(Re)writing Global Gender Norms: The Role of Southern Actors - A Comment

Kieran Edmond James iD

University of the West of Scotland, Paisley campus, UK

Correspondence

Kieran James

School of Business and Creative Industries, University of the West of Scotland, Paisley campus, High Street, Paisley PA1 2BE, Renfrewshire, Scotland, UK

Abstract

In this article, based on my personal experiences as an ethnographer working in Indonesia, Singapore and Fiji, I provide two case studies of two women, who don't know each other, who are 'writing' Global Gender in Singapore and Indonesia. Both are wives and mothers, the former is a liberal-democratic opposition party activist, while the latter is a black/death metal guitarist in a local, highly-respected underground band. Both are totally committed to their chosen pathways and belief systems and act as social glue within their organizations and subcultures (grounded cosmopolitanism, if you will). Then, I present two mini-case studies that suggest some formidable barriers still exist to rewriting Global Gender. If these barriers are not overcome, people will have to write Global Gender or not-Global Gender within their own little independent silos or rooms with restricted views looking out over dystopian landscapes characterized by surveillance, control, friendlessness and alienation.

Introduction

In this article, based on my personal experiences as an ethnographer working in Indonesia, Singapore and Fiji, I provide two case studies of two women, who don't know each other, who are 'writing' Global Gender in Singapore and Indonesia. Both are wives and mothers, the former is a liberal-democratic opposition party activist, while the latter is a black/death metal guitarist in a local, highly-respected underground band. Both are totally committed to their chosen pathways and belief systems and act as social glue within their organizations and subcultures. Then, I present two shorter case studies that suggest some formidable barriers to rewriting Global Gender. Lastly, a Discussion section, drawing on Connell's [1] *Southern theory* text, draws the evidence and arguments together and makes some concluding observations. Problems include the different ways Northern and Southern women define private and public realms and distinguish between business opportunities, friendship, and strangers. The Northern woman in our first mini-case tends to be opportunistic in relation to business opportunities, while she perceives that friends are to be socialized with, while strangers are to be ignored. By contrast, the Southern woman reaches out for connection and solidarity even to strangers if there is some perceived similarity. In the second mini-case, a white Scottish man uses a classification system, highly racialized and gendered and overtly sexualized, to attempt to relate to self and others in a multicultural country and create some sense, meaning, and enjoyment out of what he sees, even though to readers of this journal the categorization process would be seen as questionable.

Just as the West often regards Muslims as a homogenous bloc of identical people [2], we need to be aware, as most readers will be, that Southern women are an extremely diverse group, ranging from middle-class Chinese-Singaporean businesswomen to Indonesian factory workers and foreign maids working overseas in cities such as Hong Kong and Dubai, to women living in feudal or semi-feudal village communities in countries such as the Solomon Islands [3] and Fiji [4-12]. How can we make meaningful comments about such a diverse group of individuals? My only answer, here or elsewhere [5], is to rely on fieldwork observations of actual practices, and interpretations thereof, bearing in mind that interpretations will always be contestable and partial. Furthermore, interpretations, despite an author's good intentions, will always be strongly embedded within the ways that they perceive and judge the world, which will be a product of their upbringing, class, race/ethnicity, age, and gender. The more interpretation we can read about a single community or materialized practice, the deeper and broader will be the level of understanding that we can gain.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The next section presents and discusses two cases of women I have met through my fieldwork, Jazreel (name changed) in Singapore opposition politics and Maya in the Indonesian death metal music underground, and explains how they 'write' Global Gender for their respective audiences and beyond.

Then, the third section uses two shorter mini-cases to highlight barriers to the rewriting or even the reimagining of Global Gender; while the fourth section is a Discussion section that draws upon Connell's (2007) [1] *Southern Theory* to make concluding observations.

Two case studies

Section introduction

We will look at two case studies taken from my fieldwork of two women that are social glue in their oppositional subcultures--opposition politics in Singapore for one case and the Indonesian death metal community for the other--who operate with a long-term vision to communicate their ideas to outsiders and insiders, to mentor younger women, and to operate as social glue where others sometimes lack the communication skills, flexibility and humility to fulfill such a role in addition to their regular duties.

While male leaders write books on economic and immigration policies, the Singapore Democratic Party's (SDP) Jazreel, by her long-term commitment to the Women's Wing, acts out the vision and ethos of the party and the opposition movement for a kinder and more humanitarian Singapore. Maya, by contrast, is a guitarist in the black/death metal band, Mortality, based in Bandung, Indonesia, and has been for 14 years. Her husband plays bass guitar in the band, but the lead guitar is arguably the most demanding and important position within metal bands (think Jimmy Page at Led Zeppelin, Richie Blackmore at Deep Purple or Tony Iommi at Black Sabbath) and she has held it down successfully for over a decade of recording albums, rehearsing, touring and playing shows. She mentors younger women in the scene and looks after her daughter and son who was about six-years-old at our 2014 band interview. The *hijab*-wearing Maya is a humble person who also operates in terms of providing the social glue needed to build up intrascene trust [13-16] over the longer-term.

