

GENDERED FILM ADAPTATION? AN INDONESIAN CASE STUDY

Christopher A. Woodrich

Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada

Email: chris_woodrich@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

Cartmell (2010) writes that "... the screen makeover of a literary text self-consciously appeals primarily to women", one of eight traits which she considers to be characteristic of an "adaptation genre". Without subscribing to the concept of an adaptation genre, this article attempts to test the hypothesis that film adaptations tend to appeal to and be targeted at women more often than men. To do so, this article examines 234 cases of film adaptation in Indonesia, dating from 1927 to 2014. Focusing on the adaptations' source novels, themes, and advertising media, this article classifies the adaptations based on their apparent target audience, as measured by their appeal to an ideal gender normative audience. Three categories of adaptations are identified: films targeted towards women, films targeted towards men, and (apparently) gender-neutral films. Films adaptations in Indonesia have most commonly appealed to and been targeted towards women, with the majority of adaptations being classified as romances and oriented towards marriage. This supports the hypothesis formulated by Cartmell.

Keywords: Adaptation, Film, Gender, Indonesian cinema

INTRODUCTION

In her article "*Pride and Prejudice* and the Adaptation Genre" (2010), Deborah Cartmell builds on the works of Thomas Leitch (2008) and Christine Geraghty (2009) to describe an "adaptation genre", or, more specifically, a subset of adaptations which recognize themselves as adaptations rather than "conceal, forget or transform their literary origins". Films in this adaptation genre, she writes (2010: 229–230), have seven characteristics: they tend to have a period setting (emphasizing architecture); use period music which fetishizes history; show an obsession with words, books and authors; have a preponderance of intertitles; foreground media; use pictures and other art forms throughout; makeover the author to screen; and self-consciously appeal predominantly to women.

This final point is particularly interesting given the conventional understanding of filmic narrative being dominated by men. Writers such as Tuchman (1978), de Lauretis (1987), Ruppert (1994), and Chandler (1998) have all noted cinema's tendency to attribute "the power of the gaze" to men, be they male protagonists, male directors (represented through the camera), or male spectators/audiences. According to conventional wisdom, this tendency leads to women being positioned primarily as objects and undergoing a symbolic annihilation which negates their ability to narrate themselves. If the power of the gaze is held by men, and if cinema defines women "as spectacle to be looked at and object to be desired, investigated, pursued, controlled, and

ultimately possessed by a subject who is masculine" (de Lauretis, 1987: 99), and if "the spectator is typically assumed not simply to be male but also to be heterosexual, over the age of puberty" and often of the ethnic majority (Chandler, 1998), how then can film adaptations "self-consciously appeal predominantly to women" as hypothesized by Cartmell?

To explore this issue (without subscribing to the concept of an adaptation genre which is both distinct from adaptation in general and is marked by the criteria mentioned above),¹ this article intends to test the hypothesis that adaptations, as a rule, tend to both be directed towards and appeal to women audiences more than men. To do so, this article examines novel-to-film adaptation as practiced in the Indonesian archipelago² between 1927, when the first domestic adaptation of a novel was produced, and 2014,³ a period which includes 234 films (Woodrich, 2015). This article will categorize these films—based on both intrinsic elements such as themes as well as extrinsic elements such as advertisements and the authors of the source material—as either male-oriented, female-oriented, or (apparently) gender-neutral using a qualitative approach. The results of this categorization will be tallied and analyzed using a quantitative approach to determine if film adaptations produced in Indonesia have indeed been predominantly female-oriented.

Idealized Audiences and Gender Norms

The categories used in this article—male-oriented film adaptation, female-oriented film adaptation, and (apparently) gender-neutral film adaptation—by necessity require generalization and overwrites the dynamics and fluidity of sex, sexuality, and gender. This would, in studies of real populations, be problematic: human sex, sexuality, and gender are complex and fluid, given meaning, constructed, and normalized by individuals and societies. None of these three related ideas exists in a perfect binary: human beings can experience varying degrees of intersexuality, bisexuality (or asexuality), and gender nonconformity. One who is biologically female, for instance, can exhibit behavioral characteristics which are similar to those expected of men in her society, just as one who is biologically male can exhibit behavioral characteristics similar to those expected of women in his society.

