



AMERICAN STUDIES IN INDONESIA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

editor:
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AMERICAN STUDIES STUDENTS' AND ALUMNI ASSOCIATION (ASSAA)
FACULTY OF CULTURAL SCIENCES
UNIVERSITAS GADJAH MADA

American Studies in Indonesia and Its Implications

Bernardus Hidayat, MA

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Acknowledgement

Ginanjar Gailea
Chief of ASSAA

American Studies Scholars Summit 2012 is an academic event where American Studies students and scholars can meet in a forum to share and exchange knowledge and ideas about American Studies. The theme for the summit is “American Studies in Indonesia and its Implications”. The purpose of having the theme for the seminar and discussion in the summit is to measure how far the development of American Studies in Indonesia has been and what significances it has contributed to the interdisciplinary studies in academic level. Apart from the scientific contribution to all of the participants of the seminar, the outcome of this activity is considered important to be the starting point to establish a national American Studies Association.

On behalf of American Studies Students and Alumni Association (ASSAA) and the organizing committee of the summit, I would like to express my gratitude to all of the speakers both in the seminar and parallel discussion. I would also like to express my special gratitude to Prof. Michael G. Vann, Ph.D., a Fulbright senior scholar from California State University, Sacramento for his contribution as one of the speakers in the seminar. ASSAA is also indebted to Prof. Melanie Budianta from Universitas Indonesia for sharing her

opinion and giving her support for the founding of the national American Studies Association. Much of my gratitude also goes to Dr. Ida Rochani Adi from American Studies Program Universitas Gadjah Mada as one of the contributors in designing the founding of the national association.

I'm also glad to report that we, the organizing committee of the summit, have completed compiling the papers contributed for the event, both presented and not presented in the seminar and parallel discussion. There are 16 papers we have assembled into a proceeding paper book. We would like to express our great appreciation to all the writers of the papers. We hope the book can enrich scientific studies on American culture and society and the readers find the book one of useful references in developing their critical thinking or having their own studies on American culture and society.

Thank you

Foreword

Dr. Juliasih K., S.U.

Head of American Studies Program

American Studies Program at Universitas Gadjah Mada has been intensively exploring, scrutinizing and examining the latest issues, theories and methods of American Studies through some systematic and continuous projects. A series of seminars of the recent situation related to global, transnational and multilingual American studies yields a collection of academic writings in which experts and researchers propose fruitful findings and strategies in various fields.

Within the framework of a long-term project, we have just recently held an event entitled “American Studies Scholars Summit 2012” on December 1st, 2012. Approximately 200 participants from many institutions and came to this convention. They represented at least 20 universities and colleges from about 10 cities throughout Indonesia. Their educational backgrounds were mostly American studies. This convention was followed by a series of meetings to formulate short and long term strategies and action plans. One of the results is the formation of the American Studies Society of Indonesia, abbreviated as ASSINDO. This organization mainly attempts to attract more people to do researches related to American Studies.

Another important result of the series of the meetings is to publish a book containing carefully selected papers presented in the convention. The publication of the book is one of our programs to not only examine and explore existing theories and experiences but also to share the findings with the public who we hope in turn would provide feedbacks for the improvement or reorientation of the American studies in Indonesia.

On behalf of the American Studies Program at UGM, I would like to express my gratitude to the students, experts and all participants involved in the project. Hopefully, this could be a good beginning of productive future for the American studies society in Indonesia.

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FRAMING A GLOBALIZED CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH A TRANSNATIONAL AMERICAN STUDIES

Ekawati Marhaenny Dukut

ABSTRACT

American Studies as a discipline has developed from an intellectual history synthesis to a transnational one. With the transnationalism of American Studies embracing globalization as an important factor, American Studies scholars are expected to not only learn about the American experience within its borders, but also within its cross-borders, in addition to the outside border lines. American Studies no longer focus its research about American works developed in the U.S.A. but it also looks at the works developed outside the country. An inspection of how some magazine advertisements of the world wide distributed *Cosmopolitan* becomes a media of transmitting American values globally and how the 2012 U.S. Presidential election has affected the U.S. become points of discussion in this paper. The discussion is hoped to make Indonesian American Studies scholar reflect on what kinds of opportunities and challenges they can have for their own cultural identity.