Case one: Jazreel, Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) activist

Jazreel (name changed) has been part of the Singapore Democratic Party's (SDP) Women's Wing for at least 16 years. I first met her on a sunny afternoon, Tuesday, 22 September 2009, when I ventured out to the SDP's then headquarters at Jalan Gelenggang in Singapore's leafy and tranquil northern suburbs. We did a group interview with Jazreel; activist and punk musician, Seelan Palay; and aspiring SDP Youth member, Jarrod Luo, who left the party, somewhat acrimoniously, in 2012. What follows in regards this case study draws in part upon James, Chia, Grant, and Lee [17]; James, Walsh, and Grant [18]; and James [19]. In September 2023, Jazreel attended the Taipei CALD Women's Caucus and was appointed CALD Women's Caucus Chairperson.

During this 2009 interview, the three activists expounded upon the ruling People's Action Party's (PAP) neglect of the elderly people living in one-room government rental flats and the problems of income-inequality and neoliberal policies in the city-state. The SDP, at that time, was well-known and generally either admired or disliked for its unashamed liberal-democratic (not neoliberal) programme of action, which highlighted the importance of freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, women's rights, human rights, LGBT rights, foreign workers' rights, equality under the law and reduced inequalities. The Secretary-General, Dr Chee Soon Juan, disliked and feared by the government, had written a number of books, not all freely available in Singapore, criticizing the government and proposing detailed alternative policies covering social, economic and political realms (see, for example, Chee, [20-23]. The party was well-known for civil disobedience campaigns [7] that had seen some of its members or leaders serving jail terms. This aspect of the SDP's behaviour had tended to alienate the older and more socially-conservative Chinese-Singaporean voters, while appealing to younger, English-educated liberal-democrats of all races/ethnicities.

Jazreel was the social glue that was always present at social functions, meetings, and at the party headquarters and she seemed to be assigned to welcoming and accompanying researchers and other visitors from overseas. She was often seen out and about with team members, in red polo shirts, selling the party newspaper. Jazreel was dedicated to the party and its beliefs over a very long time and had a steadfast presence online and offline as a committed activist who was also down-to-earth, humble and approachable. After some heavy electoral losses in 2001 and 2006, the party's electoral fortunes began to improve by the Bukit Batok by-election of 2016 when it came reasonably close, at least by historic Singapore standards, to winning control of this middle-class constituency that it had chosen to contest. Jazreel is married but her husband seems to have no involvement in SDP politics. She wants to build a more humanitarian and kinder Singapore for her children and the next generation. As the Workers' Party of Singapore (WP) volunteer at the 2006 General Election, Roderick Chia, once said to me, 'the opposition needs people like Jazreel' (source: personal interview, 4 March 2010, Singapore, notes in possession of author).

At the 2016 Bukit Batok by-election, Chee polled well (38.77%, with a swing in his favour of +12.39%), and it seems now that his long-term commitment to liberal-democratic values and his own stable marriage had begun to work in his favour, given that the incumbent PAP MP's extra-marital affair had created the need for the by-election in the first place. All this time, Jazreel was a cohesive, articulate, compassionate, unifying force in the background, showing voters that she had conclusively decided that the SDP was the party for the future and that voters should fall into line. Jazreel stayed with the SDP after a number of prominent activists left the party after the moderately successful 2011 General Election, including LGBT activist Vincent Wijeysingha and SDP Youth leader Jarrod Luo.

Jazreel is not discussed here because she fits one traditional gender stereotype, that women are good and committed supporters of male leaders, as well as providing social glue. In fact, the SDP has a woman leader in Dr Chee's sister, Chee Siok Chin, who is on the Central Executive Committee. Jazreel 'rewrites' Global Gender by being deeply socially embedded in the local community as wife, mother, activist and politician (she has stood for election under the SDP banner) as well as having many overseas contacts in liberal-democratic and human rights circles. The social glue aspect is still significant as it points towards her cosmopolitanism being 'grounded' and 'rooted' in authentic community [24-29], with community here referring to both the opposition scene/subculture and the mainstream community.

She has compassion for other Southern women, such as Filipina maids and bar workers (on Filipina bar hostesses, see [27], and supports SDP policies aimed at improving their living and working conditions in the city-state and giving them a citizenship pathway that they don't have at present [27].

She opposes the neoliberalism of the PAP, seeing the priority given to economic life, which it strictly separates from social and political life, and regards this priority as detrimental to human happiness and mental health [30,31]. The PAP's ideas about meritocracy and multiracialism, while appearing good to many people on paper, are tools used to categorize, control and normalize the population [32-35]. The population is monitored and controlled to such an extent that only a very small PAP-approved elite can rise to the top in any field of endeavour. As Adorno and Foucault understood, positive terms have a negative underside or reverse, as control or domination are used to enforce, regulate and monitor their continued presence, while many people, both inside and outside of the country, accept the PAP's ideology that social truth incorporates only the positive side of their preferred terms. To sum up so far, Jazreel has been rewriting Global Gender in her own way these past 16 years. The Global Gender she is 'writing' is liberal-democratic in social, economic and political orientation and deeply socially embedded.

The ruling PAP has been relentless, consistent and remarkably successful in the decades since independence (1965) in causing the main planks of its ideology to be accepted by the bulk of the population. This is a principal reason why the opposition parties have always found it difficult just to edge up a few percentage-points at the ballot box overall and in any given constituency. The crux of the PAP's ideology has always been that, due to the small size of Singapore's land mass, its lack of natural resources, and its small population, the government must be hard-headed, development-oriented, ruthless and pragmatic, while only the best brains should be allowed to be part of government. This has meant a constant race for paper qualifications; the relentless disparagement of opposition candidates; and a focus on technical proficiency, consistent with Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's [30] [1947] theory of dialectic of Enlightenment about the reign of instrumental reason in modernity despite its negative effects on human freedom and happiness. Dr Chee and the SDP have constantly questioned many of the core assumptions and presumed solutions that together form the ideological basis for PAP power and hegemony. However, his analysis has borne little success at the ballot box, although the middle-class, the intellectuals and the liberal-democrats seem to be broadly sympathetic. Jazreel, rather than disputing the PAP's principal assumptions and solutions point-by-point, as Dr Chee does, has simply chosen a different type of society, a type of society that she believes is very close to the SDP's vision for a more humanitarian and kinder Singapore.

