Comedians Performing the Margins: The Philippines' Tito, Vic & Joey (TVJ) and Indonesia's Dono, Kasino and Indro (Warkop DKI)

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Abstract

This study examines how comedians Tito, Vic, and Joey (TVJ) and Dono, Kasino, and Indro (Warkop DKI) perform hegemonic masculinity, revealing the dual role of comedy in both supporting and subverting authoritarian norms in Manila and Jakarta. These trios embodied gendered identities that reflected and reinforced the strongman politics of the 1970s and 1980s under Ferdinand Marcos Sr. in the Philippines and Suharto in Indonesia. While both groups portrayed themselves as rebellious outliers and tricksters in the urban landscapes of Manila and Jakarta, their humor paradoxically served to bolster state power, reinforcing traditional masculine dynamics. Through their performances, these comedians navigated a nuanced interplay between insubordination and subservience, which concealed far more insidious forms of tyranny and corruption within their respective socio-political contexts. This paper demonstrates how these comedic representations reveal and reinforce shared cultural practices in Southeast Asia, bridging the perceived divide between the Philippines and Indonesia despite their distinct religious and colonial histories.

Keywords: Hegemonic Masculinities; Warkop DKI; Tito, Vic & Joey; Strongman Politics; Comedy

This study investigates the embodiment of strongman ideology through the masculine portrayals of two influential comedic trios: Tito, Vic, and Joey (TVJ) from the Philippines, and Dono, Kasino, and Indro (Warkop DKI) from Indonesia. By analyzing TVJ's portrayal of university-aged youths in the TV series *Iskul Bukol* (The School of Hard Knocks) directed by Bert De Leon, and Warkop DKI's film *Mana Tahaaan* (Can't Handle It) directed by Nawi Ismail, this study explores how these comedians—rooted in urban peripheries yet shaped by elite networks—negotiated gender, politics, and class through their comedic narratives in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Both groups maintained a strong presence in noontime TV, radio,

and film through characters rooted in folk traditions with a campiness that seemingly critiqued the politics of their respective countries. While the selected texts come from different genres, they navigate the tension between creative expression and the authoritarian constraints of their contexts.

There is limited availability of accessible records and critical analyses, largely due to persistent challenges in archiving. Despite their popularity, the scarcity of preserved materials—particularly *Iskul Bukol*—underscores the need for further scholarly attention to these cultural texts. Nonetheless, these performances are invaluable for understanding the socio-political and cultural dynamics of the late 1970s and early 1980s, as they reveal how comedy mediated political shifts and normalized gendered colonial rhetoric. Through detailed analysis, this study aims to uncover how these comedies shaped public discourse, influenced societal perceptions, and engaged with the gender politics of their time. Examining the nuances of these performances and their implications, this study seeks to address the gap in the limited scholarship surrounding these works, extending beyond their comedic personas to critically examine how their celebrity and class position allowed them to mediate existing power structures.

Central to this analysis is Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinities, which describes masculinity as shaped by "relations of alliance, dominance and subordination…constructed through practices that exclude and include" (37). This framework helps explain how specific masculine ideals reinforce power structures and inequalities, pressuring men to conform while marginalizing alternative masculinities and subordinating women. It is particularly useful in understanding power transitions from colonial rule to postcolonial regimes. Colonial masculine ideals, which emphasized authority and control, were

perpetuated by new political elites after independence, who continued to manipulate gendered power dynamics to maintain dominance. Connell explains:

> As the first performing art to emerge in the Indies with currency throughout the archipelago, stambul had a significant role in shaping what Hildred Geertz long ago described as Indonesia's "metropolitan superculture," an "integrating system" connecting cities and towns into a single network (Cohen 3).

