

**RE-IMAGINING THE ARCHIPELAGO:
THE NATION IN POST-SUHARTO INDONESIAN
WOMEN'S FICTION**

by

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Abstract

This study sets out to investigate the ways in which some fiction by Indonesian women authors produced since the downfall of President Suharto in 1998 explores the notion of ‘nation’ that was established by the New Order during its thirty-two-year rule, and offers alternative perspectives. The New Order’s ideology of the unitary state of Indonesia required, as its foremost prerequisite, the construction of a sense of Indonesianness that was neither fragmented nor centrifugal. The result, however, was not only a Java-centric perspective of a vast archipelago that consists of more than 13,000 islands, but even more narrowly, a Jakarta-centric envisioning of the entire nation. In 1998 the *Reformasi* started and these women authors, who are situated at the intersection of authoritarianism and democracy, attempted to redefine the nation from diverse perspectives as women, while at the same time struggling against the pull to reinscribe the New Order’s discourse of a monolithic national identity. Different authors offer a range of viewpoints: from spatial angles that encompass urban, archipelagic, and cosmopolitan outlooks, to cultural dimensions that include Islam, *adat*, and ethnicity. These strategies of representation are analyzed using various feminist theories and approaches, especially those which are concerned with the notion of “symbolic space” as a “*para-site*” located in the margin of the dominant power, as proposed by scholars such as Ien Ang (2001), Rey Chow (1993), and bell hooks (1990). This study not only opens up a new approach to reading post-1998 Indonesian women’s fiction in the context of constructions of Indonesianness, but also furthers understanding of how cultural production in present-day Indonesia struggles to distance itself from the cultural and political legacy of the New Order, and at the same time is influenced by the long-lasting effects of that legacy.

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Introduction

Women in the New Order Era

Saparinah Sadli, founder of the first Women's Studies program in Indonesia and first president of the National Commission on Women, is rather skeptical in her view on whether there exists a specifically 'Indonesian feminism'. She argues that even now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, many Indonesians still perceive feminism as a 'foreign object' (*benda asing*) that is not entirely relevant to the Indonesian context. They have the impression that feminism is a western concept, "anti-men", and champions lesbianism.¹ Moreover, although Indonesia has a long history of women's movements, people seldom associate these with feminism, and activists and intellectuals who are involved in combating gender inequalities still sometimes cringe from being called 'feminists'.²

Such a hostile attitude towards feminism may have its origin in Indonesian political history. Kartini, the pioneer of Indonesian women's struggles for emancipation in colonial Indonesia at the end of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century, was a staunch critic not only of the colonial education policy that discriminated against women in the Dutch East Indies but also of the practice of polygamy condoned by both Javanese customary laws and orthodox Islamic teachings.³ During the war of independence in 1945-1949, women's movements for equality were basically set aside in order to mobilize women for the struggle for

¹ Sadli, "Feminism in Indonesia" (2002), pp. 80-91.

² Ibid., p. 87.

³ Kartini's revolutionary ideas on women's emancipation in Java are expressed in the letters which she wrote between 1899 and 1904 to her Dutch friends, Rosa Abendanon and Stella Zeehandelaar. Their correspondences ended abruptly with Kartini's untimely death in 1904. For the English translation of the letters, see Coté, *Letters from Kartini* (1992) and *On Feminism and Nationalism* (1995).

independence from colonial powers.⁴ From the late 1950s to the first half of the 1960s, the most radical women's organization in Indonesia was perhaps the Gerwani (short for *Gerakan Wanita Indonesia*, Indonesian Women's Movement), which has frequently been linked with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). After the coup in September 1965 which led to the take-over of power by General Suharto and the birth of the New Order, Gerwani was banned and demonized. Women who were politically active and showed radical tendencies were portrayed as dangerous, and countless individuals were severely persecuted by the army and Islamic groups that considered Communism a major threat against Islam.⁵ One of the long-term impacts of their demonization of women's activism is the on-going, deeply-rooted animosity towards feminism. Such fear of women's radicalization was systematically fostered by the New Order, along with the fear of the radicalization of the working class, as it might revive the popularity of Communism.

In order to ensure women's docile domesticity, the New Order turned an existing nationwide women's organization, *Kowani* (short for *Kongres Wanita Indonesia*, Indonesian Women's Congress), into part of the state machineries of surveillance and control. It functioned, and still does, as an umbrella organization for all women's groups in Indonesia. The history of *Kowani* dates back to the first Indonesian women's congress held in December 1928. The congress aimed

⁴ Indonesian women actively participated in the war for independence. They organized communal kitchens and served as paramedics, as well as couriers and spies for the freedom fighters, particularly during the armed struggles against the Dutch in the aftermath of World War II. Before the struggle for independence, during the Japanese occupation, women were also involved in the war effort by taking part in military training organized by the Japanese army. See Rusiyati, "Sepintas Gerakan Wanita Indonesia" (1990). For Indonesian women's participation in military training during the Japanese occupation, see also Kowani, *Sejarah Setengah Abad* (1978).

⁵ For a comprehensive account of Gerwani and its annihilation by the New Order following the coup in September 1965, see Wieringa, *Sexual Politics in Indonesia* (2002). The communists were blamed for the attempted coup, and the New Order declared that communism was immoral and antireligious. As one of the communist-sponsored organizations, the charge against Gerwani was "that it was leading [Indonesian] women to neglect their womanly duties. Instead of being loyal wives and good mothers, obedient to state ideology, *Pancasila*, and religion, they were becoming politically active and morally loose, unleashing their frightful sexual powers in indecent ways and committing unspeakable atrocities" (p. 301). The desire to erase communism justified the banning of Gerwani.

at promoting both the independence of Indonesia and women's emancipation.⁶ Thus, in the beginning it had a dual function, unlike the women's movements that emerged in Europe and North America at about the same period, which focused primarily on women's suffrage. During the Sukarno era in the 1950s and early 1960s, the organization was mobilized intensively by Sukarno to support his anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist campaigns, thus overshadowing its commitment to women's emancipation. *Kowani's* current activities include educating women to eliminate illiteracy and providing access to loans for small businesses run by women, as well as running cooperatives and training programs to help women earn extra income⁷.

Another state-sponsored women's organization is *Dharma Wanita* (Women's Devotion), an association of wives of civil servants. This organization was created by the New Order solely to serve the purposes of the state. Membership was compulsory for all civil servants' wives, of all echelons without exception. According to Buchori and Soenarto, *Dharma Wanita* was based on the concern that all state employees and their wives should share the same ideology, in order to help the state achieve the objectives of development effectively.⁸ The president of the state is by default the chief patron of *Dharma Wanita*, and the first lady serves as its advisor. The organization is structured on the hierarchical model of the soldiers' wives' organization, *Persit*, *Persatuan Istri Prajurit* (Association of Soldier's Wives), which is inseparable from the command structure of the army.⁹ Quite similar to *Dharma Wanita* is the PKK (short for *Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga*, Family Welfare Program), also founded by the New Order to help the regime implement its policies of modernization and development. As its membership

⁶ See <http://www.kowani.or.id/> (downloaded on May 7, 2009 at 11.45 am).

⁷ See Suryochondro, "The Development of Women's Movements" (2000), pp. 224-43.

⁸ Buchori and Soenarto, "Dharma Wanita" (2000), p. 139.

⁹ See <http://www.persit-kck.org/> (downloaded on May 7, 2009, at 12.00 pm).

is not limited to civil servants' and soldiers' wives, the PKK had a larger impact, reaching out to rural areas even in the remote regions of the country.

Dharma Wanita emphasizes women's dual role as wives and mothers on the one hand, and as agents of national development programs on the other. According to Julia Suryakusuma, the underlying ideology that is used to legitimize the containment of women is the "idolatry of *keibuan* (motherhood) qualities, of the 'traditional' role of women," as well as of "women as pillars of the nation" which she refers to as 'ibuism'.¹⁰ For *Dharma Wanita*, the outcome of the state *ibuism* ideology is a feudalistic, hierarchical structure, in which the democratic process is non-existent and social status becomes the primary orientation of the organization. All of these state-sponsored women's organizations have survived the collapse of the New Order and continue to exist to the present day.

As a result of the intimidation and violence that came along with the imposition of developmentalist ideologies by the New Order, women's issues in Indonesia became severely marginalized, and female sexuality was restricted and defined in order to serve men. However, Indonesian women, especially urban middle-class women, gradually became radicalized during the prolonged economic crisis that began in 1997. Women activists played a crucial role in organizing civil disobedience as the economy worsened, with the national currency (Rupiah) plunging to rock-bottom against the US dollar. The impact of the crisis on daily life was mostly felt by women and children, since milk, one of the main sources of nutrition needed for a child's growth, was disappearing from the market. In February 1998, women activists belonging to the SIP (*Suara Ibu Peduli*, Voice of Concerned Mothers), who were mostly mothers and housewives, staged a protest denouncing the state's failure to provide for the basic needs of the

¹⁰ Suryakusuma, "State *Ibuism*" (2004b), p. 167. Suryakusuma views 'ibuism' (from the word *ibu*, literally means 'mother') as an ideology that "defines women as appendages and companions to their husbands, as procreators of the nation, as mothers and educators of children, as housekeepers, and as members of Indonesian society".

people. With the notorious anti-subversion law looming over them, the protesters exploited the fact that the government had failed to provide milk and staple food to the people as a basis for expressing their concerns; yet at the same time they used their ‘motherly’ concerns as a means to question the government’s legitimacy. This is why the government responded harshly to their peaceful protest by arresting three women leaders, Karlina Leksono, Gadis Arivia, and Wilasih Noviana, who led the protest.¹¹

The SIP and some other women’s groups also worked hand in hand with various pro-democratic elements to provide logistical support for students who were occupying the parliament building at the height of the reform movement (*Reformasi*) which began in 1998. They helped victims of violent clashes between the security forces and students by providing medicine and first-aid kits for the hospitals where the victims were treated during a series of bloody encounters between May and November 1998.¹² Melani Budianta draws attention to the consequences that women had to bear for taking to the streets for the first time in their lives to show opposition to the government. Having to deal with the state apparatuses was one issue, but for many of these women, especially the educated middle-class ones, demonstrating on the streets was also a “personal battle against the values of respectability and individual safety” that were upheld by their families.¹³ The economic and political crises, however, had brought women from various backgrounds together to forge solidarity across class, race and religious divisions. Poor urban women who did not want to have anything to do with politics for fear of persecution

¹¹ It was widely reported that the three women were harassed and intimidated during the interrogation following their arrest. The court eventually acquitted them of all of the charges, as public support for the detained women was massive. Instead of being a deterrent to women’s activism, the event significantly boosted women’s confidence, and from then on they have become openly active in challenging the ruling power. See the interview with Karlina Leksono-Supeli in *Majalah D&R* (1998).

¹² At least twenty students were killed and hundreds of others were injured. Students demanded that Suharto step down. They also rejected the Parliament’s decision to accept B.J. Habibie’s appointment as the new President by Suharto (at that time B.J. Habibie was Suharto’s Vice-President). In addition, students demanded that Suharto be brought to justice for corruption, which was pandemic during his thirty-two-year administration.

¹³ Budianta, “The Blessed Tragedy” (2003), p. 155.

and initially came to SIP's branch offices primarily for cheap milk and staple food quickly became actively involved in mass protests and took to the streets along with middle-class women, often in spite of their husbands' opposition to their involvement and at risk of being ostracized by the local communities in which they lived.

Emerging Women Writers in the *Reformasi* Period

The year 1998 marks the abrupt end of President Suharto's authoritarian New Order era and the beginning of *Reformasi*. There was a nation-wide consensus that the regime had failed miserably and the Asian monetary crisis that began to hit the region in 1997 served as a turning point for the nation to redefine itself. Democratization processes took place in almost all aspects of life, especially in politics, but two issues stood out as the highlights of *Reformasi*: freedom of the press and regional autonomy for the provinces.¹⁴ *Democratization* became a catch-word as the power of the central government was rapidly and considerably reduced, and the press began to enjoy a significant degree of freedom unthinkable in the years before. Changes have been taking place since then in almost all aspects of life, initially causing to a large extent a kind of euphoria as people became deeply engrossed in the celebration of freedom and openness.

Reformasi was also a defining moment in the contemporary history of Indonesian literature, as works by emerging young writers represent a significant break from the aesthetic norms that had been shaped by the rigid socio-political structure of the old regime.¹⁵ In the realm of literary production, freedom of speech has particularly reinforced the notion of women's

¹⁴ Amongst other changes the *Reformasi* has brought about are a series of amendments to the Constitution, market liberalization, decentralization of government, and more openness. Members of the public no longer fear to speak their minds and the government is no longer fetishized as a 'mythical' institution that is infallible. However, lately there have been indications of reactionary attempts to halt the change and reinstate some elements of the old regime: the military is coming back to the political arena, morality politics are beginning to be more rampant, and the press is facing new kinds of censorship.

¹⁵ See, amongst others, Adipurwawidjana (2004) and Suwandi (2003).

empowerment in writing. In April 1998, Ayu Utami published her first novel, *Saman*, which was hailed by many critics as the starting point of a new trend in Indonesian writing since it brings the female body and sexuality into the center of the narrative.¹⁶ A new language for expressing women's views and experiences was introduced, giving birth to a new set of images related to female sexuality. *Saman* not only provided a revolutionary way of depicting women in Indonesian literature, but also offered the reader an explicitly feminine way of perceiving women. Immediately after Utami's emergence she became a central figure in Indonesian literary circles, and many other women followed in her footsteps. The success of *Saman* led to the publication of works by other new writers such as Fira Basuki, Dewi Lestari, Nukila Amal, Dinar Rahayu, Nova Riyanti Yusuf, Djenar Maesa Ayu, to mention just a few, that served as a breath of fresh air in the male-dominated world of Indonesian literature. As Barbara Hatley correctly observes, "the beginning of a new spirit may be evident in women's writing, paralleling the growth of women's political activism", and while it remains to be seen what the impact of current women's activism is on the political structure of the country, "new developments are clearly visible [...] in the domain of literary writing."¹⁷

However, the growing number of women writing about their distinct experiences as women has sparked much controversy among critics as well as among women writers themselves. A derogatory term, *sastrawangi*, somehow came into widespread circulation. The term is specifically associated with a group of "young, well educated, good-looking and modern"

¹⁶ See Paramaditha (2007), Suryakusuma (2006a), Adipurwawidjana (2004), Lestari (2004), Budiman (2003). Ayu Utami's *Saman* tells the story of some anti-government activists who are involved in helping traditional planters resist a hostile land-acquisition by big capital owners who are backed-up by the state. The novel also contains raunchy sexual scenes and images that provoked heated debates amongst critics and moralists alike.

¹⁷ Hatley, "Literature, Mythology and Regime Change" (2002), p. 130. Hatley's observation may be correct, as women's attempts to increase their participation in politics have seen more hurdles along the way. It was not until 2008 that the Parliament ratified a law that gives women a thirty per cent quota in the nomination of parliamentary candidates by the political parties participating in general elections. Women's participation in the drafting of decentralization and revitalization of customary laws was also insignificant, as indicated by Edriana Noerdin in "Customary Institutions, Syariah Law and the Marginalization of Indonesian Women" (2002), pp. 187-97.

women who publish literary works.¹⁸ Julia Suryakusuma refers to these *sastrawangi* writers as part of the “MTV generation” that escaped the psychological and ideological burden of the New Order.¹⁹ The term originates from the name of a seductive goddess in a short story by the male author Bre Redana. *Sastrawangi* literally means ‘scented literature’, and carries a negative connotation because it implies that the writers who fall into this category generally produce inferior works yet gain popularity through their “looks and sexuality.”²⁰ Moreover, *sastrawangi* seems to be a term mostly used by male literary critics to refer to the authors’ urban lifestyle, rather than the quality of the works. The writers, who are mostly based in Jakarta, have received much publicity as new ‘celebrities’ in town, and their private lives and personal affairs do not escape media scrutiny. The *sastrawangi* discourse has eventually served as a backlash in the whole debate surrounding the contribution of this new generation of women writers, especially since it disproportionately focuses on themes related to sexuality and overlooks the other aspects of their works that may address equally important issues related to women and their experiences. The *sastrawangi* debate was short-lived as it has no longer been an issue of any significance since 2006, yet its repercussions are quite long-lasting.

This study focuses primarily on the cultural and political significance of these works in the changing landscape of Indonesian cultural politics today, especially in regard to the politics of national identity. The *sastrawangi* controversy is not the main focus of my attention; in fact, I intend to steer attention away from discussions of sexuality and the representation of the female body, as I believe that the works produced by a number of women writers have other interesting insights to offer than mere explorations of sexuality. Unfortunately, these other aspects have been overshadowed by the inflation of sexual themes in many of the studies undertaken so far. In

¹⁸ Wahyudi, “Kiprah Perempuan Pengarang” (2005), p. 9.

¹⁹ Suryakusuma, “Can Literature Act as a Vanguard for Gender Equality?” (2006a), p. 12.

²⁰ Ibid.

my view, literary criticism that overemphasizes these themes at the expense of the other important qualities of these works has done a disservice to both the works and the authors alike. Thus, deconstructing the narrow categorization of women's writing in the *Reformasi* period is an intrinsic part of the objectives of this study.

Objectives

The fiction produced by many post-Suharto women writers, in my opinion, contributes significantly to rethinking the nation. As the New Order discourse of the unitary nation has gradually been losing its legitimacy since the collapse of that regime, new writings by women have begun to explore alternatives for speaking of, coming to terms with, and if possible 'redefining', the nation, by taking into account women's perspectives and experiences related to that debate. There seems to be awareness among these writers that the dominant discourse of the nation inculcated by the New Order was not only repressive to heterogeneity but also marginalized women in particular.

The notion of Indonesian nationalism is mainly drawn from the *Pancasila* (The Five Principles), which consists of belief in God, in a just and civilized society, in national unity, in people's representation, and in social justice for all. In the New Order era, however, national unity was heavily prioritized at the expense of the other aspects. B. Herry Priyono describes Indonesian nationalism during the New Order period as an "aspiration for unity" that was violently reduced by the state into a mere "description" of unity.²¹ As a result, 'nationalism' became a dogmatic term that only the state had the right and monopoly to formulate and interpret, whereas the people merely became docile subjects of the state. This is why the New

²¹ Priyono, "Bangsa, Negara dan Rakyat" (1999). In such a construct, nationalism was transformed into a rigid doctrine that should be obeyed without question. Instead of presenting the future as a "hope", the New Order's nationalism caused the future to look like a dead-end.

Order needed a formal and fixed state ideology that was inculcated through systematic indoctrination programs, such as *Penataran P4*,²² backed up by the military that controlled not only defense and security but also all socio-political sectors. The ultimate goal was to create a centralized state in which unity prevailed over anything else. In the process, the state frequently resorted to what appeared as a divide-and-conquer tactic similar to that deployed by the colonial regime in the pre-independence period in order to ensure that no party or group become too powerful or posed a threat to the ruling power. The ideology of unity was therefore used to serve the need to accumulate power solely in the hands of the state, which was personified by the figure of the national leader, the president.

This study sets out to demonstrate that the works of a number of post-1998 women writers contain critical and intense engagements with the discourses of nationalism and national identity of the New Order, as they attempt to question and investigate those discourses; however, at the same time, these works may not be completely successful in shaking off the interpellating effects of those ideologies, and this represents, to a certain extent, a microscopic picture of a similar situation that occurs on a larger scale in post-Suharto Indonesia's cultural politics. They have to come to terms with the legacy of the New Order ideology that leaves its mark on these writers' outlooks and thoughts, as reflected by their works. A wide range of perspectives and strategies are employed in these works in their critical engagement with the dominant discourses, and this shows that the writers are seriously concerned with the processes of democratization that the country is undergoing, as well as actively participating in those processes through cultural production. However, their works also reveal the internal tension between the urge to establish a critical distance from the New Order and the magnetic force of the *status quo*, which tries to pull

²² *Penataran P4* was the most notorious, as it was a series of intensive workshop-style brainwashing programs that civil servants and public school students nation-wide had to attend. The objective was to impose the official interpretation of the state's ideology, *Pancasila*.

these writers back towards the ‘normalcy’ of the old regime. After all, most if not all of these writers were born or grew up during the New Order period, and were thus significantly influenced by it.

Previous Research

Much has been written on the works of the post-1998 generation of writers, including women, but most of the literary criticism published so far tends to deal with themes related to sexuality, the *sastrawangi* controversy, or intrigues surrounding the private lives of the authors. Stefan Danerek (2006) presents an overview of literary developments in Indonesia from the revolutionary era to the *Reformasi*, encompassing both male and female authors from those periods.²³ While he assigns chapters to the *sastrawangi* and the important role played by Ayu Utami in paving a way towards openness (*keterbukaan*), his work in general does not specifically deal with the issue of how Indonesianness is perceived and problematized by women writers. His discussion focuses more on some *sastrawangi* writers and the aesthetic debate that followed.²⁴ The chapter on Ayu still concentrates on sexuality as an underlying theme, and Ayu’s works are mostly analyzed in connection with sexual liberation,²⁵ as Danerek looks into how the author offers novel ways of exploring and portraying female sexuality.

However, there are a few essays in either Indonesian or English that stand out as revealing new and interesting dimensions in the women’s fiction produced in the *Reformasi* era. One of them is by Alia Swastika, who did ground-breaking work in her post-colonial studies of Fira Basuki’s trilogy, *Jendela-Jendela* (2001), *Pintu* (2002), and *Atap* (2002). She examines the main female protagonist by situating her in the global-local nexus of intercultural relations, in

²³ Danerek, *Tjerita and Novel* (2006).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-83.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 197-219.

order to show that these works actually re-inscribe patriarchal values and the concepts of masculinity that were dominant during the New Order period.²⁶ Whether this is the reason why Swastika labels Fira's works as "popular novels" is not clear. The term certainly contains a negative connotation as it implies a dichotomy between "popular" and "serious" novels, but the essay does not provide any clarification for the employment of such a category to describe the trilogy. Another important work on Indonesian women's writing is an essay by Intan Paramaditha (2007), which analyzes Ayu Utami's novels and Djenar Maesa Ayu's short stories from a feminist perspective by exploring how the maternal body is inscribed in the works of the two authors. Paramaditha attempts in particular to expand the notion of *écriture féminine*, a concept invoked by Hélène Cixous when talking about women's voices in writing, from its exclusive reference to the erotic body to the maternal body.²⁷ She argues that associating *écriture féminine* solely with the erotic body has resulted in the "eroticization" of female writers by the Indonesian media in the post-Suharto era and, in turn, moral judgment of these writers by some critics. However, while some writers have begun to explore the maternal body more deeply, traces of patriarchal ideology remain persistent in their fiction.²⁸

Katrin Bandel (2006) has also published an essay that undertakes a comparative study of the works of three women writers, Dewi Lestari, Clara Ng, and Ani Sekarningsih, focusing on how religiosity is explored and represented in their works. Her findings indicate that both religion and spirituality are not understood as a solution to life's problems, but rather as part of the characters' concrete awareness of their everyday lives, and thus can be scrutinized critically because they are not considered the result of divine intervention.²⁹ Nevertheless, Bandel does not

²⁶ Swastika, "Adakah Jejak Poskolonial dalam Novel Populer?" (2005), pp. 50-65.

²⁷ Paramaditha, "Tracing the White Ink" (2007), pp. 67-94.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 90.

²⁹ Bandel, "Religiusitas dalam Novel Tiga Pengarang Perempuan Indonesia" (2006), pp. 67-89.

explain further the extent to which religion plays a role in shaping the lives of the characters, if it is not perceived as part of the solutions to their everyday life problems. Nukila Amal's short-story collection, *Laluba* (2005), is the focus of another essay published in 2007 by Arif Bagus Prasetyo, who provides a close reading of her work using an intertextual approach that brings together Nukila's short stories and M.C. Escher's lithographic drawings. Prasetyo arrives at the conclusion that the short stories serve as a self-critique of their own medium and a commentary on the age of images in which we are all trapped today.³⁰ However, such a conclusion tends to disregard the other short stories in the collection, which do not contain juxtapositions between verbal expression and lithographic images. "Laluba", for instance, after which the title of the anthology is named, is completely overlooked by Prasetyo's reading, and yet this short story carries an urgent appeal for a peaceful resolution to the raging ethnic conflict that swept across the country during the *Reformasi* era. It has little to do with experimentation with images or the medium of expression. This short story is one of the texts that will be examined in the present study. One interesting study that looks at experimentation with form or medium in connection to the theme of cosmopolitanism is provided by Michael Bodden in his analysis of Djenar Maesa Ayu's fiction. Bodden demonstrates that Djenar's artistic experimentation is part of her cosmopolitan strategy to reveal the "hypocrisy of the [urban] middle class and its morality."³¹

Micaela Campbell (2007) focused on Ayu Utami's ambivalence in her exploration of female subjectivity in *Saman* (1998) and *Larung* (2001). Campbell argues that, beneath the apparent progress of female subjectivities in the two novels, the New Order's ideology of *ibuisim* is still lurking and serves as a subtext to the author's critique of dominant gender constructs.³² Some activists opt for a more articulated oppositional stance against dominant discourses,

³⁰ Prasetyo, "Tamsil Zaman Citra" (2007), pp. 3-32.