Key words: American Studies, cultural identity, globalization, transnationalism.

TRANSNATIONALISM IN AMERICAN STUDIES

Founded by Vernon Louis Parrington in 1928, American Studies as a discipline sprang from combining the methodologies of literary criticism and historical research that gave birth to his "intellectual history synthesis". Twenty years after Parrington, Tremain McDowell similarly argued that in viewing American Studies there was a need to not only see the history by making a reconciliation of the past-present-future but also on the reconciliation of the academic disciplines and the region-nation-world. This means that, a play of multi disciplinary studies were needed to deconstruct what was seen as the 'region' to represent what became the 'nation', in order to understand the 'world'. Many years later, Leo Marx was among those that developed the region-nation-world idea to conceptualize his micro to macro approach. The first scholar to have made a signature of applying McDowell's three forms of reconciliation methodology mentioned, however, was Henry Nash Smith with his influential myth and symbol work on the *Virgin Land* in 1950. Allan Trachtenberg was another scholar that employed the methodology for his 1965's *Brooklyn Bridge*. Returning to Smith, he also wrote a provoking article, "Can American Studies Develop a Method", which emphasized McDowell's reconciliation of academic disciplines. He wrote that the American Studies found its strength in the collaboration of various academic disciplines for its "conventional methods of inquiry" (207). So, in analyzing an American Studies material the disciplines from literature, history, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, economics, and psychology could be integrated and refracted

through an American lens. This is why, later in the 1970s, Gene Wise showed that as a discipline, American Studies could embrace “ethnic studies, black studies, women’s studies, folklore studies and popular culture studies” (332). Up to this present day, this “interconnection of disciplines” (Gurian 79) is believed to have contributed to the discipline of American Studies.

American Studies as a discipline is also striking with regards to its multicultural American experience of minority groups that molds the larger culture of the American nation. Alice Kessler-Harris gave her personal background as an example of the notion. She said:

If you ask me where I come from, I’ll tell you that I was born in England during World War II of refugee parents who were Hungarian-speaking, then German – the language of the refugee community. Finally, we were sent to school to learn English – an event that happened shortly before we all moved to Wales where I lived until we emigrated to the United States. By then I was a teenager. How do I construct myself? It depends on the circumstance. Neither Hungarian nor Czech, neither English nor Welsh, I claim identities as my sense of otherness requires. I suppose that makes me a certain kind of American (307).

The life example above was what made 1980 Americanists expressed their importance of a multicultural curriculum in

America. This multiculturalism process is believed to show how the U.S.A. apply its realizations of being a democratic nation

With the increasing number of media technology in the 1990s, the study of the everyday life or popular culture also became a unique factor of studying the American experience. George Lipsitz saw an importance of focusing on the contexts and processes of cultural creation in addition to whatever became the validated texts because there was recognition that the "circulation of ideas and images pervades all forms of social life" (624). Consequently, this explained for the growing number of research on popular culture products such as the creation of hip hop music, Walt Disney movie, the beauty industry or the Oprah Winfrey television show.

In November 12, 2004 the president of the American Studies Association, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, however, gave a new twist to the conceptualization of American Studies. In her address, she mentioned the importance of using transnationalism in its methodology. She reasoned that in studying the complexities of the American culture that developed from a migration of cultures, American Studies scholars must look "beyond the nation's borders" and try to understand how the nation could be seen from beyond those borders (21). This is because she saw the U.S. as a participant of a "global flow of people, ideas, texts and products" (Fishkin 24), so the U.S. is seen as a nation who readily welcomes globalization. As an illustration, Fishkin mentioned that there are Asian women working in the U.S. and also in Asia zones of assembly and manufacturing. Because of this, in literature,

for example, Fishkin regarded the cultural work done on American literature whether from outside or inside the U.S. are both materials that are valid subjects of study (26).

