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The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 has triggered sudden, calamitous social changes across the world. In the pandemic context, transformations of the Southeast Asian media landscape have prompted broader questions concerning health policies, scientific communication, transnational movement, and the increasing uptake of social media by the region's 655 million inhabitants. In the midst of these unforeseen upheavals, the current issue of *Southeast Asian Media Studies* presents a salient contribution to Media and Communication Studies in the region through an explicit focus on Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam. The issue expands critical understanding of Southeast Asian media generally and the media environments of these nations specifically. Moreover, the six contributions call attention to the steady diversification of media and communications scholarship in Southeast Asia through generative confluences with studies of Indigenous traditions, language, film, collective memory, and historiography.

The six peer-reviewed articles that comprise this issue underscore the heterogeneity of conceptual and methodological frameworks adopted—and frequently adapted—by scholars. These frameworks include content analysis and memory studies as well as material-cultural approaches and affect-based inquiry. In his introduction to *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity, and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern*, critical media literacy scholar Douglas Kellner writes, “A media culture has emerged in which images, sounds, and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behavior, and providing the materials out of which people forge their very identities” (1). Originally appearing in 1995, Kellner's comments resonate today especially vis-à-vis the influence of digital media culture on political values and identity-formation.

As evident in this issue of *SEAMS*, Southeast Asian media scholars are putting into practice a range of approaches to interrogate formations of politics and power propagated by the neoliberal structures that influence and, at times, dictate modes of expression. Contributors accordingly engage with the dynamic political milieu of Southeast Asia apparent, for instance, in Indigenous Bornean women's craft culture, Indonesia's collective memory of trauma and war as mediated in and by film, Malaysian newspapers' coverage of the MH370 tragedy, and Bruneian creative workers' affective practices enabled by social media. In exploring these timely research areas, the issue complements recent scholarship concerning the dynamic media topographies of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam, including the monographs *Media Power in Southeast Asia* (2019) by Cherian George and Gayathry Venkiteswaran and *Postcolonial Hangups in Southeast Asian Cinema* (2020) by Gerald Sim.

Anggia Valerisha and Mega Yanti's article “Behind the *Ulap Doyo* of East Borneo: Indigenous Women and the Importance of Media Coverage” focuses on the intersections between Indigenous people, gender roles, and the power of media to enhance biocultural heritage conservation through a case study from Kalimantan, the Indonesian part of the island of Borneo. The *ulap doyo* is a natural fabric from Kalimantan woven by the women of the Dayak Benuaq community of Samarinda, East Kalimantan for centuries. Painstakingly manufactured from the leaves of *Curculigo*

latifolia, the delicate fabric has become an integral element of the cultural heritage of Indigenous Borneans. However, since the 1990s in particular, *ulap doyo* and the environment from which it originates have been under intensive threat from deforestation and related commercial activities in the West Kutai Regency of Kalimantan. Valerisha and Yanti advocate the use of social media to fortify the *ulap doyo* tradition and safeguard the craft-based livelihoods of the Indigenous women of Dayak Benuaq. The authors recommend the use of various social media outlets to communicate the challenges faced by Indigenous women both in Kalimantan and across Indonesia.

Lim Shiang Shiang, Ihediwa Samuel Chibundu, and Sharon Wilson’s article “One Crisis, Different Frames: A Comparative Study of Newspapers’ Coverage of Malaysian Airlines MH370” critically appraises the ways in which the Malaysian newspapers *The Star* and *Malaysiakini* covered the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, which vanished on March 8, 2014 enroute from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. Whereas *The Star* is Malaysia’s highest circulating English-language newspaper, *Malaysiakini* is the country’s most read online media portal. Based on their analysis of 185 news articles from both sources, Shiang et al. found that *The Star* covered the tragedy in terms largely favorable to the Malaysian authorities with the preponderance of its articles characterizing MH370 as an unparalleled aviation mystery. In comparison, *Malaysiakini*—regarded as an alternative news outlet—cast critical light on the disappearance, called into question ensuing efforts to locate the plane, and blamed authorities for mismanaging the crisis. Shiang et al. underscore how crisis journalism in Malaysia is constrained by political, economic, social, and religious factors. Their findings imply that the journalistic framing of crisis functions according to the regulation of media freedom. Nonetheless, critical news encourages readers to negotiate bias and interpret events from various points of view. To be certain, the methodology put into practice by Shiang et al. may be applicable to other forms of crisis reporting in Southeast Asia such as climate change and COVID-19.

