with creative workers" (Stahl 2009:56), the distinction between Sindhi bosses and those 'in service' has very important social implications as well. For Sindhis being a boss is the main, if not the only, way of getting social recognition and respect from their fellow Sindhis, while for example, for employers/copyright holders in the US there are equivalent ways of confirming their social status, such as degrees from prestigious universities or art collections.

2.2. Foreignness

The second distinction that shaped social relations in the *sinetron* PHs owned by the Indonesian Sindhis is also directly related to ethnic imagery, but in quite a different way. Unlike the distinction based on occupation, the division into locals and foreigners is projected from below and is rooted in the relatively recent colonial past of Indonesia. In the Introduction I discussed the roots of racial and ethnic division of Indonesian society and pointed out that for political and economic reasons, the Dutch colonial rulers classified the population of the Indonesian archipelago into three broad categories: "Natives", "Foreign Orientals" and "Europeans". While the natives (with the exception of the local aristocracy) were at the bottom of the social hierarchy, and Europeans at the top, Foreign Orientals, mainly Chinese, Indians and Arabs, were somewhere in between. Unlike the natives, Chinese, Indians and Arabs were given some social, legal and economic privileges, which were, however, not exactly similar and equal to those accorded to the colonial elites. The post-colonial, nationalist governments of Sukarno and Suharto continued to use similar categories for the official categorisation of the population: *pribumi* (natives), *WNI keturunan asing,* which stands for *Warga Negara Indonesia keturunan asing* (Indonesian citizens of foreign descent),

and *WNA, Warga Negara Asing* (foreign citizens). The logic behind the distribution of material and symbolic benefits was, however, largely reversed. The status of *pribumi* guaranteed certain economic, political and social privileges, while WNA and WNI *keturunan asing* were often deprived of basic rights. Following the fall of the New Order regime in 1998, Vice-President B.J. Habibie by the Presidential Instruction 26/1998 abolished the racist *pribumi* and non-*pribumi* division but despite eradication of the difference at the official level the division into "us" and "them", or local and foreigners, persisted in the public discourse through the early 2010s. In colloquial language these differences are often expressed as *orang kita* (our people) and *orang sana* (people from there).

For most of my respondents, there was no substantial difference between Indonesians of foreign origins (Chinese, Indians or Arabs) and foreign nationals. The former were almost as foreign as the latter. They were non-Indonesians, or at least not "real Indonesians":

> Although they are WNI [Indonesian citizens] all of them are still thinking about India. Chinese are also the same. They are not Indonesians. It is quite fair to say this...Their families are there...When they have money, they always send it to their families there. They don't care about Indonesia. It is only for business. That's it. (Handi Atmaja, Indonesian, producer/director/scriptwriter, personal communication, 22 Feb. 2013)[111]

This statement provides a clear idea of how those who consider themselves as local Indonesians draw the line that separates them from "foreigners".

My interviews showed that Sindhi producers were very much aware of the persistence of this discourse. During my conversation with Raam Punjabi, he pointed out that he was still perceived as a foreigner despite the fact that he was born in Indonesia and had held an Indonesian passport for almost thirty years:

> I'm not a foreigner, I'm a citizen by naturalisation. I became Indonesian in 1976. I had to give up my Indian passport. But here people still have different thinking. In America if you have an American passport whether you are of

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[111] Translated from the interview conducted in Indonesian.

> German or Polish origins you are American. But here there is still this *pribumi.* (Raam Punjabi, Indonesian Sindhi, producer, personal communication, 18 Feb. 2013)

The fact that the categories were officially abolished more than a decade ago did not bring a considerable change. Raam was still not seen as a "real Indonesian". Moreover, his children, Karishma and Amrit, Indonesian citizens by birth, were also seen as foreigners:

> At the end of the day mostly local people see us as Indians but we are not—we are actually Indonesians. It is our bread and butter. We were raised here, we live here. Our daily food is not Indian, it's Indonesian. And still people think we are Indian. But we are actually more Indonesian. (Karishma Punjabi, Indonesian Sindhi, producer, personal communication, 18 Feb. 2013)

The ethnic hierarchy of "us" and "them" is not as clear-cut as in the case of the occupational distinction and is easily reversible. On the one hand, "them", or foreigners, are perceived as knowledgeable, skilful, and thus, authoritative. An Indonesian of Sindhi descent vividly depicted an interaction between foreign and local staff in PHs owned by Sindhis, highlighting the higher social and professional status of foreigners:

> For Indonesians it's a pride: "I'm working with a director from abroad. My CV looks good!" So it's a win-win situation. But if a director stays here for five years then he loses his charm. But when he first comes it's *wow*! They [Indonesians] will ask you what films you have done and then you show your profile and then they will say—*oh, keren* ["cool"]. It's fun to see how they [local Indonesians and foreigners] interact. (Nagesh, Indonesian Sindhi, line producer, personal communication, 17 Apr. 2013)

To summarise the account in the words of my other respondent, an expatriate from India, "in Indonesia they respect you for being a foreigner. They [local Indonesians] appreciate it" (Amol, Indian national, member of creative team, personal communication, 11 Mar. 2013).

On the other hand, foreignness is often equated with viciousness, decadence and degradation. For example, the Broadcasting Act of 2002 states that the aim of the

broadcasting industry, is, among others, to "strengthen the ability of people to deter bad impact of foreign values" (Indonesian Broadcasting Commission 2013:40). During my fieldwork the discussions of bad foreign influence ruining (good) Indonesian culture was one of the favourite topics of *sinetron* industry workers. In that context, from the local Indonesians' point of view, on the one hand, the foreign (Indian) ethnicity of Sindhis justified their position at the top of the social hierarchy. Moreover, economic wealth of Sindhis combined with their linguistic skills (proficiency in English and/or Sindhi/Hindi) added legitimacy to their claim of superiority and control. Similarly, overseas professionals, directors and scriptwriters, were ascribed a higher social status. On the other hand, the foreignness of producers and expats was potentially their weak spot. Most importantly, the discussion above shows that Indonesians continue to categorise people based on ethnicity.

Overall, two distinct views on social relations, rooted in different historical experiences and modes of existence, formed a very rigid social hierarchy, where ethnic imagery played a key role. Imposed from above in the form of occupational distinction, the hierarchy was passively supported from below by a complex understanding of foreignness. As one of my respondents, an experienced *sinetron* scriptwriter, put it in response to my question whether production members still perceived producers as Indians:

> We still see them as Indians even though they speak Indonesian. Because basically, at the end of the day, they are still the bosses. They are "the suits", we are the workers. There is always that gap. (Budi Susanto, Indonesian, *sinetron* scriptwriter, personal communication, 1 Mar. 2013)

From Budi's account it is clear that there are two, almost coalescing categories of distinction, separating those of foreign origins/foreigners/bosses from Indonesians/workers.

3. Production Practices

The social relations structured by the ethnocultural frameworks of Sindhis and local Indonesians manifest themselves in various practices of *sinetron* making. The

actual filming of the series is one of the main sites where power relations in the PHs become particularly visible, and importantly, observable by outsiders (non-members of the crew). Unlike production meetings or creative team briefings, shooting sets are the most accessible sites for researchers of production culture.

In relation to the shooting routines of PHs owned by the Sindhis, the divide between bosses and those "in service" is transformed into a division into *orang kantor* (office people) and *orang lapangan* (field people). In the practice of PHs owned by the Indonesians of Indian descent the shooting set is the place for those "in service". Bosses, the owners/executive producers, attend shooting sites very rarely and usually in a capacity other than as bosses. For example, in April 2012 Manoj Punjabi, the owner/producer of MD, came to the set to play a small part (cameo) in one of the *sinetron*s. When interviewed, he said: "This is the first time for me to become an actor. New experience. From the 'office staff' I became a 'field person'."[112] This account is significant for two reasons. First, Manoj found it necessary to comment on the change of his status—from "office" to the "field". The emphasis on this aspect of his experience in a very brief interview suggests that this division plays a significant role in the social hierarchy. Second, from the words of Manoj it becomes clear that actors belong to the category of "field people", those below the line. In comparison, in PHs owned by *pribumi*, or local producers, the gap between office and field people barely exists. Producers/PH owners often attend the shooting sites, seeing themselves (and being seen) as part of the shooting crew.

Bosses convey their messages to the field practitioners through line producers and chief directors. Line producers are, as a rule, from the Jakartan Sindhi community. Chief directors, in charge of directing pilot episodes and supervising several shooting teams led by assistant directors, are expats from India.[113] Assignment of the middlemen positions to Indonesians of foreign descent and foreigners is a strategic tool of

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[112] "[In Prod] Tendangan Si Madun the Movie," Yusuf Mahardika and Louise Anastasya, Lautan Indonesia, http://www.lautanindonesia.com/forum/index.php?topic=112952.0;wap (last accessed on 12 Jan. 2015).

[113] *Sinetron* episodes are shot on a daily basis and each episode is broadcast the next day after its shooting. Such method of production, known as stripping, requires several production teams to work on the same episode during the shooting time so usually the production crew is divided into three or four teams, each working under the direct supervision of assistant directors, who then report to the chief director.

Indonesian Sindhi bosses to maintain social distance and impose more authority on subordinates. The foreignness of line producers and directors adds weight and value to their instructions, commands and demands. I did sense some dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs in comments like "our people [*orang kita*] are never given [a chance] to direct pilot episodes." In general, however, line producers, Indonesian Sindhis, and foreign directors, Indian nationals, are highly respected and obeyed by the crew—as professionals and as foreigners.

Besides that, the social hierarchy based on occupational status and foreignness manifests itself through the working conditions on the set. When analysing Bollywood shooting practices, Ganti observed the "stark contrast between stars and everyone else around them, especially the way stars are accorded a great deal more basic comforts than the rest of the cast and crew" (Ganti 2012:205).[114] On the shooting sets of MD, MultiVision Plus and other PHs owned by the local Sindhis, only foreigners and *sinetron* stars are allocated certain privileges. Similar to the Hindi film industry, in the Indonesian film and television industry only certain actors are assigned the status of a "star". This status is measured monetarily and mostly linked to commercial success and people's choice awards, such as Panasonic Gobel Awards. In the whole industry there are only five to ten actors who have the "star" status. Their fees can reach 20 million rupiah (roughly US$2000) per *sinetron* episode while the usual fees for the lead actors do not exceed 3 million rupiah (roughly US$300). The working conditions provided for the foreigners and stars, and the rest of the cast and crew do not differ greatly. The former would at best be provided with more serves of coffee, a separate restroom, a chair to sit on during long shooting hours, and in some rare cases a bed to lie down, while the rest of the crew would take a nap on the ground and manage through the whole day shooting with occasional energy drinks.

There is, however, a significant difference in the way food is served for the privileged versus the rest of the production workers. One example from the MultiVision shooting site will illustrate my point. When I attended the site, lunch was offered in two different ways. For the crew and cast the food was distributed in plastic containers right

[114] Ganti underlines that there is a significant difference between "stars" and all other actors because "not all actors are categorized as 'stars' by the Hindu film industry, which has a particular taxonomy of actors related to narrative presence, commercial success, career trajectory, and tenure within the industry" (Ganti 2012:208).

on the set. At the same time, an errand boy prepared a separate table in an air-conditioned house near the shooting site. Only a few people were invited to the table: the executive producer (Indonesian Sindhi), the line producer (Indonesian Sindhi), the director (Indian national), the finance director (Indian national) and me (Russian-Australian researcher).[115] Everyone was offered the exact same food (fried rice, chicken and some vegetables). But the way the food was served—on the set, under the burning sun, in plastic containers, or in an air-conditioned room on a table set with porcelain plates and silverware, and for whom it was served—clearly reinforced the social distinction.