Two of the PAP's key principles since independence have been meritocracy and multiracialism. They sound good, but in practice it means the PAP hierarchy being ruthless and efficient in promoting and removing MPs from Parliament and election contests, and opposition candidates being constantly disparaged through and by the government-controlled mainstream media. The PAP hierarchy feels that only they have the right and ability to choose, nurture and discard talent and their processes of normalization and eradication of deviancy are perfect examples of Foucault's [32-34] idea of power/knowledge.

Multiracialism, too, in practice, means that the most compliant and controllable ethnic minority candidates get chosen to contest elections on PAP tickets and get promoted to managerial heights within government departments and Government Linked Corporations (GLCs). This does not mean that these people are not technically capable--in many cases they are, because of the emphasis placed upon technical proficiency rather than human qualities other than the ability to conform [30,36]. National Service for men is a primary way that the ruling-class enforces its ideas about society on to the bodies of the young male population, whom the government sincerely hopes will begin to internalize PAP values as part of the self-interested and responsive care of the self. If they don't fight to spread PAP values in the military or in electoral contests, they will do so in the business world, where Singapore companies are generally able to achieve dominant positions in their industries within Southeast Asia.

Case two: Maya, guitarist in black/death metal band Mortality

Maya is a humble, hijab-clad mother-of-two who lives in Greater Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. That part of her resume is fairly commonplace. What is much less commonplace is her extra-curricula activities--she has been guitarist in Mortality, one of Bandung's best-known black/death metal bands (meaning that they play a hybrid or fusion style featuring some elements of black metal and some elements of death metal) on the local scene, since 2010. Her husband, Biye, plays bass. Lyrics sometimes reflect her Islamic worldview such as one track about Anti-Zionism. She told me that her children are fully familiar with the world of black and death metal music as they have been following their parents about for pretty much all of their lives--to festivals, gigs, rehearsal rooms and recording studios. They probably feel little of the clash of cultures and values that many Indonesians feel when they participate in both underground music scenes and the broader society. However, not all people on social media are supportive, understanding, tolerant or forgiving. For example, one young person berated Maya on social media for playing in a metal band and not being a good stay-at-home wife-and-mother. The irony here is that her husband plays bass and obviously fully supports Maya's involvement in the band. The death metal community core of older-generation stalwarts and their wives have provided a supportive community structure for Maya and her family. She doesn't see herself as anything special--just a religious person, wife-and-mother, and someone who enjoys playing extreme metal music. Black/death is a technically demanding style of music, and a guitarist can arguably be regarded as the most important musician in the band, so it is significant that she holds down this position.

While being shyer than Jazreel, Maya is calm, diplomatic, humble and cheerful, and never stops smiling. She is another Southern woman who is deeply embedded within various local communities, including the black/death metal scene. Mortality has teenage fans and they are seeing, via Maya, a radical and modern way of being an Indonesian woman. She has mentored Nenx, younger female guitarist of Cimahi band Girlzeroth and is friendly with Popo, female vocalist of Bandung band Demons Damn whom we shall meet shortly. Overall, these three women, as at May 2019, were three of just five to ten female musicians playing in extreme metal bands in the Bandung-Cimahi urban conurbation.

Anyone around the world can buy a copy of Mortality music, either CD or in electronic form, and see a picture of Maya onstage with hijab and guitar. The band Voice of Baceprot (hereafter VOB), from Garut, West Java, has been a sensation in the Western nations because the band is made up of three young women who wear hijabs onstage. But Maya was doing this long before they were. Despite this, she received no attention in the

West because she was just one female band member out of four and the band was happy to stay hidden or largely anonymous in the crowded Indonesian underground. Maya has done her bit in rewriting Global Gender, but she did it in her own humble and unobtrusive style whereby she shows her children and fans that you can adapt Western musical styles while remaining true to your religion and your culture. In typical Indonesian-Muslim fashion, she doesn't push herself forward and this is maybe one difference in style from Anglo-American metal fans who tend to be attracted to the brash and gimmicky. Figure 1 shows Maya with her husband Biye and their then six-year-old son in Bandung, 2014. Figure 2 depicts Maya (left) with Amel, wife of Dani aka Papap, Dismemberment Torture/ ex-Jasad drummer, Bandung, 2014.

For a non-Western band, you tend to need a gimmick to attract attention from Western nations (e.g., VOB). So, possibly the rewriting of Global Gender will simply mean Maya, and others like her, humbly writing her own contributions while

Figure 1. *Maya with her husband Biye and their then six-year-old son in Bandung, 2014.*

Figure 2. *Maya (left) with Amel, wife of Dani aka Papap, Dismemberment Torture/ ex-Jasad drummer, Bandung, 2014.*

Westerners write their own versions with no interactions or common ground at all between either the stories or the people. VOB might, if they are lucky, get a footnoted reference in the Western versions whereas Maya and Mortality would not. This might be a pessimistic picture and I hope to be proven wrong. I also hope the Indonesian-Muslim humility and understated charm can go on being what it is. The largest Muslim-majority democracy in the world attracts little interest from beyond its borders but, in many ways, its social cohesion, cultural richness, tolerance and harmony, and relative lack of interethnic and interreligious violence are shining examples. And not pushing yourself forward is a value that we should admire.

