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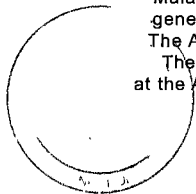
# rima

**Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs**

**volume 41, number 1**

**2007**

The Association for the Publication of Indonesian and Malaysian Studies Inc. acknowledges generous support in many forms from The Australian National University and The University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force Academy



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*RIMA* is published twice a year by the Association for the Publication of Indonesian and Malaysian Studies Inc. It is a fully refereed journal recognised by the Australian Research Council.

ISSN 0815-7251

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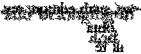
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This issue of *RIMA* has been edited by Amrih Widodo, Jennifer Lindsay and Campbell Macknight.

Cover: The photographer Mark Nesham says: 'I took this shot in 1990, when all you had at Bingin [in Bali] was a handful of *waring* on the cliff overlooking the surf spot. There weren't many Bingin surfers then, but when the surf was good the lineup would fill with Kuta surfers and foreigners. I know the area has been built up recently, and I can imagine these kids being among the local hotshots dominating the crowded lineup today. Still, I hope their pictures aren't appearing on Rip Curl or Quiksilver billboards.'

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**Subjectivity and belonging  
in popular culture**

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## Introduction

Amrih Widodo

The first three papers in this issue of *RIMA* explore the themes of subjectivity and belonging in popular culture. They arise from shared interests among staff and students at universities in Canberra over recent years and further papers on these themes are planned for future issues.

What do surfing, talking in a radio show and reading a magazine have in common? A neo-Gramscian reading of these articles may argue that these leisure activities can serve as sites for negotiation, not only between incorporation and resistance, but as multi-faceted and multi-layered sites of cultural interventions which can take the forms of globalisation, localisation, indigenisation, regionalisation, cosmopolitanism, individualisation, and what not. Leonard signals how surfing serves as an act of 'indigenisation of modern surfing ... a reclamation of place and practice' and 'an expression of nationalist and cosmopolitan aspirations'; Jurriëns demonstrates how participation in a radio show has open possibilities for 'exploring the opportunities and restrictions of democratic debate'; and Bexley depicts producing and reading *Talitakum* magazines as a venue for 'Indonesian-educated young Timorese to assert their legitimacy as national subjects of belonging in the new independent nation-state.'

What seems to be commonly demonstrated in these three articles is the importance of agency in the consumption of media and popular cultural products. We may want to look into the conditions which have made such an agency and subjectivity actively possible: the absence or weakness of state intervention, the injection of capital, the proliferation of and access to media, the availability of technology, or a combination of all of them. In portraying the globalising effects of popular culture, all three authors demonstrate similarities in the tendency of local agencies to aspire for a locality: the enhancement of people's sense of regional belonging (Jurriëns and Leonard), or

belonging to a nation-state (Bexley). This position has confirmed the inevitable pairing of globalisation-localisation while suggesting that national belonging could be one form of such a localisation.

Finally, reading popular culture is both an act of consumption and reflection, hence, these three articles should be read to satisfy our need for leisure and learning.



## Learning to surf in Kuta, Bali

Alex Leonard

Surfing has become a scene that may transcend boundaries of age, sex, race, nationality, income and location, so that it presents a complex and often oxymoronic cultural jumble to the researcher. (Robin Canniford 2005)

In the village of Kuta on the island of Bali, many people enjoy surfing, the sport of riding towards shore on the crest of a wave by standing on some sort of board. With its fine sand, warm water and well-shaped, gently breaking waves, Kuta's beach can seem to have been made for surfing. And surfing and its signs are everywhere: in the sea off Kuta Beach, where surfers bob about and paddle for waves; on the beach itself, where surfers gather before and after surfing to chat, eat, rest and idle the hours away; on Kuta's main roads and little lanes, where cars with surfboards strapped on top pass surfers on motorbikes with surfboards under arm; inside its dozens of surf shops, which sell surfboards, surfwear and surf accessories to surfers and non-surfers alike; in two Kuta-based surfing magazines, *Surf Time* and *Magic Wave*; on billboards above surf shops, colourful and loud; in bars and restaurants with names like 'Tubes' and 'All-Stars Surf Café'; in hundreds of houses and guesthouses, where surfboards lean against walls and towels hang over lines stretched from tree to tree; and in dozens of workshops and small factories, where surfwear and surf accessories are produced for distribution around the world.

Many of the thousands of surfers one can see in Kuta are short-term visitors from overseas, but there are also many who call Kuta home, including Balinese whose families have lived in Kuta for generations and Balinese migrants from other parts of the island. Many non-Balinese Indonesian surfers also live in Kuta. The majority of

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*Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, vol. 41, no. 1 (2007), pp. 3–32.

Kuta surfers are boys and young men, but there are also many middle-aged men among them, and a handful of girls and young women. For some Kuta surfers surfing is a profession, but most Kuta surfers still go to school, work in retail, tourism or manufacturing, or have businesses of their own. Surfing is such an integral aspect of social and economic life in Kuta today that it could almost be said to be a Kuta tradition.

Just forty years ago, however, the situation was very different: surfing — or the sport of wave-riding in its modern, Westernised form — was an exotic pastime introduced to Kuta kids by Western travellers. At first frowned upon by the majority of Kuta residents, throughout the 1970s and 1980s modern surfing steadily grew in popularity among the village's residents, so that by the 1990s countless Kuta kids were learning to surf not from Western travellers but from their own fathers, brothers and neighbourhood friends. The more adept young Kuta surfers could expect to receive success in contests held by the Bali Surfing Club, sponsorship from surfboard or surfwear manufacturers, and exposure in local and overseas magazines. Some Kuta surfers in their twenties even began to make a living as professional surfers. In the words of one of Kuta's first surfers, surfing in Kuta had become an 'elite activity'; at the same time, it had also become something almost all Kuta kids tried.

In this article I look at how the surfers of Kuta have learned to surf and to be surfers — how they have developed surfing knowledge, technique and style, how they have learned to live lives revolving around surfing, how they have come to take for granted participation in surfing-based social networks and economic activities, and how they have come to identify as surfers and thus make surfing somehow their own. I suggest that the Kuta surfing tradition can be understood not only as an indigenisation of modern surfing by Kuta surfers, but also as a reclamation of place and practice (supposedly co-opted and commodified by the surf industry) and a form of anti-colonial resistance — to the colonisation of Bali as a land of surf spots by Western surfers and as a tourist destination by the Indonesian government and Indonesian property developers, and foreign and domestic tourists. I also try to show how for many Kuta surfers surfing