Image 2. Lunch of the Executive Team[116]

Line producer–Indonesian Sindhi (left) and executive producer–Indonesian Sindhi (right)

Actors, including the lead actors, none of whom were the *sinetron* stars, were not invited to join the meal served in the house. This confirms that only stars, due to their "selling capacity" and very high fees, are entitled to certain privileges. In comparison,

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[115] As mentioned above, the executive producers rarely attend the shooting sites, mostly for some specific reasons. This was exactly the case with Amrit, the son of Raam Punjabi, who was just appointed the executive producer of the series and wanted to familiarise himself with the set.

[116] From the author's fieldwork photo archive.

when I attended the sets where the crew consisted only of local, *pribumi*, Indonesians, no differentiation between producers, directors, actors (even stars) and the rest of the crew was made during the meals. Everyone ate together.

Office celebrations are another practice where social hierarchy built on occupational distinction and foreignness becomes visible. From an anthropological point of view, office celebrations can be seen as "production rituals", aimed at maintaining coherence and stability within production culture. Diwali, the main Indian festival, is celebrated in all PHs owned by the Indonesian Sindhis. In fact, Diwali is the only Indian festive event that Sindhi bosses celebrate with their employees. MD provided a detailed description of the Diwali celebration held in its office in 2014: when "authentic vegetarian Indian food" was served, all the MD staff "neatly lined up" for food "without regard to their position and status".[117] The emphasis on the absence of distinction based on status and position during the festival underlines its significance in the everyday life of production.

The celebration of the fortieth birthday of Manoj Punjabi, head of MD, offers an example of how the bosses draw the line when it is time for more substantial "gift giving" rather than just food sharing. To celebrate his birthday, Manoj Punjabi invited his idol, Bollywood mega star, Shah Rukh Khan, to perform in Jakarta. The invitations for the gala show were distributed only to overseas (Indian) workers, heads of various departments (Indonesian Sindhis) and *sinetron* stars, not the whole MD staff (around 200 people). A similar distinction was made when MD organised a cruise after a very successful season of one of the *sinetron* titles. Only Indian nationals and Indonesians of Indian descent, as well as stars, the highest-paid actors, were invited to join this celebratory tour. In sum, when there is an occasion to share some material and symbolic benefits of production, the distinction is mostly made on the criteria of foreignness and occupation.[118]

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[117] "Berita," MD Entertainment, http://www.mdentertainment.co/berita/index/7 (last accessed on 14 Jan. 2015).

[118] I should mention that all other PHs owned by the Indonesian Sindhis (MultiVision, Soraya Intercine, Rapi, Mega Kreasi) have a very similar approach to office celebrations and distribution of material benefits to their cast and crew. Most of my examples are from MD because at the time of my fieldwork (2013) MD was most open to the outside observers. In addition to that, MD produces quite a substantial amount of self-reflective materials, such as

4. Contestation over Power (Authorship)

In the previous section I described the social hierarchy of *sinetron* PHs owned by the Indonesians of Indian descent and showed how social relations are manifested on the shooting set and through office rituals. I argued that two distinct cultural frameworks formed quite a rigid social structure. But no matter how rigid the social hierarchy is, it is always challenged from within as well as from outside. One of the main factors that often leads to power redistribution in media production is contestation over authorship. Although production of television programs is a result of teamwork, not an individual endeavour, authorship is neither shared equally among the production workers, nor follows naturally from particular skills and tasks.[119] Authorship is an exercise of power. Those who have power are able to and, as a rule, do claim a fair bit of authorship, and even proprietary rights of the product. At the same time those who might not have much control, but who feel that they have made a substantial contribution to the product, can make a strong case for eventually gaining decision-making power in the production. In other words, authorship is never fixed; it is subject to constant negotiation, even struggle, among individuals and/or various groups involved in the production process. In Jonathan Gray's words "authorship is... about control, power, and the management of meaning and of people as much as it is about creativity and innovation" (Gray 2013:4).

Claims for authorship can be expressed in many different ways, and are themselves products of specific discursive practices. For example, they can be voiced through the rhetoric of creativity and responsibility (Stahl 2009:59), or formulated in quite concrete and specific terms such as "aesthetic status metaphors", "idea-theft", "writing by committee" and "mentoring" (Caldwell 2008:201). In *sinetron* PHs owned by the Indonesian Sindhis the claims for authorship, or ownership, of the product are very often centred on the idea of indigeneity, which is directly linked to the ethnic imagery. In other words, the ethnocultural identity of participants in the production process and certain associations that go along with it play an important role both in establishing a rigid social structure and in constantly challenging it.

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brochures, promo materials and updates on their corporate website, whereas other PHs usually do not make information about the internal practices available for public consumption.

[119] For more on the shared authorship in production see, for example, Dornfeld (1998), Stahl (2009), Gray (2013).

4.1. Indigeneity

When asserting authorship over *sinetron* and its meaning the *sinetron* workers, those below the imaginary line separating the privileged and the rest, often see their *pribumi*-ness, or local Indonesianness, as their main bargaining power in their struggle over authorship of the product of their labour. In my interviews with local Indonesian directors, operators (DOPs), scriptwriters and others, the rhetoric of indigeneity as a value in *sinetron* production constantly reoccurred. For example, when Budi Sutanto shared his experience as a head of creative department in MultiVision during the late 1990s–early 2000s, he recalled the following:

> I went to India seven times—to choose writers mostly. At that time, we needed more stories and we relied on regular Indian writers. Mr Raam would go to India, I would go with him...I was interviewing writers and since I knew more or less what Pak Raam needed and since I am an Indonesian, usually I could guess...whether there are three new subject [matters] not written in Indonesia. It was very interesting actually. (Budi Susanto, Indonesian, scriptwriter, personal communication, 1 Mar. 2013)

According to Budi, it is not his professionalism as a scriptwriter that made him an asset for the company, but his Indonesianness. The fact that Budi does not use the word 'local' or does not specify that he is a local Indonesian, makes the meaning of what he is saying even stronger. In Budi's view, Raam Punjabi is not an Indonesian at all, despite the fact that he, as Budi, was born and brought up in Indonesia. And because of his "foreign origins", Raam is just unable to grasp the essence of Indonesianness, a skill Budi possesses by default, as a true Indonesian.

Yuli, a scriptwriter with extensive experience of working for various PHs, including those owned by the Indonesian Sindhis, applied a similar logic when she discussed the incapability of Sindhi producers to make comedies with local ethnic flavour.

Yuli: It seems like if it is Betawi [humour] they [producers of Indian descent] can't do it. Because of their culture. Even though they are here for a long time they still can't see it [Betawi culture].[120]

Author: How do you prepare yourself for writing a local comedy? Do you spend time at the Betawi village or what do you do?

Yuli: Usually if we want to make a local film at most we will go and check the location, how it looks like, who these Betawi people are. So we will just go there, see the settings. And after that we'll write the story straight away. It's not that difficult after all. (Yuli, Indonesian, scriptwriter, personal communication, 17 Apr. 2013)[121]

Yuli herself is not Betawi. She was born and raised in Sulawesi. But in Yuli's view, her non-Betawiness does not impede her writing about Betawi people. She and other local Indonesian colleagues can easily grasp the essence of Betawi culture by visiting the location, while for Indonesians of Indian descent such a possibility is closed just because of their foreignness. Likewise, in his research on adaptation of foreign products to the Indonesian market, Kitley (2004) quoted a young director/producer from Sumatra, saying that adapting programs for the local audiences is an art, and can be done properly only by the local Indonesian people, not foreigners, the category which includes both foreign nationals and Indonesians of foreign origins (Kitley 2004:148).

While *sinetron* production workers appeal on the basis of indigeneity, the bosses ground their (counter-)claims for authorship on the rhetoric of genes. Sindhi producers assert that their ability to make films be it for television or wide screen is part of their DNA:

> Indians have the culture of making movies. I feel it's in our blood. I guess you [either] have it or not....When Indians in India go for a movie they still believe in the first day show...I will dress up to suit the movie. Indians are like that. So I think DNA somehow passes through us. We have strong roots when movies are

[120] The Betawi is an ethnic group of native inhabitants of Jakarta that has a particular sense of humour popularised through mainstream television. For more on Betawi cultural identity and television shows see Loven (2008).

[121] Translated from the interview conducted in Indonesian.

concerned. (Manoj Punjabi, Indonesian Sindhi, PH owner/executive producer, personal communication, 3 Apr. 2013)

Similar to Budi, Manoj attributes his success in the industry primarily to his physical self. Film culture is something one is born with or into, not something to be acquired through learning and practice. One can become skilful and experienced in production but education and hard work has its limits, and cannot guarantee success.

The idea of indigeneity as one of the cornerstones of the production process has its roots in the *film nasional* discourse, constructed by the ideologists of the Indonesian nationalism from the early days of Indonesian independence. *Film nasional* was a state ideology succinctly defined by Thomas Barker as "*pribumi*, idealist and nationalist" (Barker 2011:39). The ideologists and practitioners of national cinema evaluated films based on their potential to instil nationalistic ideas into the audience. In this regard the production process, and more precisely the ethnocultural identity of the filmmakers, was as important for national cinema as the stories told and the faces shown on the screen (Barker 2011). According to the ideologists of *film nasional,* only *pribumi*, or indigenous Indonesians, could produce quality (read nationalistic) films. Those of foreign origins were not able to do so "by virtue of their race" (Barker 2011:39).[122] When commercial television was sanctioned in Indonesia in the late 1980s, the film industry was stagnant and many film professionals got involved in *sinetron* production. Although commercial television operated on very different principles, according to which a good program meant a commercially successful, not necessarily an ideologically correct program, the nationalist views of film industry workers continued to be circulated within the production.

During my research period (1990–2013) the rhetoric of indigeneity did not result in any substantial redistribution of power within the PHs owned by the Sindhis. In production culture, which allocated control based on occupational distinction and foreignness (foreign ethnicity and nationality), strongly associated with knowledge and skilfulness, indigeneity was not worth much. It is neither a professional skill nor a rare

[122] It should be mentioned that there were several exceptions when filmmakers of "foreign" descent became the key figures of *film nasional*. For example, Teguh Karya, one of the most prominent, most awarded film directors during the New Order, who produced highly patriotic and nationalist films, was of Chinese descent. For more on the Indonesian filmmakers of Chinese descent see Sen (2006).

commodity. At the same time, since the mid-2000s there is a tendency towards revival of the discourse of national culture as the primary objective of television medium. The shift towards national ideology is promoted by KPI*, Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia* (Indonesian Broadcasting Commission). Many industry practitioners oppose the establishment of KPI as they see it as a revival of the New Order institution of censorship and control. Although KPI has not yet come up with a precise definition of *budaya Indonesia* (Indonesian culture) and indigeneity as its core element, KPI's active use of the concept of Indonesian culture in its reports and warnings sent to television channels creates an environment where indigeneity can be seen as a strong claim for the ownership of the product.

4.2. Credit Titles

Besides the rhetoric, ethnic imagery stands behind a very practical tool, which regulates distribution of authorship in the production process, i.e. the organisation of credit titles. In Barry Dornfeld's definition credit titles "represent the division of responsibilities in typographical distinctions, assign an order of importance to job categories, and ascribe to a single producer/directors the authorship of the shows for which they had primary responsibility" (Dornfeld 1998:73). In the case of PHs owned by the Sindhis the ethnic factor has an impact on one aspect of credit titles organisation—the practice of inclusion/exclusion of certain names in/from *sinetron* credit titles.