Two mini-cases indicating barriers to rewriting of Global Gender

In this section, I highlight and discuss, drawing on two real-life narratives (one from my fieldwork and one from my regular life), the problems inherent in trying to reimagine or rewrite Global Gender, despite the best efforts of Southern women and their supporters. The first case reveals an attempt by Popo, Bandung City's only female death metal vocalist as at May 2019 (Cimahi being a separate city from Bandung), and her spurned efforts to contact her hero, a British woman death metal vocalist (who shall remain nameless here as she has exited the music scene). The story shows the Global South woman reaching out for support, encouragement and validation and the Global North woman resisting and scorning her advances. Why both women might have acted as they did is subjected to analysis and I argue that both sets of actions are deeply ingrained and deeply cultural.

The second story looks at a case in Scotland when a white Scottish man (a pensioner who is ex-Navy) was talking excitedly to a barmaid (actually the pub owner) about being served by a Japanese girl at the town's new Japanese restaurant. He seemed thoroughly displeased when I, as a fellow customer, told him that in fact the woman was Hong Kong Chinese and so were the restaurant owners. This story is worth unpacking for what it arguably reveals about the Western imagination and the overt sexualization of Japanese women in an actual setting where the Other has been misrecognized. Why the woman's national or ethnic origin might matter to the Scottish man is also discussed. The mini-case shows the power of Western categorization of the Orient and how these categorizations continually reproduce themselves within society despite the presumed wishes of the individuals that are being subjected to the categorizations. Britain's political relationship, past and present, with Hong Kong is also relevant. Southern women are misrecognized and/or silenced by the continual application and reapplication of racialized categories by Westerners that speak of Western desires and fears rather than those that belong to the objects of discussion.

To return to the first mini-case, Popo sent a message (email or chat message) to the female vocalist of a British death metal band hoping to establish a long-term connection that might be mutually beneficial. The message received no reply. Popo was informed by a sense of underground (music scene) ethics, in my opinion, as well as arguably Indonesian-Muslim religious and cultural values of support and solidarity.

Different concepts of public and private realm and business context-versus-friendship are evident here. The Global North woman does not recognize Popo's name as either a business contact or a friend. With a self-interested or business-minded perspective, she quickly and probably subconsciously dismisses Popo immediately from her consciousness because she doesn't

fit into either category. Hence, she (Popo) is an outsider, a stranger, a nobody, a pest, and a foreign one at that, and hence she is immediately dismissed by the Northern woman. She is neither a friend nor a business contact who can help the Northern woman in any immediate, tangible or monetary way so she is banished from consideration. Self-interest immediately and largely subconsciously dictates the rejection of Popo by the Northern woman. And the Northern woman can do this without any guilt at all, whereas Popo feels the pain of rejection continually over a long period of time. She feels the pain of a door being continuously and guiltlessly slammed into her face. And this type of thing is culturally ingrained on both sides of the fence and puts serious limits on the ability of well-intentioned people to rewrite Global Gender. This story may be depressing, so it should be balanced against the more positive stories told earlier.

Some might say that the Northern woman needs a re-education, and an injection of compassion, while Popo needs to lower her expectations, while still keeping her positive and community-minded outlook. While such advice would probably be appropriate in both cases, it is doubtful whether anyone could change either the Northern woman or Popo's mind with such advice. If such advice was given, it would probably be immediately dismissed as incomprehensible if not offensive. Popo's message was seen as spam or inconvenient, and the self-interested mentality of Global North people continues to ride roughshod over other people's needs and feelings. (It is worth pointing out, however, that if the two women had met backstage in real-life in a concert setting, the outcome might well have been different and a mutually-supportive relationship might have developed.) It is hard to imagine rewriting or even reimagining Global Gender when such behavioural patterns are deeply ingrained and entrenched on both sides of the equation. Cultural and racial hierarchies, that date back to colonial times, are actually entrenched and reproduced by such interactions--the Indonesian woman struggles to maintain mentally her notion of her own self-worth while the Northern woman, by an action that took only a moment, reinforced colonial hierarchies and dictated that Southern women are below her and not worthy of her attention.

My second mini-case is somewhat depressing too because it shows the power of mentally-cherished sexualized categories maintained by Westerners as their way of making sense of and receiving pleasure from the Orient as well as putting some order into their world. The Scottish man received enjoyment by being served by the so-called 'Japanese' woman at the so-called 'Japanese' restaurant that was actually owned and operated by Hong Kong Chinese immigrants. The imagined commodity of *Japanese food being served by a Japanese woman at a Japanese restaurant* was what the Scottish man *wanted to purchase* as an allegedly authentic culinary experience. He was disappointed, or maybe even annoyed, to hear from me that the woman and the owners were Hong Kong Chinese. Why this might matter to him is complex and we can't explore all aspects here. Was there an aspect of insincerity or even deception involved here by the Hong Kong Chinese people running a Japanese restaurant in an allegedly 'authentic' Japanese style with all the proper furnishings and décor? Why is it any more inauthentic than white British people serving in Chinese takeaways in Britain, something that is generally accepted? Is it the fault of the Hong Kong Chinese that, to some customers, they look indistinguishable from Japanese? And, again, why should anyone care? The man's original enjoyment of the commodity,

