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Editorial

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# From *adat* revivalism to augmented realities: Introducing Vol. 11 No. 1

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Politics of indigeneity—what is often termed in the Indonesian context as "*adat* revivalism"—is "one of the most prominent forms of political undertaking in the current post-Reformation Indonesia."[1] Its emergence in Indonesia is usually, and not unjustifiably, attributed to the injustices experienced by local indigenous peoples who have, particularly during the New Order wherein a certain authoritarian vision of national unity was emphasized and imposed, been excluded from the Indonesian polity in various ways.

However, it is one thing for a political project to promise justice for the hitherto excluded; it is another for it to deliver on its promises. It is to this crucial difference that William Batlayeri's research points. In his article, "Politics of *Adat* Revivalism in Ambonese Discursive Practices", Batlayeri argues that the "euphoria of indigenous values" witnessed during the revival of *adat* in post-*Reformasi* era has been undermined by the "bureaucratization, managerialization, and administration of indigenous values". Batlayeri's research on *adat* revivalism in Ambon explores the premise that community-building is never devoid of operations of power—even when the community in question is positioned against some dominant, hegemonic power. According to Batlayeri, "obedience occurs not because one is forced to, but because one internalizes" the demands of power. In the context of Ambonese *adat* revival, this internalization, Batlayeri argues, "works through the desire to be an ideal indigenous child: to be an ideal Ambonese."

In "*Penti* Ritual in Diasporic Lands: Manggarai Communitas of West

[1] Rangga Kala Mahaswa and Min Seong Kim, "Introducing the Pluriverse of the Anthropocene: Toward an Ontological Politics of Environmental Governance in Indonesia," in *Environmental Governance in Indonesia*, ed. Annisa Triyanti et al. (Cham: Springer, 2023), 23, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-15904-6_2.

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Kalimantan", Felomena Sunarti presents a perhaps more sympathetic account of indigenous politics and community building. Drawing from the works of Thomas A. Tweed and Victor Turner, Sunarti describes the role of ritual practices in the diasporic communities of the Manggarai people for fostering ethno-familial relations and transmitting traditional culture and knowledge to younger generations of the Manggarai. While, on the one hand, the community-building practices of the sort described by Sunarti might be said to constitute precisely the kind of "articulatory" practice that Batlayeri, with reference to Laclau and Mouffe, cautiously endorses, it might be asked on the other hand whether the positive appraisal of Manggarai "communitas" risks dissimulating the very operations of power that Batlayeri, from a perspective informed by Foucaultian critical theory, uncovers in his analysis of Ambonese *adat* revivalism.

The distance between the appraisal of indigenous politics seen in the two articles by Batlayeri and Sunarti, it might be argued, actually attests to the increasing importance of what has been conceptualized by some in terms of "ontological politics",[2] a thinking of politics that is necessitated once it is accepted that the very *logics* that structure the social may not legitimately be reduced to a single (often Western-centric, modernist) vantage point. Yet, indigenous worldings whose recognition is integral to ontological politics—or, more generally, post- and de-colonial approaches in philosophy and social theory—raise difficult questions regarding the grounds of critique.[3] To put it succinctly: whereas the particularity of each worlding and indigenous epistemology places under question the universalizability of any given critical apparatus, simply affirming particular indigenous practices and worldings or denying any possibility of critique "from outside" risks conforming to an ultimately *depoliticized* liberalism.

Thus, although neither Batlayeri nor Sunarti proceeds in this direction, the two articles, when read alongside each other, do seem to point toward one of the central issues of contention in discussions of the "pluriversal" Anthropocene. For, if the initial turn toward ontological politics is motivated by the recognition of what Jean-François Lyotard called the *differend* that arises from

[2] See, for instance, Arturo Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

[3] Amy Allen has engaged with this question from within the Frankfurt School tradition: Amy Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

the irreducible chasm between the pluralities of indigenous worldings and the "single world" of Western-centric modernity,[4] recent debates over what constitutes the *political* in ontological politics—epitomized by the one between Erik Swyngedouw and Mario Blaser[5]—attest to an emergent differend within social theory itself regarding the "proper" response to, and engagement with, the pluriverse.