There are two overlapping categories of industry workers whose names get excluded from the credit titles of soap operas made in Sindhi-owned PHs: members of the creative team and expatriates. I should say that omitting the names of the writers' team members is a common practice in all *sinetron* PHs in Indonesia, not only in those owned by the Sindhis.[123] The contribution of the writers are mostly often summed up by a set expression: "story by [PH's name] creative team". Meanwhile, the exclusion of expats' names occurs only in the PHs owned by the Indonesian Sindhis. Consider the

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[123] See, for example, the article "Jangan Remehkan Credit Title Tim Penulis Skenario!" Detik Hot Art, last modified 6 Jan. 2014, http://hot.detik.com/read/2014/01/06/172255/2459637/1059/jangan-remehkan-credit-title-tim-penulis-skenario (last accessed on 14 Sept. 2014).

case of Rajesh, one of the Indian directors who worked for both Sindhi and non-Sindhi owned PHs during various periods of his career in Indonesia. When working for SinemArt, a PH owned by a non-Sindhi, the name of Rajesh was always mentioned in the credits. When he moved to MD, his name vanished and was replaced by the name of one of his local Indonesian assistants. There is, however, an important nuance—the names of expat workers are mentioned in the first, or pilot, episodes of dramas, but are omitted in all subsequent ones. When I asked my expatriate respondents to comment on this practice, they usually gave me the following answer: "We come here [to Indonesia] for money, not names". They would also mention that producers were constantly worried that their creative labour would be "stolen" by the rival PHs. The expatriates themselves found this reason quite ridiculous, as *sinetron* production in Indonesia is a small world and usually people know each other anyway.

Along with exclusion, there is also a practice of including the names of people who have minimal or even no relation to the project:

> Indian producers are bold enough to pay only for the names. They need only names. There were several cases—the names appeared in the credits but I was not sure whether people actually worked [on that program]. Maybe only on the pilot episodes. I was asked three times—my name was mentioned in the credits but I didn't work. Financially it was beneficial but from business side I lost. There was no guarantee it was a good program. (Handi Atmaja, Indonesian, producer/director/scriptwriter, personal communication, 22 Feb. 2013)[124]

For producers the manipulation with the credits is obviously a rather costly practice. Expatriate workers require monetary compensation for the loss of their "career capital". And local Indonesian directors/scriptwriters demand to be financially covered for the risk of damaging their professional reputation in case *sinetron* that is produced under their names does not meet certain standards of quality (usually set by the professionals themselves).[125]

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[124] Translated from the interview conducted in Indonesian.

[125] In their own words, media practitioners in Indonesia "developed an idiosyncrasy" towards rules and standards set for media production during the militarist New Order regime. Until recent (the early 2010s), establishing a written set of standards for the industry was avoided.

Why do producers want to incur additional expenses to juggle the names in the credits? I would argue that in one way or another ethnic imagery and the associated perceptions of foreignness and indigeneity is behind this complex organisation and re-organisation of *sinetron* credit titles.[126] First of all, pilot episodes target a very specific audience of TV channel management that sees foreign crew as a guarantee of quality for drama series, and local Indonesian crew as a key to successful comedies. Thus, to sell pilots to TV channels, Sindhi producers will keep the names of their expatriate workers in the credits for dramas and pay some extra to get the names of the top local directors/writers for sitcoms. After the pilots are sold, producers rearrange the credits by dropping the names used for marketing the shows for TV.

The exclusion of foreigners from the credit titles could, in fact, be a strategy of the Indonesian Sindhi producers to protect themselves from possible ownership claims by expats who usually have a rather developed "authorial self-understanding" grounded on professional skills, creative contribution and responsibility (Stahl 2009:59). Under Indonesian Copyright Law (Law 19/2002), which was in force during my fieldwork in 2013, author was defined as "the person whose name is mentioned in a Work or published as the Author of a Work."[127] Thus, by omitting the names of the contributors in the credit titles, the producers of Indian descent could be reducing the risk of legal disputes over proprietary rights. They protect their status as the sole copyright holders.

But the reasons for dropping the names of expatriate workers go beyond immediate commercial interests. My respondents, both Indonesians and expats, often linked the exclusion of overseas labour from *sinetron* credits with fear of xenophobia: "if there were too many foreign names in the credit titles there would be protests in front of our office". This statement is important as certain logic is at work here. When non-Sindhi PHs hire Indian expatriates they do not feel the need to erase their names

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Most often, practitioners rely on their own ideas about labour and product quality, acquired through education and/or professional experience.

[126] The practice of buying names was present in Indonesian film industry during the early 1990s but for a different set of reasons. As mentioned previously, only the members of the KFT were permitted to take part in production. Those filmmakers, who were not registered in this association, usually for ideological/political reasons, were able to continue working only under the names of the registered members.

[127] Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 19 Tahun 2002 Tentang Hak Cipta, Bab I, Pasal 5(1), b [Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 19 Regarding Copyright, 2002 Part Two, Article 5(1), b]. In 2014 the new Law (28/2014) regarding Copyright came into force.

from the titles. So it is not the names of the foreigners as such, and not even a certain number of expatriates working on *sinetron* production that can provoke negative reaction. It is the work of imagination that makes this instinctive linking and equation between Indonesians of Indian descent with Indians from overseas. It is the connection between local Indians with Indian nationals or local Chinese with Chinese citizens that can raise suspicion and distrust.

Complicated immigration and labour laws restricting employment of foreigners in the entertainment sector was rarely mentioned by my respondents but was surely an issue. Again, although it is not only Indonesians of foreign descent who have a record of hiring labour from abroad without following the due procedures, the entrepreneurs of foreign descent often become the main target of accusations of migration and labour law infringement. Several such cases were brought to public attention, especially in the period from the 1990s to the mid-2000s.[128] Importantly, during such cases the media usually focused not so much on the fact of non-compliance with the laws and regulations but on the alleged infiltration of Indonesian culture with the elements of foreign culture. Although such critique in media was mostly dropped in the late 2000s, PH bosses continue to exercise extra caution to avoid unnecessary attention from the immigration officers as well as journalists. In one way or another, a rather expensive manipulation of the credit titles is linked to the ethnicity of producers as well as other participants of the *sinetron* production process. In other words, ethnicity, understood as foreign or local, played a distinctive role, being simultaneously an asset and a risk factor.

5. Conclusion

This discussion has offered an account of commercial television production culture in Indonesia during the first two decades of industry establishment (the 1990s–2013), with a particular focus on social relationships within the leading PHs. I argued that the social hierarchy, formed in commercial *sinetron* production, was a result of the views of Sindhis that occupation is the main category of social classification. These

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[128] See Pontoh (2001) and Kitley (2004) for the examples of media attacks on Indonesian producers of Indian and Chinese descent.

views can be traced back to the caste system of South Asia. The perceptions of Sindhis merged well with the ideas of local Indonesians about social hierarchy based on ethnic division, the legacy of the colonial and post-revolutionary regimes. The rigid social structure shaped by distinct historical experiences helped maintain the operation of PHs during the period of political, economic and social instability—the decline and fall of the New Order regime and transition to democracy, as well as the rapid development of the national television industry.

Besides shaping the structure of social relations, ethnic imagery played a role in challenging it. The contestation over authorship in PHs was often built on the idea of superiority of one particular ethnicity over another. The rhetoric of indigeneity, a remnant of the New Order ideology, continued to circulate among commercial television industry workers. Moreover, foreignness, closely related to ethnicity and colonial imagery, retained its ambivalent status of power and weakness. The analysis of social relations, formed in a rather specific environment of the television production industry, showed that despite political and legal changes that took place after the fall of the New Order regime (formal abolition of the terms *pribumi*/non-*pribumi*), and the new economy of the cultural industry, social relations and everyday practices continued to be defined by the old categories of ethnic differences.

On a more general level, the case of the Indonesian soap opera production culture confirms the argument of Ganti, that "the commercial nature of a media institution does not necessarily render its hierarchy, organisation or working style transparent or universal" (Ganti 2012:176). Commercial industries are as much the products of particular cultures with their distinct operational logic and dynamics as they are the products of capitalism. While macro analysis of the cultural economy provides vital clues on how media industries operate globally and nationally, cultural analysis, supported by the ethnographic data, brings to the surface the nuances of everyday operation, which often play a decisive role in shaping power relations in particular local settings.

In the next chapter I continue to examine social relationships within the *sinetron* production culture and the role of ethnic imagery by adding the category of gender to my analysis. Along with demonstrating how ethnicised gender operates in media production on an everyday basis I will show that the scholarly literature on gender in

media production also falls into the trap of ethnic imagery and continues to reproduce the existing social hierarchy, despite claiming to do otherwise.

Chapter 6

Sindhi Women and *Sinetron* Production

1. Introduction

The previous chapters showed how certain practices of ethnicity construction featured in the *sinetron* production industry. First, I argued that the growth of the industry was to a large extent defined by the pressure on Sindhi men to acquire a self-employed status, to move from being "in service" to being self-employed. I then discussed how ethnic imagery significantly shaped the social hierarchy within *sinetron* production houses (henceforth PHs) owned by the Sindhi businessmen. So far the *sinetron* production industry looked like an exclusively male world with men establishing the companies, making decisions, controlling all aspects of production and distribution of the product to the clients.

This chapter starts with answering a slightly rephrased question of Cynthia Enloe: "where are the Sindhi women?" (Enloe 2004). Are they a part of the media production process? If yes, how do they construct their identity through the practices related to the *sinetron* production and do these practices influence the *sinetron* industry, "contribute to texts and shape possibilities for audience readings" (Levine 2001:68)? In other words, what is the role of Sindhi women in relation to the production of the soap operas—the television programs which are usually seen "to be both for and about women" (Brunsdon 2000:29)? As I explore the role and (self)-positioning of Sindhi women within the production culture by presenting new empirical data, I take a step further and offer a critique of existing scholarly approaches to the analysis of women's role in the national media production. My critique suggests that the scholarly work on women and the Indonesian media production has not challenged, but, on the contrary, reproduced the nationalistic and patriarchal social order. Last but not least, I argue for the importance of intersectionality, "the mutual constitution of ethnicity, gender, class

and nation" (Collins 1998; McCall 2005) when addressing social and political aspects of contemporary Indonesia.

My fieldwork showed that quite a few Sindhi women in Jakarta have been involved in the *sinetron* industry. Despite that, to the best of my knowledge no academic literature discusses the role of Sindhi female practitioners in Indonesian media. The absence of any mention of Sindhi women is peculiar amid the increased scholarly interest in female media practitioners in Indonesia (Hughes-Freeland 2011; Kurnia 2014; Michalik 2013, 2015; Nilan 2008). Given the silence of academic sources on Sindhi women in the *sinetron* production, this chapter is organised differently to the previous chapters. First, I introduce Sindhi women and describe what they do in the *sinetron* industry. The discussion is based on my ethnographic data, which includes my conversations with media practitioners and community members as well as data available through publicly accessible newspapers, promotional materials, press-conferences.