before I took it away from him by introducing him to some inconvenient facts, reflects an imperialistic view of the world based on American foreign policy and America's military and economic domination of Asia. But there may be more to it than that. Hong Kong Chinese are a sensitive topic in today's Britain for two reasons. Firstly, many people feel suppressed guilt about abandoning Hong Kong and returning the island to the Chinese communist regime. Secondly, the UK government has provided a special immigration route and category to Hong Kong Chinese immigrants which still offers no employment or income guarantees once they arrive. Both of these aspects can be annoying to certain individuals who prefer a restrictive immigration policy that offers no special concessions to anyone.

What does this say about Global Gender? One key point is that the Scottish man refuses to allow Hong Kong Chinese to 'play with' either ethnic or racial categories even when that may be the most promising way that they can earn an income. There was a gap in the market because there were very few actual Japanese immigrants who might want to or be able to set up Japanese restaurants. Refusing to allow others to experiment or play with racial categories is a sign of wanting to enforce subordinated status upon those individuals. Secondly, the Hong Kong Chinese waitress was perceived to be misrepresenting herself or deceitful by working in a 'Japanese' restaurant even when she never told anyone verbally that she was Japanese. As Foucault would have maintained, the placing of people in racial categories for our own enjoyment or for us to be able to make sense of the world is a disciplinary process that reinforces and reproduces subjugation and discontent. The woman was alleged to have confessed Japanese status without even opening her mouth. She was raised to a higher status because of that, although it was a sexually-charged reaction, and then her status was lowered again, in the man's imagination, when I revealed to him her Hong Kong Chinese ethnicity. I am trying to rewrite Global Gender here, through analysis of this mini-case, but readers might notice that I am struggling too. But, in that moment, when I revealed her Hong Kong Chinese ethnicity to the man in the pub, I was trying to restore their Hong Kong Chinese identity to them and I refused to relegate it below or subordinate it to Japanese ethnicity, British ethnicity, or any other ethnicity.

Discussion

In her discussion of the history of sociology, Connell [1] explains how the North was assigned as the place of theory and the South as the place of data. Only in the 1950s and 1960s did scholars like Talcott Parsons and others retrospectively redefine the classic founding fathers of sociology as Durkheim, Marx and Weber.

In my ethnographic work and in this article, I have aimed to fulfill and enact Connell's [1] injunction to let the experiences of the South be brought to light, especially the stories of the oppressed and those excluded from the benefits and privileges of history and modernity as written by the citizens of the imperial powers.

We have seen Jazreel working hard behind the scenes for 16 years or more to build and develop community and to act out and live her vision of a liberal-democratic and humanitarian Singapore. Then if her vision does not literally come to pass politically, in terms of a change in government, in her imagination and among her circle of friends and activists, she is living out those values today and that becomes her/their world.

In the case of Maya, she rewrites Global Gender by being a religious wife-and-mother while playing guitar with underground black/death metal band Mortality alongside husband Biye. She communicates to the youth and to the underground that you can make your own enjoyment, meaning and history. Don't let anyone believe that they are just mindlessly copying the West, as Sukarno once feared. The lyrics, the culture and the discourse aim to address particular aspects of social, economic and political life within Indonesia. Suharto's New Order might have gone, but the problems of the country haven't.

The success of the Indonesian underground (punk, hardcore, metal), and especially in Bandung, has been quite remarkable [37-43], and is certainly a story worth telling [44]. If we use inductive theory to understand it, then that is Southern theory being made, and why not add Marx and Foucault et al. into the mix and let's see how these authors fare in such a different setting?

In 2012, *Bandung Death Fest #6* was held in daytime at a three-way intersection in the inner-city red-light district of Jalan Braga, Bandung. Twenty thousand fans, supporters and curious onlookers filled all three roads for as far as the eye could see in all directions. And this is for a subgenre of music where the most famous bands in the world struggle to attract 300 attendees at most major Global North city venues. Strangely, there was never another *Bandung Death Fest* held after this one, and this is now seen as the high point in the history of the scene in terms of its popularity and influence.

There was a sense of irony, timing and pathos as the ex-Jasad drummer, Dani aka Papap, who was pushed out of Jasad, after his motorcycle accident in 2011, won the ballot with his new band Dismemberment Torture (hereafter DT) and they played a sterling set as the last band of the day as the sun was setting. Papap ruled from behind his drum kit over his youthful band of hired talents much like Captain Kirk on the deck of the Starship Enterprise.

There was another interesting ironic aspect to it. While Jasad had conveniently switched from socially-unacceptable gore and murder lyrics to lyrics of Sundanese culture and empowerment (the Sundanese are the majority ethnic group of West Java, but not of Java as a whole), which allowed them to tour Europe on the back of government funding, Papap stuck to traditional death metal gore lyrics in his new band. One interpretation of this choice is that Papap was defiantly saying to the world: 'I don't care whether I can tour Europe or not [although the Jasad tour of Europe was still in the future], I will function as I have always functioned within the scene, but this time as a band leader and not just one-fourth of something that I cannot control, and I will stay true to the traditions of death metal lyrics while I'm at it'. This raises an issue mentioned by Dennis Lee [45]--*authenticity as pure versus authenticity as hybrid.* So, DT were the underdogs on the day but the experienced hand Papap with charismatic young dreadlocked vocalist Glenn, of Bloodgush (band), stole the show. They were ably backed up by the talented Saffar bass player, Ramon, and Dedra of Digging Up (band) on guitar. Dedra had been named the best Indonesian death metal guitarist by the Canadian death metal expert, Andrew Sick of Sick Reviews, an accolade which I saw Dedra humbly shrug off, but with a twinkle in his eye.