The stamboel[1] was not only a geographic amalgamation of cultures, but it also preserved cultural legacies across time, helping integrate Indonesia's folk heritage into modern mass media formats like film, television, and radio. This context highlights Warkop DKI's significance as a continuation of these comedic traditions (Anderson 36-37). The Komedie Stamboel revitalized Indonesian humor, shaping not just emerging media but also integrating public participation in broader socio-political and cultural dialogues. As Indonesia moved away from colonial rule, its theatrical practices evolved significantly, particularly through Komedie Stamboel, which transitioned from live performances to film, television, and radio. This evolution not only modernized traditional humor but also preserved cultural identity while embracing new expressions. By expanding across various media, Komedie Stamboel provided a multi-dimensional comedic experience, fostering a shared sense of identity throughout the archipelago. Similar to wayang puppetry, it combined visual storytelling with music, captivating audiences with witty dialogues and diverse cultural influences. Its humor served as more than entertainment; it offered social and political commentary, critiquing norms and sparking critical discourse.

In contrast, Warkop DKI's portrayal of panakawan figures highlights a more nuanced participation, often characterized by ignorance and gullibility. In the opening scenes of *Mana Tahaaan*, Slamet and Paijo meet on a train bound for Jakarta. As they form a friendship and attempt to navigate the city, their provincial background becomes apparent. Slamet's claim of

having secured accommodation in Jakarta proves less substantial than expected, and their encounters with various rental options—each marked by the allure of young women—highlight the city's complexities. These moments underscore the broader theme of modernity intersecting with entrenched hierarchies, subjugating non-hegemonic masculinities while reinforcing ideals of power and dominance.

Warkop DKI's evolution in the 1970s into new media positioned humor as a tool for social commentary and cultural preservation. Their exploration of gender dynamics parallels TVJ's *Iskul Bukol*, though with a different focus. As TVJ realigns not-so ideal masculine identities in existing power structures, Warkop DKI highlights the erasure of provincial identities in *Mana Tahaaan*'s Jakarta. This theme illustrates how traditional hierarchies persist alongside modernity, suggesting that individuality and rights are not always guaranteed. Dominant groups maintain power by shaping cultural norms, leading to the fetishization of certain body types as standards of masculinity, reinforcing traits associated with power, dominance, and control.

Gender Politics in TVJ and Warkop DKI's Comedy

The emergence of strongman politics in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the Philippines and Indonesia provides the crucial context for understanding the broader implications of TVJ and Warkop DKI's comedic performances. The authoritarian rule of Ferdinand Marcos, Sr. in the Philippines and Suharto in Indonesia promoted dominant masculine ideals, consolidating power through coercion, cultural norms, and media manipulation. Their regimes, rooted in strength, control, and paternal authority, created a societal framework where masculinity was equated with leadership and order. Within this framework, the identities constructed in the

narratives of TVJ and Warkop DKI appear disempowered, dependent on these strongman figures to guide and protect them, rather than actively shaping their own lives.

Fabricating Marcos as War Hero

Marcos constructed his persona as a war hero, bolstering his political legitimacy by valorizing his participation in the Second World War. Although his claims were later exposed as "fraudulent" and "absurd" (Gerth and Brinkley 1), he wielded these fabrications to sustain his image of masculine strength, emphasizing the attachment of masculinity to roles where men were protectors and saviors of the nation.

The Philippines has a rich history of separatist movements that often emphasized male muscularity as vital to the struggle for independence. The late 19th-century Philippine Revolution against Spain aimed for national independence, while localized movements sought regional autonomy. Following the exit of Spain in 1898, the Philippines fell under American colonial rule, prompting various indigenous groups to advocate for self-governance. The Moro peoples in Mindanao and Sulu notably resisted American control during the Moro Rebellion (1899-1913), fighting for their political and cultural rights. As the country neared independence from the U.S., the Bangsamoro movement emerged, seeking autonomy under a federal system. This led to significant agreements like the Tripoli Agreement in 1976 and the 1996 Final Peace Agreement, aimed at addressing Moro autonomy. Additionally, other groups, such as the Cordillera peoples in northern Luzon, pursued recognition and autonomy through organizations like the Cordillera People's Liberation Army (CPLA) and the Cordillera People's Alliance (CPA), advocating for indigenous rights and cultural identity.