³¹ Bodden, "Shattered Families" (2007b), pp. 95-125.

³² Campbell, "Mother/Non-mother" (2007), pp. 41-66.

whereas some others prefer working within the constraints of those discourses in order to carve a niche for themselves. Tineke Hellwig (2007) also laid out a path to connecting the works of post-Suharto women writers to representations of the nation, through her analysis of Nukila Amal's *Cala Ibi* (2003). She discusses Amal's attempt to re-imagine the nation from its margins, resulting in the problematization of the notion of 'home' as an essential and unitary place with fixed boundaries.³³ Hellwig's work explores the way in which literature serves as a source of ideas related to the formation of a new sense of nationhood, and she demonstrates how such ideas can be generated from the periphery as a response to an imposed, single definition promulgated by the state. A year earlier, Julia Suryakusuma had written about the relationship between nation and culture through a comparative analysis of *Rojak* (2004), a novel written by Fira Basuki, and *Sekuntum Bunga Nozomi* (2006), written by Marga T., a prolific writer who began her career in the early 1970s. Suryakusuma concludes that both works try to give more space to gender and sexuality in the construction of national identity, and claim that women can play an equally important role as men in representing the nation.³⁴ Suryakusuma's work, however, is a broad overview of the two novels and she therefore does not provide in-depth arguments on how exactly women may play their role in representing the nation in a different sense from that which was favored by the state.

In comparison to the number of critical works that take on sexuality as their primary object of enquiry, studies of the non-sexual dimensions of women's fiction in the *Reformasi* era comprise a minority. Furthermore, despite the sporadic efforts made by different scholars to explore other possibilities that the works offer, there has not been any extensive and in-depth research that aims to examine the works of different women writers with a specific focus on how

³³ Hellwig, "A Dragon-Shaped Hummingbird" (2007), pp. 127-50.

³⁴ Suryakusuma, "Fragmentasi Konstruksi Gender" (2006b), pp. 16-31.

Indonesianness is redefined in post-Suharto Indonesia. By adopting various critical lenses, this study will lay the groundwork for the establishment of a specific body of knowledge about women's fiction in Indonesia in the context of *Reformasi*, the emphasis being on how the fiction engages with issues concerning nation-building and national identities. The aim is to demonstrate the need for more serious and comprehensive studies of the cultural struggle of these writers with the New Order's dominant discourses of Indonesianness as well as their internal contradictions, thus contributing to a better understanding of the cultural-political dynamics in Indonesia from a feminist perspective.

Method and Scope

The works of a number of post-Suharto women writers are divided into five categories, based on the primary issues addressed and the perspectives adopted by the authors: (1) those concerned with the urban environment; (2) those that take maritime and archipelagic views; (3) those that deal with Islamic revivalism and take issue with the revitalization of customary laws (*adat*); (4) those engaged with problems of ethnicity, and finally, (5) those that locate Indonesia at the intersection between the local and the global. These five categories serve as entry points, leading towards a discussion of the redefinition of the nation as one of the most important endeavors undertaken by women writers in the *Reformasi* era. All of the works will be analyzed using conceptual and analytical tools provided by a wide range of feminist theories, thus bringing to the foreground a feminist perspective that serves as the primary framework for the entire study and its goals. This being said, I must also acknowledge that, as a male researcher, my position is always already problematic, and as a result there may be inadvertent gender biases in the ways in which various feminist theories are applied to the works.

I will particularly deploy the concept of the *margin*, as used in feminist criticism and developed by scholars such as bell hooks, Ien Ang, and Rey Chow. hooks postulates that the center can be critically interrogated in order to unmask the underlying ideology of a dominant discourse, as well as to distinguish the margin from it. hooks' conception of the margin is strategic, in the sense that marginality is a positioning that women can adopt as a site of resistance, or in her own words, a "location of radical openness and possibility."³⁵ Marginality of this kind must be understood as a choice rather than an imposition. From such a strategic margin, a counter-hegemonic reading of the New Order's discourses of Indonesianness can be explored and offered by Indonesian women writers.

In a similar way, Ien Ang describes how the presence of women in a dominant center can serve as an intervention in order to transform that center. Thus, her conception of the margin is rather different from that of hooks, for according to Ang there is no position that is not always-already "contaminated" by dominant discourses or practices, and so the only hope for resistance is when we are able to carve out "spaces of relative autonomy and freedom within the interstices" of the hegemonic discourse.³⁶ The margin, therefore, is a space marked by ambivalence and ambiguity, but it is also a space that is potentially empowering. This space is what Ien Ang calls the "symbolic space."³⁷ In conjunction with this, I will also make use of Rey Chow's concept of "para-sites" or "border" areas from which the center can be eroded "slowly and tactically."³⁸ Unlike hooks, who assigns a long-term strategic function to the margin, Chow considers the margin as a basis to launch tactical maneuvers to disrupt the stability of the center,

³⁵ hooks, *Yearning* (1990), p. 153.

³⁶ Ang, "I'm a Feminist but... 'Other' Women and Postcolonial Feminism" (2001), p. 187.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

³⁸ Chow, *Writing Diaspora* (1993), pp. 16-7.

thus attributing to it a sense of ‘emergency’ and immediacy, whereas hooks views the margin mainly as a space of possibilities.

Ang points out the ambivalent nature of this space, and Chow sees that the margin—because of its advantages and disadvantages—carries with it a tactical potential. I believe that these mutually complementary concepts of the margin can effectively help to scrutinize the location of women’s fiction in Indonesia’s cultural politics, especially as far as redefinition of Indonesianness is concerned. They also allow me to deal with contradictions and ambiguities that some of the works contain within themselves in order to better understand the complexities of these works.

In addition, concepts and theories proposed by other feminist thinkers such as Jane Jacobs and Judith Butler, as well as Indonesian feminist scholars and activists, such as Melani Budianta and Julia Suryakusuma, are used to provide a more comprehensive examination of specific issues related to women’s conditions in their local contexts. Their theorizing work and engagements prove to be very helpful in opening up more possibilities for my analyses. The works of these scholars also serve as a constant reminder of my own problematic position as a male-bodied person writing about women in the works of women writers, and the inevitable implications of such positioning.

Outline of This Study

The initial brief overview above of the New Order’s gender ideology and women’s marginalization during the New Order rule is essential background to the birth of a new generation of young female writers. In Chapter One, I describe in greater detail how the nation was constructed in Indonesia’s cultural politics by the New Order regime through the ideology of

the unitary state of Indonesia. I also examine some of the critiques launched against the New Order's nationalist discourses by both Indonesian and foreign scholars during the New Order period and its aftermath. Women's cultural production during the New Order era, especially in the area of fiction, is examined briefly in order to provide some background for a better understanding of what has happened since then.

How women writers of the *Reformasi* take issue with urbanism and question the New Order's ideology of nationalist urbanism is the focus of Chapter Two. Works by Nukila Amal and Djenar Maesa Ayu that specifically deal with these issues are analyzed in order to see how these writers attempt to distance themselves from the dominant discourse on urbanism, while at the same time taking part in the preservation of that discourse—if not in its construction—since they themselves were born, grew up, and resided, and still reside in big cities. The sense of isolation and immobilization experienced by urban middle-class women as a result of being located in the capital city is examined, along with the ways in which they come to terms with a sense of disempowerment.

In Chapter Three, I explore how the maritime and archipelagic perspectives are introduced and employed in several short stories in order to offer alternative ways of defining and understanding the nation. While bodies of water and the sea are not necessarily new images in contemporary Indonesian fiction, the ways in which they are used to frame and shape certain themes are quite novel and can be considered as a distinct contribution of post-1998 women writers. Works written by Hanna Rambe, Nukila Amal, and Linda Christanty, which give the outer islands and people living in the margins of the archipelago a focal point in the narrative, are examined to see to what extent these perspectives may contribute to the formation of a new construction of Indonesianness that subverts the dominant discourse. In their works, the

periphery is given a strategic position that serves as a pivotal point to question the centrality of Java and Jakarta, and whether it is possible at all to re-envision the nation without being overshadowed by these centers. Both Chapters Two and Three address the spatial dimension of nationhood within Indonesia, which are complemented by the last chapter, which discusses the location of Indonesianness in the global-local nexus.

While Islam has been part of Indonesian cultural formation for centuries, the New Order was quite successful in suppressing Islamic radicalization in Indonesia. *Reformasi* has brought up Islamic revivalism as one of the central themes in the current debate on ‘political Islam’, which tries to make Islam the official ideology of post-Suharto Indonesia. Chapter Four focuses on how two women writers deal with this issue and, in addition, explores how they address issues related to the revitalization of *adat*, by which women quite often find themselves being disadvantaged. The weakening of the unitary state ideology has also brought about movements that aim at incorporating *adat* in the formulation of regional autonomy as part of the post-New Order decentralization processes. Women in many regions find that the revitalization of *adat* presents a threat to their newly acquired freedom, and works by Novia Syahidah and Oka Rusmini dealing with issues concerning religion and *adat* are representatives of women’s responses to them.

Chapter Five deals with issues of ethnicity, especially how ethnicity is perceived as a fluid signifier of identity and how it intertwines with gender. The end of the New Order was tragically marked by riots and looting that took place in mid-May 1998, in which the rape of Chinese-Indonesian women occurred in several major cities on Java. The fact that ethnicity and gender became two key factors in the violent transition from the New Order to the *Reformasi* era serves as a symptom of the fragility of the New Order’s imposed notion of national identity as a

‘transcendental’, unifying force that has the power to bring the whole nation together. The focus here is on two works by women authors, Lan Fang and Clara Ng, who specifically take on the entanglement of ethnicity and gender. Their works take issue with the dichotomy between ‘us’ and ‘them’, which was often used by the New Order in its tactic of ‘othering’ when dealing with different groups and communities within the nation. Moreover, the notion of ‘national allegiance’ is problematized by bringing it to the center of the tension experienced by the Chinese community between loyalty to ancestral traditions and the need to blend into the ‘host’ society.

Chapter Six turns to two writers who take a cosmopolitan viewpoint in coming to terms with post-Suharto Indonesia. Issues related to transnationalism, tensions between the global and the local, and what it means to be Indonesian in a context of global ‘citizenship’, are explored in order to see how the new notion of Indonesianness that Y.B. Mangunwijaya (1999) refers to as “post-Indonesia” is manifested in the works of members of the new generation of women writers, such as Abidah El-Khalieqy and Fira Basuki. The main question is whether such a notion represents a radical break with the New Order ideology of unity or still carries with it remnants of that ideology. Furthermore, this chapter explores the extent to which the Islamic notions of ‘modernity’ and ‘universality’ can serve as an alternative to the New Order’s inward-looking nationalist discourses.

The final concluding chapter ties all of the key points together so that a comprehensive picture of what is being proposed by post-1998 women writers in regard to how Indonesia could be alternatively viewed may begin to become visible. Whether their proposals represent a radical break from the New Order nationalist discourses or problematically reinscribe those discourses as well as resisting them will be assessed and clarified. The complex and multidimensional

issues that these writers are struggling with, as reflected in their works, to a large extent reflect the complexities of Indonesia's social, cultural, and political settings in the post-New Order era. It is clear that the dominant discourses of national identity are not a coherent and unified set of thoughts that is easy to deconstruct, even when their physical or geographical centers, namely Jakarta and Java, can be significantly destabilized by shifting the gravity to the periphery, as some of the writers in question attempt to do.

Chapter 1

Indonesia under the New Order and Women's Literary Production

The Formation of the Postcolonial Nation-State

Like many other postcolonial states, the formation of the Republic of Indonesia was profoundly influenced by two irreconcilable forces that give it a distinct, contradictory character. On the one hand, the nation-state came into being as an outcome of a struggle by the people to free themselves from colonial subjugation. Thus, the new Indonesia tried to distinguish itself substantially from its former foreign master and subjugated status by inventing its own 'national' identity and culture, replacing the official colonial language and setting up a new government that was not accountable to any foreign power. On the other hand, the new nation-state had to adopt many features and models of a modern governing system that had been introduced by the former master. Therefore, instead of reinstating the pre-colonial feudal system, the nation supposedly adopted a republican governing system founded on the *trias politica* principle in which the executive, legislative, and judiciary powers are clearly demarcated. Yet this process is not without some contradictions, particularly in regard to the New Order politics, as will be clear later in this chapter.

Most importantly, Indonesia—as it became at the declaration of independence in August 1945—was an amalgamation of numerous thousands of islands and hundreds of ethnic groups sprawling across the archipelago located between the Asian and Australian continents. It had been a colony of the Netherlands, referred to as the 'Dutch East Indies'. The Dutch initially arrived in the region in the early 1600s and quickly established their presence by setting up trading posts under the administration of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), after

successfully driving out their competitors, the Portuguese and the Spanish, who came to Southeast Asia a century earlier. The archipelago briefly fell under the rule of England, when the English took over the Dutch colonial possessions for five years (1811-1816) during the Napoleonic Wars in Europe. Indonesia's nationalist movements date back to the early 1900s and culminated in 1928, when youth organizations from various islands gathered in Batavia, the colony's capital (now called Jakarta) and declared the Youth Oath to affirm their allegiance to Indonesia as one state and one nation, with one common language. In 1850, an English ethnologist, George Samuel Windsor Earl, had called the archipelago *Indunesia*, which means "the islands of India", and in the same year another Englishman named James Richardson Logan adopted the term to refer to the archipelago, making a slight change in the spelling. The Dutch colonial administration strongly objected to this naming.

When the Japanese invaded in early 1942, many of the nationalist leaders considered them liberators and chose to collaborate with them. The Japanese military allowed the term 'Indonesia' to be used to replace the 'Dutch East Indies', and the Indonesian language to be designated the new 'official' language in place of the Dutch language. Nationalist leaders such as Sukarno¹ and Muhammad Hatta collaborated with the Japanese to open up the way towards independence, but it was various youth groups that forced them to declare the country's independence two days after Japan officially surrendered. They feared that the Dutch would make their return, along with the Allied contingents that were sent to disarm the Japanese soldiers and free the European POWs. An *ad hoc* committee was set up in order to formulate the form of the new state, its territorial boundaries and national ideology. Muhammad Yamin, one of the nationalist leaders involved in the preparatory work, suggested that Indonesia's territory

¹ The spelling of names that contain the sound /u/ hereafter will be based on the EYD (*Ejaan Yang Disempurnakan*, the Improved Spelling Rules), which replaces the older 'oe' spelling with 'u', especially in regard to the names Sukarno and Suharto.

should include the former colonies of the Netherlands, as well as Malaya, Portuguese Timor, and the entire island of New Guinea, whereas Sukarno proposed that the new Indonesia should consist only of the former Dutch East Indies.² Both seemed to be inspired by the grandeur of the ancient Majapahit empire,³ but some other members of the committee disapproved of these expansionist ideas and held onto the notion that the territory of Indonesia should only go as far as that of the former Dutch East Indies, considering that the status of Malaya as a British colony and East Timor as under Portuguese rule would make negotiations too complicated.⁴

From the onset the newly proclaimed nation-state seemed to be determined to cut any connections with its former colonizer. Sukarno, Indonesia's first president, used his anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist stance to feed the hungry and war-torn nation with a vibrant and militant nationalist rhetoric, as it braced itself for the Revolution. While sentiments against Western powers heightened, many nationalist leaders were, in fact, Western-educated. They embraced Western modernity without critically questioning it, though to what extent they became truly 'westernized' or 'modern' remains unclear. These leaders were, in Hans Antlov's words, '*new priyayi*' (the new nobility) in the sense that they dreamed of bringing back the glorious Majapahit past reality into the present. Their frame of reference for the new nation, therefore, demanded the formation of a national culture that would unite all the citizens.⁵ The Dutch eventually returned and reestablished colonial authority, and armed resistance began. In this period of the Revolution, some nationalist leaders accepted Dutch offers of scholarships to study in the Netherlands. This was not considered an act of betrayal, because the newly-born

² See Hering, *Soekarno* (2002), pp. 358-59.

³ The ancient Hindu-Javanese kingdom which ruled over the entire archipelago, including present-day Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines, from the thirteenth century to the sixteenth century, is believed to be the largest empire of the region in early Indonesian history.

⁴ For details of the committee meetings, particularly on the territorial debate, see Bahar et al, *Risalah Sidang BPUPKI* (1995), pp. 55, 147, and 154.

⁵ See Antlov, "The New Rich and Cultural Tensions" (2003), p. 189.

republic would need foreign-trained experts and scholars who would gain new respect when they returned to Indonesia. Thus, as James Siegel argues, the main danger faced by the nationalists when they were confronted by the Dutch was not imprisonment or banishment, but co-optation, as some suddenly found themselves to some extent “on the Dutch side”.⁶ Therefore, in Sartono Kartodirdjo’s view, it is quite ironic that many of these Western-educated *priyayi* led the nationalist movement for independence from Western colonialism.⁷

The Netherlands officially handed over sovereignty to a new Republic of the United States of Indonesia (*Republik Indonesia Serikat*) in late 1949. This federal state lasted only a year. In the grip of Sukarno’s rhetoric, the country was intensely involved in global resistance against so-called “neo-colonialism” and “neo-imperialism”. This was actually a manifestation of the president’s anti-Western stance, which hardened as Indonesia established closer diplomatic relations with China and the USSR and became an influential power in the Non-Aligned Movement, whose membership consisted mostly of Asian and African countries that had experienced decolonization. In the 1950s, the new republic witnessed a series of separatist attempts by some regions to leave the federation, which undermined the authority of the central government in Jakarta. Tensions between “regional loyalties” in the provinces and “national identity” as represented by Jakarta⁸ resulted in rebellions that broke out in West Sumatra, Sulawesi, West Java, and Maluku. These are often portrayed as a form of provincial resistance against so-called ‘Javanization’. Many of the rebel leaders were formerly revolutionary fighters

⁶ See Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* (1997), pp. 183-86. Siegel draws attention to the fact that for some nationalist leaders accepting the scholarships offered by the Dutch to study in the Netherlands was an “opportunity” rather than a betrayal of the Revolution, thus showing the ambiguous relationship that the revolutionaries had with their former master, as well as the inability of the new post-colonial state to completely do away with the colonial legacy.

⁷ See Kartodirdjo, *Modern Indonesia* (1984), pp. 180-202. According to Kartodirdjo, the *priyayi* were Indonesia’s ruling elite as they became state officials during both the colonial and postcolonial period, and even though they did not have noble origins, they tended to act like nobility. Further, they felt superior to the peasantry, and this gave them the necessary justification for ruling over them.

⁸ See Anan et al, “Nation, Region and the Ambiguities of Modernity in Indonesia” (2006), pp.115-62.

who had fought the Dutch. These rebellions were not attempts to break up the Indonesian state,⁹ but as Gusti Anan et al (2006) suggest, dissatisfaction with the central government's performance in the 1950s "stimulated opposition against the central state and the championing of regional identity and autonomy".¹⁰ The central government became increasingly dominated by Javanese officials and corruption was rampant in Jakarta, at the expense of regional resources. Sukarno's presidency also saw a showdown with the Dutch in the campaign to integrate West Papua into Indonesia in the early 1960s. Western powers such as the United States and Australia supported Sukarno in the United Nations by putting pressures on the Netherlands to let go of its last stronghold in the archipelago, in hope of preventing Sukarno from leaning further towards communist China and Russia.

According to Benedict Anderson, Sukarno's leadership style in dealing with various domestic and foreign policy issues was predominantly based on the traditional Javanese concept of power, notwithstanding the fact that he was an avid reader of Karl Marx and many other Western (including Dutch) leftist thinkers,¹¹ and that he seemed 'modern' in terms of his appearance and political speeches. Anderson describes him as frequently inviting guests to shadow puppet plays in the palace, "flirting with foreign female guests and politicking with members of the corps diplomatique".¹² The Javanese concept of power, in contrast to that of the West, focuses primarily on the "concentration of power" rather than on the "exercise of power".¹³ Such a concept of power always needs a center and manifests itself in the personality of the leader, who is also a personification of the "unity of the society". This is why, Anderson

⁹ Ibid., p.130.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 151.

¹¹ For an authoritative reference on Sukarno's early political activism and Marxist influence on his political thought, see Hering, *Soekarno* (2002).

¹² See Anderson in the Introduction to his book, *Language and Power* (1990), p. 4.

¹³ Ibid., pp.23-38.

argues, the notions of federalism or “dispersion of power” championed by many separatist leaders in the 1950s were viewed with contempt by the national leadership in Jakarta, which was heavily dominated by Javanese.¹⁴ Furthermore, the state is represented by its center rather than its periphery, so that while the state boundaries may change from time to time, the center always has to be fixed and permanent.¹⁵ Such a unique connection between the notions of state and leader brings about a belief that everything that happens to the state is largely, if not entirely, influenced by the personal power of the leader. In Anderson’s view, no Indonesian leader has been more successful in mobilizing populist support and solidifying his or her personal power than Sukarno. Yet his eventual downfall in 1965 could be attributed to exactly the same factor that had brought him success: the desire to be the center of the various opposing forces that fought against one another. Sukarno tried to unite the three major forces in Indonesia, the nationalist, the religious, and the communist groups, with a tragic outcome, as he was stripped of power by Suharto in the aftermath of a relatively bloodless coup, following the slaying of seven army officers, supposedly by a militant faction of the Indonesian Communist Party, on the night of September 30, 1965.¹⁶

The Rise and Fall of the New Order

What actually happened on the night of September 30, 1965, and the fateful days that followed, has never been really clear, in spite of the fact that a vast number of studies have

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁵ Ibid: According to Anderson, in Javanese shadow puppet stories as well as in Javanese ancient history, the capital city of a kingdom and the kingdom *per se* are never strictly differentiated from each other (pp. 41-42). The center or the capital city always represents the entire state or kingdom.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 73. Roosa, in *Pretext for Mass Murder* (2006), suggests that the movement was not an official party policy and that the party’s leadership did not even know that such a movement existed.

attempted to solve the mystery.¹⁷ A group of presidential palace guards and armed PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) members are said to have kidnapped, tortured, and killed seven army officers on the pretext that there was a ‘Council of Generals’, mostly in the army, that was suspected of planning to stage a coup against Sukarno. Sukarno was considered to be leaning too far to the left, and his anti-imperialist and anti-Western stance bothered not only elements in the army that were keen on building closer relationships with the West but also Western superpowers such as the United States and Britain. Adrian Vickers asserts that by 1965 the PKI claimed that it had more than three million followers and more than twenty million sympathizers, making it the most powerful political party in Indonesia.¹⁸ The September 30 movement was carried out with the conviction that they were saving the president. Official history textbooks produced during the New Order period, however, named it an ‘act of treason’ by the PKI, and implied that Sukarno seemed to have quietly condoned the action. The consensus among various scholars is that the event was a culmination of the prolonged tension between the army and the PKI. However, the movement was so poorly organized that in a very short time the army, under General Suharto, managed to take over control of Jakarta, and by the dawn of October 1st the movement had been crushed. At that time, power was, *de facto*, in Suharto’s hands.

The army began a nation-wide campaign blaming the PKI as the perpetrator of the coup. The army and Suharto were hailed by both the domestic population and Western community as saviors of the country from the Communist coup.¹⁹ Students were organized to stage rallies in Jakarta demanding that the PKI be banned, while in the regions outside Jakarta and Java Muslim

¹⁷ The most authoritative ones include Anderson’s and McVey’s paper, “A Preliminary Analysis of the October 1, 1965 Coup in Indonesia” (1971), which is more widely known as the ‘Cornell Paper’, and a more recent book by Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder* (2006). The principle difference between the two is that the former suggests that the event was actually a military coup against Sukarno, whereas the latter argues that some rogue elements of the PKI played a key role in the action in which some army generals were abducted and eventually lost their lives.

¹⁸ See Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia* (2005), p. 153-54.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

youth groups were mobilized to wipe out suspected PKI members, leading to a bloodbath that claimed about one million lives. More than a million others were imprisoned without trial.²⁰ With the safety and integrity of the republic at stake, Sukarno was forced to transfer much of his power to Suharto, and he remained only virtually president. He died in 1970 from chronic illness while under house arrest. The presidential decree of March 11, 1966, which gave almost full authority to Suharto to restore peace and order, was used by the New Order regime to serve as a primary source of legitimacy for its existence and actions thereafter. Just a day after the decree was issued, Suharto used it to ban the PKI. Because of his anti-communist stance, Suharto won favor with Western powers, and foreign aid programs for Indonesia were restored. In 1969, Indonesia's economy was no longer in crisis, mostly because of debt restructuring and the adoption of free market policies by the new regime, and foreign investment began to flow into the country.²¹ The army practically dominated almost all sectors of the social and political realms, and by the early 1980s, the New Order was at the height of its power.

However, as Adam Schwarz argues, there were several noticeable continuities from the Sukarno era, which by then was referred to as the "Old Order". Some of the most striking were the domination exerted by Java and a sense of nationhood that was centralized rather than pluralistic.²² The unitary foundation of the nation-state remained solid, if not further strengthened, with power being increasingly centralized in the hands of the president. Comparing Sukarno and Suharto, Michael Vatikiotis suggests that both of them

provide compelling evidence of a political culture with one foot in the past; of a society resistant to change. One facet of this political culture is of crucial importance to understanding why Sukarno commanded popularity while people starved, why Suharto

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 156-60.