While there is unlikely to ever be a conclusive resolution to debates of this kind, it should be noted that Indonesia's archipelagic geography and ethnic and cultural diversity, its historical experience of rapid economic development under authoritarian rule, and the post-*Reformasi* resurgence of *adat*-oriented politics may well conjure a unique opportunity to think through the implications of the pluriverse and ontological politics—or, even more radically (or, to borrow a term from Deleuze and Guattari, *geo-philosophically*), to pose and explore the question of what (or how) the archipelago (or, as some Indonesians might prefer, the *Nusantara*) *thinks*.[6]

The next two articles included in this issue of *Retorik* hold up a critical lens against aspects of contemporary culture. In "The Simulation of (Gossip) Infotainment in the Rhetorical (Im)morality of Celebrities", Anicetus Windarto investigates forms of what he calls "rhetorical (im)morality" of the celebrities who appear on infotainment shows, analyzing thereby the implications of communication technology on the contemporary political discourse. Windarto makes use of the conceptual apparatus of Jean Baudrillard, whose discussions of simulation and simulacra are sure to continue to inspire research regarding the implications of technology on our lives. Indeed, it is none other than the status of one of Baudrillard's central concerns, namely, reality—or

[4] The connection between the Lyotardian differend and pluriversal politics has been drawn in Mahaswa and Kim, "Introducing the Pluriverse of the Anthropocene," 18–19.

[5] Erik Swyngedouw and Henrik Ernstson, "Interrupting the Anthropo-ObScene: Immuno-Biopolitics and Depoliticizing Ontologies in the Anthropocene," *Theory, Culture & Society* 35, no. 6 (2018): 3–30, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276418757314; Mario Blaser, "On the Properly Political (Disposition for the) Anthropocene," *Anthropological Theory* 19, no. 1 (2019): 74–94, https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499618779745.

[6] Jonathan Pugh and David Chandler's critical nessology of the Carribean exemplify this sort of questioning. See: Jonathan Pugh and David Chandler, *The World as Abyss: The Caribbean and Critical Thought in the Anthropocene* (London: University of Westminster Press, 2023), https://www.uwestminsterpress.co.uk/site/books/m/10.16997/book72/.

*realities*, in the plural—that the rapid development of digital technology has problematized. The contribution by Padmo Adi Nugroho, "Obsessive Neurosis in Those Who Live Between Two Worlds: The Everyday Real World and the Artificial Virtual World of Games", provides a glimpse into a world made possible by augmented reality games, such as Mobbles and Pokémon Go. Through his study, based on (auto-)ethnography and direct participatory observation, Nugroho describes new forms of experience and indeed, community-building, that have been enabled by this technological development. For Nugroho, the Lacanian understanding of obsessive neurosis proves useful in elucidating the subjectivity that can be witnessed in the technologically transformed lifeworld of AR-gamers.

The last contribution in this issue of *Retorik* provides a critical review of recent developments in the intersection between psychology and cultural studies. In "From Critical Psychology and Cultural-Historical Psychology to 'Culturally-Turned' Psychology," Augustinus Supratiknya engages with the thought of Thomas Teo, Svend Brinkmann, Richard Johnson, Stuart Hall, and others in the fields of psychology and cultural studies to outline the contours of research in psychology that is attuned to a sophisticated understanding of culture. Supratiknya finally calls for a "culturally-turned" psychology (*psikologi berhampiran budaya*) which could foster "production of knowledge on both the subject and the society of the present-day Indonesia."

The five articles included in the first issue of the eleventh volume of *Retorik*—Batlayeri and Sunarti's contributions that point toward questions of the pluriverse and ontological politics, Windarto and Nugroho's contributions that examine the consequences of media and technology, and Supratiknya's article that outlines a possible program of psychological research—collectively stand as a testament to the journal's continued engagement with the most important questions and phenomena in today's social and cultural theory from perspectives informed by the Indonesian condition.

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