The emphasis on masculine physicality in these separatist movements bolstered Marcos's image as the nation's protector. By attaching himself to these historically constructed

notions of masculinity, Marcos tapped into the connection between strength, military prowess, and leadership, positioning himself as the guardian of national unity. His rise to power was tied to this image of strength and control, aimed at resonating with both domestic and international audiences. Marcos's strongman persona—navigating Cold War tensions and nationalist opposition to U.S. bases—showcased the link between geopolitical strategy and dominant masculine identity.

Framing Suharto as the Nation's Father

Meanwhile, Suharto consolidated his power by promoting the idea that his "New Order" would bring direction, stability, and development to Indonesia. He used this rhetoric to position his regime as the solution to the social, economic, and political crises of the Sukarno era (Sidel 160-162). To achieve this, he enlisted the help of U.S.-educated economists, whose collaboration introduced fresh perspectives and expertise into the country's economic management.

The New Order era, spanning from the mid-1960s to the late 1990s, marked a significant shift from Sukarno's leadership and ushered in a period of economic modernization. One of Suharto's key strategies was to attract Western investment and foreign aid. By creating conditions favorable to international involvement, Suharto sought to stimulate economic growth and development. This strategy not only brought capital into the Indonesian economy but also facilitated the exchange of technology, expertise, and management practices from overseas. A crucial element of this growth was the expansion of domestic oil production, which generated substantial revenues. These funds were directed toward essential sectors such as infrastructure and development projects, providing a steady source of income that allowed the

government to implement initiatives aimed at modernizing the nation's physical and social infrastructure.

Known as "Pak Harto" (short for Bapak Suharto, where bapak means father in Indonesian), Suharto presented himself as a paternal figure guiding and nurturing the Indonesian nation. He frequently employed familial metaphors to portray his leadership, conveying a sense of care, stability, and authority. Like many authoritarian leaders, Suharto used the father-child metaphor to establish a personal connection between himself and the masses, reinforcing control and loyalty. This imagery reflected societal norms that normalized and celebrated male leadership, paralleling the authority fathers had over families with Suharto's governance over the state.

Positioning himself as the ultimate authority and caretaker, Suharto cast his constituents in the role of dependents in need of his protection and guidance. This portrayal fostered a sense of dependency on his leadership, encouraging passivity and obedience among the populace. The paternalistic framing associated leadership with traditionally masculine traits, reinforcing the idea that a strong, protective fatherly figure was necessary for maintaining stability and unity. Additionally, it emphasized a hierarchical relationship in which citizens were seen as submissive dependents, potentially discouraging active political engagement or dissent. Suharto's portrayal of himself as the sole provider of order and stability discouraged resistance and positioned questioning of his rule as a challenge to the nation's well-being.

Comedians as Models of Subservience

The characters in TVJ's *Iskul Bukol* and Warkop DKI's *Mana Tahaaan* embody the effects of this strongman ideology. Despite their comedic misadventures that seem to challenge the existing order, they remain subservient. Their struggles as rural dwellers in an urban

environment, their lack of access to quality education and housing, and their insecurities about their futures are real concerns. Yet, rather than protest or question the systems that oppress them, the characters often default to traditional virtues of obedience and submission. In *Iskul Bukol*, the narrative consistently emphasizes the restoration of order, as seen in how Tito and Joey are punished for disrupting the system by never finishing school, suggesting how societal stability depends on adherence to established structures, such as education. Similarly, in *Mana Tahaaan*, despite facing numerous setbacks and false accusations, the characters only achieve success after conforming to the system—a system that, ironically, their creators already benefited from. As comedians whose popularity gave them political access and public trust, their narratives functioned as moral allegories that reassured audiences of stability under elite rule. Graduating from school, the characters find their place in Jakarta eventually, and their success is a source of comfort for the boarding house owner who has lost love and trusted help.