However, as implied by the above statement by Chandler (1998), the dynamics and fluidity of sex, sexuality, and gender are not considered by filmmakers or marketers. Filmmakers and marketers target films not at specific individual audience members, but rather at abstracted or idealized audiences which are defined in general terms. Films, especially those which prioritize profit (generally including adaptations, which "co-opt the original material in order to make it adhere to the principles of formulaic commercial filmmaking" [Axelrod, 1996: 202]), frequently target what has been termed "the lowest common denominator" (Franklin, 2006: 46), an imagined audience which

¹ Potential objections to the concept of an adaptation genre as presented by Cartmell include that it normalizes and conceals biases supporting capital-L Literature, gives greater weight to an adaptation's fidelity, and emphasizes the novel rather than view films as film. Though these objections are worth discussion, they are outside the scope of this paper.

² This term covers both the colonial Dutch East Indies and the modern country of Indonesia.

³ Films produced in 2015 and 2016 are not included here as, at the time of writing, they may still potentially receive further critical or commercial reception which affects their categorization.

precisely meets the normative standards of a society. Dialogue and themes are simplified, and scenes may be added or removed to appeal to a broader audience. This means that audiences are generally expected to be heterosexual, cisgender, over the age of puberty, and of the same ethnic majority as the majority of the population. As such, instead of forcing generalized categorizations on a dynamic population, this article approximates the idealized audiences used by filmmakers and marketers.

With this understood, what, then, are the gender norms used in this study to determine whether a film was targeted at men or women?

For the purposes of this article, films are categorized as being male-oriented if they have the following characteristics, all of which have been stereotyped as typically masculine in an Indonesian context (Brenner, 1999; Clark, 2008): prioritizing the self over family, prioritizing resistance over compliance, prioritizing (female) sexuality over romance, and prioritizing action over melodrama. This includes, for example, most films in the crime, horror, and action genres. Film adaptations may also be considered male-oriented if they were based on a novel by a male author or advertisements for the film either emphasized the role of men or assumed a male audience.

Films are categorized here as being female-oriented if they have the following characteristics, all of which have been stereotyped (and even promoted under the Suharto government) as typically feminine in an Indonesian context (Brenner, 1999; Clark, 2008): prioritizing the family over the self, prioritizing compliance over resistance, prioritizing romance over sexuality, and prioritizing melodrama over action. This includes, for example, many films in the romance and family drama genres. Film adaptations may also be considered female-oriented if they were based on a novel by a female author or advertisements for the film emphasized the role of women.

Adaptations are categorized as being (apparently) gender neutral, meanwhile, if they focus primarily on shared experiences between men and women or appear to be targeted at an undifferentiated audience. This does not mean that the films are truly gender neutral, as they may in fact be targeted (albeit indefinitely) at a specific audience. Furthermore, it should be noted that the classification of a film as being targeted towards a specific gender does not mean that it is bereft of scenes which appeal more to the other gender in the stereotypical gender binary; the romantic drama *Badai Pasti Berlalu* ('The Storm Will Pass'; 1977), for instance, includes the overtly sexual (and sexualized) character Marina.

On Directors and Authors

As stated above, one consideration for a film being categorized as female-oriented is the sex of the source novel's author. The sex of the film's director, meanwhile, is not considered here in the determination of a film's target audience. This is not intended as a claim that the director does not have a critical role in shaping a film's narrative; indeed, even though multiple people are needed to fulfill a variety of roles during filmmaking, directors are frequently credited as if they are the sole creative force behind a film. Rather, this lack of consideration of the sex of a film adaptation's director is based on a considerable gender gap in the film industry. As with in the Indonesian film

industry in general, male directors have been considerably more common than female directors in the production of film adaptations.⁴

Table 1: Directors of Film Adaptations, Categorized by Sex

	Amount	Percentage
Male	121	93.8%
Female	8	6.2%
Total	129	100%

Of the one-hundred and twenty-nine individuals who have directed a film adaptation of a novel in Indonesia, only eight (6.2%) have been women. Between them, these eight women have been responsible for ten film adaptations (4.3% of the total number of film adaptations released between 1927 and 2014), as follows:

- Dian Sasmita (*Dealova*, 2006)
- Chiska Doppert (*Ketika Tuhan Jatuh Cinta* ['When God Falls in Love'], 2009, as Fransiska Fiorella; *Pocong juga Pocong* ['Pocong is a Pocong'], 2011; *Mengejar Malam Pertama* ['Chasing the Wedding Night'], 2014, as Fransiska Fiorella)
- Ida Farida (*Perempuan Kedua* ['The Second Woman'], 1990)
- Lasja Fauzia Susatyo (*Mika*, 2013)
- Nia Dinata (*Ca Bau Kan* ['The Courtesan'], 2001)
- Rachmania Arunita (*Lost in Love*, 2008)
- Tya Subiyakto Satria (*Kehormatan di Balik Kerudung* ['Honor Behind the Veil'], 2011)