²¹ Ibid., p. 164.

²² See Schwarz, *A Nation in Waiting* (1994), p. 3.

survives mounting pressure for more open government and criticism of his family's hydra-like business interests: that is the inordinate respect Indonesians have for firm, established leadership.²³

Both Sukarno and Suharto disliked public participation in politics, as Indonesia was deemed too heterogeneous to be able to achieve consensus. Nevertheless, Suharto had more reasons to limit political participation because he believed that economic growth was paramount for the country.²⁴ The word 'politics', as sociologist Arief Budiman writes, became a sort of 'dirty word' in New Order discourses,²⁵ and the keyword that prevailed in this period was '*pembangunan*' (development). For the New Order, 'development' strictly referred to economic growth, whose prerequisite was a strongly enforced political order. For this, Suharto's supporters honored him with a title, 'the Father of Indonesian Development' (*Bapak Pembangunan*), which made him equally significant as Sukarno, who was revered as 'the Great Leader of the Revolution' at the height of his renown. Developmentalism was not merely an economic agenda but had far reaching repercussions. It provided the army with a justification for tightening its grip on the nation, since order and stability were a *conditio sine qua non* for economic growth. Furthermore, it gave the army a crucial excuse to play an active role in Indonesia's political and economic affairs.

Suharto's view of Indonesia was not fundamentally different from his predecessor's in the sense that it was a "kingdom modeled closely on the independent polities of pre-colonial Java".²⁶ Michael Wood asserts that the New Order was fascinated by the type of society that was supposed to have existed in the Majapahit era, as it was "highly ordered" and "prosperous"—a

²³ See Vatikiotis, *Indonesian Politics under Suharto* (1993), p. 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

²⁵ Quoted in Schwarz, *ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁶ Vatikiotis, *ibid.*, p. 29.

vision of Indonesian society that the New Order championed and tried to achieve through its developmentalist outlook.²⁷ Another great historical empire with its center in the archipelago, the Buddhist Srivijaya, did not receive as much attention as Majapahit from New Order historians, probably because it was located on Sumatra instead of Java, and much of its territory lay in what presently are Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore.²⁸ For Suharto's New Order, Majapahit certainly served as a better model than Srivijaya as it represented refined Javanese values and models of behavior, fitting for the New Order's imagination of Indonesia. In other words, the New Order viewed itself as a 'New Majapahit', to use the term coined by Wood,²⁹ a happy and united society under the leadership of a strong personality, namely Suharto. Suharto himself always maintained a "stately Javanese air" in all of his public appearances, as Keith Loveard points out,³⁰ even though he came from a humble peasant background. As David Jenkins observes, "Suharto's bland, almost avuncular, manner concealed astuteness and craft, and the personal graciousness he exhibited to guests disguised strongly held—and surprisingly rigid—views about the sort of society he was seeking to build".³¹ The attitude attributed to Suharto by his official biographer, O.G. Roeder, in his book *The Smiling General* (1969), seems to fit perfectly with the image the leader wanted to project. Behind the famous smile was a cunning mind capable of engineering mass murder without flinching.

During Sukarno's era it was the norm for (male) citizens to address one another as '*Bung*' (literally meaning *Brother*), but during the New Order period *Bung* had to make way for a more

²⁷ See Wood, *Official History in Modern Indonesia* (2005), p. 53. Most of the description of Majapahit's glory in the Indonesian folk imagination is drawn from the ancient text *Nagarakertagama*, composed by Mpu Prapanca, which contains descriptions of the Hindu-Buddhist empire during the reign of its great king, Hayam Wuruk.

²⁸ Srivijaya dates back to the seventh century and its capital city was located at what presently is Palembang, in the southern part of Sumatra Island. Historian Michael Wood argues that Srivijaya was the "wrong past" for the New Order because, unlike Majapahit, it lacked connection with Java and Hindu-Javanese culture. See Wood, *ibid.*, 53-54.

²⁹ See Wood, *ibid.*, p. 196.

³⁰ See Loveard, *Suharto: Indonesia's Last Sultan* (1999), p. 34.

³¹ Jenkins, *Suharto and his Generals* (1984), p. 13.

respectful term, ‘*Bapak*’ (literally *Father*, although the meaning has shifted to an obsequious *Sir* or *Mister*). In the eyes of Ali Sadikin, a former close friend of Suharto who later had a falling out with him, this term is evidence of the “Javanese feudalism” that Suharto was keen on adopting as a framework during his rule. Loveard describes Suharto’s affinity with old Javanese beliefs as follows: “While always officially a Muslim, he was for most of his rule seen as a mystic who drew power from the *wahyu* or spiritual grace of the traditional deities of Java”.³² His attitude can alternatively be seen as evidence of the New Order’s paternalistic leadership style, which upholds the nation’s father figure high on a pedestal. As *Bapak*, Suharto was assumed to embrace and safeguard the nation. In contrast to a monarch, a *bapak*’s rule is based on familial compassion rather than the ruthless exercise of power over his subjects. Thus, Suharto perceived himself as the ‘father’ of the nation, while the whole nation was to be like a big family.³³

His vision of a united Indonesia under strong, centralized leadership manifested itself clearly in the *transmigration* program, based on the belief that transmigration and uniformed development policy across the country would have a positive impact on ethnic integration and national unity. Residents from densely populated islands were relocated to less populated islands, resulting in ‘melting pots’ of various ethnic communities in target regions. Brian Hoey suggests that in a country as heterogeneous as Indonesia, the transmigration program was implemented as a means of “promoting a nationalist vision and narrative of territory and culture through deliberate community building in the name of progress and development”, so that a sense of (imagined) community and unity could be maintained nation-wide.³⁴ However, the program largely failed to yield the expected outcomes since the ethnic groups “were not seen as having

³² Loveard, *ibid.*, p. 69.

³³ Jenkins, *ibid.*, p. 127.

³⁴ See Hoey, “Nationalism in Indonesia” (2003), p. 109.

equal rights and status” by the government.³⁵ In most cases, migrants from more developed areas took over jobs in the market and positions in public office, and the local populations were further marginalized. To make matters worse, there was a feeling that a deliberate Javanization process was taking place.³⁶ Thus, transmigration as a “spatial and social practice that affects not only the physical landscape but also the connections among people and between people and the land, and their memories and identities”,³⁷ very often only created more serious divisions among the ethnic groups, as well as widespread anti-Javanese sentiments on the outer islands.

Suharto’s regime was undoubtedly militaristic. He himself was a retired five-star general, and his inner circle included many army generals: some were already retired and others still on active duty. Many of his cabinet ministers were also retired army officers who were loyal to him or had done a favor for him in the past. Suharto and his generals chose to maintain the military presence in the government in order to safeguard national stability, lest it be overturned by those deemed to be enemies of the state.³⁸ The PKI, despite the fact that it had been banned since the birth of the New Order, continued to be portrayed as a ‘latent threat’ (*bahaya laten*) to order and stability, and this was always used as a pretext to sustain the heavy presence of the military in politics. The result was the demonization of the left and suppression of free thought. In relation to women, this demonization of the PKI affected them significantly because politically active women were frequently associated with the banned *Gerwani*. Another militaristic tendency of the New Order was the formation of several ideological state apparatuses such as *Golkar*,³⁹ the

³⁵ See Hermann, “Regional Conflict” (2005), p. 143.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-44.

³⁷ Hoey, *ibid.*, p. 122.

³⁸ On the roles of the military in Indonesian politics and the relationship between Suharto and the army generals, see Jenkins (1984).

³⁹ *Golkar* is short for *Golongan Karya* (Functional Group), a quasi-political party established by Suharto in the late 1960s, in the aftermath of the PKI massacre. Membership, which comprised all civil servants and members of the armed forces, was compulsory, which means that all of the members had to vote for *Golkar* in general elections,

New Order's main political machine. Together with some other organizations such as *Korpri*,⁴⁰ *Dharma Wanita*, and PKK, *Golkar* served as a means of ensuring that members had a single loyalty (*mono-loyalitas*) to the New Order only. The structures of these organizations were quite rigid and hierarchical, and there was not much space for creativity or individual initiatives as the organizational line was based on a top-down approach. Furthermore, these organizations were used as fertile grounds for ideological indoctrination through the *Penataran P4* mentioned earlier, in which members were subjected to intensive, multi-hour crash courses on state-sanctioned models of behavior and values based on the state ideology of *Pancasila*. *Pancasila* was originally coined by Sukarno in order to unite the archipelago after independence but, during the New Order era, it underwent a massive process of formalization and sacralization to the point that no other ideology was allowed to exist in Indonesia, and any criticism of the New Order's interpretation of *Pancasila* would be considered an act of treason. All organizations—public or private—were required to state in their constitutions their loyalty to *Pancasila*. Thus, an enormous number of docile and unconditionally loyal citizens was created throughout the archipelago to help the regime preserve the *status quo* for more than thirty years. Only the multidimensional crisis that befell Indonesia in 1997 had the power to initiate a regime change.

However, even without a crisis, the New Order's ideology of unity was never completely solid and coherent. It contained internal contradictions that made it almost impossible to work effectively without the coercive power of the military to support it. The practices of favoring the Javanese over the other ethnic groups while promulgating the rhetoric of equality before the law,

resulting in *Golkar* receiving the majority vote in every election during the New Order period. Suharto himself served as Head of the Advisory Council of *Golkar*.

⁴⁰ *Korpri* is short for *Korps Pegawai Republik Indonesia* (Indonesia's Civil Service). All civil servants were automatic members of this organization. *Korpri* was always mobilized to vote for *Golkar* in elections.

and discriminating against the Chinese as “essential outsiders”⁴¹ while continuously urging them to assimilate, are among these contradictions. It could be argued that such practices resembled the Dutch colonial tactic of ‘divide and conquer’, whose main purpose was to prevent the colonized people from establishing a united front against the colonizing power. Thus, in the New Order’s context, it could be argued that Suharto used the same tactic in order to ensure that there would be no group powerful enough to challenge his authority, since various groups were pitched against one another. But if Anderson’s conceptualization of the Javanese notion of power is valid, and it is true that such a notion of power is what informed both Sukarno and Suharto in their attempts to secure their authority in post-colonial Indonesia, then the contradictions embedded within the New Order’s ideology of unity can be better explained from another perspective. This is especially true if Suharto indeed saw himself as a modern ‘sultan’ and practiced a feudalistic ruling style, as some of the observers pinpoint. Rather than a new form of the divide-and-conquer tactic, these contradictions should be understood as a coherent and integral aspect of the Javanese concept of power. Unlike the Western concept of power, which emphasizes the ways in which it is exercised, in the Javanese conception power is primarily about its accumulation, because power is perceived as concrete and homogeneous. What a leader needs is the concentration of power in his personality, and conversely a leader loses legitimacy when such a concentration is distracted or diffused. That is why a leader must maintain “steadfastness” and “singleness of purpose” in order to ensure the continuous accumulation of power and absorb diverse, conflicting groups into his power circle.⁴² This ability to absorb

⁴¹ A term borrowed from Chiro and Reid’s book on Chinese and Jews in Southeast Asia and Central Europe, *Essential Outsiders* (1997), which refers to the need to prevent the Chinese and the Jews from integrating completely with the communities in which they live because they can always be used as scapegoats whenever a misfortune befalls the community, and simultaneously as cash cows to be exploited by the ruling power for its own interest.

⁴² Anderson, *ibid.*, pp. 22-27.

external concentrations of power into his own inner power is what significantly marked the person of power.

Anderson argues that during Sukarno's era this was manifested in his attempt to embrace nationalist, religious, and communist groups.⁴³ Sukarno failed, and Suharto learned from his predecessor's mistake. He did not strive for compromise, but tried to secure the loyalty of each group. The transmigration program created tensions among ethnic groups, but at the same time it was also a means of maintaining balance so that no ethnic group could become dominant. This was achieved by relocating people from Java, Madura, and Bali to other islands. Similarly, the Chinese were allowed to be dominant players in the country's economy, yet their political participation was restricted. The Muslims were given freedom to develop various aspects of Islamic culture, but severely constrained from being too political. The ultimate objective of all these policies was to create the 'harmony' and 'balance' that would help Suharto maintain the concentration of power. In other words, what appeared as a 'politics of othering' was in fact an inseparable part of Suharto's implementation of the Javanese concept of power. In reality, it inevitably produced a serious side-effect, namely marginalization, but the marginalized groups were never completely marginal, as they were also 'compensated' by certain 'concessions' in other aspects, as illustrated above. In this respect, Suharto's rule cannot be simply labeled 'authoritarian' in the narrow sense of the term. 'Compensations' were given in order to arrive at 'negotiated' positions, but these positions were not a form of compromise such as that which Sukarno tried to achieve. The internal contradictions that might have made the New Order's ideology look less coherent at first may begin to make sense when perceived from this angle. Therefore, the concept of 'margin' in the context of this study is not to be understood as in opposition to the 'centre', but rather as something that is always already incorporated by the

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

center. This is the fundamental difference between Suharto's strategy and the colonial divide-and-conquer tactic.

In the economic sector, national development was considered to be one of Suharto's strong points. However, this success was built upon foreign debt and foreign direct investment (FDI) rather than self-reliance. Sukarno left a legacy of debt that amounted to over two billion dollars, but in the first five years of Suharto's rule the foreign debt soared to four billion dollars.⁴⁴ Western-educated economic technocrats were employed to formulate economic planning and policies that would encourage private enterprise and more foreign investment.⁴⁵ In practice, many army generals and civilian officials were heavily involved in so-called 'private enterprise'. The army provided protection to investors, especially from any threat related to industrial relations issues, while the bureaucrats facilitated smooth procedures and the necessary licenses. This resulted in systemic cronyism at almost all levels of bureaucracy nation-wide. Another key element in the New Order's economy was the Indonesian-Chinese tycoons, such as Liem Soe Liong, Mochtar Rijadi, William Suryajaya, and Bob Hasan, who served as cash-cows for Suharto's family businesses and the businesses run by army generals. Chinese political participation was severely limited during Suharto's era, but Suharto allowed the Chinese to establish economic domination, and he and his generals provided them with protection from the 'social envy' (*kecemburuan sosial*) that was brewing among the indigenous citizens (*pribumi*). In addition, they were prohibited from practicing their ancestral traditions in public. Despite making up only about four per cent of the population, the Chinese ran 70 per cent of the national economic activity, and hence constituted an 'economic asset' and a 'political liability' at the

⁴⁴ See Mody, *Indonesia under Suharto* (1987), p.197.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

same time.⁴⁶ As Vickers observes, “by the 1990s New Order development had produced a large group of Indonesians who shared in the wealth through patronage from the ruling class”.⁴⁷

Economic growth was also increasing as order was maintained, at least in appearance. Already in the early 1990s Suharto was inclined to allow his own children to become involved in lucrative business ventures and establish monopolies over some agricultural and manufacturing goods.⁴⁸ Corruption was rampant, and state representatives, ranging from petty officials in district administrative offices or traffic police on the streets, to cabinet ministers, participated in one way or another in corrupt practices. In April 1993 the editorial column of the *Jakarta Post* daily blasted such practices by stating that Indonesia would only attract “profiteering businessmen, monopolies, oligopolies and other kinds of rent-seekers with strong political connections, who can offset the unusually high hidden cost of doing business with abnormally high profits”.⁴⁹

The early 1990s saw growing dissatisfaction among various elements of civil society and criticism of how the country was run was heard more often. After the presidential election in 1988, when Suharto was elected for the fifth time, Vatikiotis points out that “calls for Suharto to make this term the last were heard as soon as it began in 1988”.⁵⁰ However, it took more than another decade for Suharto to be brought down from power. A monetary crisis, mounting opposition from democratic elements, and the chronic corruption and cronyism that destroyed the fundamentals of the country’s economy all combined forces to end the thirty-two years of New Order rule in Indonesia. This shift marks the beginning of the *Reformasi*, in which Indonesia embarked on its journey towards democratization and openness. As the nation began

⁴⁶ See Schwarz, *ibid.*, p. 99.

⁴⁷ Vickers, *ibid.*, p. 194.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 134 and 142-43.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Schwarz, *ibid.*, p. 158.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

to cope with the New Order's legacy, it became immediately apparent that almost all groups and communities claimed that they had suffered from marginalization: from women to *adat* communities, from the Chinese to religious minorities, and even the Muslims, claimed that they had been discriminated against by Suharto's regime in one way or another. This is why the *Reformasi* era is a transition period that is overwhelmingly marked by enormous demands for social, cultural, political and economic rights and equality from all sides. This provides a further basis to reassess the perception that the New Order targeted its discriminatory practices at a few specific groups only.

If a politics of 'othering' indeed existed, it would be extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible, to pinpoint who exactly the main target of such a politics was, and against whom it was directed. The divide-and-conquer tactic of the pre-independence period was concerned with pitching one group against another so that there would never be harmony among them, but Suharto did not seem to have such a scheme in mind. His objective, on the contrary, was to create 'harmony' among these diverse groups, albeit a forced and superficial harmony, so that there would be no serious disruption to his own accumulation of power. It is no wonder then that 'stability' and 'order' became the major slogans of the New Order politics, along with the taboo against discussing issues related to SARA (*suku, agama, ras, antar-golongan*—ethnicity, religion, race, 'interest grouping').⁵¹ Therefore, the New Order's unitary ideology was laden with contradictions, because harmony and unity were imposed by curtailing some basic rights of the various segments of civil society, and at the expense of the heterogeneity that characterizes the dynamics of their relations.

⁵¹ The New Order strongly discouraged people to have upfront and open discussions on differences and conflict related to ethnicity, religious belief, race, and social groups' interests, as they supposedly would cause instability and unrest (*keresahan*). The term SARA was coined by the state to serve as a reminder for the people not to raise such potentially divisive issues in the public sphere.

Women's Participation: Past and Present

Women's participation in Indonesian history is not limited to political involvement in nationalist movements for independence against Dutch colonial rule but also includes efforts to improve women's quality of life and emancipation. Issues related to women's status under Islamic marriage law, prevention of underage marriage, political participation, and access to education have remained high on the agenda at the annual women's congress since 1928, in addition to a commitment to the struggle for independence.⁵² During the Japanese occupation, women were actively involved in military training to support Japan's war effort, but many took part in the training with a vested interest in preparing the road to Indonesia's independence. In the time of the Revolution, Indonesian women managed to continue their annual congress amidst the armed conflict between the returning Dutch military and Indonesian guerillas. On Java as well as in other regions such as North Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Nusa Tenggara, various women's organizations were established to defend Indonesia's sovereignty.

In Sukarno's era, women participated in the first general election in 1955. Resistance against Islamic and *adat* laws that marginalized women was always at the top of women's organizations' agenda. But tension between *Kowani* and the leftist women's organization *Gerwani* was already visible from the start, although *Gerwani* was formally affiliated with *Kowani* as the umbrella organization for all women's organizations nation-wide.⁵³ Women's organizations in this era were highly politicized, and to a certain extent co-opted by Sukarno's revolutionary project. In 1964, *Kowani* gave Sukarno the honorary title of 'Great Patron of Indonesia's Revolutionary Women's Movement' (*Pembimbing Agung Gerakan Wanita*

⁵² See Kongres Wanita Indonesia. *Sejarah Setengah Abad Pergerakan Wanita Indonesia* (1978), p. 30.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

Revolusioner Indonesia).⁵⁴ In the aftermath of the coup in 1965, *Gerwani* was expelled from *Kowani*'s membership, and the cleansing of *Gerwani* elements in *Kowani* continued until 1966.⁵⁵ *Kowani* was practically taken over by the New Order from 1966 on, and most of its programs reflected New Order policies and ideology. Indonesian women's main duty, as stated in the organization's resolution in 1966, was to dedicate themselves as wives (*istri*), housewives (*ibu rumah tangga*), and the nation's mothers (*ibu bangsa*).⁵⁶

The transformation of the Indonesian women's movement from a rebellious and revolutionary one into a movement tamed by the New Order regime seems to echo the fate of Raden Ajeng Kartini, a *priyayi*'s daughter who lived at the end of the nineteenth century and is considered one of the most prominent women heroes in modern Indonesian history. Even at a very young age, Kartini had been critical of the social injustice resulting from the practices of some Islamic doctrine and *adat*, as well as the colonial education policy that discriminated against women. Her revolutionary ideas regarding women's emancipation were immortalized in the letters that she wrote to her two Dutch friends, Stella Zeehandelaar and Rosa Abendanon.⁵⁷ Kartini eventually had to give up her dreams of being an independent woman and helping to improve women's education, as she succumbed to the arranged marriage set up by her father. She died not long after giving birth to her first baby at the age of twenty-five. Kartini's birthday is celebrated every year on Kartini's Day, but during the New Order period the celebrations were used to further strengthen the New Order's ideology of unity and the taming of women's revolutionary potential into the role of housewives who support their husband's career. In Sylvia Tiwon's (1996) words, Kartini "stands as the officially sanctioned model of behavior not for

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 140.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 142.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 180.

⁵⁷ See Coté, *Letters from Kartini* (1992) and *On Feminism and Nationalism* (1995) for the English translation of Kartini's Letters to Rosa Abendanon and Stella Zeehandelaar.

what she says but rather for what is said about her.”⁵⁸ Officially called ‘Ibu Kartini’ in Kartini’s Day celebrations and history textbooks, she becomes identified as *ibu rumah tangga* (housewife), and this completes the domestication of Kartini by New Order discourses. According to Suryakusuma, the underlying ideology used to legitimize such containment of women is the “idolatry of *keibuan* (motherhood) qualities, of the ‘traditional’ role of women,” as well as of “women as pillars of the nation”.⁵⁹ This ideology contains its own inherent contradiction because women are expected to participate in development programs, yet at the same time they are to accept their natural state (*kodrat*) as the second sex. The outcome of the “state *ibuism*” ideology is the feudalistic, hierarchical structure of the *Dharma Wanita*, in which democratic process is non-existent and status becomes the primary orientation of the organization.

In the wake of the *Reformasi*, women activists outside the *Kowani* structure provided support for student protesters who occupied the parliament building. However, not all women activists approved of this type of subordinate role, which is associated with women’s traditional, domestic duties and could easily have been perceived as a drawback in the Indonesian feminist movement. But, as mentioned earlier, during the outbreak of the economic crisis in 1998 women actually overturned the ideology of *state ibuism* by playing on the meaning of the term ‘*ibu*’ (mother) and using it against the state power. The term that was initially designated to represent women’s domestication by the state became a weapon turned against its own master. Although it still carried with it the demeaning sense of a ‘woman who stays at home to take care of the

⁵⁸ See Tiwon, “Models and Maniacs” (1996), p. 57.

⁵⁹ Suryakusuma, “State Ibuism” (2004b), p.167. Suryakusuma argues that containing women in the primary categories of housewives and mothers was the most convenient means of controlling women in the New Order state. The result of such a massive effort to enforce domestication was the creation of a “follow-the-husband culture” (*budaya ikut suami*). As the state was in full control of its civil servants, who in turn controlled their wives, the imposition of gender hierarchy was achieved.

household', women activists were able to give the term new meaning. It put the state in a tight spot because, on the one hand, what the women did was considered a subversive act, yet they could not be punished harshly for such an act because, as the women cleverly pointed out, their action was 'merely' an expression of their concern as mothers with the effects of the economic crisis.

Melani Budianta warns of having too high expectations of Indonesian women's activism. The movements already early on contained many contradictions and conflicts, as demonstrated by what happened with many of the coalitions after Suharto was ousted from power. For instance, in the aftermath of the May riots, in which hundreds of Chinese women became victims of mass-rape, women activists who were involved in providing advocacy and protection for the victims were bitterly divided on several key issues. Some refused to work with law enforcement officials by providing evidence of the rapes because they were concerned about the victims' safety, while others believed that the movement's political objectives should not be sacrificed for humanitarian considerations.⁶⁰ They were also divided on whether to foreground the racial aspect of the rapes in order to uncover the involvement of radical Islamic elements in the riots, or to insist that the incident be considered as violence against women in general rather than against women from a particular ethnic background, in order not to alienate Muslim sympathizers.

These dynamics illustrate the problem of creating long-term alliances amongst women's organizations due to diverse ideological affiliations and the complexities of the situation that each of them is facing, as conceptualized by Ien Ang and Chandra Mohanty. Mohanty is against any attempt at establishing a "consensual homogeneity of 'women' as a group" because one always has to take into account the "historically specific material reality of groups of women". She suggests that the category of 'woman' should be understood as "constructed in a variety of

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 163.

political contexts that often exist simultaneously and overlaid on top of one another”, and only through such an understanding “effective political action and challenges can be devised”.⁶¹ In the same manner, Ang is quite critical towards the politics of difference in feminism. She discusses the difficulties of dealing with difference⁶² that cannot be resolved merely through communication. She warns of the danger of absorbing difference into “an already existing feminist community without challenging the naturalized legitimacy of that community *as a community*”.⁶³ Moreover, she points out that amongst feminists coming from different backgrounds, there are moments when no common ground exists and communication may entirely fail. In place of a politics of difference, Ang proposes an alternative, a “politics of partiality” which accepts the principle that “feminism can never ever be an encompassing political home for all women”, thus recognizing the “unavoidable limits of feminism as a political project”.⁶⁴

In the Indonesian context, however, there is an aspect of feminism that is fundamentally different from feminist debates and developments in the West. Although ideological divides and conflicts occur among women activists, there is still a shared belief that establishing alliances is not only possible but also necessary, as it will open up more grounds for activism and give women from different backgrounds ample opportunities to get out of their domestic confinement, be exposed to different realities, and make their voices heard.⁶⁵ Melani Budianta situates the

⁶¹ See Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes” (2003), pp. 32-33.