The creolization of food in the Caribbean and also the Korean identity by studying the responses of the Koreans eating at McDonald's in Seoul are equally valid of study. In her address, Fishkin continued to argue that the scholarships given to people to come to America is not to export an arrogant, pro-American nationalist, but rather to promote an understanding of the multiple meanings of American culture (21). Not putting aside the important concepts of previous founding fathers of American Studies, therefore, Fishkin's recent transnationalism idea show American Studies scholars that the U.S. experience is better understood by reflecting to the migration of multi cultures over two centuries ago. It was this fact that form U.S.A. culture as being made from globalized nations.

IDENTIFYING GLOBALIZATION

Many foreign scholars have been invited to study about the American culture, whether for a tour, a conference, a workshop, a short course, or for as long as a graduate study. If not able to have that fortune, with the advancement of technology, foreigners would already have some experience of the American culture through the transformations of its popular culture products. These could be through fictions, movies, television shows or magazine advertisements distributed in foreigners' local newsstands. How has U.S.A. as

a nation that is influenced by globalization showed its current cultural identity? Before dealing with the question, let us first look into the word global, which has become a popular adjective in recent years.

Upon the word global, Douglas Kellner informs that it has become the "buzzword" ever since the 1990s (285). This must have been the reason for Wimal Dissanayake's statement who says about globalization being the "defining marker of the twenty-first century" (26). The statement is backed up by Vidya S.A. Kumar's definition of globalization, which is a concept created spontaneously to reflect people's experiences of having a social integration, which compromises the bonds between nation states (94). Citing Cesare Poppi and A.S. Bhalla who are globalization theorists, Kumar describes globalization as a condition, phenomenon, stage, phase, discourse, ideology or a "series of waves" whose nature undergoes one or many processes (91-92). With regards to the nature of being a process, Nayef R.F. Al-Rodhan (5) offers the definition of globalization as one that "encompasses the causes, course, and consequences of transnational and transcultural integration of human and non-human activities". The human activities in this case encompass the linguistic, cultural, economic, and political aspects of human life that are part of the human and social sphere. Whereas, the non-human activities incorporates but are not limited to, the spread of bacteria and non-human disease such as bird flu and natural disasters such as tornadoes, tsunamis, earthquakes, and hurricanes. This is why Al-Rodhan sees globalization as a current that impacts

communities, cultures, and economies for years. He believes it resulted from transnational and transcultural integrations that occurred globally throughout human history. Because of these transnational and transcultural points, therefore, the American Studies' methodology of deconstructing nations with transnationalism is considered a significant choice for scholars of today.

In addition to Al-Rhodan and Kumar's definition of globalization, Kellner argued further that the current world is organized by the acceleration of globalization that is strengthened through the domination of a world capitalistic economic system, which lays the platform for transnational corporations and organizations that wear down local cultures and traditions (287). Dissayanake (26-27) has a similar view but prefers to analyze globalization through a number of levels, which corresponds to the American Studies' play of bringing forth an interdisciplinary of studies. She explained that in the economic level there has been a worldwide spread of free market capitalism with its complex ways that influences the local economy. She understood this as being influenced by the dominant knowledge of economy that obeyed different axioms from the world's industrial economy and the ever growing influence of multinational corporations. At the technological level, Dissayanake says that the impact of increasingly new communications from satellite to internet and websites were significant contributions for globalization. Then, at the cultural level the impacts of consumerism, commodification and transnationalized forms of popular pleasures and desires, along with indigenous traditions were

those that have also built up the characteristics of globalization. Finally, at the political and social level, she believes the challenges of a nation-state, the proliferation of non-governmental organizations, and the new social order that has come from the fall of Soviet communism are the building up factors of globalization.