After documenting the presence of Sindhi women in *sinetron* business I examine how the practices of Sindhi women within the realm of *sinetron* production contribute to the constitution of Sindhi identity. I argue that while formally being in business Sindhi women continue to reproduce themselves in accordance with the gender ideology of the Sindhi community by approaching media not as business but as a family matter. I will then show that while acting strictly in line with gender expectations of the community, Sindhi women have considerably altered the *sinetron* production and texts. In the second half of the chapter I will pay attention to the theoretical implications of discussing the role of Sindhi women in the *sinetron* industry. I ask why, despite their active involvement in *sinetron* production business, Sindhi women "continue to fall through the gaps in critical analysis into a void of invisibility" (Hallam 2007:21). And what do the gaps in academic literature tell us about the nature of the existing scholarship on ethnicity, gender and national media production in Indonesia?

2. Sindhi Women and Production Business

As discussed in chapter Two, my fieldwork showed that by and large Sindhi women in Jakarta stayed away from business, dividing their time between family and

household matters, beauty salons and social and religious gatherings. At the same time, in 2013 there were around ten Sindhi women who were actively involved in day-to-day operations of the *sinetron* business. While most joined the industry in the mid-2000s, at least two have been working in production since the 1990s. By "being actively involved" I mean that these women hold official positions, get a mention in the credit titles, and are physically present in the office participating in day-to-day business activities. Most probably, the actual number of women who have had an impact on the decision-making process in *sinetron* production is even higher. In many cases women are involved in business informally, which makes it difficult for outside observers, or even employees, to see and document their role in the production process.

The Sindhi women who are engaged in production of television content constitute quite a diverse group: they represent different generations, and as a result have different educational levels and skills. Their life trajectories as well as their personal interests vary considerably. Despite these differences Sindhi women working for *sinetron* production share common behaviour patterns—they act as if they are not in business, i.e. male sphere of life, but as if they are still within their domestic space. To put it differently, they redefine office work and relationships in the terms of domesticity.

As discussed in chapter Two, the Sindhi community defines gender roles very clearly, and altering or reversing these gender roles is problematic for women and men alike.[129] While men, to be true to their ethnocultural identity, have to be in business, women should take responsibility for the family and household, as well as demonstrate family wealth and prosperity through certain practices (staying at home, not working) and appearance. Sindhi girls are brought up with the idea that their main goal in life is to get married (Falzon 2004, Thapan 2002). All other activities of Sindhi females are subdued to it. The educational degrees are worth as much as they help a Sindhi girl to find a good, meaning wealthy suitor. Work experience is seen as a way of "having some fun" before settling down, not as a step towards professional and personal development. If after marriage a Sindhi woman wants to continue working she can do so with her husband's approval and mostly for a family business. In rare cases a married Sindhi

[129] It is, in fact, much more difficult for men to leave business and become an employee or house husband, than for a woman to join business. For more on gender ideology in Jakartan Sindhi community see chapter Two.

woman can work outside of her family business but usually still for a company owned by Sindhis. Moreover, most Sindhi women who work after marriage choose occupations that are deemed suitable for their "female nature" like cooking, teaching, arts and design, human resources, and finances.[130]

In the *sinetron* production business the behaviour and positioning of Sindhi women conform to the expectations set for women in Sindhi community. First of all, Sindhi media practitioners whom I met and heard of during my fieldwork worked for the companies owned by the Sindhis. The only exception was Gita Jiwatram Kemchandani who worked for media corporation Netmediatama, a non-Sindhi company. Her name, however, suggests that she is from the family of KK Jiwat (Jiwat Kemchandani), the owner of PT Bola Dunia production house, and probably gained her first experience in media in a Sindhi company. Moreover, Sindhi women joined media businesses not as individual, independent media professionals but as dutiful wives and daughters, at the request of their husbands or fathers to assist with the family business. It should be emphasised that although in the early 1990s and the 2000s some prejudice against women formally joining business was still present, working was not a taboo for Sindhi women as it was in the 1950s and 1960s. In other words, by joining Sindhi family businesses these women did not challenge gender norms. Quite the contrary, they reinforced them in many ways. Moreover, it is important to emphasise that by the 1990s the improved economic status of the Sindhis considerably limited the number of duties through which Sindhi women could reproduce themselves as good wives if staying at home. As one of my respondents put it, "with all help you get at home, how much can you be a housewife?"[131]

Consider the case of Raakhee Punjabi, one of the first Sindhi women in the media industry.[132] Raakhee, born Shanta Harjani, married Raam Punjabi in 1971, at the beginning of his career in film distribution and production business. For the first twenty years of her marriage Raakhee was an ideal Sindhi wife, behaving strictly in line with

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[130] For more about post-Partition experience and change in gender ideology after migration see chapter Two.

[131] Household staff of a middle and middle-upper class family usually consists of two or three maids, a babysitter (one for each child), a cook, drivers and a gardener.

[132] The wife of Manu Sukmajaya (Manu Mahtani), Hanita Mahtani, is mentioned in the credits of several films released in the 1980s.

the expectations set for women in the Sindhi community during the 1970s–1980s. She spent most of her time at home with her mother-in-law learning how to cook and tidy up the house (Endah 2005). Raakhee joined the production business only in the early 1990s when the presence of a woman working for a Sindhi business was already quite common and domestic help available at home did not leave much scope for a Sindhi woman to show matrimonial piety.

Similar to Raakhee, Shania Punjabi, born Lakhiani, joined the media production business at the request of her husband, Manoj Punjabi, who after working for his uncle's company for more than ten years, decided to establish his own business. For the first two years, when her husband was an employee, Shania, a highly educated professional with work experience in a consulting company in Singapore, was a full time housewife and mother. Thus, for both Raakhee and Shania, the main trigger to enter business was to provide support for their husbands and thus conform to the gender expectation of the community.

Shalu TM (Mulani), Sonya VM (Mukhi), Priya NK (Keswani), and Karishma Jethani, the third generation of Sindhi migrants, entered media business as obedient daughters. During the first several years of their work for Rapi, Shalu and Sonya assisted their ageing father, Shankar Samtani. After Shankar passed away, the sisters established a new PH, PT Mega Kreasi (henceforth Mega Kreasi), to carry "the legacy left to them by the legendary film maker, Subagio Samtono (Shankar Samtani)."[133] Priya, the daughter of Shankar's brother and business partner, Gope Samtani, joined Rapi as a personal assistant to her father, when her cousins decided to branch off. Karishma Jethani, daughter of Raam Punjabi, who is more than ten years younger than Shalu, Sonya and Priya, was interested in media production since her childhood and even took film production as her major in one of the leading film schools in Australia. Although she had a chance to establish her career in production independently (she had a job offer from an Australian production company), as a dutiful daughter she returned to Indonesia and replaced her mother, Raakhee, as head of the finance department at MultiVision, Punjabi's family business.

[133] www.megakreasi.com (last accessed 11 Apr. 2014). The site ceased to exist.

Along with entering production due to matrimonial or filial piety, Sindhi women take positions in media businesses that are allocated to them based on their ethnicised gender, not their education, professional experience or personal preferences. The duties of Sindhi women, which vary from greeting important visitors to being in charge of creative decisions, public relations and corporate image, are set based on several factors: the position of their male family members, the Sindhi idea about suitability of a job for "female nature" and general expectations applied to all Sindhis, male and female alike. Thus, Sindhi women are at the top of the production hierarchy not because of their professional qualifications but due to the position of their husbands (which however does not mean that Sindhi women are not qualified to fulfil their duties).

While ethnicised gender facilitates access to certain positions, it is a barrier to others. Certain positions in production are deemed unsuitable for Sindhis in general, and Sindhi women in particular. For example, being an artist, director or any other member of the production crew is mostly unthinkable for Sindhi men and women alike because of the low status of employee and the small amount of money these occupations bring in Indonesia.[134] Compared to men, women who wish to choose these roles have to deal with a harsher moral judgement because of the alleged lifestyle – work during the night, extensive travel, parties. Therefore, by occupying positions ascribed to them by husbands and fathers, Sindhi women conform to the gender norms in the Sindhi community.

All Sindhi women started their work in production in roles where their husbands or fathers needed most assistance. When Raakhee joined production, she took full charge not only of financial matters but grooming and training aspiring *sinetron* actresses (see below for more detail). Karishma Punjabi, who during her studies specialised in film directing and had experience working on the shooting site in Australia, took responsibility for financial matters. She explained her position in the family business in the following way:

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[134] To the best of my knowledge for more than a half century history of Sindhi settlement in Indonesia and the involvement of Sindhis in media production, there has been only one Sindhi male film director and one Sindhi male presenter on Indonesian television. In India there are several Sindhi directors and artists. From the point of view of Jakartan Sindhis being an actress/actor in Bollywood is socially acceptable because the fees of the artists are much higher in India than the fees of Indonesian celebrities.

> I used to be in production but now I'm in finance *because* now it's my brother and my husband who are involved in production. I *have stepped back because* one needs to oversee the finance. Basically I am now doing my mom's job. It's another crucial thing. (Karishma Punjabi, Indonesian Sindhi, producer, personal communication, 18 Feb. 2013)

Meanwhile, Shania Punjabi, a graduate of the prestigious Wharton Business School, handled "back office, general affairs, human resources, corporate image and creative department".[135] All of these tasks – taking care of finances and human resources, being responsible for the image of the company – do not compromise the norm of Sindhi femininity. While formally being in business, they remain in their female domain and do not step into male territory. Even when Sindhi women eventually gain the control of certain divisions or even the whole company, as in case of Shalu and Sonya, they try to avoid projecting themselves as being part of a business (read male) world. Neither Sonya, who since 2013 runs the whole production business, nor Raakhee or Shania, who are often acting as executive producers, are members of Gandhi Seva Loka, Sindhi business association, or *Persatuan Produser Film Indonesia* (Association of Film Producers in Indonesia). For Sindhi women these associations remain strictly a male area and joining them is considered a serious deviation from the gender norm.

In relationship with public media Sindhi female practitioners also try to stay within the ascribed gender norms. As mentioned in chapter Two, women are usually responsible for those aspects of business that "do not require contact with the public sphere" (Thapan 2002:70). The media production business poses a certain challenge in this respect, but Sindhi women manage it well by actively avoiding any publicity, leaving public appearances to the male members of the family. Shalu, Sonya and Priya maintain a very low profile and have no interaction with the press whatsoever. Similarly, Karishma avoids attention from the media. Karishma's brother, however, does give interviews as a producer, and from time to time features in society pages of glossy magazines. The only occasion when Karishma received media attention was her wedding.

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[135] "Shania, di Balik Layar Gemerlap Itu," Kompas News Megapolis, last modified 28 Feb. 2010, ttp://megapolitan.kompas.com/read/2010/02/28/11213666/ Shania.di.Balik.Layar.Gemerlap.Itu (last accessed 15 Feb. 2015).

Raakhee and Shania Punjabi are the only Sindhi ladies who have some media presence, but they manage it carefully to create an image that conforms to the existing ideal of Sindhi women.[136] Raakhee appears in tabloids only as a companion of her husband.[137] Unlike Raakhee, Shania does give interviews on her own, but these are, as a rule, for fashion and style magazines (*Indonesian Tatler*, for example). In other words, she is interviewed as a beautiful and rich woman first, and only then as a professional. In all her interviews Shania presents herself first and foremost as an ideal wife taking care of her husband, supporting him in the moments of happiness and grief, at home as well as outside of it. Moreover, the interviews usually open with a paragraph praising Shania's ability to support her husband in his business activities without compromising her motherly and household responsibilities:

> Shania is able to help her husband to run business without neglecting the importance of the family matters. Two parts [of life] are well balanced... She is smart and thorough no matter what she does; she is a good spouse, a good housewife, a good director.[138]

In addition to that, both Raakhee and Shania portray (and are portrayed by their husbands) and position themselves not only as mothers of their own children but as mothers of the company's employees. According to Raam, *sinetron* artists and PH crew would often call Raakhee "mama" (Endah 2005:269). As a "mother" of her employees, Raakhee exercised rigid control over *sinetron* actors and actresses. It is well known that the exclusive contracts of MultiVision define most aspects of life of *sinetron* celebrities. Such form of control can be equalled with parental control in Sindhi families where grown-up children are fully accountable to their parents until marriage (see chapter

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[136] It should be mentioned that journalists covering media personas in Indonesia show little interest in the producers of *sinetron* and film, left alone their wives. This is not a critical journalism but a kind of a service available for people who are looking for public presence. All the media presence of Shania is the result of her own and her husband's initiative and the work of MD entertainment public relations department.