⁶² Ang argues that, more often than not, the need to deal with difference “is seen in the light of the greater need to save, expand, improve or enrich feminism as a political home which would ideally represent all women”, and so it is as if the difficulties of dealing with difference could be solved through a politics of “inclusion” in which a “pluralist sisterhood” is constructed in order to accommodate all differences and inequalities amongst women (2003:203).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁶⁵ Budianta, *ibid.*, p. 170-71: Budianta believes that Indonesian women empower themselves through “emergency activism”. The experience of activism, which began with efforts to meet the basic needs of their families, and developed into growing anger towards the state, or merely the fulfillment of the need for a “release” that street rallies provided, has brought changes to the lives of women involved.

difficulties of establishing solid alliances amongst women's organizations as not only based on differences of ideology, but also organizing skills and the quality of human resources. Whereas western-based third-world intellectuals such as Ang and Mohanty focus almost exclusively on the differences within and among women in explaining the impossibility of long-term coalitions, Budiarta seems to believe that if the organizing and human resource issues can be addressed, Indonesian women may be able to work together despite ideological divisions. During the activism in the wake of the *Reformasi*, for instance, the lack of human resources resulted in a limited number of people circulating from one activity to another. While they were quite successful as "initiators and managers of small-scale action", they got burnt out quickly and failed in managing bigger projects that needed professional coordination and better strategizing. Consequently, the large number of members coming from middle-class and lower middle-class backgrounds who had been empowered by activism during the crisis and participated in opposition towards the state power were "left unorganized and incapable of making a greater contribution to the collective cause".⁶⁶

Another reason for the need to have only guarded optimism in assessing the success of women's movements in Indonesia is that, despite the significant role that women played in helping to bring Suharto down from power, women's issues were sidelined during the transition period as everybody was busy debating issues such as "who would be the next leader, what would be the basis of the state, what role should be played by Islam, and should Suharto be tried for his abuses while in power".⁶⁷ Even among political parties which claim to be sympathetic to women's issues, the struggle for gender equality tends to be reduced to merely a secondary

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 170.

⁶⁷ See Suryakusuma (2004a), pp. 128-29.

aspect in the struggle for democracy.⁶⁸ Women's participation in the revitalization of customary laws and institutions, as well as in the formulation of *shariah* law in Muslim-dominated regions such as Aceh and Banten, is inconsequential, which reflects the exclusion of women from political processes. Even in civil society there is a visible lack of interest in involving women in the socialization and implementation of decentralization and regional autonomy (Noerdin, 2002:185). As a result, regional autonomy is frequently used by conservative elements in Indonesia's civil society to advance their own interests and agenda that marginalize women even further.

In the post-Suharto era, in addition to having to struggle against the state power and a male-dominated political system, Indonesian women have seen the advent of new political and cultural forces that pose a serious threat to the democratization process in general and gender equality in particular, i.e., radical Islamic groups that aim at imposing Islamic *shariah* through regional bylaws, taking advantage of the weakening of the state power and implementation of decentralization. Thus, women's struggles take place on the vertical axis of resistance against non-democratic elements of state power, and also on the more local, horizontal axis against the rise of Islamic religious fundamentalism that often targets women and other minority groups. In many regions, the local governments produce bylaws with strong Islamic nuances that require women to wear the Islamic headdress (*jilbab*) in their work places, schools and other public places in blatant disregard of the Constitution. Some local leaders require that all activities have to be stopped during the pronouncement of the *azan* (call for prayer) transmitted from mosques by loudspeakers. Some others have added the ability to recite the *Qur'an* to the requirement for

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 136.

promotion of local government employees.⁶⁹ At the national level, efforts to revise the existing marriage law, which, among other things, prohibits interfaith marriage and opens up the possibility for Muslim men to practice polygamy, have failed due to staunch resistance from conservative *ulamas* and other Muslim hardliners. The challenge that Muslim societies such as Indonesia face, as formulated by Malaysian feminist scholar Norani Othman, is “whether Muslim scholars and leaders themselves are able to create coherent theories and structures of Islamic democracy that are not simple reformulations of Western notions offered in Islamic idioms”.⁷⁰ Muslim women in Southeast Asia, according to Othman, have a better chance to participate in public life because the society in which they live has “fewer patriarchal institutions and practices especially when compared to South Asia or the Middle East”.⁷¹ However, as the Indonesian examples illustrate, patriarchal aspects of Islamic *shariah* can also be implemented by drawing equivalent practices from local traditions and customary laws which are patriarchal in nature. Both *shariah* and customary laws frequently go hand in hand to strengthen the patriarchal grip on society.

Women and Literary Production

The publication of Ayu Utami’s *Saman* in April 1998 served as the ‘writing on the wall’ for the New Order, as less than a month after, Suharto abruptly stepped down. Since then, many young women writers have emerged, but some of them seemed to purposefully exploit sexual themes, as they realized that the time was ripe for such themes to be used as a selling point. Therefore, one needs to take seriously the critique of Alia Swastika, who asserts that openness

⁶⁹ Information regarding the implementation of *shariah*-based local bylaws is accessible on the website of the Independent Media Center Jakarta, <http://jakarta.indymedia.org>.

⁷⁰ See Othman, “Islamization and Democratization” (2003), pp. 123.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

about sexuality should not be the only remarkable achievement of the century-old women's struggle for gender equality that these new writers can demonstrate in their works.⁷² Implied is an expectation that women's writing in the *Reformasi* era should be part of the "dismantling of New Order political structures and ideologies" that Barbara Hatley refers to in her assessment of the impact of women's activism following the fall of the regime.⁷³ Swastika's critique of some works by women, which she considers to be mainly preoccupied with sexuality and lacking any serious engagement with redefinition of the nation in post-Suharto Indonesia, is important because it has been evident that the New Order's universalizing view of the nation had a damaging impact on women. Some women writers have been able to answer the skepticism directed against them by mainstream literary critics and the media by seriously demonstrating that they are equally concerned with engaging in other social issues that directly or indirectly affect women and by offering fresh, original insights on those issues.

In most discourses concerning the emergence of the new generation of women writers in Indonesian contemporary literature, not much is said about how women have been represented in literary works by men in post-colonial Indonesia, or in what way today's women writers are different from their predecessors. The dominant view gives a false impression that before 1998 women were totally silenced and that there were no serious works produced by or about women. Very little attention has been devoted to how women have been represented in literary works in Indonesia, with the exception of one significant study undertaken by Tineke Hellwig. Hellwig draws critical attention to the ways in which women are characterized in fiction produced by

⁷² See Swastika, "Adakah Jejak Poskolonial dalam Novel Populer?" (2005).

⁷³ Hatley, "Literature, Mythology and Regime Change" (2002a), pp.130-43. Hatley speaks of the difficulty in deciding if there is any trend or pattern that can be drawn out of the changes in social practices and attitudes in the post-New Order era, but there is clearly a new development in terms of women's cultural production.

both male and female authors from the pre-World War II period to the 1980s.⁷⁴ Her seminal work discusses female authors in the 1970s who deal with women's issues in their writings and achieved considerable success, such as Nh. Dini and Marga T. Hellwig argues that women had already played a significant role in literary production in that period.⁷⁵ She suggests that for women to be able to voice themselves through reading and writing was already a kind of empowerment, especially since language has been regulated by masculine standards. Indonesian women have always had to resist the imposition of *kodrat* (destiny), which requires them to take a passive, secondary role in society, even, and especially, during the New Order period.⁷⁶

Hellwig agrees that novels produced by women in the 1970s were dominated by the theme of female sexuality, but that it is depicted as controlled by men;⁷⁷ the female protagonists have to sacrifice their own freedom and happiness for the sake of others. This nurturing aspect attributed to women was frequently foregrounded, and it further reinforced the notion of *kodrat*. Hellwig argues that, as a result of this stern control, the portrayal of female characters in women's writing in this period was generally even more unsympathetic than in novels of the same period by male authors, and could be taken as evidence of women's alienation from their own selves.⁷⁸ Barbara Hatley (1997) reiterates Hellwig's argument regarding this recurring pattern in Indonesian fiction prior to the *Reformasi*, when she claims that a "conjuncture of conservative social values, Javanese cultural tradition and female identity" was responsible for the "stereotyping of women figures" as subordinate citizens.⁷⁹ Compared to men, who are often associated with "change and progress", women are identified with "nostalgic celebration" of

⁷⁴ See Hellwig, *In the Shadow of Change* (1994).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, "Preface", pp. ix-x.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 202

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

⁷⁹ See Hatley, "Nation, 'Tradition', and the Construction of the Feminine" (1997), p. 94.

traditions, and any desire for autonomy and any form of assertiveness on their part will immediately be denounced as “loose sexual morality”.⁸⁰ When *Saman* was published in 1998, many male readers and critics had doubts about whether a woman had the capability to produce work of such a quality—an attitude that many female readers found “insulting and condescending”,⁸¹ especially as it later turned into gossip and rumors that were injurious to Ayu’s personal integrity as a newly emerging young writer. Commenting on an anthology on modern Indonesian literature by Foulcher and Day (2002),⁸² Hatley points out that it does not contain any essay on women writers and their works. She examines several works written by women since the 1930s. The truth is that as early as the 1930s and the 1940s there were successful women writers, such as Selasih, Hamidah, Arti Poerbani, and Soewarsih Djojopoespito, but some wrote in Dutch. While their works are never considered as “serious literature” by the literary establishment in Indonesia, they provide a window to “female experience in colonial/post-colonial Indonesia” that allows one to see how women responded to the “opportunities opened up by the colonial interface for obtaining a European style education and employment, participating in the nationalist project, establishing a modern household”.⁸³

In 1950, S. Rukiah published her novel *Kejatuhan dan Hati* (The Downfall and the Heart), having already published poems in various magazines since 1946. The 1960s saw many more women writers who were not only active in cultural activities but also involved in cultural politics. S. Rukiah was listed as a Lekra member,⁸⁴ along with another woman writer, Sugiarti Siswandi. Other fiction writers were Titie Said, S. Tjahjaningsih, Titis Basino, Erniswati

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 101.

⁸¹ See Aveling, “Indonesian Literature after *Reformasi*” (2007), p. 20.

⁸² Hatley refers to a volume on postcolonial readings of modern Indonesian literature edited by K. Foulcher and T. Day, *Clearing a Space* (2002), in which she is one of the contributors.

⁸³ Hatley, “Postcoloniality and the Feminine” (2002b), pp., 160, 177-78.

⁸⁴ *Lekra* stands for *Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat* (People’s Cultural Institute), a writers’ guild associated with the PKI and fiercely involved in polemics and ideological contestation with non-leftist writers in the first half of the 1960s. When Suharto took power, *Lekra* was banned along with other organizations affiliated with the PKI.

Nutomo, and Enny Sumargo.⁸⁵ In the 1970s and beyond, the number of female writers kept on increasing, and names such as Nh. Dini, Marga T., Mira W., Maria A. Sardjono, Marianne Katoppo, Ike Soepomo and La Rose were widely known by the reading public. Most of their stories evolve around heterosexual relationships, including marriage, pregnancy, children, and sometimes rape. While female characters are given a primary role, they are forced to comply with heteronormativity and conventional values, at the expense of personal desire and individual freedom. Many of the protagonists are portrayed as “educated, professional, and well-travelled”, but they are also “demure, restrained, and apolitical”.⁸⁶ Hellwig argues that, despite their shortcomings, the works of these writers shed light on the “taste” of the readers, their “reading habits”, as well as the ideological impact of the works on the readers’ perception of women in general.⁸⁷ Hatley notes that there were two male authors writing in the 1980s and 1990s whose novels frequently represent female protagonists who deviate from the New Order’s dominant gender ideology. Both Pramoedya Ananta Toer and Y.B. Mangunwijaya present female protagonists who are independent, strong-willed, and assertive, challenging the stereotype of women as associated with “nature, nurture, and tradition”.⁸⁸ However, Hatley wonders about the impact of such alternative representations on Indonesian women readers:

...the role of resistant female characters within an essentially male discourse on political power, countering the conservative, hierarchical values implied by mainstream representations of women, arguably distances them from womanly experience. As emblems of total resistance, such figures are depicted as unaffected by the inherent

⁸⁵ Information is gathered from <http://daudp65.byethost4.com/ssastra/ssastra8.html>, downloaded on September 3, 2010, at 4.30 pm.

⁸⁶ See Hatley (2002a), *ibid.*, p. 133.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁸⁸ Hatley (1997), *ibid.*, pp. 102-06.

expectations of and constraints on female identity in Indonesia, to the extent that they may appear less than convincing as women.⁸⁹

This may explain why, even after the fall of the New Order, women writers such as Ayu Utami still had to deal with undermining assumptions and suspicions that women do not have the capacity to produce great works; and when women actually prove that they can write quality fiction, literary critics—still mostly men—are only interested in drawing the readers' attention to secondary and trivial or sensational aspects, such as sexual themes.

The analyses in the chapters that follow demonstrate that many works of fiction produced by women writers after the New Order deal with a myriad of issues in original and challenging ways, and in doing so they contribute to profound re-examination of that era's dominant ideologies of unity, gender, race, class, and nationhood. Therefore, this study does not adopt a formalistic approach to examine the structure of the works, but rather undertakes a thematic exploration of the authors' perceptions of the 'nation' in relation to diversity and gender, regardless of whether such a convergence is intended or not. This approach also allows us to see the authors' ambivalent attitudes towards various conflicting issues that are often present simultaneously. Such ambivalence is mostly caused by the dilemma faced by these authors in making sense of the New Order's notion of power, whose effects have impacted their thoughts and outlooks, whether they are willing to admit it or not.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 104.

Chapter 2

The Capital City and National Allegory

Introduction

The *Reformasi* has brought about change not only to the regime in power but also to the site where power is located and centralized. Jakarta, as the center of power, remained conflated with the nation during both Sukarno's and Suharto's eras. This is apparent in the massive presence of edifices intended to reinforce this notion, such as the National Monument (Monas), the Hotel Indonesia, the Senayan stadium, and the Miniature Park of Beautiful Indonesia (Taman Mini Indonesia Indah). This attitude still comes out in the official discourse of the supposedly regional government of Jakarta nowadays, despite the introduction of decentralization throughout the country as a result of the *Reformasi*. The idea of the nation remains predominantly shaped by the assumption that Jakarta is *the* center that holds the entire nation together. Thus, there is a continuation of the prevalent view of Jakarta as the seat of centralized power, which began with Sukarno in the 1950s and 1960s and continued all the way through the New Order era under Suharto, who ruled for thirty-two years. The Regional Strategic Plan of Jakarta for 2002-2007, still gives Jakarta a central role as a "service city" that "represents the image of both the nation and the state to the international world" (my translation).¹ The ideology of "nationalist urbanism," which Abidin Kusno discusses in an essay on Jakarta in the post-

¹ In addition, the Strategic Plan also spells out in its mission statements that Jakarta should be "the capital city of the Republic of Indonesia that is humane, efficient, able to compete at the global level, populated by a community that is proactive, in possession of high moral values, prosperous, and cultured, that lives in a safe and sustainable living environment." (<http://www.jakarta.go.id/pemerintahan/renstra/default2.asp>).

Reformasi period, may be in decline in the post-Suharto era, but it refuses to wither away easily.² This is evident in the way Jakarta's residents respond to their city.

It is primarily for this reason that the official discourse of Jakarta is frequently imbued with the notions of beauty and order. At the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s, for example, the supposedly smart and catchy slogan *BMW*, standing for *Bersih* (clean), *Manusiawi* (humane), and *ber-Wibawa* (dignified), was introduced by then Governor Wiyogo Atmodarminto. It is interesting to see how a slogan that claims to promote beauty, humanity, and dignity is purposefully articulated by the abbreviation *BMW*, which is more widely known as an up-market brand of luxurious and expensive German car. A few years prior to the *Reformasi*, another slogan that very much conveyed the same old message but was given new packaging came to replace *BMW*. The new slogan, *Jakarta Teguh Beriman* (literally meaning 'Jakarta Steadfast in Faith') was coined by Governor Atmodarminto's successor, Suryadi Sudirja. While carrying a strong religious connotation in terms of its surface message, the new slogan is actually an acronym that stands for a string of positive attributes given to the capital city. *Teguh Beriman* comprises the adjectives *TEnanG* (tranquil), *tedUH* (cool), *BERsih* (clean), *Indah* (beautiful), and *nyaMAN* (cozy). Even now, in the *Reformasi* era, it is still quite common to see both slogans prominently displayed on official billboards and banners all around Jakarta, which indicates that such ideals persist and prevail despite the change of power and the coming of a new era of democratization.

Jakarta is the center of cultural production, and the *Reformasi* opened up new avenues in this area. Initiated by the phenomenal success of Ayu Utami's novel, *Saman*, which was published just before President Suharto stepped down, a new generation of women writers

² Kusno defines "nationalist urbanism" as a view that perceives Jakarta as a "centre that represents the nation for citizens," but this representation of Jakarta as a "unifying image" is not only intended for the citizens of Jakarta, but is also extended to members of the nation who live in other parts of the country (2004:77).

emerged and very quickly caught the attention of a nation that was still basking in the euphoria of new-found democracy. This new wave of writers is mostly comprised of urban-based, middle-class women whose work contains a wide range of reflections, responses and commentaries vis-à-vis the crisis that the nation underwent, as well as the new sense of freedom brought about by the *Reformasi*. Like their predecessors, these authors offer critical views on what has been, and is, taking place in the country, but I want to argue that there are at least two novel elements that uniquely belong to the work of these post-1998 writers. The first is the incorporation of gendered views into their narratives, a perspective that is linked, in a highly problematic manner, to the second element, which is their representation of the capital city. Jakarta serves not merely as a physical setting, but also plays a determining role in shaping the consciousness of the characters and their actions in these narratives.

To date, I have yet to find any in-depth research that takes urbanism in the work of women writers in Indonesia as its primary focus. There are, of course, some critical commentaries about the capital city in essays produced by writers such as Goenawan Mohamad³ and Seno Gumira Ajidarma,⁴ but they do not make any attempt to incorporate this aspect and elaborate on their ideas in their main literary endeavors. Other leading women writers who were writing long before 1998, such as N.H. Dini, Marga T., and Mira W., seem to have other preoccupations that have little to do with representing the capital city as a distinct subject whose influence on their characters is worth taking into account.

³ In one of the essays in his seminal series of *Sidelines* (1994), Goenawan Mohamad laments that “there is no ‘national’ glory of being in the city” and that all of us are “foreigners” there. This shows a growing sense of alienation amongst the citizens of Jakarta with regard to the city (pp. 28-29).

⁴ A columnist in *Djakarta, The City Life Magazine*, Seno Gumira Ajidarma, wrote in 2002 that Jakarta could be perceived as a metaphor of ‘oppression’ by those who are not lucky enough to be in Jakarta, and so anything that comes from Jakarta will immediately be regarded with suspicion (qtd in Kusno, 2004:2380)

In this chapter, I want to demonstrate that Jakarta has become a major concern in the works of many post-1998 women writers and is highly influential in shaping the female characters' views of the world around them. It is portrayed from a distinctly feminine perspective, and critiques and reflections on the city are generated from this vantage point. However, since many of these writers are urbanites and they participate on a daily basis in the complexities of the urban life style that they critically explore in their works, the artistic outcomes of such critiques of urbanism entail a high degree of irony. This is how these women writers distinguish themselves from their more senior, male counterparts, such as Goenawan Mohamad and Seno Gumira Ajidarma. In contrast to Mohamad and Ajidarma, who describe the capital city from the point of view of an observer's located outside the object of observation, post-1998 writers such as Nukila Amal and Djenar Maesa Ayu prefer to position themselves as inseparable from the city, as being *in* the city rather than *outside* it when conducting their critical observations.

I will examine the representations of Jakarta and its female citizens in two chapters of Nukila Amal's novel, *Cala Ibi*⁵ (2003), and in three short stories published in Djenar Maesa Ayu's collection, *Jangan Main-Main (dengan Kelaminmu)* (2004), "Staccato", "Moral", and "Ting!".⁶ Both writers were born in Jakarta and spent most of their lives there. They started their writing careers in this city, and have established themselves as two must-read, current Indonesian women writers. Based on my reading of their work and the ways in which the capital city is represented in official discourse, as briefly laid out earlier, I will address two questions: first, do

⁵ The title *Cala Ibi* is a term from a local Ternatean language referring to a small species of hummingbird. In the novel, the bird magically turns into a dragon and becomes the protagonist's spiritual guide in her journey of self-discovery.

⁶ *Jangan Main-Main (dengan Kelaminmu)*, translated loosely as *Don't Fool around (with Your Genitals)*, contains eleven short stories. The work incited heated debates and controversy amongst its readers and critics alike as soon as it was published, because of its bold representation of the female body and sexuality. This is mostly considered to be immoral and vulgar, to the point that it is labeled by some adversaries as pornography.

the works of these two writers subvert the official representation of Jakarta, and if so, in the process of subverting it, are they inevitably reinscribing it? This is not simply a matter of judging whether Nukila and Ayu are entirely opposed to, or totally co-opted by, the prevailing New Order's notion of Jakarta as a central locus of beauty and order in which the rest of the nation is encouraged to find its own reflection. On the contrary, I intend to unveil the complexities of the writers' attitudes and responses to the city, bearing in mind that they do not see themselves as outsiders who can view the city from a disinterested perspective. The second question is about alternative views of Jakarta as offered by these writers: what kind of (re)imagining of the nation results from such different ways of seeing? The answers to these questions will help us assess more carefully the contribution of these post-1998 women writers to the ongoing process of re-imagining the nation since 1998.

***Cala Ibi*: The Capital City as a National Allegory**

Cala Ibi (2003) is Nukila Amal's first novel. Published in the wake of an explosion of literary productions unprecedented in the history of modern Indonesian literature, the novel offers an enigmatic reading that challenges its readers to see the story from the eye of the protagonist whose mythical quest for new meaning in life converges with the personal quest of the author for a 'new language'. The protagonist, Maia, lives in two different worlds, one being the world of dreams and imagination, the other the world of her everyday reality; yet the plot is constructed in such a way that the boundaries of these two worlds become blurred and impossible to demarcate clearly.

In one chapter of the novel entitled, "Kota Kata-Kata" ("A City of Words"), Maia is in her car, trapped in the endless line of a traffic jam that has become part of the daily panorama of

Jakarta. The somber observation of the city that she makes from behind the window of the car deserves serious attention, because it results primarily from an ironic sense of being entrapped within the confines of the car rather than from being stuck in the traffic jam. Between her and the world outside there is only a thin layer of glass, yet this is what separates her small and private safe space inside the car from the dangerous street. The illusion of safety is further reinforced by the coziness of the car's air-conditioned interior. The only factor that prevents Maia from being totally lured by this illusion is the fact that her car is unable to move, stuck in the heavy traffic congestion. This situation does not allow her to be a completely detached spectator who looks at the city from an outsider's point of view.

Despite the sense of safety that the cozy interior of the car seems to offer, Maia somehow feels insecure. This sense of insecurity in regard to the street 'out there' is aesthetically expressed through an interplay between her personification of Jakarta as a disturbing feminine figure and her view of herself as perceived as 'public property', *because of* her gender. Another means of expressing her insecurity is by portraying the street as a metonymy of the city in which fear of public space predominates. Finally, fear is also portrayed as that which constitutes the tension between the protagonist's effort to distance herself from the city in order to come to terms with her fear, and the irresistible pull of the city that tries to suck her deeper into the realm of fear. Through a range of stylistic and thematic strategies, Nukila offers us a representation of Jakarta as an allegory of the nation.

That the city is portrayed as feminine is not a new idea. In *The Sphinx and the City*, Elizabeth Wilson describes how the urban crowd inhabiting nineteenth-century European cities "was increasingly invested with female characteristics", inasmuch as the crowd was viewed as a threat to discipline and order. Further, Wilson points out that while the city was perceived as

“masculine” in terms of its edifices and industrial enterprises, it was also pictured as “feminine” due to its “indeterminacy and labyrinthine uncentredness.”⁷ Nukila’s description of Jakarta adopts some of this century-old view when, at the beginning of “Kota Kata-Kata”, she refers to Jakarta as “an old slut, repeatedly undergoing plastic surgery, fond of fashioning herself with layers of cosmetics, heaps of debt, endlessly digging up and filling up her purse in order to survive”.⁸ Jakarta is personified as a female being, but the resulting image is certainly a degrading one as far as femininity is concerned. Implied in the above description is a notion that an appearance of beauty matters most, and the city is expected first and foremost to be a public spectacle—built and fashioned in order to be seen on a very superficial level. Yet, underneath that skin-deep beauty, the city hides its ugly real face, ridden with heaps of unsolved social problems. It is not exaggerating, then, when Nukila calls the city “a perfect *fata morgana*” (*fatamorgana sempurna*).⁹ The city is there for its inhabitants to gaze at and to allow them to succumb to its alluring, fatal attraction. What is interesting in the description of the city as a prostitute who is already past her prime and desperate to maintain her appearance of beauty, is that in the process the city falls victim to its own phantasmagoric images.