The media texts' emphasis on social stability and the characters' acceptance of their circumstances also perpetuate center-periphery dynamics. The center, represented by the ruling elites and strongman leaders, maintains control over the peripheries—symbolized by the characters' humble backgrounds and challenges. By not challenging the status quo, the characters indirectly uphold the authority of the center, aligning with the interests of those who benefit from the existing power structure. In aligning with a conservative outlook that prioritizes social stability and adherence to traditional norms, TVJ and Warkop DKI's comedies mirror the strategies employed by strongman politicians whose promise of stability and control often comes at the cost of limiting dissent and change. Similarly, the comedians' portrayal of characters who navigate challenges without challenging the system echoes the strongman's goal of suppressing disruptive forces that could threaten their authority. The characters' adherence to conventional norms and values, even in the face of challenges or

injustices, mirrors the conservative tendencies of the dominant political climate during the eras in which the media texts were produced.

Paradoxes of Urban Masculinity

Beyond themes of stability and control, another crucial layer of analysis lies in the urban contexts in which these narratives unfold. Metro Manila and Jakarta, the megacities in question, serve not only as settings for these stories but also as symbols of the concentrated power and influence exerted by their respective leaders.

The rapid urban expansion in both cities had significant consequences. Manila's rapid population growth, driven by economic opportunities, overwhelmed its infrastructure, leading to traffic congestion, inadequate housing, and poor public services. Informal settlements highlighted the city's struggle to support its urban poor. Simultaneously, industrial and commercial expansion transformed Manila into a bustling economic hub, attracting investments. Infrastructure projects, including roads, bridges, and public buildings, were developed to accommodate the growing population. Similarly, in Jakarta, urban development initiatives which sought to modernize the city came at the cost of displacement and forced evictions. Suharto's efforts to make Jakarta a center of economic and political power led to the marginalization of certain communities as infrastructure projects—such as roads, transport systems, and commercial centers—pushed poorer residents further into the peripheries.

The urban struggles in Manila and Jakarta are intricately woven into the narratives of *Iskul Bukol* and *Mana Tahaaan*. In both, the protagonists are drawn into the city by the lure of higher education, many living in boarding houses near their academic institutions. Their stories revolve around the risk of eviction. The Escalera brothers in *Iskul Bukol* are frequently pressured to find quick ways to raise money for rent, reflecting broader issues tied to the cost

of housing in urban areas. These portrayals of financial challenges for rural students are filtered through the lens of comedians whose own social positions rarely mirrored the precarity they depicted. Their ability to portray poverty and exclusion—without living it—allowed humor to veil the deeper contradictions of representation and privilege. Students migrate to cities in search of better opportunities, yet face financial difficulties, such as the high cost of housing. This emphasizes the need for more strategic ways of addressing the needs of different individuals migrating to the city. Urban planning that provides accessible housing for people across different income levels is central here. Access to housing is not solely determined by financial factors but also by cultural practices as students from diverse backgrounds bring new social and cultural dynamics to the urban environment. As they pursue education and establish themselves in the city, a shared urban culture is enforced, much like what the student renters in *Mana Tahaaan* experience. From regulating language and appearance to shaping them into productive workers, integration into the urban system could be facilitated in better ways. One such form of urban integration is how well they embody certain masculine ideals, revealing the paradoxes of urban masculinity in these narratives. With the rising concentration of power in megacities like Metro Manila and Jakarta, the urban environments not only became hubs of economic, social, and political activity, they also became important symbols that inadvertently commemorated what these leaders were able to do even though these cities would have evolved and grown regardless of leadership. In both instances, the concentration of power and resources in these cities provided a platform for leaders to assert dominance and control.

Rapid urbanization in Manila and Jakarta brought significant challenges. In Manila, the surge in rural-to-urban migration strained infrastructure, leading to traffic congestion, inadequate housing, and insufficient public services. Informal settlements emerged as the city struggled to provide for its growing population, highlighting the urban poor's dire conditions. Meanwhile, the expansion of industries and commercial sectors, including business districts

like Makati, transformed Manila into an economic hub, attracting domestic and foreign investments. Infrastructure projects, such as roads and public buildings, were developed to support the population boom. Similarly, in Jakarta, rapid urban development aimed to modernize the city and attract foreign investments under Suharto's leadership. However, this progress came at the cost of displacing residents from informal settlements, pushing poorer communities to the city's peripheries. Large-scale infrastructure projects, including transportation networks and commercial centers, reshaped Jakarta into a center of economic and political power, but often at the expense of its most vulnerable residents.