Bandung Death Fest #6 was an amazing achievement for an underground scene that had begun with five or six teenage bands in the 1990s, all or most living in the eastern working-class satellite city of Ujung Berung. Ujung Berung has now become a romanticized, mythologized place of underground values revered throughout Indonesia [40]. If you have the right contacts or are just fortunate, you can still meet Papap and his charming Javanese wife, Amel (see Figure 2), in the back room of their Ujung Berung home and enjoy some strong Indonesian coffee as young bands move back and forth between the living room and the adjacent rehearsal room. The air is colder here, in the shadow of the mountain, and it seems more alive! Many metalheads, punks, and hardcore musicians have moved out of Ujung Berung, but the Ujung Berung myth stays alive [40] and most underground people understand that the myth surrounding Ujung Berung is vital to the future success of the Bandung underground, if not the whole Indonesian scene.

But, in the Global North, saturated with bands, gigs, marketing, self-aggrandizement and social media, who is going to check out bands from a geographically- and culturally-remote Muslim nation even if they manage to hear about Indonesian metal?

The residents of the Global North, in both academic and popular circles, cling rigidly to the idea that they are at the centre of the world and at the centre of civilization. It is a subconscious collective understanding, a *habitus.* Do North people believe that maintaining the predominance of this worldview is their key to future success, just as the Ujung Berung people, from an Indonesian subaltern underground perspective, believe in the importance of the Ujung Berung myth and brand name that holds enormous influence today in the undergrounds of East Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore?

Connell [1] also writes of the need to communicate periphery knowledge to other parts of the periphery. With my research interviews on Singapore politics and Indonesian metal music, being placed on my two blogs since 2012, and the links shared on Facebook, the opportunity existed for people in one of these subcultures and countries to learn about the other. But, to my disappointment, this never really happened, as blog page-view statistics attest to. People are caught up in their immediate worlds and subcultures--they learn the discourses and the materialized practices, and they don't want to bother exploring further and investigating alternative realms of knowledge and experience.

Very few Indonesian residents have read my interviews with Singapore politicians and activists and very few Singapore politicians and activists have read my interviews with Indonesian metal musicians, even though strategies and tactics of one subculture could have been informative and useful in the other [1]. One point is that Singapore politicians, especially those aged over twenty-five, see themselves as part of the business and professional class, or as part of the Monday-to-Friday overground and not as part of any underground, with the concept probably not even being understood.

Writing Global Gender is important, but it must be placed within the overall broader context of writing (grounded and subaltern) Global History and Global Sociology because, as Lenin said, everything is connected to everything else, through complex and dialectical processes of development, decline and change. The stories of the Global South actors must be told and retold until every Global North person is sick and tired of hearing of them. They are more exciting anyway, (in part) because the forces of commodification have not yet completely taken over every aspect of social life and sociability.

I end this section with a story. Many Western tourists in Bali were being bored out of their minds and paying tourist prices for beer at a tourist pub. From across the road, the sounds of abrasive death metal music began to drift over towards the tourist pub.

Slowly, one-by-one and two-by-two, the braver tourists made their way across the road to check out the source of the noise. It was a collection of local death metal bands playing a type of one-day indoor festival. All tourists thought that the show was far more interesting and exciting than the tourist pub and they were glad that they had crossed the road and taken the risk. But, in life, not many cross the road or take the risk.

Conclusion

In this article, I provided two case studies of two women who are 'writing' Global Gender in Singapore and Indonesia. Both are wives and mothers, the former is a liberal-democratic opposition party activist, while the latter is a black/death metal guitarist in a local, highly-respected underground band. Both are totally committed to their chosen pathways and belief systems and act as social glue within their organizations and subcultures (grounded cosmopolitanism, if you will). Then, I presented two mini-case studies that suggest some formidable barriers still exist to rewriting Global Gender. If these barriers are not overcome, people will have to write Global Gender or not-Global Gender within their own little independent silos or rooms with restricted views looking out over dystopian landscapes characterized by surveillance, control, friendlessness, alienation and money-making. Lastly, a Discussion section, referencing Connell's *Southern Theory,* drew the evidence and arguments together and made some concluding observations.

Connell [1] suggests that Indigenous knowledge should tell of things and show things that are relatively uncommon in the metropolis (i.e., the major cities of the Global North). These would include the experiences of loss and dispossession.

While playing extreme black/death metal music and being a woman is not common in any country, the case of Maya shows that to be involved in underground music scenes and to be sincerely and deeply religious is a far more common phenomenon in Indonesia than nearly anywhere else, including even Latin America and India. I'm reminded here of Adorno's call to bring metaphysical concepts, such as God, truth, immortality, liberty and beauty, back into philosophy [46] as part of a technique so that negative and dialectical philosophy, such as his own, might 'live on' [47] [1966] after the moment that philosophy was meant to have been replaced by real-life had passed by. To put it another way, Bernstein [36] specified the dialectic of Enlightenment as being between or comprising the two opposites of pure insight and religious faith, so the idea that instrumental reason had begun to reign over human happiness suggests that religious faith could/should be brought back, at least as a critical tool if not as actual practice.