Nukila does not stop short at merely describing Jakarta as an inauthentic and dangerous site of deceitful attractions through a demonic feminine portrayal. She also employs another strategy of representation which allows her to situate women in an urban setting that is hostile to femininity. Addressing the reader by the use of the pronoun *you*, the narrator seems to speak directly to an addressee rather than through the protagonist: “In case you forget what your sex is, take a walk around the city, or get on a public bus, and if your body seems to no longer belong to

⁷ Wilson, *The Sphinx and the City* (1991), p. 7.

⁸ Amal, *Cala Ibi* (2003), p. 36.

⁹ Amal, *ibid.*, p. 36.

you, to be public property, it means you're a woman".¹⁰ It is evident here that the text uses a gendered perspective to critique women's disadvantageous positioning in the metropolis, thus making it clear why the city is necessarily identified with fear. However, the fear experienced by female citizens of the city is not exclusively the result of the criminalization of the crowd or public space, as seems to be the case in Wilson's account of nineteenth-century cities, for in *Cala Ibi* the source of fear has much more to do with women being objects of the public gaze, a kind of 'public property' that has no right to itself. Yet it is also this fear that helps women develop their sense of *difference*, from which it is just a step away to a struggle for a distinct space of their own in a city that tends to victimize women instead of protecting them.

The strategy of bringing together two incompatible images of Jakarta, as both a preying prostitute and a female victim of sexual objectification, results in a blurred demarcation between the notion of the city as a predatory female devourer and that of women as objects victimized or consumed by the city because of their gender. Such a juxtaposition, in effect, serves a dual purpose: to neutralize the damaging potential of stereotyping the city, and potentially to raise the consciousness of the city's women. If Kusno is right to say that the middle class and the urban poor are competing for public space in the city,¹¹ then *Cala Ibi* seems to suggest that, in such a competition for space, women are on the same side as the urban poor as they both share a common experience of marginalization in the city. Yet this marginalization becomes the source of fear in women, whereas the poor urban masses tend to be constantly criminalized in official discourses about Jakarta and seen as a threat.

¹⁰ Ibid.: *Jika kau lupa apa jenis kelaminmu, berjalan-jalanlah keliling kota, atau naiklah bis kota, dan jika tubuhmu seperti bukan milikmu, tapi sebuah properti publik, berarti kau perempuan* (p. 36).

¹¹ Kusno argues that, since the *Reformasi* in 1998, a sense of insecurity and uncertainty has grown amongst the urban middle class as a result of the loss of "discipline and order," which are the two constitutive aspects of the nationalist urbanism ideology (2004:83). He further adds that this new sense of vulnerability leads the middle class to the conclusion that it is not only unsafe for them to be on the streets of Jakarta, but even their homes no longer provide safety (89).

Another strategy used by Nukila is the over-determination of the street as a metonymy of the city. The street is depicted as the most dangerous place in the city, yet once again this sense of danger does not come out from a close encounter with the street, for the protagonist is safely protected inside her car. Instead, a sense of powerlessness inevitably emerges from the fact that the car is stuck in the middle of a traffic jam, and so the sense of danger that Maia feels is an ironic one. The car is emblematic of mobility, an important characteristic that the city strives to identify with, as opposed to the static and unchanging nature of rural areas. In the middle of a traffic jam, this technological embodiment of mobility suddenly becomes paralyzed and its function is ironically reversed. Instead of representing mobility, the car becomes part of a mechanism for instilling fear into the heart of the human subject that is supposed to be in control behind the steering wheel. Trapped in the traffic jam, the car is a sitting duck and appears more like a suffocating cage. It no longer serves as a safe haven for the spectator who initially looks at the city from inside the car and assumes an (illusory) outside observer's point of view: "Only paranoia keeps me alert to whoever and whatever is out here. That helps me to survive the street ritual of traffic jams, like-it-or-not, to forget—like the chaotic web of streets in this city".¹² This description echoes Wilson's theory of women's location in the context of urban space: "The contemporary urban woman is both consumer and consumed. In her automobile she may seem the predator of freeways—she may even become the female private eye. Yet she remains an object of consumption at the same time as she becomes an actor".¹³

It must be kept in mind that, in taking up the street as a metonymy of the city, Nukila is not talking about the street *per se*. The hideous image of the street that she depicts in this chapter

¹² Amal, *ibid.*: *Dan hanya paranoia, yang membuatku bisa tetap waspada terhadap apa dan siapa-siapa di luar sini. Yang membuatku terus bertahan mengikuti ritus kemacetan di jalanan, senang-taksenang, melupa—seperti sengarut jalanan kota ini* (p. 37).

¹³ Wilson (1991), *ibid.*, p. 139.

should be contextualized strictly in the urban setting. It is true that she writes, “The street offers a glimpse of a grave, eats people alive, decomposes them into blood, flesh, messed-up intestines,” and, “One can never be sure if one has only twenty minutes, or two minutes, left to live her life”.¹⁴ The street is not always a predator in the face of which one is entirely powerless, for such a fearful imagining of the streets of Jakarta then brings into the protagonist’s mind the memory of another kind of street: “I recall those nameless streets. There are no heroes, heroic monuments, cars’ exhaust, billboards, traffic signs. There, the streets are nameless, I feel safe, far from all of this”.¹⁵ It is as if suddenly a new light is shed, which allows the protagonist to remember the other kind of street located far away in an imaginary hometown on the remote island of Ternate. Here, the dawn of a consciousness regarding the existence of places in the country other than just Jakarta begins to rise, which views Jakarta in a contrasting perspective to Indonesia’s other more peripheral spaces.

Hellwig argues that, while *Cala Ibi* “scrutinizes female subjectivity and explores female sexuality as an integral part of woman’s identity”, it also “destabilizes the common notion of Indonesia as a nation”, since Maia uses the peripheral perspective of Ternate to look at the centre, represented by the capital city, and thus “undermines the dominant discourse of a Java-centric Indonesia.”¹⁶ Hellwig also draws attention to the fact that the title of the novel itself is not Indonesian but in Ternatean, one of the several hundred ethnic languages spoken in Indonesia and not by any means a major ethnic language in that constellation. The impact of this choice of language, according to her, is significant in the sense that it “decenters the Indonesian language

¹⁴ Amal, *ibid.*: *Jalanan yang memberi ancaman mencelahkan kuburan, memakan orang hidup-hidup, mengurai orang jadi darah daging usus lepas tak rapi... Seseorang tak pernah pasti hidupnya sisa dua puluh menit lagi, atau dua menit* (p. 37).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*: *Aku mengingat jalan-jalan tak bernama. Di sana tak ada pahlawan, monumen perjuangan, asap buangan kendaraan, papan iklan, rambu-rambu peraturan. Di sana, jalan-jalan tak bernama, aku merasa aman, jauh dari semua ini.*

¹⁶ Hellwig, “A Dragon-Shaped Hummingbird” (2007), pp. 131 and 133.

as a symbol of national unity.”¹⁷ It is through such a decentering of the national language and destabilizing of the dominant discourse of national unity as entirely controlled by centralized power in the capital city on Java that one may begin to see the complex and heterogeneous mosaic called Indonesia, including its contradictions and fragmentations.

The street is also portrayed in a metaphoric manner in *Cala Ibi*, in a shift which marks a change in the protagonist’s perception of the street. From within the same interiority of the car, she is not only able to experience fear but also, gradually, to be positively inspired by what she sees outside and around the comfort of the car. Nukila’s novel, despite its rather gloomy standpoint in regard to Jakarta, does not altogether convey a loss of faith in the city’s ability to deliver something good out of the bad, even to its marginalized citizens. This resonates with what Wilson suggests elsewhere, that, in spite of its problems, the city offers more freedom and opportunity than rural life, even to the poor.¹⁸ Nukila writes,

The city buzzes eagerly, warm air, cars become colorful candies made of orange, strawberry, caramel, vanilla, the sky is a rainbow of colors of advertising balloons, the wind dances as flowers shed their leaves, street children laugh showing their young milk teeth and bones. A man crossing the street becomes an angel in disguise. A young man sitting at the bus stop is probably a cyborg coming from the future, to change a life. And the old woman sitting next to him probably comes from the past.¹⁹

This paragraph clearly demonstrates the protagonist’s creative thinking, which allows her to create a safer *symbolic space* for herself and to gain some more positive insights from what

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Wilson, *The Contradictions of Culture* (2001), p. 67.

¹⁹ Amal, *ibid.*: Kota mendengung giat, udara hangat, mobil-mobil tampak seperti permen warna-warni jeruk stroberi caramel vanilla, langit berbalon iklan rupa-rupa warnanya, angin menarik bunga menggugurkan daun, anak-anak jalanan tertawa bergigi susu bertulang rawan. Seorang bapak menyeberang tampak seperti malaikat turun menyamar. Lelaki muda yang duduk di halte bis mungkin seorang cyborg yang datang dari masa depan, hendak mengubah sebuah kehidupan. Dan perempuan tua yang duduk di sebelahnya mungkin datang dari masa lalu (p. 38).

initially appears to be a disadvantaged situation. At this point, the street is transformed into a rich source of imaginative inspiration, once she is willing to commit herself to the city by adopting a participatory stance instead of remaining a passive spectator. In other words, once the psychological barrier that separates the interior (the car) and the exterior (the street) collapses, the city begins to reveal its advantages. The above quotation further suggests that, as the psychological barrier that bars the female subject from the city crumbles, social division between the protagonist as a member of the middle class and the street children as part of the underclass is also loosening up.²⁰ The protagonist and everybody outside the car, those who are on the street—regardless of their class or gender—seem to be reconnected in this imaginary solidarity that reinscribes the idea of the nation as an imagined community.

The view expressed in the above quotation can be seen to contain a subjective positioning of the protagonist in terms of her relation with the city, as well as her attempt to come to terms with her fear of the city, to wrestle the city away from the dominant urban discourse that is responsible for creating the social divisions from which fear originates, and to turn the city into a liberating, rather than marginalizing, force.²¹ From another angle, though, one can also sense that the protagonist is simultaneously being interpellated by the city, as her fear is eventually conquered by her fascination with the sensuous attractions that the city has to offer and this shift, in turn, helps develop her creative imagination. Wilson suggests that women's experience with the city is more ambivalent than that of men. While safety remains a paramount issue, women

²⁰ See also Kusno, *Behind the Postcolonial* (2000), for a discussion of how the New Order regime purposefully maintained the divide between the middle class and the underclass by creating a mutual distrust between them, which is manifested in making the street a space of fear for the middle class.

²¹ As the opposition between the interior and the exterior gradually dissolves, the protagonist no longer feels that she is a detached observer of the city, and her sense of being in a participatory relationship with the city begins to take shape. At this point, Wilson's argument that, due to their socialization, women tend to be less governed by the logic of "duality and opposition" seems to find its echo in the fluidity of the protagonist's perspectives on the street. Wilson argues that, "instead of setting nature against the city, [women] find nature in the city" (1991:8). The metaphoric description of the city that the female protagonist of the novel uses to foreground the human subjects who bring life to the street serves as an exemplary illustration of Wilson's idea.

are also aware of the pleasures that city life offers as opposed to the monotony of rural life. Therefore, the city is often regarded as a potential site of women's emancipation or, to borrow Wilson's words, as a "zone of individual freedom".²² The colorful images of the city and its streets are further reinforced as Nukila continues, "The street is never gone and always there, waiting faithfully for humans. Also kind enough to feed lost children at its intersections, showing compassion to women beggars carrying babies at their breasts."²³

Nukila Amal's position vis-à-vis Jakarta in *Cala Ibi* is certainly ambivalent. That she refuses to be entirely taken by the sensuous yet superficial charms of the capital city is evident in another chapter, "Bacalah Iklan" ("Read the Ads"). Here, the critical consciousness that is facilitated by the protagonist's confrontation with the ugly side of the street and the comparison of the street in Jakarta to those in Ternate reappears. Moreover, the problematic relationship between the capital city as a representation of the nation and the nation it is supposed to represent is brought to the surface.

In this chapter, Maia is again stuck in traffic that barely moves. It is getting dark, and Jakarta begins to bathe itself in lights. Maia is consciously fighting against the overwhelming temptation to immerse herself in the false promises emanating from the glittering advertising billboards along the street. At such a critical moment, she contemplates, "Could it be, I stare in astonishment, that it's such fascination that my relatives were experiencing on their visit to this place from the remote eastern islands... Close-but-distant relatives, coming from a small district town, whose jaws dropped upon seeing Jakarta". She goes on, "When will our village be like this—a dream, even electricity doesn't exist... They just wanted it to be like here in Java. It

²² Wilson (1991), *ibid.*, pp. 10 and 16. See also Wilson (2001) for a comparison between the city and the country in terms of the promises that the city offers to migrants and the eroticization of the urban space.

²³ Amal, *ibid.*: *Jalanan tak pernah pergi dan selalu ada, setia menunggu manusia-manusia. Juga berbaik hati memberi makan anak-anak hilang di perempatan, membagi belas kasihan untuk perempuan pengemis dan bayi dalam gendongan* (p. 38).

doesn't have to be as bright as Jakarta.”²⁴ There is a poignant awareness that Jakarta does not, by any means, represent the nation, as the nationalist urbanism ideology wishes to inculcate. There is a huge gap between Jakarta as the ‘national’ city on Java and the other parts of the country that lie in the remote outer islands. Further complication is brought to this existing gap by the sense of ‘unbelongingness’ that Maia experiences as the physical and social distance between her and her “relatives” in Ternate is accentuated. She wants to identify with those who are located at the periphery of the nation, yet she cannot escape from Jakarta, even though she never really belongs to the city.

If Jakarta is to be read as an allegory of the nation, this can only be understood in ironic terms, that is, through the social division that exists between the middle class in their jammed cars and the urban poor begging on the street, as well as the separation between what is going on in the interiority of the car and in the exteriority of the street. It is a division that seems to be unbridgeable, even though the protagonist tries to create a ‘symbolic’ bridge to connect the two. Such an attempt eventually proves to be somehow illusory, and the protagonist ultimately has to accept the fact that what the city signifies is the dark side of the nation, that life over there “on the corners of Maluku” (*di huk-huk Maluku*), replicates and multiplies social divisions on a greater and far more violent scale. Nukila suggests this through her vague reference to the religious and political conflict in North Maluku: “...where are they? The relatives I know, I never know, have no time to know...the vestiges of those fights, where are they now? So far away over there, at the periphery. Far from the centre. While I am right at the centre; the heart of

²⁴ Ibid.: *Mungkinkah, aku menatap dengan takjub, mungkin kesima seperti ini yang dirasa para saudaraku yang datang melancong ke mari dari pulau-pulau timur nun jauh itu... Para kerabat jauh-dekat, datang dari kota kecil kabupaten kecamatan hingga pedalaman, ternganga-nganga saat melihat kota Jakarta... Tempo apa kitorang pe kampung bisa model ini—jang mimpi, listrik saja tara ada... Mereka cuma ingin seperti di Jawa sini. Tara usahlah semeriah Jakarta* (p. 147).

Jakarta, the heart of Java, the heart of Indonesia”.²⁵ In her somewhat gloomy reflection, she realizes how insurmountable this division is, and experiences a deeper sense of being uprooted from her land of origin which she never sees, Ternate. This cannot be simply solved or consoled by the mere fact that she lives in Jakarta, “the heart of Indonesia” (*jantung negeri Indonesia*), or the heart of the nation. As Marco Kusumawijaya suggests, the city is the “locus of modernization”, and as such, it is our “final destination” (*tujuan terakhir*).²⁶ Maia cannot escape from Jakarta, but even if she could manage to reunite with her folks in far-away Ternate, there is no guarantee that she would be able to survive being at the periphery.

Don't Fool Around (with Your Genitals): Morality Politics and the City

Jangan Main-Main (dengan Kelaminmu) (2004) is Djenar Maesa Ayu's second work, coming after her successful debut with *Mereka Bilang Saya Monyet (They Say I'm a Monkey)*, (2003). Both collections of short stories have provoked controversy due to the explicit take on sexuality that they exploit. Critiques and commentaries produced by various critics and scholars mostly deal with this specific theme.²⁷ In this analysis, I want to draw attention to some other aspects of the work that do not directly relate to Djenar's treatment of sexuality but are relevant to my discussion of urbanism.

In “Staccato”, what may strike readers above all is the repetitive, almost formulaic use of words and phrases that recur throughout the story and serve as icons that point to hedonism and

²⁵ Ibid.: ...di mana mereka. Saudara-saudara yang telah kukenal, yang tak pernah kukenal, yang tak sempat. Mereka, yang bertebaran di huk-huk Maluku, reruntuhan baku hantam itu, di mana mereka kini. Begitu jauh di sana, di tepi-tepi. Jauh dari pusat ini. Sedang aku berada tepat di pusat: jantung kota Jakarta, jantung Pulau Jawa, jantung negeri Indonesia (p. 147-8).

²⁶ Kusumawijaya, “Seni (dan Sastra) dalam Perkembangan Kota” (2008), p. 70.

²⁷ See, for instance, Paramaditha, “Seksualitas Remaja” (2004), pp. 133-50, and Loekito, “Perempuan dan Sastra Seksual” (2003), pp. 130-56.

decadence. Expressions such as “cigarettes,” “whiskey,” “ecstasy,” “lust,” “mini skirt”, “genitals,” and “penis” are scattered throughout the text at high frequency. For instance:

*How come? Nighttime. Cigarettes. Whiskey. Ecstasy. Men. Lust. Where? Discotheque, of course! With house music! Nighttime. Discotheque. House music. Cigarettes. Whiskey. Ecstasy. Men. Lust. How can you see those men? The discotheque is so goddamned dark?! Bah! Nighttime. Karaoke. House music. Cigarettes. Whiskey. Ecstasy. Men. Lust. Can you take ecstasy with whiskey? That’s why it’s called a party. Nighttime. Party. Karaoke. House music. Cigarettes. Whiskey. Ecstasy. Men. Lust. So what are you gonna do with lust?*²⁸

In what at first seems to be a highly eroticized narrative of a night in the life of a nameless, female protagonist who is obsessed with sex, readers can also situate this scene in her story, and see that this is actually a woman deprived of sexual pleasure from her own husband. Her hedonistic lifestyle and highly promiscuous sex life are a means of escape from a reality bereft of any compassion or genuine human relationship. The everyday world of the protagonist circulates around sites such as the shopping mall, discotheque, spa, beauty salon, and café, all primarily associated with urban, sensuous pleasures.

The conflict she faces is aptly reflected in the repetitive structure of the plot, which is fast-paced, very intense and highly charged with energy, as the title of the story “Staccato” suggests. Yet at the same time readers cannot help but feel the monotony resulting from the narrative structure and a sense of impotence on the part of the protagonist. She is restless, seemingly immersing herself fully in the materialistic lifestyle of the city, yet deeply aware of

²⁸ Ayu, *Jangan Main-Main* (2004): Kok bisa? Malam hari. Rokok. Whiskey. Ecstasy. Laki-laki. Birahi. Di mana? Diskotik, dong! Yang ada house music! Malam hari. Diskotik. House music. Rokok. Whiskey. Laki-laki. Birahi. Memang bisa lihat laki-laki? Diskotik gelap begitu? Huh! Malam hari. Karaoke. House music. Rokok. Whiskey. Ecstasy. Laki-laki. Birahi. Bisa apa minum ecstasy pakai whiskey? Namanya juga party. Malam hari. Party. Karaoke. House music. Rokok. Whiskey. Ecstasy. Laki-laki. Birahi. Lantas kalo birahi diapain? (p. 64)

the emptiness and failure of her personal life that she tries hard to deny. As her domestic life crumbles, the banality of the city becomes her only consolation, and in the process she herself becomes a public *persona* hollow on the inside. Michael Bodden suggests that such cosmopolitan banalism “colludes with, collides with, or exposes the hypocrisy of middle-class life and normative discourses of social behavior and morality.”²⁹ The city in Djenar’s story offers itself to be consumed, but actually it is the protagonist who is being ‘consumed’ by the city. At the end of the story, the protagonist expresses her loneliness and emptiness—the feelings that the structure of the plot has tried to suppress since the very beginning: “I am alone. At home without a husband” (*Saya sendiri. Di rumah tanpa suami.*).³⁰ It is the vicious cycle of decadence resulting from a sense of lack or loss, as well as the destructive impact that it has on the human subject, which “Staccato” sets out to portray. Thus, while it may be true that the city “offers untrammelled sexual experience” and anything that is forbidden is made possible, as Wilson suggests,³¹ promiscuous sexual experience and insatiable thirst for the forbidden are, for Djenar’s protagonist, just means of escaping reality, rather than ends in themselves. The city is where people live together, as Marco Kusumawijaya points out, yet it is also where the ‘biggest threat of growing apart’ lies, and this threat is part and parcel of the very essence of the city itself: its “diversity in density” (*keragaman dalam kepadatan*), which some of the citizens find “inspiring”, while others find it “vexing.”³²

The second story, “Morals” can be read as the author’s response to the scathing moralistic critiques that she has had to endure because of what is narrowly perceived by some as loose moral values in her work. In this particular story, her attack on the hypocrisy that is

²⁹ Bodden, “Shattered Families” (2007b), 96.

³⁰ Ayu, *ibid.*, p. 72.

³¹ Wilson (1991), *ibid.*, p. 6.

³² Kusumawijaya, *ibid.*, p. 71.

demonstrated by the reading public is expressed through a grossly exaggerated portrayal of a moral crisis that suggests an alternative reading of the work as social caricature and criticism. The story opens with a depiction of the protagonist shopping in a mall, facing the dilemma of making up her mind whether to buy a very expensive mini-skirt for a party that she plans to attend in the evening, or to buy morals for an unbelievably much lower price: “Yesterday I saw morals on display in the shopping mall. The price was one thousand rupiah. But as I was more interested in a leather mini-skirt offered at one million, nine hundred, ninety eight thousand, eight hundred rupiah, I finally decided to postpone buying morals”.³³ The protagonist’s preference for purchasing the mini skirt demonstrates two points. First, there is a crisis of morality going on, which is indicated by how low the price of morals is. Second, the protagonist does not try to hide the fact that, for her, the mini skirt is much more valuable than morals, thus showing that she is not a hypocrite.

However, when she and her friend arrive at the party, they are shocked to find that everybody is wearing morals, and they seem to be the only ones wearing mini-skirts:

As we arrive at the top of the stairs, we are shocked to see what’s before our eyes. All of the guests in the ballroom are wearing morals. Some wear them as head-dress, some others wear them on their breasts as brooches. Still others wear them in their cufflinks. Some even wear them on their entire body as ornaments. We look at each other, neither of us is wearing morals. Imagine how disappointed I am for not buying morals yesterday

³³ Ayu, *ibid.*: *Kemarin saya melihat moral di etalase sebuah toko, harganya seribu rupiah. Tapi karena saya tertarik dengan rok kulit mini seharga satu juta sembilan ratus sembilan puluh delapan ribu delapan ratus rupiah, akhirnya saya memutuskan untuk menunda membeli moral* (p. 25).

or this morning. Even worse, my friend whispers to me, “Morals were on sale today at the parliament building, three for only five thousand rupiah.”³⁴

Her friend’s words reveal the message that the story conveys. The moral crisis at its worst takes place, not in the shopping mall, but in the building where people’s representatives from all the provinces in the country convene. There, morals are severely devalued, and, ironically, this is happening exactly when everywhere people seem to be very much obsessed with morals, as demonstrated by the guests at the party. The transformation of the legislative body into a busybody that watches over citizens’ moral behavior is the primary cause of the crash of moral values in the country.

To understand the story better, one needs to know how the public has responded to Djenar’s work so far. She has been accused of promoting cheap pornography through explicit sexual scenes and vocabulary in many of her works. In ‘Morals,’ it is as if the protagonist speaks back for the author, lambasting her opponents, whom she deems to be hypocrites. Djenar has expressed her discontent about the double standards that critics use to judge her work. According to her, male writers are never judged by the sexual themes that they exploit, no matter how vulgar their language. In contrast, woman writers like Djenar are quickly and harshly condemned on a moral basis, whenever they try to be frank and explicit about the female body and sexuality.³⁵ This reinforces Wilson’s argument that women’s presence in the urban context is

³⁴ *Ibid.*: *Namun setibanya kami di mulut tangga, begitu terhenyaknya kami melihat pemandangan yang ada. Semua tamu di ruangan itu memakai moral. Ada yang dipasang sebagai hiasan kepala. Ada yang memakai sebagai penghias dada. Ada yang memakai sebagai manset. Bahkan ada yang menghiasi seluruh bajunya. Kami saling berpandang-pandangan, tidak ada dari kami yang memakai moral. Betapa kecewanya saya yang tidak jadi membeli moral kemarin hingga pagi tadi. Apalagi ketika pasangan saya berbisik, “Moral diobral lima ribu tiga di gedung DPR hari ini (pp. 32-33).*

³⁵ See Gita Widya Laksmi’s interview with Djenar Maesa Ayu in *Prosa*, No. 4 (2004), pp. 190-96. See also Budiman, “Ketika Perempuan Menulis” (2005), p. 29.

often seen as symbolizing “the promise of sexual adventure”, which is immediately “converted into a general moral and political threat.”³⁶

The parliament building becomes the primary target of Djenar’s criticism because this is where lawmakers from various political parties have busied themselves with trying to regulate the morality of the citizens. In her view, they never stop talking about morals and judge everything by ‘moral standards’, but this is just another political game whose real objective is to advance their own political agenda and gain more power. It is the politicizing of morality, rather than a lack of morality, that is deemed responsible by Djenar for the current moral crisis. Djenar’s quarrel with the politicization of morality and its damaging impact on urban women’s writing in contemporary Indonesian literature seems to point to the situation in the post-1998 period regarding urbanism and the politics of morality, as Kusno writes: “The city has been liberated from the imposed uniformity of the national framework, but other politics of morality have been emerging”.³⁷ The veracity of both Djenar’s and Kusno’s concerns over the growing politicization of morality that takes the urban space as its site of contestation³⁸ is confirmed by the heated debate that recently took place between opposing camps on the Anti-Pornography and Porno-action Bill. In subsequent demonstrations staged by both camps, they have fiercely articulated their views on the proposed bill.