The urban struggles of Manila and Jakarta are central to the narratives of *Iskul Bukol* and *Mana Tahaaan*. Both feature protagonists drawn to the city for tertiary education, living in boarding houses near their schools. *Iskul Bukol* often explores their displacement due to unpaid rent, with much of the Escalera brothers' quick-money schemes focused on covering housing costs. This struggle offers a microcosm of urbanization's broader dynamics, highlighting the economic disparities between rural and urban areas. Students migrate to cities for better opportunities, yet face financial challenges, underscoring the unmet demand for affordable housing—not only for local residents but also for students seeking proximity to educational institutions. This influx introduces social and cultural diversity, which could enrich the city's fabric, but often leads to deeper social fragmentation, strained infrastructure, and greater competition for limited resources, exacerbating existing inequalities rather than bridging them. Most of all, the protagonists' integration into city life is carefully monitored, with *Iskul Bukol* highlighting the privilege enjoyed by TVJ as men who reinforce the existing power structures, and *Mana Tahaaan* focusing on Warkop DKI's ability to uphold traditional virtues valued by Indonesian society. These dynamics reflect how urban environments enforce conformity, shaping the characters' identities and validating their presence through paradoxical performances of masculinity.

Different but Same: The School Misfits and the Nerd in TVJ

In *Iskul Bukol*, TVJ's portrayal of masculinity reveals a tension between education as a path to success and the lingering influence of non-conformity. Tito and Joey Escalera, the perpetual school misfits, are caught in a prolonged academic journey, and their non-participation in traditional power structures that typically define ideal masculinity. Their failure to complete their education undermines their ability to achieve the ideal masculine status, yet they maintain considerable influence within their university environment. Their disruptive behavior—while reprimanded—often goes unpunished, and despite their lack of progress, they are not forced to drop out of school. Meanwhile, Vic Ungasis, who follows societal norms by completing his education and securing a teaching post in the same university, experiences little tangible reward for his efforts. Though academically successful, his economic and social circumstances remain largely indistinguishable from those of Tito and Joey. He lives in the same boarding house, earns a modest income, and despite his diligence, exerts little authority over the Escalera brothers.

In a conventional sense, the stereotypical contrast between the misfit dropouts and the diligent nerd would usually define their positions in the societal hierarchy and gender relations. However, in TVJ's narrative, the lines are blurred—not only in fiction but in real life. The comedians' ability to embody both the failing student and the cultural authority figure reflects their double status: socially dominant yet performatively marginal. Both the accomplished Vic and the rebellious Tito and Joey are equally marginalized, each failing to conform to the hegemonic ideals of masculinity. Vic, despite his intellectual achievements and professional status, struggles to find meaningful advantages. His adherence to academic success and social norms fails to elevate him in a society that prioritizes traditional masculine traits like physical dominance or assertiveness. His intellectual pursuits, though commendable, are perceived as

less masculine, and his limited salary further diminishes his authority and status, making him an outsider in terms of conventional masculine success.

Conversely, Tito and Joey embody a more recognizable form of hegemonic masculinity. Their ability to intimidate and influence those around them suggests dominance, reinforcing their standing as assertive figures. Their resistance to the educational system aligns with a broader display of rebellious strength, making them leaders within their social group. Yet, their power is paradoxical. While they exert control and authority over others, their refusal to conform to societal expectations—by prolonging their time in school and rejecting the established norms—ultimately positions them as outsiders as well. Their non-conformity undermines their authority, as those under their sway eventually turn against them, imposing discipline and forcing them to confront the limits of their influence.

This dynamic reflects the paradox of masculine identity construction in *Iskul Bukol*: the nerd and the misfits both challenge and reinforce hegemonic masculinity, yet neither fully occupies the space of traditional masculine success. Both are caught in the liminal space between societal expectations and personal rebellion, revealing the fragile nature of masculinity in a rapidly changing urban context.