The low frequency of female directors of film adaptations means that, for the purposes of this study, the sex of an adaptation's director cannot be used as a metric. Since male directors are credited with the vast majority of films based on novels, both those targeted at men and those targeted at women, there can be no significant correlation found between their sex and the sex of their target audiences. It is, however, interesting to note that even in this small sample there is a tendency for women to direct films stereotypically targeted at men (*Mengejar Malam Pertama*, for example, is a sex comedy) as well as films stereotypically targeted at women (such as the romance *Lost in Love*).

What, then, of female authors? More male authors are listed as having novels adapted to film than female authors (81 male authors vs. 40 female authors). Male authors are likewise credited with more novels which have been adapted to film than women (137 novels by male authors vs. 86 novels by female authors). However, female authors average more films adapted from their works than male authors (2.1 novels adapted to film per female author vs. 1.7 novels adapted to film per male author). Mira W. alone wrote twenty-two novels that were adapted to film, twice as many as the most productive male author, Eddy D. Iskandar.

⁴ Before 1998, only four women had taken on the role of director: Ratna Asmara, Sofia W.D., Chitra Dewi, and Ida Farida. These women received very little support from male directors, and none of their films have been considered significant in the Indonesian cinematic canon. Since 1998 there has been a significant increase in the number of women film directors—including the critically acclaimed Nia Dinata and Djenar Maesa Ayu—but they remain a minority (Swestin, 2012).

Table 2: Authors whose Novels Are Adapted to Film, Categorized by Sex

	Amount	Percentage
Male	81	66.9%
Female	40	33.1%
Total	121	100%

Owing to the larger sample size, the sex of the author whose novel serves as the basis for a film adaptation is more useful as a criteria. It is more possible for there to be a significant correlation between the sex of the director and the sex of the target audience. However, it must be noted that an author's sex is not the sole factor determining an adaptation's target audience. The works of Eddy D. Iskandar, for instance, were mostly romances, and Titi Said's novel *Fatima* (1981) was adapted into the highly sexual and male-oriented *Budak Nafsu* ('Slave to Lust', 1983).

Gendered Adaptation: Frequency and Trends

This survey of the two-hundred and thirty-four film adaptations of novels produced in the Indonesian archipelago between 1927 and 2014 found that a significant majority—142 films, or 60.7%—were indeed targeted at women, as shown in Table 3 below. Films targeted at men were less common, but still frequently found: a total of eighty-four films (35.9% of the film adaptations surveyed) were targeted at male audiences. Only eight films (3.4% of the film adaptations surveyed) appeared to be gender neutral, neither reaching out primarily to women or appealing predominantly to men. This is not to say that all aspects of these (apparently) gender-neutral films appealed equally to all audiences: for example, adaptations of inspirational fiction (a genre commonly identified with women readers [Higgins, 2006]) often have male main characters.

Table 3: Target Audience of Film Adaptations, Categorized by Sex

	Amount	Percentage
Male	84	35.9%
Female	142	60.7%
Neutral	8	3.4%
Total	234	100%

The majority of the film adaptations targeted at female audiences were based on romance novels. At 123 films (53% of film adaptations surveyed, Woodrich: 2014), romances—particularly those which emphasized marriage as an end goal—were also the most common genre of novel to be adapted. Of the five most-adapted authors—Mira W. (22 adaptations), Eddy D. Iskandar (11 adaptations), Abdullah Harahap (8 adaptations), Marga T. (6 adaptations), and Motinggo Busye (6 adaptations)—three (Mira W., Eddy D. Iskandar, and Marga T.) are recognized almost exclusively for their popular romance novels. The works of a fourth author, Motinggo Busye, fit a number of genres, including romance (such as *Selangit Mesra*, 'Romance Under One Sky', 1977) and supernatural thrillers (such as *Tujuh Manusia Harimau*, 'Seven Tiger People', 1986). Adaptations of the former were generally targeted at female audiences, whereas adaptations of the latter were targeted at male audiences.