What is interesting is that Djenar voices her critique of society’s hypocrisy through a caricatural representation, which exaggerates the events in the story, thus adding more power to the irony. There is no bitterness in her tone, and she conveys her message frankly but also light-heartedly. The city plays a significant role in the story because Djenar juxtaposes two kinds of

³⁶ Wilson (1991), *ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁷ Kusno (2004), *ibid.*, p. 91

³⁸ The Bill was finally ratified by the parliament on October 30, 2008, despite widespread opposition. Four provinces where non-Muslims predominate in the population (Bali, Papua, Nusa Tenggara Timur, and Sulawesi Utara) immediately responded by refusing to implement the new law.

urban edifices, the shopping mall and the parliament building, in order to take issue with the moral crisis that the nation is facing. The former is often associated with banality and consumerism, two aspects of urban life style that serve as easy targets for moralistic criticism, while the latter is associated with legislation and is assumed to be the guardian of the nation's moral values. If the moral crisis is considered to be a national issue rather than just a specific issue related to urbanism, then this short story seems to impart the message that all the nation's problems begin in the capital city. Through irony and caricatural representation, Djenar deflects the trajectory of moral attack from its initial target, urban lifestyle, to a more appropriate target: the national institution that sees itself as the moral police of the nation.

Another story, "Ting!", is written in a more serious tone. Irony is still strongly present, as in almost all of Djenar's short stories, but it is conveyed in a more subtle way. The story takes place in an elevator, and the title, *ting*, is an onomatopoeia for the sound that the elevator produces every time the door opens. The young female protagonist is on her way down in the elevator, apparently located in a high-rise hotel in the city. The plot lures the reader to draw a conclusion that the protagonist is some kind of a high-class sex trade worker who is used to seeing clients in this place. At least, this is how other people who enter the elevator judge her, but nothing explicit is provided by the text to confirm this. As a result of the narrative technique used, readers are tempted to identify themselves with the people in the elevator rather than with the protagonist, and therefore judge her from a moralistic perspective: "God knows how many people she has been with in this elevator. People look at her with scrutinizing eyes, suspicious, and insulting."³⁹ The only person who does not cast moral judgment on her is her small child, who waits for her in another room in the hotel where they are going to meet. The thought of her

³⁹ Ayu, *ibid.*: *Entah sudah berapa orang bersamanya dalam satu elevator. Orang-orang dengan pandangan menyelidik, curiga, dan menghina* (p. 86).

child helps the protagonist endure the seemingly everlasting and tortuous ‘journey’ in the elevator. The voice that calls her “Mama” when she eventually reaches her destination and the door is opened is the only haven that provides her with a sense of safety and comfort, as well as human connectedness.

This short story vividly portrays the fear and discomfort that the protagonist has to endure in the small space of the elevator. The elevator, a product of technology that is intended to support mobility, just like the car in *Cala Ibi*, becomes the setting of “Ting!”. The four walls that surround the space inside the elevator fail to provide the protagonist with security and protect her from fear. However, the source of fear in Djenar’s story does not originate from the elevator proper. It is the way in which people use the space in the elevator as a public space that poses a threat to the protagonist and creates fear in her, for the protagonist feels quite safe when she is *alone* in the elevator. The elevator begins to feel suffocating precisely when there are other people with their scrutinizing eyes inside: “She doesn’t want to think, not even to feel. There’s no room for her to think or feel, especially at times when she’s in the elevator with some other strangers. Because if she allows herself to feel, she would surely have run out of the elevator by now.”⁴⁰ Iris Marion Young discusses the notion of the “unoppressive city” in her essay on the ideal sense of community, and states that one characteristic of such a kind of city is the “anonymity” of its citizens. Even though individuals live side by side and interact in public places, they basically remain strangers to one another and mind their own business; this is why the city potentially is an ideal place where difference is respected.⁴¹ Yet Jakarta, as depicted in this short story, does not offer “liberatory possibilities” due to the attitude of anonymity

⁴⁰ Ibid.: *Ia memang tak mau berpikir, bahkan ia tak ingin merasa. Tak ada ruang baginya untuk berpikir dan merasa, terlebih-lebih di saat-saat dalam elevator bersama orang lain yang tak dikenal. Sebab jika perasaannya dibiarkan, pastilah ia sudah lari keluar dari elevator sekarang* (pp. 87-88).

⁴¹ See Young, “The Ideal of Community” (1990), pp. 317-19.

displayed by its citizens. On the contrary, the citizens of the capital city are portrayed as ‘busy-bodies’ who always want to know what the others are doing, and this is where the oppressive atmosphere in the elevator originates.

The irony of the story lies in the fact that fear emerges in the protagonist’s psyche due to the presence of other people in the elevator, a presence which provokes paranoia rather than a sense of safety. Even the presence of the hotel’s security personnel in the elevator makes matters worse for her, because they not only look at her with suspicion but also look down on her. Like the protagonist in “Staccato”, the protagonist in “Ting!” is a lonely character who has to deal with the problems of life on her own and cannot expect any understanding from others. The difference is that the protagonist in “Ting!” does not have to immerse herself in the banality of the glimmering urban nightlife to escape from her harsh reality. The elevator brings her to a poignant realization that she is alone and has nowhere to feel safe or appreciated, she can only allow her life to be steered by the ups and downs of the elevator that has become all too familiar to her by now.

Conclusion

Both Nukila Amal and Djenar Maesa Ayu cast a critical eye on the capital city and question its ability to represent the nation adequately and positively. The various ways in which the urban space is represented in the work of both authors demonstrate a belief that the city, like the nation, has failed to deliver on its promises. However, their views of the city are not unproblematic. Nukila’s attitude and response carry a considerable degree of ambivalence. On the one hand, she can clearly see the complexities of the social problems that haunt the city and prevent it from delivering on its promises. On the other hand, there is also a painful realization

that, being a citizen of the city who enjoys all the privileges of such a status, she is part of the problem rather than the solution. Nukila's protagonist is a *problematic hero* who is not blind to the social diseases from which her society is suffering, yet she is not in a position to solve the problems because she herself is part of them.

Djenar Maesa Ayu's protagonists have a more or less similar awareness of the problems that their city is facing and how these problems have impacted their lives as citizens of the city, but the way these protagonists deal with their dilemmas is different from that taken by Nukila's protagonist. In Djenar's stories, the women choose to adopt a playful and ironic attitude by whole-heartedly celebrating the banality of life and willingly consuming all the pleasures that the city shoves in their faces. For them, this is the most viable way to come to terms with the destructive forces of the city that are beyond their power to resist. They make use of everything the city has to offer, but at the same time, they also make fun of it. This strategy helps them to deal with a sense of powerlessness, while also serving as a reminder that whatever constraints they have to face as citizens of a failing city, they always have the power to make limited choices within the confines of the city's dehumanizing forces. Marco Kusumawijaya states that urban citizens are people whose "bodies and souls are broken into pieces pummeled by changes that occur in the city", and in such circumstances, there are only two options available, "to escape the city or to enjoy it. To curse it is not an option."⁴² The women in Djenar's stories do not loathe the city or try to escape from it. In fact, they allow themselves to be bent by its pressures, but they refuse to break down. They develop an ironic awareness of the dehumanizing forces and try to keep their sanity intact.

Both writers make a connection between the city and the nation. The socially divided city, in Nukila's view, is symptomatic of the divided nation. Being compartmentalized in her car,

⁴² Kusumawijaya, *ibid.*, pp. 67 and 69.

separated from others in other cars or on the street in the long line of traffic in which “nothing is moving anywhere,” Nukila’s protagonist comes to a realization of how fragmented the nation is, a sense which becomes even more acute as her imagination wanders to far-away places at the periphery of the country, to fellow citizens who are not as ‘fortunate’ as she is to be at the heart of the nation with all of the privileges that come with it. Those “distant-close relatives” living on remote islands are just like “the lost children” on the street of Jakarta: both are ‘orphaned’ by the failure of the state/the city to care for them and nurture them.

In Djenar’s work, the people’s faith in the nation is collapsing, as is the faith of the citizens in their own city, even if they are still willing to be participants in the imagining process that enables the nation and the city to maintain their unifying images. However, the protagonists decide how they will participate, and it is in this respect that they manage to preserve whatever is left of their waning sense of agency. This is why irony becomes a dominant device in Djenar’s works, for the citizens choose to adopt an ironic position in coming to terms with their situations. Their participation, in short, is not unconditional.

In reality, the city remains a powerful frame of reference for the ruling elite in defining the nation, as it provides a kind of window for them to see a larger world outside the boundaries of the city itself. Yet it also serves as a wall that does not allow the ruling elite to connect with those living outside those boundaries. Locating themselves in the city and being part of the modernizing elite, post-Suharto women writers like Nukila and Djenar are alienated from the rest of the nation, especially those who inhabit the peripheral spaces outside the city limits. This alienation sharpens their awareness of the huge gap that exists between them and the masses rather than desensitizing them, but at the same time there is a sense of powerlessness—of not being able to do anything concrete to overcome the gap and reach out—as they themselves are

shaped and defined by the city. The two writers discussed in this chapter have their own ways of coming to terms with such a shortcoming. Nukila brings images of Ternate to Jakarta, juxtaposes them with images of the city and demonstrates the inadequacy of the capital city as a representation of the nation. Djenar shows how resistance can even be launched through what on the surface seems to be a total surrender to the dehumanizing effect of the city.

Chapter 3

Voices from the Corners of the Archipelago

Introduction

The notion of ‘homeland’ in Indonesia is expressed by the term *tanah air*, which literally means ‘land and water’. During the New Order era, the meaning of the term underwent a shift towards the land dimension, and in the process, attention to the maritime element depreciated. Yet, in strategic terms the Indonesian navy was one of the most powerful forces in Asia during the Sukarno era, as he was aware that the archipelago could best be defended by a formidable maritime power. When Suharto took power in 1966, the navy and air force were accused of sympathizing with the communists, and as a result both were curtailed. The army has dominated the country’s defense forces ever since. The army was instrumental in crushing the Communists in the tumultuous period between 1965 and 1966 under Suharto’s command as the commander-in-chief of an elite force, KOSTRAD.¹ Jakarta and Java became further solidified as the centre of the country, while the other islands played a peripheral role in the New Order’s imagining of the nation. Economic growth was most visible on Java, and major trading and economic activities mostly took place on this island. Many high-ranking army officers were directly involved in commerce and development projects, as the business sector needed their protection and patronage.

A similar development occurred in the field of cultural production, as Jakarta became the mecca of Indonesia’s literary and artistic circles. Authors had to reside in Jakarta in order to gain

¹ As the person in charge of the army’s strategic reserve corps (KOSTRAD), General Suharto forced Sukarno to sign a letter that gave him a mandate to restore stability and security following the killing of seven army officers, presumably by elements of the Indonesian Communist Party and the Presidential Palace Guard. In reality, the mandate gave Suharto full authority to take any steps necessary to end the chaos, and it was eventually used to place President Sukarno under house arrest and finally oust him from office.

access to leading publishers and media and establish themselves as part of the ‘national’ literary elite. Seen from outside Jakarta, the capital city looked like an “impenetrable bastion”, and regardless of how hard a non-Jakarta writer tried to gain acceptance, the effort would be in vain.² One East Java-based writer, Kuspriyanto Namma, attacked the literary establishment of Jakarta: “Arrogant! That’s what I call it. Jakarta, the national elite, and the press are very arrogant. They don’t show any appreciation at all of the work of regional writers, who keep up a thundering roar of activity”.³ In reality, cultural activities outside Jakarta increased significantly in quantity, and many new “literary pockets” (*kantung-kantung sastra*) developed in small towns and cities on Java away from the capital, but they were rarely given space in Jakarta-based national media. A movement called *gerakan sastra pedalaman* (hinterland literary movement) emerged in the early 1990s and tried to distance its productions from the literary tenets of Jakarta. Similar activities also happened on the islands of Sumatra and Bali.⁴ While each region developed a different format and strategy in expressing its distinct aesthetics, what united them across their unique literary experimentations was a shared discontent towards the Jakarta cultural elite. This oppositional standpoint, however, was rebuked by one Jakarta-based literary critic, Nirwan Dewanto, who pointed out that in positioning the nation’s capital as a ‘centre’ and deploying their entire energy to attack it, the movement ironically further reinforced the ‘myth’ of Jakarta as a dominant power.⁵

Gerakan sastra pedalaman is not the only anti-establishment literary movement that emerged as a response to what was perceived as Jakarta’s domination. Another movement

² See Derks, “Sastra Pedalaman” (2002). Derks describes how the Jakarta cultural elite controlled the media and abused them for their own purposes in order to block every effort made by non-Jakarta writers and artists to publish their works. Corruption and collusion also marred literary and publication practices in Jakarta.

³ Kuspriyanto Namma, quoted in Derks, *ibid.*, p. 325.

⁴ Derks, *ibid.*: Derks argues that one cannot have a good grasp of Indonesian literature without taking into consideration all of the vibrant literary activities that have been mushrooming in many parts of the archipelago.

⁵ See Dewanto, “Tentang Sastra Pedalaman Itu” (1994).

appeared that based itself on the notion of the archipelago as a maritime entity, particularly in the Riau islands off the eastern coast of Sumatra, in Kalimantan and Sulawesi. The works produced by authors who belong to this movement intentionally foreground various distinct elements of the local cultures, and in many instances they received much support from local governments.⁶ The movement is often referred to as *sastra kepulauan* (archipelagic literature), as it restores the importance of the maritime element. Some proponents of *sastra kepulauan* point to the Dutch colonial era as the culprit for the marginalizing of that aspect, which continues to take place in the postcolonial era. Muhammad Yamin argues that the Dutch succeeded in making the continental perspective prevail over its maritime counterpart in the mindset of the indigenous people. The over-emphasis given to agriculture by colonial policy contributed significantly to the process.⁷ Moreover, as Batavia—the former name of Jakarta during the Dutch colonial era—officially became the main trading-port and administrative center of the Dutch East Indies, Java too became the key island where economic growth was primarily to take place. The result was the death of many traditional port-cities along the coasts of the archipelago by the end of the seventeenth century, which had hitherto enjoyed an important status in regional commerce.

In this chapter I will examine works by women writers who were never considered as part of the literary movements that came into being during the New Order era. Hanna Rambe is seldom mentioned or discussed in the alternative *sastra pedalaman* or *sastra kepulauan* discourses, despite the fact that she consistently expresses her concern for small, outer islands and has shown her commitment to issues that directly deal with maritime aspects and the

⁶ See Kusni, “Sastra-Seni Kepulauan dan Daerah” (2003).

⁷ Yamin, “Bukan Tanah Kepungan” (2009). Yamin writes that even as early as 1677, most Javanese living in the eastern part of the island of Java had already lost their knowledge of the sea, and they no longer had the big ships needed to conduct their trade—a trend which continues today as 95 per cent of the shipping industry in Indonesia is owned by foreign shipping companies, and 80 per cent of the trawlers involved in fishing activities in the archipelago are in the hands of foreign investors.

archipelago. None of those movements considers her one of them, and she remains a solitary female voice with no place in the debate over *sastra pedalaman* and *sastra kepulauan*. However, in *Pertarungan* (*The Fight*, 2002), readers can clearly distinguish Hanna's feminine perspective on the *tanah air* notion and her commitment to raising her readers' awareness of the need to understand the archipelago from marginal vantage points distanced from Jakarta or Java. Two other writers, Linda Christanty, who published the short story "Lelaki Beraroma Kebun" (*The Man with the Scent of a Garden*, 2004) and Nukila Amal, the author of "Laluba" ("Dolphin", 2005) mostly write from Jakarta, yet their works undoubtedly contain serious explorations of the maritime and archipelagic dimensions of Indonesia that are not deeply contaminated by Jakarta-oriented viewpoints. These three authors affirm that other tactics of dealing with the issues of *pedalaman* and *kepulauan* exist, as well as other kinds of engagement, rather than being part of a movement or involved in a rigid binarism in literary politics of the center versus the periphery.

***Pertarungan*: A Eulogy for 'Mother Nature'**

Pertarungan was written in 1995 and published in the Jakarta-based daily, *Suara Pembaruan*, as a serial novel. Hanna subsequently revised the novel, but she could not find a publisher until 2002, when a Magelang publisher, Indonesiatera, salvaged the novel from oblivion. Her short biography at the end of the novel asserts that the lack of interest among publishers had to do with the "absence of sex, violence, blood, and intrigues" in the novel.⁸ Hanna (born in 1942) is the oldest of the three authors examined in this chapter, and she does not categorically belong to the post-1998 generation as she began her career long before the *Reformasi*. However, I will argue that she gains new importance in this particular period in contemporary Indonesian literature because she is the only woman writer who shows genuine

⁸ See "Tentang Penulis", in Hanna Rambe, *Pertarungan* (2002), pp. 233-34.

concern about nature and the environment, and has continuously written about the archipelago in her works during and after the New Order period. That Indonesiatera, currently a major literary publishing house, decided to publish the book a few years after the New Order lost power is an indication that the novel is deemed to have considerable relevance to Indonesia's present-day issues, including growing awareness of the importance of preserving the environment and revitalizing indigenous knowledge as part of problem-solving efforts. One established author, Gerson Poyk, rightly argues in support of the novel, that *Pertarungan* tells a story of the battle between the "forces of love for life" on the one hand and of "love for death and destruction" on the other.⁹

The story is set on a fictional island called Sente, presumably located off the South Sumatran coast. The place names in the story sound familiar and are similar to typical Lampung places, in the southern part of Sumatra. The novel was allegedly inspired by news about elephant migration in Lampung Province.¹⁰ Situating the story on an imaginary island much smaller than Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan or Sulawesi—the four major islands in Indonesia—is a strategic move, as it serves to draw attention to the fact that the archipelago consists of thousands of small islands. Another aspect that encourages readers to establish an immediate association between Sente and Lampung is the problem of elephant attacks, which is a recurring phenomenon in that particular region. Elephant attacks on transmigrants' villages on the island function as the entry point to the plot, as well as an element that binds the other major events together.¹¹ The novel

⁹ Poyk, in "Pre-Scriptum", *Pertarungan*, pp. xi-xii.

¹⁰ Rambe, *ibid.*, p. 232. In 1982, the government deployed four hundred soldiers, helped by local villagers, to move more than two hundred elephants from their old habitat, which was turned into farmland and transmigration areas, to a new habitat that was still heavily forested. The seventy-kilometer march took forty-four days to complete.

¹¹ The *transmigration* program, which moved people from heavily populated islands such as Java, Madura, and Bali to other islands, was an implementation of the New Order's unitary ideology as it believed that transmigration would help promote the sense of unity amongst various ethnic groups that coexisted in transmigration areas. However, it might also be a strategy for neutralizing the threat of separatism in the outer islands. From the beginning of the New Order until 2006, there were more than 3,000 transmigrant settlements across Indonesia. Transmigrants

presents the elephants' destructive behavior as a result of their habitat getting smaller because of human greed, such as forest clearing for new settlements, logging, and elephant hunting, in addition to food shortage and drought. The story addresses issues related to ecology and, in the context of my study, offers an insight into 'ecofeminism', which tries to approach environmental problems using feminist perspectives. The other inhabitants of Sente are the native Cici tribe, an indigenous community who, like the elephants, are being pushed inland by constant waves of settlers who arrive at Sente from different regions of the country. To make matters worse, Sente has been an arena where conflicting interests collide with one another. The central government is supposed to protect the environment, yet in reality it takes an active part in the destruction through poorly-planned transmigration programs; the number of settlers keeps growing, and they have to clear more virgin forests; seasonal hunters kill elephants for their tusks; the logging industry enjoys full governmental back-up in exploiting the natural resources; and the indigenous people, along with the wildlife, struggle to survive amidst the slow but inevitable destruction of their habitats.

Last but not least, foreign scholars and researchers visit the island and are mainly interested in studying the environment, yet they cannot do much to save it from destruction. The image of Sente, broken down into smaller pieces of land by the many branches of the Wai Biting river running through it, leads one to interpret it as a metaphor for the archipelago itself: a myriad of islands separated—yet at the same time connected—by water. Likewise, the archipelago has been ravaged by exploitative forces whose sole interest is to sap up all the natural resources it contains. Moreover, Sente's population is multicultural, just like the

were relocated to Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Papua. Lampung, in the most southern part of Sumatra, was the first transmigration area in the archipelago, and the first transmigration dates back to 1905 when the Dutch colonial administration sent hundreds of families from Java to work on plantations. See "Bagelen, Kampung Transmigrasi Indonesia", *Kompas*, May 6, 2010.

inhabitants of the archipelago. In addition to the indigenous people and the settlers from other parts of Sumatra there are the Chinese (Bah Cong, who owns a boat business) and some Javanese characters, mainly represented by Agus, the local official in charge of the transmigration bureau. Interethnic relations are portrayed as amicable and peaceful, and there is no evidence of actual or potential tension or conflict among the various groups or even between the settlers and the Cicis, despite the fact that the newcomers have taken over much of the traditional Cicis land.

The story opens as news of another elephant attack reaches Seribu Nyiur village. The village is predominantly inhabited by settlers, whose primary means of earning a living is running coconut plantations. The Cicis, on the other hand, live a nomadic lifestyle further inland, in the sacred forest of Tano Rajo. They are portrayed as shy and reserved, avoiding encounters with outsiders, and depending on hunting as their main source of livelihood. In addition to Seribu Nyiur, there are transmigration settlements such as Selindong (where elephant attacks have intensified lately because of land clearing for coffee and rubber plantations) and Muaro Biting (where trade is conducted among settlers from different villages through the many branches of the Wai Biting River). Frequent elephant attacks are a strong reminder to the settlers of how important it is for them to control their greed and help preserve the environment, if they want to live peacefully with nature on Sente. They realize that the forests surrounding the river have begun to deteriorate, and when the dry season comes and hunters as well as rattan gatherers appear on the island, animals living in the forests no longer have adequate space to live or search for food. In the words of Yusuf, the elder of Seribu Nyiur, human beings and animals now have to fight against each other over land, food, and water, and the question is: who shall perish first? While the villagers generally agree that their survival should be prioritized, Yusuf has a deep awareness that both humans and animals have the right to the forests and the food they provide.

He believes that once the animals are extinct, human beings will also be in danger of extinction, as humans and animals are interdependent in their survival.¹²

Yusuf is a refugee from his hometown, where around forty years ago an armed conflict between the security forces and a separatist movement occurred. He knows well that life is precious and that it is absolutely important to maintain the balance between progress and conservation in the settlement area, or they may have to be refugees again in search of another livable place. In the early years the settlers had to defend their lives against the marauding pirates who often attacked the villages along the coast of the Kandura sea, but now it seems that they have to fight for their lives again. This time the enemy is the wildlife with whom they used to share the richness of the natural environment. Sometimes Yusuf thinks that the early settlers are in the same boat as the Cicis and the wildlife, insofar as they all have to cope with the same problems: “Seribu Nyiur is no longer like it used to be when it was founded. Many people have stopped by. They go to the market, go upstream to make movies, explore oil, conduct logging, study the Cicis, and God knows what else.”¹³

The novel conveys the message that the real enemy is not the animals or the drought but the destruction brought to Sente by the human desire to consume. The island seems to be besieged, tropical rainforests are shrinking fast, and because of development everywhere the elephants have lost much of their habitat. The Cicis are not more fortunate than the elephants. They respect nature, and for them land is sacred, so they take only what they need for their subsistence, living in peaceful coexistence with the elephants: “the elephants never cause any trouble to the Cicis [...] and the Cicis leave the elephants alone”.¹⁴ However, when outsiders

¹² Rambe, *ibid.*, p. 20.