Same but Different: The Exclusion of Warkop DKI

Warkop DKI's characters, like their counterparts in TVJ, are positioned as outsiders. However, their exclusion is more distinctly tied to their rural identities as they struggle to navigate the complexities of city life in Jakarta. The humor in Warkop DKI's sketches largely derives from their characters' inability to function within urban settings, eliciting laughter through a mix of pity and discomfort. Though the characters speak the same language and share the same national identity, they find themselves alienated within their own country—a paradox that

underscores the cultural and psychological gap between rural and urban life. This narrative highlights how rapidly modernized urban centers like Jakarta have become unrecognizable to those from rural backgrounds, further estranging them from what should be familiar spaces.

The slapstick humor in Warkop DKI reinforces this sense of exclusion. While slapstick is expected in the genre, much of the laughter is directed at the characters rather than with them, underscoring their role as objects of ridicule. This dynamic hinges on their foolishness and ineptitude in navigating the unfamiliar urban environment. For instance, in one scene where the boarding house owner visits their rooms for the first time to welcome them, the characters' discomfort is palpable as the older woman enters wearing a nightgown that accentuates her bosoms. Their exaggerated attempts to avoid staring fuel the humor of the moment, highlighting their unease with the seemingly relaxed and liberal attitudes they encounter in Jakarta. This awkwardness speaks to their conservative rural backgrounds and reinforces how out of place they are in the city, with Slamet quipping, "Oh dear, there are so many temptations when it's like this" (Ismail 00:26:01).

The humor generated from their misadventures is rooted in a mix of pity and disgust. This combination amplifies their status as outsiders and drives the comedic atmosphere, which is built on their failure to belong. Their inability to comprehend the city's norms generates pity, as viewers sympathize with their struggles. At the same time, their frequent missteps evoke a sense of disgust due to their apparent incompetence. This dual emotional response further accentuates the cultural divide between rural and urban experiences, encapsulating the tension between traditional values and the demands of modern urban life.

While traditionally masculine traits might be expected to help the characters thrive in the city, Warkop DKI's narrative complexity goes beyond this assumption. In Jakarta, the characters need more than just masculinity to navigate their way; they require a distinct urban

identity that encompasses not only financial capital but also cultural, social, and linguistic acumen essential for survival in the sprawling metropolis. Urban success is not merely about embodying masculine traits, but about accessing forms of cultural capital—media fluency, class familiarity, linguistic polish—all of which the comedians themselves possessed in real life. Their characters' bumbling failures made their real-life mastery of modernity all the more ironic.

The paradoxes of urban masculinity unfold as a complex tapestry woven from the rise of megacities as centers of power, which magnified the achievements of national leaders while also exacerbating the challenges brought by rapid urbanization. The struggles of Manila and Jakarta, as mirrored in *Iskul Bukol* and *Mana Tahaaan*, reflect the tension between the promise of urban opportunities and the persistent difficulties of equitable housing and social integration. TVJ's characters highlight the dichotomy between traditional masculinity and the shifting ideals of success and authority, demonstrating how both the accomplished nerd and the school misfits occupy a space outside the hegemonic norm. Meanwhile, Warkop DKI's comedic portrayal further underlines the ongoing tension between rural and urban identities. Their slapstick interactions, driven by laughter laced with pity and discomfort, emphasize the dissonance between their rural backgrounds and the complexities of city life. Across these narratives, masculinity is a central theme, but its malleability and evolving nature are constantly tested by broader societal changes, showing how masculinity itself must adapt to shifting urban landscapes.

Authoritarian Appeal and the Unsustainable Masculine Order

As Marcos and Suharto presented themselves as strong, capable leaders who justified their power through military involvement and control over the state, Manila and Jakarta emerged as

crucial centers of national and global power, serving as the epicenters from which these strongmen demonstrated their dominance over their respective archipelagos. Both asserted a rigid sense of order, enforced through state-sanctioned violence, using displays of force to suppress dissent and maintain authority.