[137] Raakhee started appearing in media independently only in 2014, after she left MultiVision and got involved in women's charity activities.

[138] "Berita," MD Entertainment, www.mdentertainment.net (last accessed 15 May 2015).

Two). Shania creates an image of a supporting and caring mother: "Shania often becomes a shoulder to cry on for the company employees."[139]

Besides, publicly accessible materials emphasise "typical" female features of these women. In his autobiography, Raam states that Raakhee "in a distinctively feminine way, [acting] in a soft and persuasive manner, helped a lot to solve problems with the artists of MultiVision" (Endah 2005:269). The MD site describes Shania in a very similar way: "Shania's character is calm and soft."[140] At the same time, being a Sindhi woman does not mean being weak. Raam Punjabi talks about Raakhee as "a very tough woman" (Endah 2005:269), while Manoj points to intelligence of his wife: "Shania's way of thinking is sharp and assertive."[141]

Last but not least, Sindhi women reproduce themselves as dutiful wives by demonstrating the wealth of their husbands through their own image and the image of the company, mostly mediated through the image of the *sinetron* artists. Display of family wealth through dress, expensive jewellery (diamonds, gold), accessories as well as plastic surgeries is obligatory for Sindhi women. Raakhee Punjabi illustrates this point particularly well. When I came to MultiVision to interview Punjabi's family, I was first greeted by Raakhee Punjabi, a tiny woman with a youthful face and a sophisticated hairstyle. During the six hours that I spent in MultiVision, Raakhee demonstrated self-restraint and modesty. Her participation in the discussion was minimal. In those few moments when Raakhee joined the conversation it was mostly to help her husband express his thoughts well and correct his Indonesian and English. During lunch Raakhee ate very little and explained to me that she had been a vegetarian for 30 years. At the same time, while Raakhee was obviously in high control of her emotions and actions, her appearance was in many ways excessive, especially her hairstyle.

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[139] "Berita," MD Entertainment, www.mdentertainment.net (last accessed 15 May 2015).

[140] "Berita," MD Entertainment, www.mdentertainment.net (last accessed 15 May 2015).

[141] "Berita," MD Entertainment, www.mdentertainment.net (last accessed 15 May 2015).

Image 3. Raakhee and Raam Punjabi[142]

As I came to know later, Raakhee's hairstyle is her trademark, not only in the Sindhi community but outside of it. She never leaves her house without having her hair (and makeup) done by the one of the most expensive stylists in Jakarta, Susy Turino, who charges around one million rupiah, or approximately US$100 per session.[143] The impossibility of recreating this hairstyle in its perfection without (expensive) professional help is the main feature of Raakhee's look and one of the best illustrations of how knowledge of one's worth is being communicated in the Sindhi community (Falzon 2004:253).

But Raakhee exhibits family wealth not only through her own image but also the looks of *sinetron* artists, and the image of the company, more generally. When Raakhee joined the production business in 1991 she took charge of makeup, hairstyle as well as dress of the *sinetron* actresses, and created the image of *sinetron* celebrities both on and off screen. Raakhee was successful in her endeavour not only because the girls who

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[142] From the forum discussion called "Rambut Mahal Rakhe Punjabi" (Expensive hair of Rakhe Punjabi), Detik Forum, Entertainment Online, Selebriti, last modified 18 July, 2008, 10:52 a.m., http://forum.detik.com/rambut-mahal-rakhe-punjabi-t26970p34.html (last accessed 1 Aug. 2016).

[143] "Susy Turino, Make Up Artist dan Hairdresser Langganan Sosialita," Henni T. Soelaeman, SWA, last modified 10 Feb.2013, http://swa.co.id/headline/susy-turino-make-up-artist-dan-hairdresser-langganan-sosialita (last accessed 13 Dec. 2015).

started working for commercial *sinetron* had no professional background or training whatsoever (see chapter Three) but also because as a good Sindhi wife she had the necessary skills to create a glamorous look. One senior Sindhi community member shared her admiration for Raakhee's contribution to the Indonesian visual culture:

> Raam Punjabi's wife brought the creative look of the actresses making them look very pretty, which was not seen in Indonesia before. They [Raakhee and Raam Punjabi] both are legends. She made the best of Indonesian actresses look beautiful. She brought the trend of the hair style, make-up... She brought the spec of grandness. (Rohini, Sindhi community member, personal communication, 5 March 2013)

Two aspects are important here: first, Raakhee considerably altered the look of the actresses/actors and set the trend for future *sinetron* celebrities; and second, she did so in accordance with the Sindhi idea of beauty, understood in terms of wealth and conspicuous consumption of goods and services. For Sindhis money is the measurement of one's worth, and beauty is also measured in monetary terms. Looking beautiful means looking expensive. In the early 1990s such understanding of beauty was in sharp contrast with the concept of beauty promoted by the state-run courses in femininity, according to which beauty "could only be expressed through managed consumption" (Jones 2010: 275).

Indeed, Indonesian *sinetron* actresses (and actors but to a lesser extent), or to be more precise, celebrities, who were trained, groomed and nurtured by Raakhee, differed significantly from the artists appearing in dramas produced by the state-owned TV channel. As a rule, *sinetron* celebrities would have fair skin, long wavy hair, white even teeth, slim bodies. In TVRI dramas the beauty was not directly linked to the cultural signifiers of wealth, such as fair skin, for example. The beauty could be associated with skin colour of "young teak wood or sweet dark" meaning "beautiful dark skin" (Sunindyo 1993:138). Each feature of commercial *sinetron* celebrities would speak for investment and upper class. In colonial and post-colonial Indonesia, as in other countries in South and Southeast Asia, fair skin has long been a signifier of an upper

class.[144] Wavy styled hair is also a sign of professional beauty services as straight hair is more common in Java (where most of *sinetron* stars come from). Slim bodies can be nature given but staying fit requires hours of training in fitness clubs, another marker of upper class lifestyle (Sen 1998). By creating glamorous images of the aspiring *sinetron* actresses Raakhee (and later other Sindhi women) was acting not as a professional make-up artist, but as a diligent Sindhi wife, whose matrimonial obligation included demonstration of husband's wealth and prosperity through the look.

To sum up, Sindhi women have been actively participating in the media production business. Some hold top positions and make decisions which impact on the production process and industry as a whole. At the same time, Sindhi women do not break or challenge the gender norms of Sindhi community explicitly. They approach production business as domestic space, behaving first and foremost as obedient wives and dutiful daughters, or at least producing the image of matrimonial and filial piety. The following discussion of the exceptional case of a Sindhi girl in media production as well as the comparison of Sindhi females with non-Sindhi women in media business will provide additional evidence to the fact that positioning of Sindhi women within the organisational hierarchy is defined not only by their gender but their ethnicised gender.

2.1. Neha's Case

As it is sometimes the case, not all Sindhi women who are involved in national media production conform to the existing gender norms and expectations. First, I would like to bring to the fore the case of Sonya MK, who is a full-time, hands-on company owner, running a complex business of *sinetron* and FTV production for commercial television channels.[145] The crew members who worked for Sonya described her as a strong authoritative woman. Her production crew talked about her working ethics in a way that was usually used to discuss the ethics in other PHs owned by Indonesian Sindhis: "she cares only about budget", "she does not set up high standards", "she cares more about quantity than quality". But Sonya's case is not the only example of Sindhi

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[144] For more on fair skin and construction of whiteness throughout the history of Indonesia see Saraswati (2007, 2010).

[145] FTV, or *Film Televisi*, are films shot specifically for television, not cinema. It is a popular subgenre of *sinetron*. The main specialisation of Sonya's production, Mega Kreasi, is FTVs.

females deviating from the prescribed gender roles when stepping into the realm of the Indonesian media production. The story of a young Sindhi girl, Neha, is an interesting example of resistance against the gender expectations, which, in fact, grew out of inability to conform to the imposed ideals of femininity.

Neha, an Indonesian Sindhi of the fourth generation, grew up in a typical middle-class Indonesian Sindhi family: Neha's father is a successful private entrepreneur owning a textile shop in Pasar Baru, and her mother is a housewife, who occasionally helps her husband with his business but spends most of her time watching Indian soap operas on Zee TV and attending social gatherings. None of Neha's direct family members were involved in film production and distribution. Neha graduated from Mahatma Gandhi School, is fluent in English and Indonesian, and speaks a bit of Hindi and Sindhi.[146] She considers herself Indonesian brought up in a Sindhi tradition. Neha's parents do not encourage her to make friends outside of the Sindhi community and make it very clear that they expect her to marry a Sindhi.

Neha started questioning Sindhi gender ideals and norms in her early teens when her body suddenly stopped conforming to certain parameters of Sindhi feminine beauty. Neha's mother, seeing her daughter overgrowing size six, insisted on diet pills, when Neha was only 12, because, as Neha explained to me, in the Sindhi community the girls and women should be skinny.[147] If for Sindhi men, especially married ones, some extra weight is seen as a sign of prosperity and happiness, for Sindhi girls and women it is something to be ashamed of. Social pressure made Neha challenge other gendered rules and taboos. In her late teens she started smoking. While smoking is not exactly praised in most societies, it is a strict taboo for Sindhi women. Neha found smoking liberating. At the same time she always carried with her several "devices" to eliminate smell of cigarettes from her car, her belongings and her body, so her parents would not notice it.

Neha's major attack on gender prescribed roles was the choice of her higher degree and refusal to marry in her early twenties. Facing strong disapproval from her

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[146] For more on the Mahatma Gandhi School, previously known as Gandhi Memorial School, see chapter One.

[147] I am not saying that such attitude to body shape and size is something unique to the Sindhi community. What I want to say is that the non-conformity with certain gender expectations has a serious impact on a person's life and his/her inclusion in the community.

parents and community elders, she enrolled into a new private university for a degree in filmmaking. Her parents eventually agreed to pay for Neha's education, but only after one of the respected female community members who had experience working for the Sindhi-owned PHs supported Neha's choice. For her internships Neha chose a local independent film production company and worked as a crew member spending long hours "in the field". Neha's work became another constant worry of her mother, who often visited the late night shootings or asked Neha's older sister to "look after" her younger sibling. According to Neha, the major concern of her parents was a non-Sindhi Indonesian crew that Neha worked with: "if I go out with my Sindhi friends, my parents would not call me until 2 am, but when I am with my Indonesian [non-Sindhi] friends they would start calling around 9 pm," Neha complained to me. For her final project Neha made a short film about a world where fat people were in the majority. The scenario reflected social pressure that Neha experienced in the Sindhi community for not being able to conform to the ideal type of a Sindhi femininity—a skinny lady working "for fun" doing some gendered administrative office work, while looking for a perfect (read wealthy) suitor.