¹³ *Ibid.*: *Seribu Nyiur tak seperti baru didirikan dulu. Banyak orang singgah. Entah habis berpekan, hendak ke hulu membuat film, hendak menggali minyak, mengusahakan kayu, mempelajari suku Cici dan entah apa lagi* (p. 23).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*: *Gajah tak pernah menyusahkan orang Cici [...] dan orang Cici pun tak peduli pada gajah* (p. 124).

began to come, the situation gradually changed. According to Adnan, a Cici tracker hired by a group of elephant hunters, outsiders “have come to the forest with their heavy machines: tractors, bulldozers, electric chainsaws, motor boats, generators”, in order to clear the forest. This is why “the wildlife and the Cicis are no longer friendly to outsiders”.¹⁵

Representing the government is Agus, a Javanese official from the transmigration bureau, who is involved in a secret love affair with Nunung, Yusuf’s granddaughter. Yusuf would prefer Nunung to marry a local man, and this is why Agus and Nunung keep their relationship out of the public eye. Nunung attends a literacy class taught by Agus, and during their frequent encounters he tells her many stories about faraway places. She wants to see with her own eyes “people living in crowded places, automobiles squeezing one another, buildings competing to reach the sky” and “amusement parks full of fish, games, birds, dancers, shops, markets [...] girls going to school freely, electricity that is available day and night”.¹⁶ She is drawn to those magnificent places and never stops thinking of ways in which she can go there.¹⁷ She does not want to spend a lifetime in Seribu Nyiur and grow old as a housewife who only looks after children and household chores. Agus is in dire need of money to marry Nunung, who is pregnant with his child, and he decides to track into the forest to kill some elephants for their precious tusks. He needs help from the Cicis, who possess a certain type of herbal potion to poison elephants. Agus has a close relationship with the Cicis because he once helped a drowning Cici child, and ever since that time they feel indebted to him. He explains to Abas, his assistant, that the elephants must be hunted because they pose a threat to the newly opened transmigration

¹⁵ Ibid.: *Tidak terlalu mengherankan, pikirnya, bila hewan dan suku Cici tidak begitu bersahabat lagi dengan orang luar hutan rimba* (p. 119).

¹⁶ Ibid.: *manusia hidup berdesak-desakan, mobil saling berhimpitan, gedung pun berlomba mencapai langit... tempat hiburan yang penuh ikan, yang penuh permainan, yang penuh burung, penari, toko, pasar, gadis-gadis yang bebas pergi ke sekolah, listrik yang menyala siang dan malam* (pp. 30-31).

¹⁷ Ibid.: *Manusia hidup berdesak-desakan. Mobil saling berhimpitan. Gedung pun berlomba mencapai langit. Tempat hiburan yang penuh ikan, yang penuh permainan, yang penuh burung, penari, toko, pasar [...] Gadis-gadis yang bebas pergi ke sekolah. Listrik yang menyala siang dan malam* (pp. 30-31).

settlements in Rimbo Datuk area. Moreover, he asks Abas to take care of official matters at the bureau while he goes into the forest, even though some high officials from Jakarta are expected for a site visit. Agus puts his personal interest above his main duty as head of the local transmigration bureau, and also abuses the Cicis' trust by promising them that the transmigration bureau will not force them to move further inland to make room for new transmigrants. He knows full well that such a decision can only come from Jakarta, and a minor official like him does not have any say in policy-making. He realizes that he has deceived the Cicis and feels guilty about it, yet he does not have much choice as he desperately needs money.

In his conversation with Rudolf Fontanella, an elephant researcher from Africa, Agus expresses the dilemma that he is facing: "We all love beautiful scenery, a clean environment. But I work in an office whose task is to open up new settlements for human beings. I have to clear forests in the name of development, or better, in the name of humanity".¹⁸ In fact Agus merely wants to give himself an excuse to justify his misconduct, although his decision to steal ivory to pay for his wedding is not the result of greed, but rather of necessity. His situation seems to reflect a common dilemma faced by many minor government officials in his position: they abuse power, not because they have the opportunity to do so but because circumstances force them to. This is why Agus can never free himself from guilt and an internal conflict within himself. In the end, he dies when he slips down into the river while carrying the illegally harvested ivory from the slain elephants. His death had already been foreseen by the Cicis. The ancestors who protect the Cicis appear to Kudo, who helps Agus poison the elephants, and in his vision Kudo is told that the greedy city people who destroy the forest will be punished. Agus's punishment is particularly severe because he has lied to the Cicis for the sake of his own personal interest.

¹⁸ Ibid.: *Kita semua cinta pemandangan indah, alam yang bersih. Tetapi saya bekerja di kantor yang kerjanya menyiapkan daerah hunian baru untuk manusia. Terpaksa membongkar hutan, atas nama pembangunan atau lebih hebat lagi, atas nama kemanusiaan* (p. 187).

Other hunters who come to Sente, Ted, Gunadi, Dora and Martha, are also punished. They visit from the United States, where Ted and Gunadi, Indonesians by nationality, are university students. Ted comes from a rich and powerful family of hunters, while Gunadi's father holds a license for forest utilization in Sente.¹⁹ Accompanying them are Dora and Martha, two clueless American girls who seek adventure and expect to see a lot of excitement on the exotic island. Martha even contemplates making an action-movie, using the Cicis as the background, about the saga of "brave men" (*orang-orang gagah*) who fight and kill elephants that threaten the safety of human settlers. This group represents another interest that is detrimental to the island. Ted and Gun show their contempt for nature. Ted has no interest in forestry or conservation, and cares only about the thrill of hunting. He does not believe that the efforts made by various environmental organizations will bear any fruit, because humans have already dominated the planet. In a similar manner, Gun believes that human beings have come up as the winners in their struggle against nature, so nobody can stop them from destroying the environment. Like Agus, Ted and Gun justify their selfish motivation by blaming others, such as the U.S. and Europe:

Americans are the noisiest ones, acting as if they were a guardian angel, defending tropical rainforests in Southeast Asia and Latin America. Who destroyed important forests in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia? It's them! Long before Indonesia created the HPH system. And now they make such a big fuss about it.²⁰

Gun echoes the sentiment by adding,

¹⁹ In Indonesia, the image of forest utilization license holders is badly tarnished due to their greed and irresponsible exploitation of forest resources. The license called *Hak Pengelolaan Hutan* (HPH) (issued by the Ministry of Forestry) gives a legal permit to forest and plantation industries to utilize the forest. Although the license obliges them to plant new trees to replace the old ones that are cut down for logging or land-clearing, the rule is never fully observed or enforced.

²⁰ Rambe, *ibid.*: *Orang Amerika paling rebut, seperti malaikat penyelamat saja aksinya. Membela hutan-hutan tropis di Asia Tenggara dan Amerika Latin. Siapa yang menghancurkan hutan-hutan di Vietnam, Laos, dan Kamboja? Mereka kan? Jauh sebelum Indonesia punya HPH. Lalu sekarang ribut* (p. 44).

Look at those forests along the Amazon in Brazil. Landlords and farmers clear up the forests for ranches, roads, tourism, a Volkswagen assembly plant. They borrowed money from Americans and Europeans. They'll be the ones who enjoy the benefits. Do you think poor Latin Americans can afford a piece of steak as big as a plate, driving on fancy roads like tourists? Who can afford to buy a Volkswagen?²¹

While their arguments and critiques of Western capitalism, social injustice, and environmental destruction are valid, they only use them to project their own guilt onto others, as they are about to participate in the looting and killing of elephants as a game. Both eventually meet their fate when they are trampled to death by fleeing elephants during a forest fire. Like Agus, they are cursed by the Cicis' ancestors for ravaging the land out of selfish motives.

There is no particular character in the story who serves as a central protagonist. Yusuf, despite being a wise and respected man, does not play a central role as he suffers from a stroke halfway through the story. His granddaughter, Nunung, is an ambitious young woman who knows how to pursue what she wants, but she plays a secondary role and is only important insofar as she provides Agus with a motive to kill the elephants and steal their tusks. Agus, Gun and Ted are characters with corrupt minds, and the role they play is more an antagonistic one. I would argue that the central character in this novel is in fact nature, and the main conflict is between nature and 'civilized' mankind, who tries unsuccessfully to subjugate nature, blinded by greed and self-importance. The Cicis serve as the mouthpiece of nature: they look powerless, and they are marginalized, yet through their ancestors' spirits, who are the gods of the forest, the invaders are punished and their greed crushed. For the Cicis, nature is the primary life-giver. The

²¹ Ibid.: *Kita lihat hutan-hutan di sisi sungai Amazone [sic] di Brasil. Tuan tanah dan peternak ramai-ramai buka hutan untuk peternakan, jalan raya, turisme, pabrik mobil Volkswagen. Biayanya pinjam dari orang Amerika dan Eropa. Nanti yang menikmati hasilnya mereka juga. Apa orang Amerika Latin miskin bisa beli steak segede piring, jalan-jalan melewati jalan mewah sebagai turis? Yang sanggup beli Volkswagen siapa?*

forest and wildlife are benevolent agents of life that help them survive. When there are too many settlers and forest clearing activities intensify, nature is threatened with annihilation and fights back. The elephant attacks are evidence of such a force of nature that strikes back, and when the forest is on fire, the “brave men” who hunt the wildlife and the corrupt government official must pay the price. Nature, in this respect, is portrayed as a feminine, nurturing figure, but when its survival is in danger it unleashes an extraordinary power of self-preservation and resilience that would otherwise remain dormant.

By focusing on the Cicis and the wildlife as representing nature, the novel emphasizes the interconnectedness of humans and nature while avoiding being trapped in an ultimately masculinist approach to the environment that feminizes it through an anthropocentric outlook that privileges the human while sidelining the non-human aspects of nature. *Pertarungan* underscores an alternative approach to the environment, which Jane Jacob refers to as “ecocentric environmentalism”. It relates to (eco)feminism in the sense that it adopts the “woman/nature association as a source of empowerment” from which a critique of “patriarchal domination and the exploitation of both women and nature” can be initiated.²² Woman’s body and her reproductive system are associated with care-giving, and this by extension is shared by nature in its nurturing role. In terms of their struggle, women and nature are considered to share the same “experience of patriarchal oppression and exploitation”.²³ The source of ecological knowledge or wisdom in ecocentric environmentalism is not Western rational thought and its intellectual repertoire but the local genius developed by indigenous cultures. Ecofeminism, however, has drawn criticism as it tends to identify women with nature based on their ‘biological’ traits, and thus falls prey to essentialism in regard to the notion of ‘woman’. On the

²² See Jacobs, “Earth Honoring: Western Desires and Indigenous Knowledge” (2003), p. 670.

²³ Ibid.

one hand, ecocentric environmentalism and ecofeminism seem to celebrate difference, particularly in the importance they assign to indigenous knowledge, yet on the other hand they tend to downplay difference by taking for granted that a sort of ‘oneness’ between women and nature exists.²⁴

The novel manages to avoid this shortcoming by not assigning any primary role to the human characters or drawing an overt parallelism between the characters and nature. As I have argued, if there is a protagonist in the novel, it is nature itself. This explains why the narrative sections are more dominant than dialogue, which would allow the human characters to develop more fully. While from a literary perspective this can possibly be viewed as a deficiency, it helps to avoid the universalist mode of subjectivity that ecofeminism has been accused of adopting when it attempts to make a positive identification between women and nature. The novel stresses that the indigenous people are located in the margin, just as the environment is considered a marginal issue in the face of many conflicting interests that are present on Sente. All of these, as Bah Cong observes, “prioritizing their own egos to the point that it is no longer clear what is important and what is not” (*mendahulukan ego hingga tidak ketahuan lagi mana yang penting dan mana yang tidak penting*).²⁵ However, the Cicis are never portrayed by a fully developed, personalized character. They are consistently represented collectively as part of nature, rather than competing with nature or amongst themselves. Furthermore, while most of the culprits guilty of the environmental destruction are outsiders, a simplistic binary opposition of the outsiders versus the indigenous people, or the settlers versus the indigenous people for that matter, does not occur. Some visitors, such as the science professor, Fontanella, and his assistant, Abimanyu, a Jakarta-based journalist, are portrayed as having positive attitudes towards nature

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 671-72.

²⁵ Rambe, *ibid.*, p. 139.

and genuine concerns for environmental conservation. They come to the island without any civilizing agenda, and appreciate the biodiversity that Sente has to offer.

Like Ted and Gun, Abimanyu has a critical view of the capitalists who have destroyed forests around the world to fulfill their material greed, but his view tends to be more contemplative than judgmental, as he laments the vanishing species of mammals, birds, fish and plants. Abimanyu serves as Fontanella's guide, but he is actually on a mission to track Ted, whose influential father had helped his son (who is accused of murder) to flee from the law by sending him to the U.S. When Ted comes to Sente for his annual hunting trip, he assumes that no one will notice him on this isolated island. He is clearly mistaken. But as Abimanyu arrives at Sente and witnesses the impact of the environmental damage there, he is no longer interested in finding out Ted's whereabouts. It is noteworthy that Abimanyu and Fontanella do not turn to the indigenous people for guidance in understanding the relationship between nature and human beings on the island, or the elephants' behavior in response to their shrinking habitat. They respectfully leave the Cicis alone. This is in sharp contrast to Agus, Ted, and Gun, who take advantage of the locals to advance their own purposes. Ted and Gun use a Cici tracker to find the elephants, whereas Agus abuses the Cicis' trust to acquire their poison. The indigenous people, for them, merely serve as a source of knowledge to be exploited.

The novel does not romanticize the pristine life of the Cicis as the rightful owners of the land and the source of local wisdom, rather the Cicis are depicted as marginalized but also as at a loss in their attempts to understand what is happening to their environment. This adds to their sense of powerlessness. It is evident when Pangulo Pauh, a Cici medicine man, sees a herd of elephants whose young ones look malnourished. He complains silently to the gods, blaming them for allowing the disaster to happen: "Don't the gods see how miserable these forest

creatures are? Why does the rain come so late? Why do the habitats of the elephants, tigers, bears and wild buffalos shrink? Why is the Cicis' living space pushed further inland deep into the jungle?"²⁶ Even though he is an elder in his community and revered because of his supernatural skills, Pangulo has to admit that he no longer knows the answer to those questions. He can only hope that the ancestors will not hold it against him for providing poison to Agus. The Cicis are so desperate that they are willing to collaborate with Agus in killing elephants because they believe that their survival, to a large extent, depends on Agus as a representative of the central government. They do not know that Agus is lying when he promises that he will persuade the central government to review its transmigration policy on the island. The novel ends with a question: "Ted and Agus have similar interests, they both need elephants. Who will defend the Cicis? And the wildlife that live in this forest? Only the gods know."²⁷ Adnan asks himself this question in the aftermath of the forest fire that has killed Ted and Gun, and upon learning that Agus has died by slipping off his boat while carrying the heavy tusks on his head. *Pertarungan* thus leaves its readers to ponder over the power balance between mankind and nature. In the narrow context of Indonesia, it invites us to perceive Sente as a miniature representation of Indonesia: a mosaic of land and water inhabited by various ethnic groups and rich in natural resources, but endlessly exploited by the state through its corrupt officials and its collusion with powerful HPH license holders without any regard for the ecosystem. While most of the events and conflicts in the plot take place in the forest, the island-character of Sente, including the rivers that breaks it down into smaller 'islands', is what ultimately defines nature and its living inhabitants.

²⁶ Ibid.: *Apakah para junjungan itu tidak dapat melihat betapa merananya hewan rimba itu? Mengapa hujan begitu lama terlambat? Mengapa daerah jelajah gajah, harimau, beruang, dan kerbau liar semakin sempit? Mengapa wilayah pengembaraan orang Cici juga semakin terdesak ke rimba belantara?* (p. 171).

²⁷ Ibid.: *Kepentingan Ted dan Agus sama, yakni perlu gajah. Siapa yang membela suku Cici yang terdesak? Dan hewan serta tumbuh-tumbuhan pengisi hutan? Entahlah* (p. 228).

Nukila Amal and Linda Christanty: Land-and-Water as a Signifier of the Nation

In this section I examine two short stories, “Laluba” (2005) by Nukila Amal and “Lelaki Beraroma Kebun” (2004) by Linda Christanty, which deal with water from the perspectives of their female protagonists. They represent water as an image of life, which was rarely seen before in the works of leading male authors during the New Order era. Y.B. Mangunwijaya uses images of water quite extensively in his works, such as *Ikan-Ikan Hiu, Ido, Homa* (1983), but water in that novel almost always serves as an arena where various male heroes try to claim the sea through a series of epic battles and conquests. Water becomes a feminized setting in which heroic deeds of the past are performed by men, and thus a site where masculinity is established and reaffirmed. In her novel *Mirah dari Banda* (2003), Hanna Rambe uses the sea as a setting and she is the only female author from the New Order period who makes the sea a central point of attention. However, it essentially serves as a mere symbol of natural beauty around the Banda islands, which nature-loving tourists from Jakarta and overseas occasionally come to enjoy. As in Mangunwijaya’s novel, the sea is a silent witness to a long history of conquest and colonization in the archipelago, but it does not significantly shape the characters or play a major role in plot development.

In “Laluba”, water plays a crucial part both thematically and stylistically. The background of the short story is the bloody religious conflict which occurred between 1999 and 2004, between the Muslim and Christian populations of Ternate, an island located in the North Maluku region, in the eastern part of Indonesia.²⁸ The unnamed protagonist is fleeing the conflict

²⁸ It began as a political conflict between the Ternate sultanate and the Tidore sultanate, both of which claimed the right to rule North Maluku. However, as the conflict involved various ethnic groups who had settled in the region and are divided into two major religious groups, it quickly developed into religious strife. Thousands of people from both sides were killed and hundreds of houses of worship were destroyed. The central government is believed to have made the situation worse by siding with one faction. See Diharjo, “Sumber-Sumber Konflik di Maluku Utara” (2008).

area while pregnant, because her husband has died earlier in the riots and now her village is under attack. The location in a coastal area makes it impossible for the villagers who try to escape the massacre to run inland, as the attackers seem to come from that direction. The only route to safety is the sea, and this is where the protagonist is heading. Throughout the story, she continually talks to the baby she carries in her womb. It is striking that, despite the violence that takes place and the overwhelming fear that threatens to engulf her, she speaks to the fetus as if nothing dreadful was happening. She describes the surroundings to the baby as a peaceful and beautiful place imbued with cherished memories of her and her husband before the conflict came to their area and took her husband's life. The carnage that is happening in the background becomes blurred and slowly disappears, to be replaced by an atmosphere of serenity in which a mother is soothing her unborn child by describing the beauty of the sea and the biodiversity that finds its home there:

Look at the beach. Over there, where rows of mangroves and coral reefs protrude to the sea, that's the cape. Our place of celebration. I and your father went there one morning, when we found out that you had turned into a baby in my womb. At that time the sky was clear after the pre-dawn rain, and there was a rainbow curving in the southwestern sky. In front of me, your father was rowing the boat slowly [...] Underneath were colorful reefs covered by crystal green blue water. And the fish. Tiny bright-colored fish were swimming among the corals. At the beach, we ate and conversed for a long time until your father fell asleep next to a bush of mangroves.²⁹

²⁹ Amal (2005): *Pandanglah pantai. Di sebelah sana, di mana barisan bakau dan karang agak menjorok ke laut, itulah tanjung. Tempat perayaan kami. Aku dan ayahmu pergi ke sana suatu pagi, setelah mengetahui kau telah menjelma seorang jabang bayi dalam perutku. Saat itu langit cerah sehabis hujan subuh hari, ada pelangi membusur di langit barat daya. Di depanku, ayahmu mengayuh sampan perlahan [...] Di bawah tampak koral warna-warni tertabiri air hijau biru jernih. Dan ikan. Ikan-ikan kecil berwarna terang berenang-renang di antara karang. Di pantai, kami makan, bercakap panjang hingga ayahmu tertidur di pinggir gerumbun bakau* (p. 23).

It is as if she tries to protect the baby from the fear, anxiety and desperation that overwhelm her. It is safe to assume that there is an underlying conviction in her that she and her baby are one, and that the baby can feel whatever she feels at a given moment. In spite of her loss of hope and despair, she refuses to let the baby suffer by distracting the baby's attention from the devastation that is taking place. She speaks in positive tones, knowing full well that she and her unborn baby will eventually drown: "To the sea. Only to the sea that will liberate us. All branches of rivers end here. They no longer have any origin or number or trace or color. Everything's the same. Marine blue. Vast. Flat. Calm. Here water bubbles break up, float, roll, shoot out to the sky. Blue sky."³⁰

At the literal level, the sea is associated with death, for escaping to the sea means to die by drowning. However, at the figurative level, the sea becomes associated with liberation from the death brought about by the killings. The way the protagonist depicts the sea creates a new image of a giver of ultimate peace and freedom from fear and death. The protagonist has already named her unborn child *Laluba*, which in the Ternatean language means *dolphin*, in the hope that the child will be able to "swim swiftly like dolphins. Like the children of fishermen here. Their bodies transmit the aroma of the sea. Their hair reddens, almost blond. With skin that looks like dark copper just like the skin of their fathers, who work naked under the sun."³¹ If the sea is to save them by taking them into its depths, what else can a desperate mother look forward to for her child than to be able to live and move in the water like a fish? This sounds like wishful thinking on the one hand, but on the other, it is the only option left for her to envision a 'future'

³⁰ Ibid.: *Ke laut. Cuma ke laut yang akan membebaskan. Semua cecabang sungai berakhir di sini. Tak lagi punya asal-usul atau jumlah atau jejak atau warna. Semua sama. Biru laut. Luas. Datar. Tenang. Di sini bulir-bulir air melebur, mengapung, mengombak, naik menderas ke langit. Biru langit* (p. 29).

³¹ Ibid.: *... gesit berenang seperti lumba-lumba. Seperti anak-anak nelayan di sini. Badan-badan mereka meruapkan harum laut. Rambut mereka kemerahan hampir pirang. Dengan kulit legam tembaga serupa kulit ayah-ayah mereka yang bekerja bertelanjang dada di bawah matahari* (p. 24).

for the child when everything else in the real world is denied to her. To be on the land surface has become associated with danger and death: “Memories quickly come and pass by, and I want to immerse them all to the deepest seabed so that there is nothing left to swim back onto the surface”.³² The sea, in this respect, is the only safe place to bury everything that is precious to her, including herself and her unborn child, so that the men running amok on the island will not be able to harm them.

Wounded by an arrow shot from the beach by one of the fighting men, the protagonist keeps on wading out into the water towards the deeper side. She can clearly distinguish the smell of the salty water and that of the blood flowing out of her wound and from the bloodbath that is taking place in her village. She can see men running around as if possessed by the devil and thick smoke rising from the burning houses. She feels sorry for her child for not having an opportunity to live a normal, peaceful life: “Forgive them, my child. Those men never know how it feels to carry life in their bodies like pregnant women. They carry death on their hands and fingers”.³³ Furthermore, she does not allow hatred and anger to take control and shape the child into a vengeful human being like the men who are killing one another in the village. Their deaths by drowning will cut the chain of violence that is passed on from generation to generation when everybody else is thirsty for blood. This is aptly conveyed through the symbolism of an empty conch-shell which the protagonist finds lying on the sand near her feet as she makes her way to the water. She puts the shell near her stomach, hoping that the baby will be able to see it:

A beautiful home, with staircases spiraling to the top. The wave has washed it so many times with salt water that its color is fading, now pale white, no longer shiny. It seems it's

³² Ibid.: *Kenangan datang berkelebatan dan aku ingin membenamkan semuanya ke dasar laut terdalam, hingga tak ada lagi yang bersisa untuk berenang naik ke permukaan* (p. 25).

³³ Ibid.: *Maafkan mereka, anakku. Lelaki-lelaki itu cuma tak pernah merasai membawa-bawa kehidupan dalam tubuhnya seperti perempuan mengandung. Mereka membawa-bawa kematian di lengan dan jari-jari* (p. 28).

been abandoned a long time ago by its inhabitant. Why did she leave? Maybe the house had become too small for her, no longer cozy to accommodate her body. No longer safe as a shelter, no longer meaningful to live in. Why should she stay? She decided to leave, perhaps going back to the sea. Crawling along the sand, searching for another home in the deep. Yes, why should we stay, my child? They don't allow us to grow up here, on this beautiful coast. This place, like any other place, is never built for eternity. Let us go.³⁴

The empty conch-shell represents several ideas. It can be interpreted as a microscopic portrait of the village that is abandoned because of the conflict, a 'home' which can no longer offer protection, comfort, and peace. However, it could also refer to the protagonist's own sense of powerlessness. She cannot offer her unborn child safety and comfort, as her body is no longer a safe 'home'. She is wounded, heading towards a certain death, and has to come to the conclusion that death by drowning is better for her child than to be slaughtered if they remain in the village. She does not want to be separated from her baby, like the conch that had to leave her shell, as she envisions herself to be in a union with the baby that even death cannot part: "Beautiful baby, beautiful fish-child in the ocean of my womb. Laluba. With you, I'm complete. I've become everything that I ever wanted: a child, a student, a worker, a wife, a mother, a woman, a witness, a winner".³⁵ Both mother and child take refuge in the imaginary realm where they become one and where men are absent. The maternal body, which from patriarchy's point

³⁴ Ibid.: *Rumah yang cantik, dengan tangga spiral berputar menuju puncak. Ombak telah membasuhnya berkali-kali dengan air garam hingga warna salemnya memudar, kini putih pucat, tak mengkilat. Tampaknya telah lama ditinggalkan sang penghuni. Mengapa ia pergi? Mungkin rumah ini jadi terlalu menyakkan baginya, tak lagi nyaman memuat badan, tak lagi aman sebagai perlindungan, tak lagi berarti untuk dihuni. Mengapa mesti tinggal? Ia memutuskan pergi, mungkin kembali ke laut. Merangkak-rangkak di sepanjang pasir, mencari rumah lain di kedalaman. Ya, mengapa mesti tinggal, anakku? Mereka tak mengizinkan kita besar di sini, di pesisir indah ini. Tempat ini, seperti tempat-tempat lainnya, tak pernah dibangun untuk kekal. Mari pergi* (pp. 28-29).