INDONESIAN AND U.S. *COSMOPOLITAN*'s GLOBAL VALUES

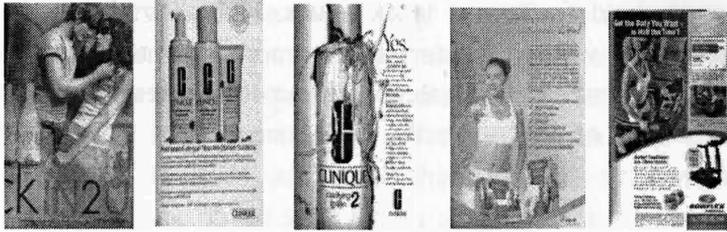
Currently, I am an American Studies scholar from Indonesia, who is given the opportunity to do research in the U.S. for my dissertation on women magazine advertisements. The discussion about globalization above has made me reflect the *Cosmopolitan* through the American Studies' lens of transnationalism. *Cosmopolitan* is one of the most popular magazines in the world, because according to David Machin and Joanna Thornborrow the *Cosmopolitan* has 44 international versions (453). So, this makes it a good example to discuss about the magazine's global values. For starters, the magazine is said to have been localized to different degrees and in different ways, which results in observable differences between the versions. Yet, in the different versions, it managed to globally distribute its 'brand' thus leaving with it some similarities between the 44 versions (Machin and Thornborrow 454). The brand referred to here is about the set of representation and value that are not directly tied to a specific product or products but on the basic theme of the magazine. In this case, Machin and Thornborrow regards *Cosmopolitan* to have set itself into selling the values of "independence, power and fun" (Machin

and Thornborrow 455), whereas Kathryn McMahon regards it as offering the values of “love, success, sex”, and “money” (381). With regards to this, I believe, these set of values have signified the magazine’s running theme of fun, fearless female.

Acknowledging G. Kress and T. Van Leeuwen, the values set are not only disseminated by the magazine but also realized by the aid of other media such as the television industry who show the same values through a display of fashion items, cosmetics and also in the cafe industry. The magazine did start at the local environment, but because the magazine is globalized, the values become transnationalized in order to be received well by people all over the world. It follows that the realizations of the global values Kress and Van Leeuwen speak of, is aligned through *Cosmopolitan’s* advertisements on for example, the choice of fun and fearless female’s clothing or cosmetics for the models in the magazine. Based on the notion of globalization, it is an interesting point that some advertisements in the magazine can be exactly the same, by means of textual and visual means. For example, is how the English language and American environment of daring to be sexy is used in the magazine advertisement for all over the world without any editions to it. I believe it is done to successfully transmit the globalized phenomenon. An example of this is a Calvin Klein jeans advertisement seen in both the U.S. and Indonesian *Cosmopolitan’s* version of September 2007 (see picture 1), whose text and visual images are left exactly the same. It is a good sample of how women are globally expected to be

daring in making decisions for her own life. This is because, by being daring, a woman is expected to have the power to control her own money for the fun and success of her love life. Thus, as stated above, the values of power, independence, fun, love, success, sexy and money are clearly transmitted. Another sample can be seen in Clinique advertisement, where the text has been translated but the values transmitted are still the same. Through the Indonesian version (see picture 2) of Clinique cosmetic's text which says the cosmetics can get rid of blemishes and the visually blue color of the bottle to represent water, as a reader, I see it transmitting the value of cleanliness for women. This same value is transmitted also in the American version (see picture 3) where there is a splash of water over the bottle, coupled by the text 'clarifying lotion' and the big word 'Yes' at the top right corner of the advertisement. These signals all support the brand name, Clinique, which to my understanding signifies the word 'clean'.

Although not explicitly said, the value of being clean from any blemishes, according to me enhances all of the values *Cosmopolitan* wants to reach its readers. It is obvious to me that the advertisement support the magazine of trying to convince women to be independent and have a successful career that brings in money enough to buy cosmetics. As a result, women can have the power to seek for a fun and healthy life. With this aim in life, there is a connotation, too, that a 'clean from blemish woman' may successfully attract the male she seeks for love.