Film adaptations targeted at men, meanwhile, included a number of films that dealt with (female) sexuality, as well as films in the martial arts, supernatural thriller and horror genres. These were, however, considerably less

common than romance films, with martial arts (six films, 3.0%), thrillers (seven films, 3.0%), and horror (ten films, 4.3%) adaptations combined only representing ten percent of all film adaptations. The three most productive authors of novels adapted for male audiences were all men: Abdullah Harahap (with eight films adapted from his novels), Kho Ping Hoo (five films), and Motinggo Busye (mentioned above). Although women authors did write novels which served as the basis for films targeted at male audiences, they were considerably less represented (8 films, 3.4% of all adaptations).

Overall, the sex of the author of a source novel correlated with the sex of the target audience in 151 films (or 64.9% of all adaptations). Correlation between the sex of the author and the sex of the target audience was more common among female authors; 76 [90.5%] of the films based on novels by female authors were targeted at female audiences. For male authors, correlation between the sex of the author and the sex of the target audience was less common. However, films exhibiting such a correlation still represented a majority of films based on novels by male authors; 75 [53.7% of] films based on novels by male authors were targeted at male audiences.

In their advertising, several film adaptations utilized explicit female sexuality to target male audiences. The flyer for *Darah Daging* ('Flesh and Blood', 1977, from the novel by Kho Ping Hoo), for example, depicted the female main character dressed in flower-print underwear on its obverse, and had several scenes apparently depicting sexual intercourse on its obverse and its reverse. The obverse of the flyer for *Kadarwati* (1983, from the novel by Pandir Kelana), meanwhile, emphasized the female main character's cleavage and showed her underpants. Again, on both the obverse and reverse of this flyer scenes of sexual intercourse were depicted. Similar portrayals of sexuality could be seen in the advertisements for *Roro Mendut* (1982, from the novel by Y.B. Mangunwijaya) and *Budak Nafsu* (from the novel *Fatima* by Titi Said).

Some films targeted at women were made their audience explicit in their advertising. One flyer for *Kabut Sutra Ungu* ('A Purple Silk Fog', 1979, from the novel by Ike Soepomo), for instance, touted the adaptation as "a film that uplifts women".⁵ Others built on the association of women with families, such as *Perisai Kasih yang Terkoyak* ['Fragmented Shield of Love', 1986, from the novel by Mira W.] which referred to its film as "valuable for the whole family".⁶ The majority, however, used stereotypical markers of romance, depicting what I have elsewhere (Woodrich, 2016) referred to as a "sensual woman" in an intimate (but not sexual) moment with a man. The flyer for *Kampus Biru* ('Blue Campus', 1976, from the novel by Ashadi Siregar) showed its main characters embracing in front of the Gadjah Mada University rectorate building; the flyer for *Permainan Bulan Desember* ('A December's Game', 1980, from the novel by Mira W.) depicted its main characters looking into each other's eyes in front of a lake; and the flyer for *Kidung Cinta* ('Love Song', 1985, from the novel by Mira W.) portrayed its main characters walking hand-in-hand.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research support the hypothesis formulated by Cartmell: film adaptations, at least in the Indonesian archipelago, tend to

⁵ Original: "Sebuah film yang mengangkat derajat kaum wanita"

⁶ Original: "BERHARGA BAGI SELURUH KELUARGA" (capital letters in the original).

appeal to and be targeted at women more often than men. Of the two-hundred and thirty-four film adaptations surveyed, spanning a period from 1927 to 2014, one-hundred and forty-two (or 60.7%) were targeted predominantly at female audiences, as indicated by these films' themes, main characters, source material, and advertising. Men, though commonly understood to have "the power of the gaze" in cinema and assumed to be the producers and implied audience of films, were less commonly targeted by film adaptations. Only eighty-four (35.9%) of the films surveyed were male-oriented.

This apparent discrepancy between commonly accepted knowledge—that cinema is generally made by men for men—and actual adaptation practice is not readily explicable through available data. As such, further research is necessary to ascertain whether or not male (implied) audiences are dominant in cinema and whether or not female (implied) audiences are dominant in adaptation; if both are shown to be true, subsequent research should attempt to determine how this can happen. Before this can be carried out, however, it is important to better test Cartmell's hypothesis through research into the gender aspects of film adaptation as practiced outside of Indonesia. It is possible that adaptations made in another culture, perhaps one which gives less recognition to women's rights and agency than Indonesia or the Western cultures which formed the foundation for Cartmell's hypothesis, may prioritize male audiences. Only then can this apparent discrepancy be resolved.