Sharifah Nurul Huda Alkaff and Reem Adib Lulu’s “‘Bite Your Tongue Sometimes’: A Study of Relationship Advice Columns in Online Women’s Magazines in Malaysia” provides a detailed analysis of advice columns in home-grown English-language women’s magazines published in Malaysia. According to the article, limited scholarly research exists on women’s advice columns in non-Western contexts particularly Southeast Asia. Notwithstanding the lack of research, this media genre offers insights into the social status of women and perceptions of female sexuality in contemporary Malaysia. The authors examined twenty articles from two magazines, *Female*, Malaysia’s best-selling lifestyle magazine, and *Her World*, the first home-grown English-language women’s lifestyle magazine in the country. The authors scrutinized relationship advice articles according to thematic categories such as unreliable partners, risky encounters, sexual dissatisfaction, and institutionalized bias. The results suggest that the problems and resolutions delineated by *Female* and *Her World* reflect contemporary progressive ideas tailored for a local readership. Yet, at the same time, the articles reveal an acute awareness among journalists of the potential for backlash when covering controversial issues such as women’s sexual freedom.

Shifting to the media landscape of Brunei Darussalam, Siti Mazidah Mohamad’s “An Overview of Bruneian Creatives’ Affective Work and Labor on Social Media” considers the affective basis of three Bruneian digital creatives’ production and promotion of online content as well as their

mobilization of other young digital entrepreneurs in the country. Mohamad draws from the concept of affective practice to understand the production of digital cultural content on social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Possibilities for media expression in Brunei have enlarged through technological developments, the collaborative nature of social media, and the entrepreneurial spirit of millennials. Young online practitioners exploit social media strategically for self-branding, thus underscoring the viability of affective online environments for further creative mobilities in the country.

Returning to the Indonesian context, Alex Melnik's "Memory and Mass Killings: How Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* Engages with Indonesia's Collective Memory of the 1965 Tragedy" assesses the documentary *The Act of Killing* (2012) that has reinvigorated public interest in the Indonesian mass killings of 1965–66, also known as the 1965 Tragedy. American-born British filmmaker Joshua Oppenheimer's documentary has provoked a re-examination of the Tragedy from the perspectives of survivors and perpetrators. Focused on collective memory in Indonesia, the film discloses the persistence of dominant narratives surrounding the Communist Party of Indonesia's presumed attempt to overthrow President Sukarno, leading to the widespread persecution of communists and sympathizers during this period. In comparison, the 270-minute Suharto-sanctioned docudrama *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI (The Treachery of the 30th September Movement)*, released in 1984, dramatizes the 1965 Tragedy through a combination of documentary, fictionalized re-enactment, melodrama, and horror. Melnik argues that *The Act of Killing* permits interviewees the freedom to relate unfiltered memories and interpretations of 1965. The documentary affirms that the binaries of good and evil—victim and perpetrator—tend to oversimplify complex historical events subsumed within a nation's collective memory.

Finally, Arnoud Arps' "An Animated Revolution: The Remembrance of the 1945 Battle of Surabaya in Indonesian Animated Film" examines the construction of cultural memories of the Indonesian War of Independence (1945–49) through Indonesian animation and, specifically, the animated war drama film *Battle of Surabaya* released in 2015, directed by Aryanto Yuniawan, and produced by M. Suyanto. Arps' analysis contributes distinctively to Indonesian film studies through a dual emphasis on animation and war-themed films. The article characterizes the *Battle of Surabaya* as a memory-based film—one that prompts the global transmission of images depicting a key historical event. The animation film also exemplifies the genre of *film perjuangan* dramatizing the struggle for independence—a common historical narrative in Indonesian popular culture. The underlying politics of memory in *Battle of Surabaya* provokes critical perspectives on history, giving rise to counter-narratives to sanctioned historiography. Critical studies of Indonesian film thus provide a generative starting point for comprehending how memories are encoded and disseminated in Indonesian culture.

As these six articles demonstrate, the field of Media Studies in Southeast Asia is a dynamic area of scholarship with room to grow through connections with studies of culture, Indigenous people, environment, memory, and manifold other areas. Toward this aim, another volume of *Southeast Asian Media Studies* will focus on "Glocalization in Southeast Asian Media" while another, to be edited by Cecilia Fe Sta, will revolve around the theme of "Communication Outbreaks." To

conclude this editorial, I encourage academics from around the world to contribute research to this exciting new journal in support of Media Studies in Southeast Asia.

REFERENCES

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