Papap being pushed out of Jasad (as many people tell the story), after his motorcycle accident in 2011, represented severe loss and pain for Papap and his wife and, to a lesser extent, the fans of Jasad. The story of DT's successful performance at *Bandung Death Fest #6* can be read as rebirth, regeneration, vindication, repossession (of what exactly?), and maybe even revenge. If we want to draw a long bow, it is as symbolic as Indonesia regaining independence in 1945 and democracy (of a kind) in 1998; and the huge crowd at Jalan Braga, arguably, and less charitably, represent the bourgeoisification of extreme metal music in Indonesia [48] as personified in the person of the politician Jokowi. Papap reclaiming his self-respect and dignity perhaps points beyond any of these worldly things to the End of the Age concept within the Abrahamic religions. Such a concept is not too remote from the worldview of most Indonesians. And by being the biggest underground scene in the world, peripheral

Indonesia turns the tables upon the richer, presumptuous countries of the Global North [44].

For her part, Jazreel and the SDP show how an organization whose values and tactics are deemed 'too Western', by its Singapore-based detractors, are imagining and living out a society of a type taken-for-granted and underappreciated in the West. They overlook the deficiencies and contradictions of liberalism and democracy because to them it is still a goal and a hope, something out of sight but certainly not out of mind. One day perhaps the content of Dr Chee's books and Jazreel's spoken words and lifestyle will win over the majority of Singaporean voters and the liberal-democratic hope will be replaced by the reality.

The general goodwill of Indonesian people and the socially-unacceptable nature of jealousy and hate (other than the generalized hate with no specific object in view as seen in metal lyrics) can be seen in the fact that Jasad members are not the bad guys in this narrative--people generally accept that they are free to change their lyrical themes and to replace their drummer. Despite this, there was obvious positive sentiment shown towards Papap that created more interest in and atmosphere at DT's Jalan Braga performance. Jasad remains respected as major leaders of the Ujung Berung underground; they are not disliked. While their new business-first mentality may be alienating to some, it is a natural result of growing older and still wanting to be an active touring and recording band. Man and Ferly of Jasad did their best to (re)write Local Gender when they mentored Popo and spoke favourably about her and Demons Damn onstage and elsewhere. That they gave out a consistent and constant message that *women musicians are welcome in the underground* ultimately paved the way for Maya and for even younger musicians such as Girlzeroth's Nenx and Gina.

Manuscript Highlights

- Taking examples from the diverse fields of opposition politics and heavy metal music, I explore how two women are rewriting global gender according to their own beliefs and preferences, eschewing stereotypical understandings of the woman's role in social institutions.

- I present two other minicases which highlight some of the barriers and challenges to the idea and practice of rewriting global gender, especially as it involves the relation between the Western countries and the Asian region.

Declaration statement

I declare that I have no material conflict of interest, financial or otherwise.

External funding

This project relied on zero external funding sources.

Ethical approval

The two studies that are drawn upon for this article have ethics approval.

Informed consent

Informed consent (IC) was obtained from all study participants.

References

1. Connell R. Southern theory: The global dynamics of knowledge in social science. Polity; 2007.

2. Feldman N. After jihad: America and the struggle for Islamic democracy. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux; 2003.

3. Dyer M. Ungrounded cosmopolitanism: Intersections of moral

responsibility and gender in environmental activism in rural Solomon Islands. Womens Stud Int Forum. 2018;67(1):128-135.

4. Dyer H, James K. Henry Dyer remembers: My life in soccer. Chișinău, Moldova: Eliva Press; 2023.

5. James KE. Doing ethnographic research in the Fiji Islands: research method and research ethics issues. Cult Stud Crit Methodol. 2023;23(4):331-340. doi:10.1177/15327086231172226

6. James K, Nadan Y. Fiji soccer history 1980–1989: A philosophical and sociological analysis. Cogent Arts Humanit. 2019;6(1):1-19. doi:10.1080/23311983.2019.1627021

7. James K, Nadan Y. Race, ethnicity, and class issues in Fiji soccer 1980-2015. Soccer Soc. 2020;21(7):741-761. doi:10.1080/14660 970.2020.1742706

8. James K, Nadan Y. Gesturing elsewhere and offshore memory: Amateur elite soccer in the Fiji Islands, 1980-1992. Sport Hist Rev. 2021;52(1):22-40. doi:10.1123/shr.2020-0001

9. James K, Nadan Y. Mental health, crime, sport, community, and island life: The post-retirement struggles of a Fiji soccer hero. Int J Sociol Leis. 2021;4(4):375-396. doi:10.1007/s41978-021-00088-1

10. James K, Nadan Y. Post-retirement blues in the shadow of Joe Tubuna: The post-retirement struggles of Fiji's indigenous soccer elite. Sport Soc. 2022;25(9):1661-1678. doi:10.1080/17430437.2 020.1847087

11. James KE, Nadan Y. 'They couldn't win and didn't want to lose': The 1982 Inter-district Championship Final (Fiji soccer). Sport Hist Rev. 2022;53(2):182-207. doi:10.1123/shr.2021-0015

12. James K, Tuidraki H, Tuidraki A, Tabaiwalu S. Sources of Indigenous Fijian 'law': Village mores versus town-based criminal laws. Griffith Law Rev. 2022;31(4):465-484. doi:10.10 80/10383441.2022.2121462

13. Craig P. Sport sociology. 3rd ed. SAGE; 2016.

14. Putnam R. Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy. Princeton University Press; 1993.

15. Putnam R. Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community. Simon & Schuster; 2000.

16. Putnam R. E pluribus unum: Diversity and community in the twenty-first century, the 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture. Scand Polit Stud. 2007;30(2):137-174.