Curiously enough, Neha also faced difficulties and prejudice in the professional circle, not as a Sindhi woman but as an Indian Indonesian. She mentioned that people usually associated her with other Indians in the industry and thought of her only in a very stereotypical way, as a *sinetron* producer, not an independent filmmaker. After graduation and several years of freelance projects, Neha joined one of the major Sindhi-owned media production houses, a decision which might have been partially motivated by the existing prejudice against Indian Indonesians in the production world.

The examples of Sonya and Neha shed light on several issues related to my discussion about Sindhi women and the Indonesian media production. First of all, the experience of female community members who entered production not as professionals but as diligent wives and daughters, did play a significant role in facilitating entry to the industry for the next generation of Sindhi girls. Second and third generation Sindhi women did not challenge the gender roles explicitly. But their ability to stay feminine in the eyes of Sindhi community members while being in the industry associated with the male world, contributed to the shift in gender ideology of the Sindhi community. The case of Neha demonstrates that professional aspirations of younger girls are taken into account. Neha's parents not only paid for her degree in filmmaking, a profession

unthinkable for men, not to speak of women, but let her build a career in media production.

Second, the cases of Sonya and Neha illustrate that the positioning of Sindhi women in Indonesian media production is defined not just by gender or ethnicity, and expectations and biases associated with these social categories, but a more complex category of ethnicised gender. Sonya and Neha have to navigate their way in the industry by taking into account the occupational and gender norms of the Indonesian Sindhi community as well as stereotypes about Indian Indonesians in the national media production industry.

3. Comparison with non-Sindhi Women

Non-Sindhi women have quite a different experience in the *sinetron* industry in general, and in Sindhi-owned production studios in particular. Since the late 1980s the media production industry was open to women. In the previous decades media production was basically a male world and those few women who worked there were the relatives of male professionals (Sen 1994b).[148] But since the second half of the 1980s Indonesian women of the economic background similar to that of Sindhis (the so-called middle and middle-upper class) started entering production "in their own right as participants in the economy in the public sphere of society, and not only as daughters, wives and mothers of male members" (Sen 1998:37). Indonesian women worked in various capacities, from make-up artists to heads of production. They were present both "in the field" and in the administration. In fact, during the early years of commercial television women even outnumbered men in decision-making positions (Michalik 2013a:178).

[148] In her work Sen focused on film production and did not discuss the situation in production of television programs. The existing literature on television production in Indonesia in the period between the 1960s and the 1980s (Kitley 2000; Alfian & Chu 1981) has no information on the gender composition of television production teams. Given that during the above-mentioned period the state did not encourage women to join labour force and that television was under control of the state, I assume that the number of women in television production was also very small.

The sharp increase in the number of women taking various positions in media production was a result of considerable changes in the social, political and economic life in Indonesia in the late 1970s. Partially due to the pressure of international organisations, the gender ideology of the New Order shifted from the ideal of women as "married, monogamous, child-bearing and rearing, house-keeping creatures" (Sen 1982:29) to contributors to various sectors of the state economy.[149] By 1988, the government five-year plan acknowledged "women's skills and education that enabled women to take advantage of work opportunities in various sectors" (Sen 1998:43). The official recognition of women as a working force facilitated entrance and participation of female professionals in different aspects of media production. During the same period (the 1990s and the 2000s), for Sindhi women entering the media business through male relatives remained the only possible way.

At the same time, in the Sindhi-owned PHs certain positions seem unattainable for Indonesian female professionals. In chapter Five I argued that the decision-making power is distributed along ethnic lines where Indonesian Sindhis occupy the top positions and non-Sindhi Indonesians are allocated the positions closer to the bottom of the social hierarchy. The picture of power distribution becomes more nuanced when gender is added to analysis. For example, there were several cases where Indonesian men in Sindhi-owned PHs held a position of department head on a permanent basis, but to the best of my knowledge such positions have never been occupied by Indonesian women.[150] In most cases Indonesian female workers employed by the Sindhi companies are doing freelance or production assistance work.

The social organisation of the Sindhi-owned PHs is even more complex in terms of power distribution along ethnic and gender lines because Sindhi producers have a record of recruiting non-Sindhi Indian female media professionals for positions which seem out of reach for Indonesian women. In fact, MultiVision represents an interesting case in respect to power distribution along ethnicised gender lines, as the second most

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[149] The United Nations declared 1978 as International Women's year and organised several global events promoting women's rights. Indonesia participated in these initiatives and made some changes in the existing policies: in 1978, "women" became a separate category in the five-year plan. In 1983 a "Junior Minister for Women's Affairs" became a cabinet position with the formal title "Office of the Minister of State for the Role of Women" (Sen 1998:42).

[150] Although there are cases when female writers are in charge of scriptwriting groups, these women are as a rule working on freelance, not permanent basis.

powerful figure in MultiVision is a female, Ms Anita Raghunath Whora, who is neither related to the MultiVision owners, nor a member of local Sindhi community. Despite that, Ms Anita, an Indian national, holds several important posts in the organisational structure of MultiVision and is the only female on the Directors' Board besides Raakhee and Karishma. Anita, who has worked in MultiVision almost since its establishment, was in charge of the creative department and responsible for all business negotiations with Astro Malaysia Holding, one of the biggest broadcasting television networks in Asia.[151] Since 2010 Anita oversees the production of television programs made in cooperation with the Malaysian partners, another important sector of MultiVision international business expansion.[152] Other Sindhi-owned PHs also have a record of recruiting female workers from India and appointing them as heads of creative and design departments.

All these examples confirm that in *sinetron* production Sindhi women position themselves (and are being positioned) based not only on their gender but ethnicised gender. The practices of Sindhi women within the production are subject to the ethnic community norms, not the broader gender ideology of Indonesian society. Within the PHs owned by the Sindhis, Sindhi, non-Sindhi Indian and non-Sindhi Indonesian women (and men) are assigned different roles. Thus, both gender and ethnicity locate production workers in the organisational hierarchy of *sinetron* production.

4. Sindhi Women and their Contribution to *Sinetron* Production

As I have shown, Sindhi women working for *sinetron* production during the research period (1991–2013) demonstrate a conscious effort to conform to the gender expectations of the local Sindhi community. They are no feminists. Their actions and the images they have created for themselves largely reproduce, not challenge the gender norms of the Sindhi community. By conforming to the norms of the Sindhi society within the space of mainstream *sinetron* production even when many gender barriers for

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[151] The negotiations were successful and the deal between MultiVision and Astro brought huge profit for Punjabi's company.

[152] Since the expansion of MultiVision into other Asian markets (Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos and the Philippines), Anita Whora is also in charge of joint film productions.

middle class women in the Indonesian society were removed, the Sindhi women have contributed to the image of the *sinetron* production culture as a patriarchal space. Moreover, the fact that in the major (read Sindhi-owned) *sinetron* PHs certain positions at the top seem unattainable for non-Indian women is possibly one of the reasons why highly qualified female professionals have looked for the opportunities outside the major PHs. In the eyes of professionals, the mainstream production continues to be equated with patriarchy largely due to the inner organisational structure of the PHs.

But this is only a part of the story. Sindhi women, acting from a space confined by their ethnicised gender, have significantly altered the *sinetron* text. First, Sindhi women introduced glamour to Indonesian soap opera. Luxury and excessiveness became one of the distinctive features of Indonesian *sinetron* produced for commercial television (Barkin 2004). Moreover, in Indonesian *sinetron* the already existing markers of wealth, prosperity and glamour are underlined by additional expressive means. For example, most Sindhi-produced *sinetron* would feature fat, bold, dark, short male actors with uneven or missing teeth. The characters played by these actors would usually be a comic relief, at the same time accentuating the beauty of fair, slim, tall female protagonists. If American day-time soap operas work only with so-called "beautiful people" (Munshi 2010:93), Indonesian soaps usually include several "ugly characters".

But Sindhi women not only changed the aesthetics of *sinetron*—they made aesthetic aspects as important as the narrative. The make-up, costumes, and interior design started to play a very important role in building the characters of *sinetron*. In sinetron aired on the state-owned TVRI the meaning was primarily conveyed through narratives and dialogues. Costumes, makeup and hair style played a secondary role. But in the case of *sinetron* made by the Sindhi PHs the role of narrative and aesthetics became equally important.[153] This change is expressed in the substantial redistribution of production budgets. While TVRI during the peak of propaganda years (the 1970s–the early 1980s) allocated only eleven per cent of the total budget for talent and costume

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[153] Audio aspects also started playing an important role but more in a sense of covering the faults of production (bad sound during shooting, lack of expression and emotions from the actors). One can argue that the focus on the appearance, physical features is also a means to compensate the inability of *sinetron* actors to act well and it holds true to a certain extent. But while most background music was, according to the production crew, copy-pasted from the Indian daytime soaps, the creative look was an original work executed by the local professionals (under supervision of Raakhee, Shania and others).

(Alfian & Chu 1981:37–38), the Sindhi-produced PHs could easily spend half of the production budget for the main talent, costume and makeup. For example, in the 2000s Raam Soraya allocated the lion's share of *sinetron* production budget to designing and making costumes, composing and recording songs in Bombay, and inviting leading Indian choreographers and art directors to take part in shooting in Indonesia. It is also a well-known fact that the fees of *sinetron* stars, the selected few, far outweigh the fees of all other production crew members, as I discussed in detail in chapter Five.

Of course, the international companies who used *sinetron* stars as the promoters of their goods (discussed in chapter Three), mostly beauty products, advertised on national television, did play an important role in encouraging PHs to emphasise the physical features of *sinetron* stars. But while these requirements were put forward to all *sinetron* production studios, it was only Sindhi-owned PHs that responded to these demands truly successfully. And this is due to the fact that for Sindhi women, raised in mercantile society, the idea of beauty "manifested in bodily glamorous beauty, materialism and consumption" (Widodo 2002) was nothing new. As obedient wives, Sindhi women were experts in expressing beauty through conspicuous consumption of expensive products and services.

Whether the change in *sinetron* aesthetics and its equal role in the narrative had a significant impact on the female viewers' subjectivity and, in general, empowerment of women, requires research on its own and is beyond the scope of my research. I just want to indicate that commercial *sinetron*, which was full of images of "sexy 'temptresses' who sport the latest Western fashions and place their glamourous jobs and lifestyles above their families" (Smith-Hefner 2007:415), might be one of the factors that changed women's self-perception in the rapidly transforming world. The significant modification of *sinetron* aesthetics and its role in the text, where visual aspects became as important as the intricacies of the plot and moral messages, created the possibility of reading *sinetron* as an authoritative guide for the emerging form of femininity, which invoked sophistication, wealth, professionalism and cosmopolitanism (Sen 1998:43).

5. Scholarship as a Reproduction of Social Order

In the remaining part of the chapter I examine the reasons why Sindhi women, who as I showed, contributed to the industry and the produced meaning, have been ignored by academia. I argue that such neglect is inscribed in the frameworks used by the scholars for analysis of the role of women in Indonesian national media. In many ways the existing scholarship on women in media production is nationalistic, elitist and patriarchal. It continues reproducing the existing hegemonic order despite claiming to challenge it.

First of all, Sindhi female practitioners have been ignored in the literature on women in the Indonesian media because nationalistic sentiments continue – to a certain extent – shaping the writing of researchers (especially Indonesian researchers) studying women in cultural production. Women's studies in Indonesia, as elsewhere in the world, are informed by the feminist movement. In the Indonesian context the feminist movement developed in parallel with the nationalist movement and, as a result, tended to exclude women who were "deemed to be 'alien'" (Blackburn 2004:19). By excluding, or simply ignoring, the experiences of women of the so-called "foreign descent" the existing scholarship on media production continues reproducing aspects of the New Order ideology, in which the definition of legitimate culture was based on the indigeneity of its producers.