Works Cited

Films

- Djunaidy, Turino. 1977. *Selangit Mesra*. Sarinande Films: Jakarta.
Karya, Teguh. 1977. *Badai Pasti Berlalu*. Suptan Film: Jakarta.
Sjumandjaja. 1983. *Budak Nafsu*. Soraya Intercine Film: Jakarta.
Tantowi, Imam. 1986. *Tujuh Manusia Harimau*. Kanta Indah Film: Jakarta.
Fiorella, Fransiska. 2014. *Mengejar Malam Pertama*. BIC Productions: Jakarta.
Arunita, Rachmania. 2008. *Lost in Love*. Itrema Creative Development: Jakarta.

Flyers

- Balu Jaya Film. 1977. *Darah Daging*.
Central Graha Utama Film. 1986. *Perisai Kasih yang Terkoyak*.
Gramedia Film. 1983. *Kadarwati*.
Gramedia Film, Sanggar Film, and Elang Perkasa Film. 1982. *Roro Mendut*.
Matari Artis Jaya Film. 1979. *Kabut Sutra Ungu*.
Matari Artis Jaya Film. 1980. *Permainan Bulan Desember*.
Safari Sinar Sakti Film. 1976. *Kampus Biru*.
Soraya Intercine Film. 1983. *Budak Nafsu*.
Virgo Putra Film. 1985. *Kidung Cinta*.

Print Sources

- Axelrod, Mark. 1996. "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood; or, the Commodification of Form in the Adaptation of Fictional Texts to the Hollywood Cinema". *Literature/Film Quarterly*. 24:2. 201–208.
Brenner, Suzanne. 1999. "On the Public Intimacy of the New Order: Images of Women in the Popular Indonesian Print Media". *Indonesia* 67: 13–37.

- Cartmell, Deborah. 2010. "Pride and Prejudice and the Adaptation Genre". *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance*. 3.3: 227–243.
- Chandler, Daniel. 1998. "Notes on 'The Gaze'". <http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/gaze/gaze08.html>. Accessed on 18 June 2016. Archived at <http://www.webcitation.org/6iLddYNkp>.
- Clark, Marshall. 2008. "Indonesian Cinema: Exploring Cultures of Masculinity, Censorship and Violence". in Ariel Heryanto (ed.). *Popular Culture in Indonesia: Fluid Identities in Post-Authoritarian Politics*. Routledge: London. 38–53.
- de Lauretis, Teresa. 1987. "Fellini's 9½". in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 95–106.
- Franklin, Daniel. 2006. *Politics and Film: The Political Culture of Film in the United States*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Geraghty, Christine. 2009. "Foregrounding the Media: *Atonement* (2007) as an Adaptation". *Adaptation*, 2:2, 91–109.
- Higgins, Charlotte. 2006, 6 April. "A Tale of Two Genders: Men Choose Novels of Alienation, while Women Go for Passion". *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/apr/06/books.booksnews>. Accessed on 22 June 2016. Archived at <http://www.webcitation.org/6iSAYM71f>.
- Leitch, Thomas. 2008. "Adaptation, the Genre". *Adaptation*, 1.1: 106–120.
- Kristanto, J.B. (ed). 2007. *Katalog Film Indonesia 1926–2007*. Jakarta: Nalar.
- Ruppert, Jeanne. 1994. "Introduction: Gender and Representation". in Jeanne Ruppert (ed.) *Gender: Literary and Cinematic Representation: Selected Papers from the Eleventh Annual Florida State University Conference on Literature and Film*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Swestin, Grace. 2012. "In the Boys' Club: A Historical Perspective on the Roles of Women in The Indonesian Cinema 1926–May 1998". *Scriptura* 3:2. 103–111.
- Tuchman, Gaye. 1978. "Introduction: The Symbolic Annihilation of Women in the Mass Media". in Gaye Tuchman, Arlene Kaplan Daniels, and James Benét (eds.). *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*. New York: Oxford University Press. 3–38.
- Woodrich, Christopher. 2015, 9 April. "Ekranisasi: Adapting Novels to the Silver Screen in Indonesia (1926–2014)" (presented at the Weekly Forum of the Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Gadjah Mada University).
- Woodrich, Christopher A. 2016. "Sexual Bodies, Sensual Bodies: Depictions of Women in Suharto-Era Indonesian Film Flyers (1966–1998)". *Indonesian Feminist Journal* 4:1. 38–50.