Picture 1 Picture 2 Picture 3 Picture 4 Picture 5

In the next sample of advertisements, although the language used in the text and the models are brought locally, both the Indonesian version of picture 4 and the American version of picture 5, signify the same value of making women have a healthy life to maintain women's power. These advertisements can be read as transmitting the global message: with power, women can keep up with the popular, fun-fearless-female *Cosmopolitan* identity. Although the above advertisements can be discussed in more details, nevertheless, these samples can make other readers see how the advertisements successfully help transmit the magazine's global values. Nowadays, I can see more healthy and slim women wear jeans, and do not have any blemishes. Although the jeans may not be a Calvin Klein and the cosmetics used may not be a Clinique product, nevertheless, it is proof that the magazine has globally transferred the values to most women. It is clear that magazine advertisements can give ample opportunities to transfer cultural values, yet, the challenge is whether or not the values are always well received, and brought forth well without endangering the

already held traditional local values. It is a challenge for Indonesian women readers of *Cosmopolitan* to take the positive sides of those values without losing her traditional stereotype of, for example, being an obedient wife and mother.

AN AMERICAN STUDIES VIEW OF GLOBALIZATION'S IMPLICATIONS

Making use of the aforementioned definitions of globalization and being an Indonesian currently reasearching in Ohio, U.S.A. makes me reflect to the implications it has on the U.S. people as well. Being a direct observer of the 2012 presidential election, I have the opportunity to experience the economic and political conditions of the country. One of the heated debate issues in the election was about China's threat to America who has a spectacular economic growth from trade and investments. There has been a rise of products made from China worldwide, that some U.S. people feel it will threaten the economic flow of the U.S. In the first presidential election debate of 26 September 2012, Mitt Romney accused Barack Obama's previous administration for not creating ample job opportunities, thereby lessening the economic flow of the people. It is interesting, however, to learn that Romney was believed as one of those who decreased job opportunities due to the closing of some of his U.S. enterprises, in order to open one instead in China because manpower was cheaper there. The U.S. house bubble experience from George W. Bush's administration was also a factor that led to the worse economic depression ever

since the 1930s Great Depression. Aversa said there was a housing correction and declining dollar value that resulted U.S. subprime mortgage crises and losses of 159,000 jobs by September 2008. At the end of the Bush administration, Jefferey A. Bader (3) accounted that America's trade deficit with China was about \$250 billion annually that it left many Americans feel vulnerable to Chinese's ownership of the \$1 trillion in U.S. government-guaranteed debt. This condition may no longer support the claim of the U.S. as a super power nation.

In addition to the political economic factor above, due to globalization the U.S. is just as vulnerable as other countries to natural disasters. A few days before Obama was re-elected as President for the term 2012-2016, people in Carolina, New Jersey and New York experienced the Sandy Hurricane, which some people believed is more disastrous than the previous Katrina. The flood and the cut of main power supplies in the two states have contributed to the stop of all transportation and the stock market of New York. This non-human factor of globalization, has directly influenced the flow of the nation's economy, too. This unfavorable condition is made even worse when a week after, the snow from Carolina reached New Jersey and New York who still have no power. This disaster has unfortunately led to the rationing of gas, which forced people to alternatively queue up based on the odd and even number of their car's license number. If usually Christmas shoe boxes are given out to Third World countries, I would not be surprised if this Christmas, some of the boxes would go to the Americans themselves. It is thus,

understandable for why in a CNN television interview of November 10, 2012, a lady remarked that she is doomed. This brings the realization of Fishkin's point previously about the importance for Americans to study examples of how the cross-border or outside border deal with, for example, natural disasters and thus gas rationing in U.S. may be avoided.

Obama's re-election is phenomenal, not only because of the natural disaster experienced above, but also on the building up of the nation's cultural identity. As an American Studies scholar, I observe that America as a nation of immigrants, is becoming stronger and there is a shift of people's expectations of who should lead the U.S. country. The U.S. people no longer want an always White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant to become their leader. They are now more open to someone like Obama who is the first Black American President. Being an American citizen who has relatives and experiences in Africa and Indonesia makes Obama a globalized person. This becomes prove that the minority groups are now being heard more than before. In fact, it was the points from the growing number of Hispanic-Americans, African-Americans, single career women, and youngsters who have given the victory number for Obama. The Republicans from Romney's side took a great blow when they thought they could depend on the white male and faithful wives of America to win the election.

The U.S. presidential election experience is proof of how through globalized values, America is moving beyond some of their traditional beliefs. It is now up to other

countries, such as Indonesia to see the phenomena as either an opportunity or challenge to upgrade the country.

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