17. James K, Chia R, Grant B, Lee D. The rejuvenation of the NSP and the rebranding of the SDP: Conversations with Singapore's opposition politicians. JEBAT Malaysian J Hist Polit Strateg Stud. 2011;38(2):99-118.

18. James K, Walsh R, Grant B. Poverty in paradise city: When the jester has a broken heart. J Peace Gend Dev Stud. 2011;1(4):138-154.

19. James K. The struggle for Singapore's Chinese heartland: The People's Action Party versus the Workers' Party versus the Singapore Democratic Party, 1998-2013. Asian J Comp Polit. 2022;7(2):233-250. doi:10.1177/2057891120988067

20. Chee SJ. Your future my faith our freedom. Open Singapore Centre; 2001.

21. Chee SJ. The power of courage: Effecting political change in Singapore through nonviolence. Chee Soon Juan; 2005.

22. Chee SJ. A nation cheated. Chee Soon Juan; 2008.

23. Chee SJ. Democratically speaking. Chee Soon Juan; 2012.

24. Bhabha H. Unsatisfied: Notes on vernacular cosmopolitanism. In: Garcia-Morena L, Pfeifer PC, eds. Text and nation. Camden House; 1996:191-207.

25. Clifford J. Traveling cultures. In: Grossberg L, Nelson C, Treichler PA, eds. Cultural studies. Routledge; 1992:96-116.

26. Fitzgerald RP, Stivens M. Editorial for special section "Gendering cosmopolitanisms: Recognition, belonging and difference". Womens Stud Int Forum. 2018;67(1):80-84.

27. James KE, Ali A, Mahmood A, Mohammed U, Rehman N, Walsh RJ. Pricing policies and culture at two Singapore hostess bars: Is a grounded cosmopolitan ethics possible in such a setting? Womens Stud Int Forum. 2021;88(1):1-9. doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2021.102516

28. Stivens M. Gendering cosmopolitanisms: Hospitality and the asylum seeking other. Women's Studies International Forum. 2018;67(1):85-93.

29. Werbner P. Vernacular cosmopolitanism. Theory, Culture & Society. 2006;23(2-3):496-498.

30. Horkheimer M, Adorno TW. Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments. Stanford University Press; 2002 [1947].

31. Marcuse H. One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society. Beacon Press; 1964.

32. Foucault M. Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison. Translated by Sheridan A. Allen Lane; 1977.

33. Foucault M. The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge. Allen Lane; 1979.

34. Foucault M. Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–77. Vintage; 1980.

35. Gordon C. Afterword. In: Gordon C, ed. Michel Foucault - Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–77. Vintage; 1980:229-259.

36. Bernstein JM. Negative dialectic as fate: Adorno and Hegel. In: Huhn T, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Adorno. Cambridge University Press; 2004:19-50.

37. Baulch E. Making Scenes: Reggae, Punk, and Death Metal in 1990s Bali. Duke University Press; 2007.

38. Hutabarat F, Kusumah IRA. Market development using community shared values: The case of Burgerkill. Unpublished working paper; Bandung, Indonesia.

39. James K, Walsh R. Bandung rocks, Cibinong shakes: Economics and applied ethics within the Indonesian death-metal community. Musicology Australia. 2015;37(1):27-46. doi:10.1080/08145857. 2015.1021438.

40. James KE, Walsh RJ. Masculinity and underground music scene participation across time: A case study from Indonesia. Metal Music Studies. 2022;8(1):29-46. doi:10.1386/mms_00065_1.

41. James KE, Walsh RJ. Forever underground, forever black: The Indonesian death metal scene as mythscape and the Ujung Berung death metal scene as myth. Popular Music History. 2022;15(1):33-53. doi:10.1558/pomh.20503.

42. Martin-Iverson S. The value of the underground: Punk, politics, and creative urbanism in Bandung, Indonesia. Cultural Studies. 2021;35(1):110-135.

43. Prasetyo FA. Punk and the city: A history of punk in Bandung. Punk & Post-Punk. 2017;6(2):189-211.

44. Wallach J. Reformasi-era popular music studies: Reflections of an anti-anti-essentialist. In: McGraw A, Miller CJ, eds. Sounding Out the State of Indonesian Music. Cornell University Press; 2022:162-179.

45. Schiefelbein P. Adorno's Negative Dialectics. In: Engelbrecht D, ed. Adorno: An Introduction. Translated by Engelbrecht D. Pennbridge; 1992:61-71.

46. Lee DW. 'Negeri seribu bangsa': Musical hybridization in contemporary Indonesian death metal. Metal Music Studies. 2018;4(3):531-548.

47. Adorno TW. Negative Dialectics. Translated by Ashton EB. Continuum; 1973 [1966].

48. Alkatiri Z, Aviandy M, Nugraha FM, Setiawan H, Putri MI. A pseudo-rebellion: Ujung Berung metalheads in the contestation of identity space in Bandung, 2010–22. Metal Music Studies. 2023;9(2):233–255. doi:10.1386/mms_00107_1.