In fact, the question of how ethnicitised gender features at the level of media production and how it shapes possibilities for gender and ethnicity representation on screen was paid little attention in the Indonesian context. This is regardless of the fact that the researchers in other fields of academic inquiry (i.e. developmental studies, anthropology) pointed to the importance of bringing these two socially constructed categories together to get a richer understanding of social and power relations in post-colonial Indonesia (Blackwood 1995; Tsing 1993; Robinson 1994, 2008). So far only Sen (2006) and Heryanto (2008) brought ethnicity and gender together in their analysis of social and political relations in contemporary Indonesia through media. In her article on Chinese Indonesians in film production Sen (2006) discusses the difficulties that Chinese male filmmakers experienced while working for national cinema during the New Order. She also points out that, along with being highly nationalist, the production of Indonesian cinema was also a predominantly male space. Although Sen did not state

this explicitly, it is clear that in such a context female professionals of Chinese descent might have experienced additional difficulties in getting access to the media production. Moreover, in her analysis of the presence, or better to say, absence of Chineseness on the silver screen, Sen found that during Suharto's rule "only one film deals overtly and substantially with the Chinese presence in Indonesia and has an ethnic Chinese heroine" (Sen 2006:177). The story of the film called *Putri Giok* ("Beautiful Giok", 1980) revolves around a couple, a Chinese girl and an "'Indonesian' (defined as such by the film) young man" (Sen 2006:177), who wants to tie the knot but who also faces strong dissent from the girl's father, a rich Chinese businessman. In contrast, the Indonesian parents welcome the girl with open hearts. Sen argued that the gender of the main character made the restoration of national order an easy task – the Chinese woman is absorbed into the Indonesian nation through marrying a *pribumi* Indonesian (Sen 2006:177). So the presence of the Chinese characters in *Putri Giok* did not challenge the existing mode of national representation.

Drawing on the work of Sen, Heryanto (2008) points out that the gender of the Chinese protagonists in Indonesian national cinema is an important signifier of the current state of ethnic politics in the country. In the 1930s "when ethnic Chinese had a privileged position economically and enjoyed political liberty, the few inter-racial love stories that they produced featured Chinese men and *pribumi* women" (Heryanto 2008:80). In post-independence nationalist Indonesia, when Indonesian Chinese became "cultural pariah", the only interracial marriages that appeared on screen were between Indonesian *pribumi* males and "foreign" females, and *Putri Giok* (1980) is the best example. In this context, Heryanto argues, the appearance of a male Chinese protagonist in the film *Ca-bau-kan* (2002), released soon after the fall of the New Order regime, indicates a significant social shift in public discourse on Chinese Indonesians. Therefore, Heryanto points to the need for further research, which takes into account both ethnicity and gender in the analysis of cultural texts and their significance for the broader social and political contexts. The work of Sen and Heryanto is, however, the only example which indicates that bringing ethnicity and gender together in the analysis of production and representation can be a fruitful exercise for tracing social and

political change in Indonesia.[154] As Sen and Heryanto focused on feature films, the question of how the construction of gender and ethnicity features in *sinetron* remained largely unanswered.

This brings me to the next point of my critique: despite the fact that television has been the most popular and watched media in Indonesia (Ishadi 2011:37; Tapsell 2015:184), with *sinetron* holding the top rating positions for the last two decades (the 1990s and the 2000s), academics addressing gender issues in media by and large ignore television. For most researchers, cinema remains the primary focus of gender analysis in Indonesian media. The scholarship on Indonesian national television, in general, and construction of gender behind and on screen, in particular, is still in its nascent stage. The exclusion of television from gender studies continues reproducing the media dichotomy of high and low culture, where cinema presents the former and television the latter. In other words, the scholarship remains elitist in its approach to media analysis, giving preference to the "higher" forms of culture at the expense of its "lower" forms.

Those few studies done on gender in television mostly focus on representation (Wardhana 2001; Sunindyo 1993; Ida 2009; Habsari 2008; Aripurnami 1996) and perception (Ida 2010; Nilan 2001; Hobart 2001), leaving production mostly neglected. In those few instances where the constructed female gender is examined in some connection with the production there is a tendency to assume that the simplified representation or mis-representation of female gender is the result of the predominantly male production crew (Aripurnami 1996:253; Wardhana 2001:380). In this context the work of Sen (2007) and Sulistyani (2005) is important because they argue for a critical, in-depth analysis of the factors that can possibly challenge gender stereotypes on screen and lead to a more nuanced representation of gender and ethnicity on screen. In the Indonesian context an in-depth study of the correlation between the gender identity of media participants and the images that they construct on screen has been conducted only in regards to Indonesian cinema (Hughes-Freeland 2011; Michalik 2013b, 2015; Kurnia 2013, 2014; Paramaditha 2007), not television. In these studies, the tendency to assert that the increased presence of women in production will almost surely result in a more nuanced representation of gender and relationships between men and women is

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[154] Even though Kurnia (2014) tries to theorise the conjuncture between "ethnicity" and "gender", she does not go beyond stating that the film *Ca-bau-kan* (2002) was produced by a woman.

still present, but no direct, causal, connection between the increased number of female practitioners and a gender revolution on screen has been made.

We, however, need to be aware of a serious weak point in the approaches used to analyse the role of women in Indonesian cinema production. So far all researchers who argue for the significance of a female presence in Indonesian media have focused only on those women who occupy positions which are seen as "traditionally" male, such as directors, producers and scriptwriters. In this framework women occupying the so-called "gendered" positions such as production designers, make-up artists, stylists, etc are left unnoticed. For example, when discussing the images of women in Indonesian cinema, Sen assumed that the "creative impulses seem wholly to originate from men" (Sen 1982:18) because there were almost no female directors, producers, scriptwriters, music conductors and camera experts in film production. In her later research (1994b, 2007) Sen continues focusing only on the women working in the "male" roles of directors and producers. Kurnia (2013, 2014), Hughes-Freeland (2011) and Michalik (2015) focus *only* on directors and producers, while using a general term of "filmmakers". They do not discuss female professionals working as costume and production designers, makeup artists, editors, casting directors: labour, which is in no way less creative or significant in the production of meaning than the work of directors or producers.[155] The approach which is centred only on female producers and directors reproduces the patriarchal nature of media culture. It maintains the order where women's contribution to production, made from so-called "gendered" positions, is seen as insignificant. The approach that allocates creative, decision-making, power only to the very few individuals at the top of production hierarchy has been criticised in the emerging literature on production culture for its narrowness and reproduction of the existing hegemony within the production world as well as outside of it (Banks 2009; Mayer 2011).

Closely related to the previous point is the preference that researchers give to the narratives, at the expense of other expressive means. Within the body of work which focuses on how gender is represented on screen and how gender features in television perception, non-narrative aspects of the programs are almost never touched upon. In

[155] Kurnia (2014) briefly touches on the question of creative authority but states that directors are the main creative force without providing any compelling argument for such statement.

fact, privileging narratives over other expressive aspects of soap operas is not unique to the Indonesian scholarship (which as mentioned before is still at an emerging stage). Geraghty states that questions of aesthetics are generally overlooked, even neglected in regards to soap opera analysis (Geraghty 2003:33). If in the film studies the idea that "fashion no longer had to remain subservient to narrative and character" (Bruzzi 1997:6) was present since the 1980s, in the television studies the analysis of the gender construction through non-narrative means, such as costume, for example, has started only a decade ago (the mid-2000s).

In the Indonesian context, Ida (2006) and Habsari (2008) are probably the only researchers who mentioned the importance of the visual aesthetics of *sinetron* and even included it in the analysis of gender construction on the screen. Discussing perception of *sinetron* among female viewers, Ida stated that "the physical settings of the rich such as the mansions, sparkling plates, wine glasses, and the lounges, fascinate the *kampung* women viewers" (Ida 2006:158). Moreover, she observed that the new houses in Surabaya were built in according to the houses shown in urban-themed *sinetron* shows:

> The two storey house, the stairs in the house, the mosaic window glass, and the Mediterranean colours such as light brown, orange, dark pink, or red-brown, are displayed in some *kampung* Gubeng houses as precise quotes from the *sinetron* houses. (Ida 2006:chap.7)

At the same time, while obviously acknowledging a significant influence of *sinetron* aesthetics on the viewers, Ida continues focusing her analysis on the narratives and characters as the only attraction and pleasure for the viewers. Habsari (2008) is probably the only researcher who centred her attention on *sinetron* aesthetic aspects, costume in particular. For example, she argues that a character's desire is manifested in the red colour of her dress, and that strong character is expressed through certain types of clothes, like pants instead of skirts, kimono style dresses instead of "tight and scanty costumes". It should also be mentioned that in the early 2010s one element of *sinetron* costume, the veil, started to attract some attention of (mostly) Indonesian researchers (Ida 2010; Ishaq 2011; Rakhmani 2013, 2014; Barkin 2014). So far, the analysis of the veil and its role in building a character proved to be a fruitful approach to examining some of the key issues in contemporary Indonesia, like relationships between the nation-state and religion.

To conclude, the absence of scholarly literature on Indonesian Sindhi women, who are not active feminists but nevertheless make a significant contribution to the mainstream television production, reveals existing gaps and weak points in academic approaches to gender, ethnicity and national media production. It shows that the emerging literature on women in media production, and television in particular, is influenced by the nationalist, elitist and patriarchal nature of the existing scholarship.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter I pursued two goals. First, I discussed the role of Sindhi women in the media production business to show that women from this ethnic group are not absent from *sinetron* production media. They are active participants in the everyday production routine. Besides, I showed that Sindhi women while holding some positions at the top of the production hierarchy continue to position themselves first and foremost as helpers and supporters of their husbands or fathers. They behave as dutiful wives and daughters, according to the norms prescribed to them by the Sindhi community. At the same time, such self-positioning of Sindhi women does not mean that they are unable to exert a considerable influence on the industry, contribute to the produced meaning and as a result, shape female subjectivity. On the contrary, Sindhi women have brought to the fore the gendered aspects of production (style, fashion, design), which in the previous epoch of television drama production were seen as ancillary if not completely meaningless.

Second, given the complete silence of academic sources about the role of Sindhi women in mainstream television production, I offered a critique of the existing scholarship on the analysis of gender construction on and behind the screen. I argued that the existing gap in research on gender, and female gender in particular, is a result of a narrow approach towards the analysis of women's role in media production. While fighting for inclusion and equality in everyday life, the researchers continue reproducing the nationalistic, elitist and patriarchal social order through academic literature. The exclusion from the scholarly literature of women of so-called foreign descent who work for mainstream national television production, often in positions other than producers, directors or scriptwriters, illustrates the nature of the existing scholarship rather well. In addition to identifying directions of further research

(mainstream television, role of aesthetic aspects in television programs, *sinetron* and women's empowerment, creative power and its distribution in production), my material contributes to the literature on intersectionality, which argues for bringing several categories (here ethnicity, gender and nation) together to provide a more nuanced account of social relations in a particular historical context.

Conclusion

I have argued throughout this thesis that the Sindhi community in Indonesia has made a substantial contribution to Indonesian popular culture. Although absent from the national television screen, this tiny ethnic community has dominated the production industry of the most watched television program, *sinetron*, (Indonesian soap opera), for the last two decades. In tracing the history of the Sindhi community in Indonesia, I have examined the political, social and economic conditions that have shaped the environment for a culturally distinct community to gain control over a major sector of television production in the country.