Traditional readings of TVJ and Warkop DKI often highlight their trickster personas as critical commentaries on the sociopolitical contexts in which they were created, with women often relegated to roles of objectification. However, a possible revolutionary aspect of both cultural texts lies in how their female characters potentially safeguard the social order. *Iskul Bukol* and *Mana Tahaaan* feature older, wiser women who dissociate themselves from the chaos and assert a sense of discipline. Yet, the position of these women is equally problematic, as their seemingly revolutionary stance can also be read as a form of subservience to the male-dominated order, with their authority ultimately reinforcing the systems established by stronger male figures operating behind the scenes.

Miss Tapia in *Iskul Bukol*

In an episode of *Iskul Bukol* where a scandal about the underground trade of selling term papers erupts in Wanbol University, it is the women who do all the problem-solving. Miss Tapia (Mely Tagasa), the head of school, recruits Andang (Susan Bautista) to infiltrate the student body undercover, leading to interactions with Tito and Vic. It's revealed that Joey Escalera is behind the illicit trade, utilizing unclaimed student papers left outside of Vic's office to sell to others. Andang confronts Joey, who initially boasts of being the mastermind behind the situation but retracts this upon realizing Andang is no regular student. Mistakenly, Andang blames Vic, leading to confusion until the truth emerges through confrontations between Tito, Vic, Joey, Andang and Miss Tapia. This episode showcases the series' typical formula of starting with

Tito and/or Joey's shenanigans resulting in chaos and the hilarity that accompanies a series of intertwining misunderstandings and characters' interactions, only to end with Miss Tapia serving lessons to the perpetrator.

This episode, and others like it, unveils a distinct power dynamic within the school setting where traditional gender roles are inverted, with women assuming positions of authority and control, while men are portrayed as the sources of disorder and confusion. Miss Tapia, who has now solidified in the public imagination as the stereotype of a stern senior teacher, is portrayed as a woman holding the reins of power and decision-making, effectively challenging the conventional narrative of male dominance in positions of authority. On the other hand, the male characters are depicted as the driving force behind the chaotic events unfolding. Joey's involvement in the illegal term paper trade and the subsequent confusion he creates present a portrayal of male characters as disruptors of order within the educational environment.

This inversion of gender roles becomes particularly interesting in the context of how traditional ideals of dominant masculinity are subverted. Instead of being the authoritative figures, the male characters become the catalysts for chaos and miscommunication. This dynamic not only contributes to the comedic nature of the show but also presents an alternative perspective on power dynamics and gender roles for the context it represents. However, it's important to recognize that this inversion of gender roles can also be problematic. While it may initially seem empowering for women, it can also be a strategic tool used to extend the reach of the strongman's control. In the case of Miss Tapia and Andang, even if they take their authority to act as problem-solvers within the educational context, they ultimately serve to maintain order within a system designed and controlled by the male characters who wield power behind the scenes. This dynamic reinforces the notion that women can have influence and agency, but only within the boundaries defined by the existing power structure. It's a subtle

way in which these cultural texts reflect and perpetuate the idea that the empowerment of women is conditional, subject to the approval and control of the dominant male figures.

Aunt Mira in *Mana Tahaaan*

The ambiguity of women's source of power is also present in *Mana Tahaaan* through Aunt Mira. On the surface, Aunt Mira appears to be a benevolent figure who goes to great lengths to support the young men residing in her boarding house. She assumes the role of a caring aunt, offering them an opportunity to complete their studies under her roof. Her actions go beyond the typical duties of a landlady or auntie, as she deliberately sets the rent at a lower rate compared to other *kosts* or boarding houses. Moreover, she actively engages with the boarders, sharing dinners with them and inquiring about their daily lives and academic progress.

However, Aunt Mira's authority extends beyond her nurturing persona and elicits a sense of fear among the boarders, despite her good intentions. This authority is underpinned by her position as a member of the urban elite. Her ownership of a substantial property for the boarding house business reinforces her influence over the young men. Within the confines of her establishment, Aunt Mira's authority mirrors the order of the city itself. This environment creates a perception among the boarders that they are constantly under surveillance, wherein they must not only excel academically but also conform to the standards of urban living that Aunt Mira embodies, a tension brought to the fore by the unplanned pregnancy of Halimah, the maid in the house, for which the male boarders are held under suspicion.

Aunt Mira's authority is intricately woven into her social class, and the power she wields as a woman becomes even more ambiguous due to her wealth and influence over the young men in her boarding house. She garners respect as a woman primarily because of her elevated social standing. In stark contrast, Halimah does not receive the same level of respect

and courtesy from the boarders. Instead, she is objectified, as exemplified by the boys' voyeuristic behavior, such as peeping at her while she showers. This dichotomy underscores the complex interplay of social class and gender in shaping power relations within the narrative of *Mana Tahaaan*. It reveals how power dynamics can be influenced and reinforced by these intersecting factors, leading to nuanced and sometimes contradictory expressions of authority and gender roles in urban environments like Jakarta.

In both *Iskul Bukol* and *Mana Tahaaan*, the portrayal of women offers a nuanced exploration of power dynamics, challenging traditional ideals of masculinity while highlighting how the inversion of gender roles can still serve the interests of dominant male figures. These women, though empowered within their immediate contexts, ultimately reinforce the existing patriarchal structures. The empowerment of women is conditional, limited by the boundaries set by the male-dominated order. These cultural texts provide insight into the interplay between gender, authority, and control, reflecting the broader societal power structures that defined the Marcos and Suharto regimes. The representations of gender in *Iskul Bukol* and *Mana Tahaaan* not only critique traditional masculinity but also amplify the subtle ways in which power and dominance are maintained, even in the simplest of social interactions.

Conclusion: Engendering Laughter

The comparative analysis of gender representations in the comedic performances of Southeast Asian comic groups TVJ from the Philippines and Dono, Kasino & Indro (Warkop DKI) from Indonesia reveals a fascinating intersection between humor, politics, and identity. These comedy groups, operating during the authoritarian regimes of Ferdinand Marcos, Sr. in the Philippines and Suharto in Indonesia, embodied carefully constructed forms of rebelliousness that simultaneously reinforced the strongman politics of their respective eras. While both TVJ

and Warkop DKI portrayed stereotypical personas akin to outliers and archetypal tricksters in the emerging urban capitals of Manila and Jakarta, their seemingly insubordinate acts provided a unique platform for the performance and assertion of state power. This paradoxical relationship between comedy and politics reflects the turbulent political landscapes of the 1970s and 1980s in these two Southeast Asian nations, where dictators sought to maintain control while fending off resistance.

Furthermore, a deeper analysis of these representations reveals similarities in how these trickster figures are ultimately disciplined and reintegrated into their fictional worlds. This reintegration suggests an eventual submission to the political climate of the time, subtly normalizing elements of tyranny and corruption in these two Southeast Asian nations. It highlights the complex web of power relations that comedy simultaneously challenges and reinforces. Moreover, it prompts critical reflection on the agency of comedians—not only as critics of power but as potential custodians of it. TVJ's seamless transition into political office and Warkop DKI's revival through capitalist-sanctioned nostalgia suggest that humor is not exclusively a tool of resistance, but also a mechanism of political accommodation.

In light of this research, it becomes evident that preserving archives of media texts in the region is of paramount importance. These texts serve as invaluable historical and cultural artifacts, offering insights into the socio-political dynamics of their respective times. They allow us to trace the evolution of such issues as gender representations, humor, and political satire in the world, and especially in Southeast Asia where hardly any formal archives exist much less any critical hindsight that connects the past's creative pursuits have contributed to our current moment. Furthermore, these archives provide a means to analyze the impact of comedy on societal norms, and how it can both challenge and reinforce power structures. By safeguarding these media texts, we ensure that future generations have access to a rich tapestry

of cultural and political expressions, enabling them to better understand the complexities of history and identity in the region.

Notes

1. The stamboel was a form of Indonesian folk theatre, originating in the Dutch East Indies in the 19th century. It was a trans-ethnic form, inspired by Malay, European, Chinese and Middle Eastern music and theatre.

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