Being the first study to examine the dominance of the Indian, and more specifically, the Sindhi, ethnic minority in one of the key projects of nation-building, national television, this research has explored the relevance of the topic for Indonesian studies as well as media and cultural studies. First, it has shed new light on ethnic politics in post-colonial Indonesia by bringing to the fore an issue largely ignored in existing studies: the mutual relationship between ethnic minorities and the nation-state, namely, co-optation and collaboration. Second, following in the steps of cultural anthropologists (Ortner 2013; Yanagisako 2002; Ganti 2012; Dornfeld 1998), it has brought culture back into the study of capitalism. The non-Western context of the research has revealed the constitutive nature of culture in commercial media.

1. The Politics of Ethnicity in Indonesia

The smooth settlement of the Sindhi community in colonial and post-colonial Indonesia made this ethnic community largely invisible to academics studying ethnic politics in Indonesia. The experiences of the Indonesian Sindhis could not be easily captured in the frameworks conventionally used for the analysis of majority-minority relations in the nation-state. The collaborative nature of the community interaction with the nation-state did not, however, mean cultural assimilation. As I have showed in my analysis, the Sindhi community made substantial efforts to maintain cultural boundaries

with non-Sindhis. The community cultivated Sindhiness as an exclusive cultural identity whose key elements of cosmopolitanism and mobility are largely incompatible with the concept of nation. The state, at first colonial and later nationalist, was also highly sensitive to the distinctive lifestyle of the Sindhis just as it was to other communities of recent, and not that recent, migration. And the state differentiated these communities by labelling them: "Foreign Orientals" during colonial times; and non-*pribumi*, or non-natives, as well as Indonesians of foreign descent, during post-colonial times.

At the same time, the status of an ethnic minority of "foreign descent" was not, in the case of Sindhis, equated with marginalisation, disadvantage or discrimination. For Sindhis, the ethnic minority status did not mean restrictions on cultural or religious expression, or significant disadvantages in economic activities. Quite on contrary, Sindhis had privileged access to quality education, financial resources and human capital. The markers of their foreignness more often contributed to their claims to power and authority rather than restrained them in their everyday lives.

When seen from this angle, the politics of ethnicity in Indonesia presents itself as much more nuanced and complex than is currently the case. The collaborative nature of interaction between the ethnic minority and the nation-state reinforces the categories of ethnicity and race that have retained their central position in Indonesian society despite the rapidly growing importance of a religious identity. Introduced by the colonial power and reinforced by the independent Indonesian state, ethnicity and race continue to form the basis of social stratification and judgement. Although the Reform period (1998–mid-2000s) initiated significant changes in abolishing classifications of Indonesian citizens based on their descent by recognising the equality of all citizens before the law, in everyday life race and ethnicity are being reproduced in idioms and practices, texts and the interpretations of texts. Moreover, ethnicity and race remain powerful mechanisms to claim rights for resources and power.

Throughout the thesis I have provided examples to illustrate the continuing persistence of "fiction of ethnicity" (Heryanto 2014) in contemporary Indonesia. My analysis of the national television production culture, the zone of the most intimate interaction between the exclusive community of Sindhis and the Indonesian nation, offers a detailed account of moments when the distribution of power and resources

occurred along ethnic and racial lines. A number of examples also suggested that decisions made purely for business reasons were often interpreted and perceived by media practitioners and observers as being the result of negotiations based on ethnic or racial identity. As discussed in chapter Four, the tensions between television stations and production studios were most often discussed in racial terms. Similarly, the contestation over authorship among *sinetron* production workers was centred around the concepts of indigeneity and foreignness.

As has been argued persuasively in the existing scholarship (Heryanto 1998, 2014), the persistence of ethnicity and race in everyday life of Indonesia and Asia more generally is the legacy of colonial times. In my study I emphasised that social relationships between the Sindhis and Indonesian society were the result not only of Dutch but also of British colonial practices. Although Sindhis were free traders and maintained a certain degree of independence from colonial capitalism, their cultural identity, aspirations and sentiments as well as business strategies were influenced by the British colonial order. Social institutions in South Asia, which structure society in accordance with occupation, inherited rank, privileges and wealth especially through the caste system, were reinforced by British colonialism and had a profound impact on the formation of the Hindu Sindhi community. The Partition of British India, one of the most significant events in the colonial history, became the major event that crystallised Hindu Sindhi identity as Sindhayat. This Sindhiness then emerged as a distinct social and religious identity, with translocal, transnational business and exuberant wealth being at its core.

In its own way, through the reproduction of social dichotomies based on occupation, descent and wealth, the Sindhi community reinforced the ethnic and racial stratification in Indonesian society and contributed to the persistence of the "fiction of ethnicity". Chapters Four, Five and Six discussed in detail how two different social worlds, constituted by different cultural frameworks and historical experiences, merged to reproduce the dominant social order in which ethnicity is perceived as fixed and real.

2. Culture and Capitalism: Commercial Media

Culture as a defining factor of commercial media development is another important theme of my study. I have placed my research in the literature that argues for bringing culture back into the analysis of capitalist society and considering economic actions as culturally and historically conditioned. I have emphasised that desires and sentiments, aspirations and insecurities of media practitioners have been important forces of production (Yanagisako 2002:11) and have shaped the industry development in a particular way.

One of my key findings is the central role of the community as a whole (and not just certain individuals from this community) in the television production business of Indonesia. The dominance of very few individuals of a particular ethnicity in *sinetron* ceases to be a puzzle as soon as the industry is analysed in the context of global Sindhi community networks. Moreover, a number of other peculiarities of the Indonesian television industry, such as the lack of new products despite the emergence of new players in the market, the strong position of small production houses and their resistance to the incessant corporatisation and conglomeration of media businesses, a rather awkward, mechanistic mixture of telenovela and Bollywood formulas with Islam, and the absence of Sindhis on the national screen while being overrepresented behind the scenes all turn out to be logical when seen through the eyes of the Indonesian Sindhi community. The addition of the global Sindhi community to the picture explains not only the development of the *sinetron* industry, but also the production and distribution of Indonesian popular films (see chapter Three) during the period that preceded the era of commercial *sinetron*.

In other words, the evidence from my research strongly suggests that the critical power of the Sindhi producers in the Indonesian media is the result of intensive work within the global Sindhi community. The establishment of Sindhis first in Indonesian media distribution and then in production would not have been possible without the mobilisation of the global Sindhi networks maintained through business and family. And through these Sindhi networks throughout the Asian region (Singapore, Hong Kong, the Philippines), North and South America and Europe, the Sindhis put Indonesian popular films, horror in particular, on the global cinema market. Later, Sindhis mobilised their global community networks in the race for a lucrative niche of

content production for national commercial television. Again, community connections enabled Sindhis to quickly mobilise sufficient human and financial capital to become strong players in the rapidly growing media business.

But the explanation for the key role of the Sindhi community in Indonesian media production was not only its ability to generate capital and establish links across the national borders. In many ways, the sense of cultural distinctiveness and the acute need to preserve and reproduce Sindhiness articulated by the community elders also shaped the *sinetron* industry. The sense of "corporacy", the social pressure experienced by Sindhi male and female members when choosing an education, an occupation, and a life partner all contributed to a distinctive history of national television in Indonesia. In other words, the community dimension, the knowledge of the community past and present, and its culture more generally, is crucial to understanding the major principles that define the development of commercial media.

By bringing together two fields of scholarship, the study of ethnic politics in Indonesia and cultural analysis of commercial media production, my research also contributes to the rapidly growing literature on gender and media in general, and the role of women in television production in particular. In my attempt to give a comprehensive account of the role of the Sindhi community in cultural production, *sinetron* industry was also examined through the prism of ethnicised gender. The analysis of the *sinetron* production from a gender perspective not only presented previously unknown material on the substantial role of Sindhi female media practitioners, but also identified gaps and weak points of the existing academic literature on gender and media. The findings of chapter Six strongly suggest that the absence of literature on Sindhi women in commercial television production is the result of the nationalist, elitist and patriarchal nature of the emerging literature on gender in Indonesian media. Moreover, my research findings contribute to the non-culture specific argument of Geraghty (2002) that aesthetic aspects of popular media products should be given serious scholarly attention.

3. Further Research

Throughout my thesis I have pointed to areas in regards to Indonesian studies and commercial media that would require further research. First of all, the scholarship of ethnic politics in Indonesia would benefit from a comparative study of the experiences of Chinese and Indian Indonesians. Bringing these two communities together and examining their relationships with the Indonesian nation-state could shed new light on the domestic and foreign politics of Indonesia. I would also argue for the importance of further research on communities that trace their roots to South Asia, i.e. Indonesian Tamils and Sikhs. Such research could add to the overall picture of majority-minority relations and illuminate the importance of class and its intersection with ethnic identity. In my research I focused only on a small community of Sindhis, whose privileged economic status played a significant part in determining the community position vis-à-vis the colonial power and later the independent nation-state. The in-depth study of Indonesian Tamils, whose history of migration and settlement differs significantly from that of Sindhis (most Tamil migrants came to Indonesia as indentured labourers), will most probably produce a very different picture of cultural, political and economic interaction between the ethnic minority, the state and society.

Overall, I see research that uses intersectionality as a method to examine "the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations" (McCall 2005:1772) to be most promising not only from a theoretical but also a practical point of view. Such research can reveal previously unseen or neglected experiences—those that happen to be at the points of intersection of socially constructed categories. Intersectionality methodology helps to identify the scholarly limitations which are inevitable when inquiries are guided by only one socially constructed category, be it gender, class, ethnicity or nation. Although such a method is not a solution to all problems in social studies and humanities, it has the potential to present a more nuanced and sophisticated picture of social reality that will address existing inequalities more effectively and prepare for (or even predict) social change.

In regards to ethnicity and media in Indonesia, a further study could assess how ethnicity features in the moments of reception. While few studies in the Indonesian context examined how gender (Ida 2006) and religious identities (Rakhmani 2013) impact the perception of media texts and contribute to shaping national identity, the

influence of ethnic imagery on the perception and interpretation of media texts is yet to be explored. Such research can contribute to understanding of nationalism in contemporary Indonesia. Moreover, it can provide strong evidence for the fact that the conditions and processes of production as well as the everyday experiences of media workers have a significant impact on the reproduction of social order.

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning that after I left Jakarta in 2013 a number of changes took place in the organisation of *sinetron* production, and the national television industry more generally. Most expatriates working in *sinetron* business left the country after their contracts were not extended. Without a foreign workforce, the ethnic and racial composition of *sinetron* production studios became less complex and hierarchical. Moreover, there was a sudden burst of Indianness on the television screen. One of the national stations, *Andalas Televisi* (AnTV), which was on the edge of bankruptcy in 2013, made an impressive comeback by relying on the contemporary Indian television dramas. Indian nationals became the face of many AnTV programs, hosting reality shows and playing major parts in local *sinetron*. More importantly, a number of spin-off shows featured not only Indian nationals but also several local Indians, including a few Sindhis, all unmarried young females. These programs produced by non-Sindhi Indonesians featuring Indonesian Sindhis talking about Indian culture seem to erase or at least dissolve distinct ethnocultural boundaries. Further research is, however, required to determine whether the current changes are just a tribute to global fashion or are indeed the indicators of some deeper processes of social change in Indonesia in regards to perceptions of ethnicity and race as the main categories of social stratification.

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