³⁵ Ibid.: *Janin jelita, anak ikan cantik dalam lautan rahimku. Laluba. Bersamamu, aku melengkap. Aku telah jadi segala yang pernah kuinginkan: anak, pelajar, istri, ibu, perempuan, saksi, pemenang* (p. 30).

of view is considered as the “site of the abject”, becomes in the short story a haven where mother and child converse in a language that is not controlled by patriarchy. This recalls what Julia Kristeva calls *the semiotic*, a pre-Oedipal, imaginary site that is exclusively occupied by mother and infant, and where such dualism dissolves. The means of communication at this stage is a “mother tongue”, which exists prior to patriarchal symbolic language. After language acquisition takes place, this site, which is associated with the maternal body, becomes *a site of the abject* that is rejected by patriarchy.³⁶ Although in the story the protagonist’s voice is verbalized in language, she actually communicates with her child in silence throughout and never produces any spoken utterance. Thus, what the reader sees printed on the page is an interior monologue.

Yet, however hard the protagonist tries to console herself and the child in order to cope with the terrible situation and justify the choice that she has made, a flash of guilt strikes her nonetheless. She feels that the baby is communicating with her, asking why they have to die in such a way: “Is your mind wrestling with questions? Why is your chest being submerged in the water, mother, why is the guava flower in your hair swept away by the waves, why is the conch-shell slipping out of your hand, why are you putting me to an end?”³⁷ The protagonist cannot fully immerse herself in the imaginary realm and deny the dreadful reality that awaits her and the child. She takes her fetus to death with her in order to ‘save’ its life. This is a paradox that even the mother herself has to struggle to make sense of. She is never sure if the child understands why she has to do it, but at the end of the story, before death greets them, she reaffirms her love for the child:

³⁶ For further discussions on Kristeva’s semiotic and abjection, see Kristeva, *Desire in Language* (1993); *Powers of Horror* (1992); *Black Sun* (1989). A useful summary and discussion of Kristeva’s key ideas can also be found in Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (1989) and Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985).

³⁷ Amal, *ibid*: *Apakah benakmu digeluti pertanyaan-pertanyaan? Mengapa dadamu terendam, ibu, mengapa bunga jambu di rambutmu hanyut tersapu ombak, mengapa kerang lepas dari genggamannya, mengapa kau musnahkan aku?* (p. 30).

Will you ever believe my answer, the reason for all reasons that have ever been? Will you have faith in it? Because I love you. As long as my spirit lives, I will never want to kill a body, to end life that occurs only once. Allow me to save you, even if I have to die for that. Is that enough, my child? Because I truly love you more than life itself.³⁸

The keywords which serve as the solution to the paradox lie in the last statement, “Because I truly love you more than life itself”. It is for love of her unborn child that she decides to end her own life and the baby’s. Her final prayer also contains an indirect critique of those who kill in the name of religion. It is not even for herself or her child. Rather, she prays for the men who are willing to kill one another while praising the name of God: “I pray for the hearts of men who love You, but cannot love others with those same hearts”.³⁹

Kristeva’s dichotomy of the semiotic as exclusively consisting of mother and child, on the one hand, and the symbolic as the realm of the father on the other, is challenged when the protagonist’s dead husband emerges as an apparition among the fighting men and approaches her, perhaps as a signifier of an inevitable death. While in Kristeva’s scheme the symbolic is masculine and the semiotic is feminine,⁴⁰ in “Laluba” the husband/father figure appears as a loving and caring nurturer rather than a tyrannical husband/father. Yet the reunion of husband/father, wife/mother, and child does not necessarily reinscribe the New Order’s doctrine of a perfect, complete family. It serves more as an affirmation that violence and death will not be able to crush the human spirit of love, which transcends the gender binarism that patriarchy sets out to solidify. The husband’s welcoming hand is portrayed as “soft, white, carrying pink guavas,

³⁸ Ibid.: *Akankah kau percayai jawabanku, alasan dari semua alasan yang pernah ada. Apakah kau akan meyakini? Karena aku mengasihimu. Sepanjang umur ruhku, aku tak pernah ingin membunuh tubuh, menyudahi kehidupan yang hanya sekali. Izinkan aku menyelamatkanmu, meski aku mesti mati untuk itu. Cukupkah itu, anakku? Karena aku sungguh mengasihimu, lebih dari kehidupan* (pp. 30-31).

³⁹ Ibid.: *Kudoakan juga hati manusia-manusia yang mencinta-Mu, tapi tak bisa mencintai sesama dengan hati itu* (p. 31).

⁴⁰ See Weedon, *ibid.*, pp. 68-71.

ripe and containing the ocean water” (*putih halus membawakan buah jambu merah muda, ranum berair samudra*). The mother’s last words to the baby are an invitation to accept the father’s extended hand, to accept death, as if it were the fresh and sweet juice of a fruit: “Take a deep gulp, it tastes sweet, fresh, deep...” (*Reguklah dalam, rasanya manis segar, dalam-dalam...*).⁴¹

The husband’s apparition signifies that death equals life, because in such impossible and paradoxical circumstances death becomes a liberator. The masculine husband/father figure becomes identical not only with death but also with the sea/water, perceived as a feminine element. Both parents give life by taking it, for the protagonist and her child are now beyond the pain and fear that initially threaten to take their lives without giving anything in return.

In the second short story examined in this sub-chapter, “Lelaki Beraroma Kebun”, Linda Christanty employs similar images of water, although they do not shape the story or the atmosphere as intensely as those in “Laluba”. The story focuses on the protagonist, Halifa, who is visiting her hometown on the island of Bangka, located in the Strait of Malacca, after having left the island to live in Jakarta for nearly fifteen years. She finds out that much has changed, and she can hardly remember anything about the island of her childhood, except for the old man who used to take care of the family’s garden. She feels that the old man is her only tie with the past when everything else fails to bring back her childhood memories. She does not seem to be very fond of her hometown, and thinks her emotional ties with Bangka island are not strong enough to make her want to stay there for long. In addition to the old gardener, another memory that lingers in her mind is the sound of the waves at night. Her family used to live near the beach before they moved further inland: “For Halifa, the sound of the waves seems like a song. She would sleep deeply surrounded by the music of such a sound. [...] she and her sister, Malida, would run to the beach to find shells and snails. They would usually find those tiny animals that live inside the

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 32.

empty shells, take them out, bind their sharp claws with strings, and then make them race”.⁴² But Bangka has changed a great deal. The place that once boasted of being the center of the tin-mining industry in the archipelago has now been relatively abandoned, and the empty tin pits that used to be the source of revenue for the state are merely mute witnesses of past glory. Halifa’s father used to work for one of the mining companies, until the firm closed down due to a financial crisis. Returning, for her, amounts to revisiting a past that has vanished. She and her island are like strangers to each other now.

Bangka is dying, just like the old gardener. It has been polluted by the mining activities, and the local population has made it worse by continuing illegal mining, which has brought subsequent damage to the rivers. In Halifa’s father’s words, the place is so contaminated now that “even crocodiles have ceased to exist on this island” (*buaya pun sudah tak ada di pulau ini*).⁴³ Her father had sent her out to Java so that she would “find her own destiny by struggling to make a living in a faraway place”, because he believed that “small islands make narrow minds”.⁴⁴ This is why Halifa feels proud of herself when she returns to her hometown, as she is no longer the same spoiled little girl that the old gardener used to know. She considers herself a woman “who has grown tall and sweet. The faraway land has hardened her muscles through work, broadened her mind with bitter-sweet experiences”.⁴⁵ Thus, from the outset, Halifa distances herself from the place she used to belong to, and a line separates her from Bangka: the island is part of a past long gone and associated with ‘smallness’, in terms of both its size and its

⁴² Christanty (2004): *Bagi Halifa, debur ombak seperti nyanyian. Ia tidur nyenyak dalam buai bunyinya. [...] ia dan adiknya, Malida, berlari ke pantai untuk mencari kulit-kulit lokan dan siput. Mereka biasa menemukan umang-umang penghuni bekas rumah-rumah siput, mengeluarkan binatang-binatang dari dalamnya, mengikat kaki-kaki tajam-lancip tersebut dengan benang, lalu memacu mereka berlomba lari* (pp. 81-82).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*: *Biar kau temukan nasibmu sendiri dengan berjuang di rantau [...] Pulau kecil membuat pikiran juga tak seberapa luas* (p. 83).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*: *Ia kini tumbuh jangkung dan manis. Tanah rantau telah membesarkan otot-ototnya lewat kerja, meluaskan pikiran penghuni pulau kecil itu dengan pahit-getir pengalaman* (p. 78).

ability to broaden the minds of its inhabitants. On the other hand, Halifa is now part of the metropolis associated with progress and modernity. The gardener—through his distinct garden scent—is the only bridge that connects Halifa and her hometown, and even that bridge is old and dilapidated as the aging man is sick and dying, just like the island. At first, he does not even recognize Halifa when she shows up at the door of his hut.

Halifa is well aware of the fact that she has drifted too far away from any sense of connectedness with her hometown, and she realizes that Jakarta has profoundly affected her attitude towards the island: “She’s not sure why she keeps on being dragged into the rhythm of the city and the pressure of work that erode her yearning for the hometown. She no longer feels that she has any ties left with this island, except for some memories and family history”.⁴⁶ While the city is physically absent from the entire story as it unfolds, it is strongly present in Halifa’s mind. She perceives the island and its inhabitants from an urban point of view, which causes her to suffer from alienation during her short visit. Along the beach concrete walls have been erected, and the former family house at the beach is gone. Only the gardener remains the same in Halifa’s eyes. This old man plays a central role in the plot, as well as in Halifa’s life, as he reveals a family secret to her. He is not just a loyal gardener, but he is Halifa’s great-uncle on her grandmother’s side. Halifa’s father was given away as a child to another couple because his parents were too poor to raise him. His five siblings were not as fortunate, however. After his father died of tuberculosis, his mother left the five children in their hut, assuming that they would be found and fed by the neighbors. When she returned weeks later, she found five decaying corpses. She lost her mind and disappeared in the jungle forever. The gardener is this woman’s younger brother, and Halifa’s great-uncle. This explains why Halifa is so fascinated with him

⁴⁶ Ibid.: *Entah kenapa, ia terus terseret dalam irama kota dan arus kerja yang mengikis rasa rindunya pada tanah kelahirannya. Ia tak lagi merasa punya ikatan apa-apa dengan pulau ini, kecuali kenangan dan sejarah keluarga* (p. 83).

without at first knowing why, except that her grandfather had asked her father to take good care of the gardener.

Only Halifa's memory of the gardener and his 'garden scent' can withstand the constant pull of the city that threatens to cut off her emotional connection with the island once and for all. When the gardener dies, after Halifa has returned to the city, she feels that there is almost nothing left to help her maintain such a connection. Only the old man's garden scent refuses to disappear: "the fresh scent of tropical trees blown by the wind continues to follow her on the streets, on the buses, in the office, in the boarding house, and in the new places that she visits for the first time".⁴⁷ The family saga, as told by the gardener, is strongly related to the island, and Halifa realizes that no matter how hard the city tries to sever her connection with her hometown, some part of her will remain forever there and will not die along with the dying island. She may be indebted to the faraway city, where she chooses to live in self-exile, for broadening her horizon of knowledge, yet she owes as much to the island for keeping her family history alive, safely stored and intact in the scent of the garden that follows Halifa wherever she goes.

"Lelaki Beraroma Kebun" illustrates the tense relationship between the archipelago and the capital city or between the peripheries and the center in modern Indonesia. Despite the fact that the country's physical configuration is made up of thousands of islands, the centrality of Java and Jakarta is so dominant in the psyche of the nation that many Indonesians tend to see their country more as a large mass of land rather than as a mosaic of fragments of land that are separated and at the same time connected to one another by water. The sea, in this respect, serves like a glue that binds the islands together, big and small. Halifa serves as a manifestation of such a 'continental' psyche: she is the embodiment of contemporary Indonesians who have lost their

⁴⁷ Ibid.: *aroma segar dari pohon-pohon tropis yang terbawa angin masih menyertainya di jalanan, di bus, di kantor, di kamar kontrakan, dan di tempat-tempat baru yang pertama kali dikunjunginya* (p. 87).

connections with the archipelagic aspect of the country as part of the price they pay for progress and modernity. The archipelago is seen as a heritage of past glory and failures. It is scattered into too many small pieces, each different from the others, which may be overwhelming for a modern mind that seeks for wholeness and unity in order to make sense of progress. More than three decades after the New Order took power, the inculcation of the state ideology of unity has been so widespread and deeply rooted that it is extremely difficult for the nation to begin to see itself again as pieces of a loose, large puzzle that in the distant past used to be referred to as *nusantara* (Sanskrit for *archipelago*).⁴⁸ The spirit of the national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Sanskrit for ‘unity in diversity’) has been significantly twisted to the point that diversity is subjugated under unity, and any effort to give diversity equal status is strongly discouraged.

Halifa’s struggle to regain what is left of her connection with her hometown represents the attempt made by a few to reconfigure the architectonic setting of the country in the citizens’ minds and restore the primacy of the archipelago over a united Indonesia; at the same time there is a poignant awareness that such an attempt will never be fully accomplished, as only remnants of the archipelagic memory survive. What is striking in this short story is how those remnants manifest themselves in an olfactory image rather than a visual one. While the visual images of the island gradually disappear from the protagonist’s memory, the distinct smell of the garden, which becomes a metonymy of the island, remains in her consciousness. The difficulty of restoring the primacy of the archipelago in the mindset of the nation due to the inability to completely replace the continental paradigm is overcome through a shift in the strategy of

⁴⁸ The term *nusantara* was first introduced by a Dutch scholar, Dr. Douwes Dekker, who found the word in the ancient Majapahit text, the *Pararaton*, at the end of the nineteenth century. The term quickly became popular amongst nationalists and was used as an alternative to the colonial term, *The Netherlands Indies*. To this date, *nusantara* is still used to refer to the archipelago in cultural and historical terms, but the official name of the country is *Indonesia*, a term originally coined by British ethnologist, George Samuel Windsor Earl, in 1850. See “Asal-Usul Nama Indonesia” (2007), <http://www.kabarnews.com/article.cfm?articleID=2368> (downloaded on September 23, 2010 at 11.05 am).

imagining from the visual to the olfactory, creating a fresh and original way of bringing the archipelago back to the forefront of the nation's consciousness. The smell of the garden is associated with plants and trees, and thus relates directly to nature. This is juxtaposed with what Halifa sees in her everyday life in the capital city, which is far from the notion of nature. The archipelago, therefore, becomes a new force in Halifa's psyche that shapes her imagining of the capital city rather than the other way around.

Conclusion

In Hanna Rambe's *Pertarungan* and the short stories by Nukila Amal and Linda Christanty, the readers find portraits of the archipelago—*tanah air*—as ransacked by greed, bloody ethnic conflict, and state-imposed unity that do not respect ecological balance, multi-ethnicity, and the uniqueness of each region. The homeland becomes a battlefield between the forces that exploit its land and water for narrow political and commercial purposes on the one hand and those that are marginalized and victimized by these processes on the other. The works examined in this chapter serve as a poignant reminder that Indonesia is not as stable and monolithic as the New Order would like us to believe. They offer new ways of understanding the archipelago by taking into account its fragmented and puzzle-like architectonics, as well as its land-water dynamics. They represent the extra-ordinary level of flexibility and tolerance the inhabitants are capable of showing, as well as the potential violence that can erupt when they are cornered. In this respect, the works of these three authors are successful in portraying both the fluid and solid aspects of the nation's character, and thus distinguish themselves from the works produced by mainstream authors during the New Order era.

In their own ways, these Indonesian women writers have continued to produce works that are critical towards Java's or Jakarta's domination in the conceptualization of the archipelago, and they offer alternative perspectives on how multiplicity and fluidity can be revived as a primary frame of reference in redefining the nation in the post-Suharto era. Their literary engagement brings the archipelago back into the mainstream, confronting major issues that the nation is facing nowadays: environmental destruction, ethnic/religious conflict, and the obsession with Jakarta as *the* centre of the nation. Local color is accentuated in these authors' works, not for the sake of glorifying it or using it to make hostile statements about Jakarta, but rather as a means of 'speaking to' the center: as a reminder that there are many problems occurring in distant islands that are either caused or neglected by Jakarta. How indigenous populations struggle with those issues and survive by relying on local knowledge and wisdom is equally important as the problems *per se*. The resilience and perseverance of the local people in the face of annihilation and neglect represent what the archipelago stands for in the minds of the authors.

We do not find anger in these works as far as Jakarta's domination is concerned. Instead, the readers are offered ample opportunities to take part in the characters' and narrators' reflections as they struggle to understand what is happening around them. Even in *Pertarungan*, where overt criticism of Jakarta can be found, the plot focuses more on how Sente's local inhabitants try to make the best of their situation rather than pour out their anger or frustration on Jakarta. Agus is not portrayed as an entirely evil character, despite his misdemeanor, and the plot allows the readers to understand his motivation without being forced to approve of it. The end of the story does not signify the end of the island's dependence on Jakarta. Another official will replace Agus, and policies will continue to be made in the capital. But a journalist like Abimanyu

will write in order to raise awareness about the need to conserve nature and influence public opinion.

In “Laluba”, not even once does the main character express anger towards the attackers who burn her village and force her to run to the sea to die with her unborn child. She spends her last moments soothing the child in her womb and depicts the sea as a safe refuge rather than a place where they are bound to meet death. She does not blame local politicians who compete for power, or policy-makers in Jakarta who have contributed to the chaos. The nameless female protagonist remains a strong, independent character who chooses to celebrate life even in the moment of death. But readers cannot fail to see her anguish, and they must acknowledge that this tragedy takes place in Maluku, located far away from the center and therefore almost erased from the ‘continental’ mindset of the nation. The distinct scent of Bangka island in “Lelaki Beraroma Kebun” leaves a powerful impression on the protagonist, who eventually returns to Jakarta as a changed person: the memory of the archipelago remains in her mind, where even the city’s hustle and bustle will not be able to take it away. Her Jakarta is now engulfed by a new vision of the nation that is not monopolized by the continental paradigm. If the nation can no longer see itself as an archipelagic entity, at least it carries the scent of the archipelago within it.

Hanna Rambe, Nukila Amal, and Linda Christanty choose to take completely different paths towards reconfiguring the relationship between the archipelago and Jakarta compared to the uncompromising, hostile position taken by the proponents of *gerakan sastra pedalaman* and *sastra kepulauan*. But this does not mean that they are co-opted by the center or that their critiques are less meaningful or substantial. These writers place the capital in the margins of their writing and draw the readers’ attention instead to the complexities of local and regional socio-political dynamics, in order to offer a better picture of the regions to those in the center. Their

works function more as an eye-opener to Jakarta than a message to far-flung inhabitants of remote islands, and in so doing they help to bring down the mental wall that blocks the view of Jakartans who cannot see a nation beyond the capital city or Java. They further require that Jakarta bear more responsibility for what happens in remote islands, and that it show concern for their well-being. The capital center does not disappear altogether from the whole picture, but it is no longer a sole, determinant factor in the nation's journey to its destiny.

Chapter 4

Negotiating *Adat* and Religion

Introduction

At the dawn of the *Reformasi*, after Suharto stepped down and Vice-President B.J. Habibie took over as leader of the country, two dominant issues came to the surface on Indonesia's political scene: democratization and decentralization. The former was the result of what Indonesian citizens demanded after having lived under authoritarian rule for more than three decades. The latter was a state-imposed policy to avoid a collapse of the unitary state, a situation that happened in the former Yugoslavia. International financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank were part of the forces that pushed for democratization and decentralization, to lay the groundwork for a grand-scale liberalization of the country's economy, which had been heavily regulated by Suharto's administration in the previous period. The demand for democratization was especially strong in Java and was spearheaded by middle-class intellectuals and activists. Meanwhile, outside Java, decentralization received the strongest support, as for a long time power had been overly centralized in the capital city on Java. Democratic movements in Indonesia had existed for quite a long time, even during the heyday of the New Order, but decentralization was a relatively new phenomenon introduced by the *Reformasi*. In the words of Schulte Nordholt and van Klinken, "the decentralization process set off new dynamics for which we hardly had a vocabulary" since heterogeneity and minority or regional cultural identities had been systematically repressed by the New Order regime.¹

¹ Schulte Nordholt and van Klinken (eds), "Preface", *Local Politics in Post-Suharto Indonesia* (2007), p. ix.

However, as Schulte Nordholt and van Klinken also suggest, a transition from a centralized government to a more decentralized one does not necessarily mean that the local government becomes more democratic and civil society becomes stronger than before.² While it is true that during the New Order period the central government had a very strong control of the provinces, making local governments in those provinces utterly dependent on the capital city, local governments seemed to reproduce “patrimonial patterns of rule at the local level”, and they were involved in collusive practices between “local businessmen and bureaucrats”.³ When Suharto resigned and B.J. Habibie stepped into the presidency, the new leader proposed two important laws related to decentralization to the parliament.⁴ These two laws served as catalysts for the decentralization process to begin and provided a further push to decentralization during Megawati Sukarnoputri’s presidency.⁵ Despite the new regulations on regional autonomy, which were implemented in 2004, the central government still holds much power over local governments, particularly as far as revenue distribution is concerned. The result is that a certain degree of dependency of local governments on the central government is preserved, whereas the power of local parliaments is weakened. One of the negative consequences of the 2004 laws on regional government is that corrupt officials cannot be removed from their seats by local parliaments, as these officials are now directly elected by the people. Another side effect, which has very quickly become an arena of heated constitutional debate nation-wide, is the rapid

² Schulte Nordholt and van Klinken state: “The weakening of the central state does not automatically result in more local democracy. On the contrary, decentralization can under certain conditions be accompanied by new forms of authoritarian rule (2007:1).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴ Law no. 22/1999 stipulates that with respect to devolution of power, governors, mayors and regents are no longer appointed by the central government but elected by local parliaments. Law no. 25/1999 regulates the distribution of revenues between the central government and local governments, which in principle maintains the central government’s control over a bigger portion of the revenues. See, Schulte Nordholt and van Klinken, *ibid.*, pp. 12-14.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15. Law no. 32/2004 on Regional Government and Law no. 33/2004 on Fiscal Balance between the Central Government and Regional Governments. In practice, as Schulte Nordholt and van Klinken point out, these two laws take away the right of local parliaments to remove governors, mayors, and regents, whereas the distribution of revenues between the two parties basically remains the same as before.

growth of local laws (*peraturan daerah—perda*) that take advantage of the new autonomy by attempting to impose religious laws—mostly Islamic—or revitalize many conservative customary laws (*adat*) which, according to critics, are not compatible with freedom and democracy. Many of these local laws focus specifically on regulating women’s dress-code and social behavior, and thus an alliance between the conservative forces of *adat* and religion has emerged.

Local laws that clearly target women are, among others, regulations on the compulsory use of the *jilbab* (Islamic head cover) by female government employees in regions such as Pamekasan (East Java), Maros (South Sulawesi), Sinjai (North Sumatra), and Gowa (South Sulawesi), as well as Cianjur and Indramayu (West Java). Similar regulations target elementary and secondary school students in Tasikmalaya (West Java), Solok (West Sumatra), and Padang (West Sumatra). Even non-Muslim students are intimidated into wearing the *jilbab*, and non-Islamic schools are forced to comply with the laws. Siti Musdah Mulia, a leading Islamic feminist scholar, reveals that many of the drafts of these laws were exact duplicates of laws from other regions, with the names of the region of origin unchanged.⁶ Mulia suspects that regional autonomy and the bylaws issued by regional governments within the framework of such autonomy have been abused, as a disguise for the implementation of the Islamic *shariah* law. Thus, there seems to be an ‘unholy alliance’ between religious revivalism and the revitalization of customary laws that aims at regulating the female body and controlling women’s ‘morality’ in public space. Mulia writes:

The initial objective of regional autonomy (*otoda*) was to foster democracy, whose main characteristic is public participation, including women, in order to improve social welfare

⁶ See Mulia, “Perda Syariat dan Peminggiran Perempuan” (2006), *Kolom ICRP* (<http://www.icrp-online.org/wmview.php?ArtID=178>).

that has been neglected so far... However, after seven years, what is happening is that, instead of improving social welfare, the implementation of regional autonomy has marginalized the people, particularly women, and displaced them further away from prosperity.⁷

For the revivalists, according to Mulia, controlling women means gaining access to control over the entire spectrum of life, which includes power, and defining truth and morality, as well as restoring the ‘purity’ of religious teaching. Women are perceived as the “guardians of moral values”, and so efforts to upgrade society’s morality must begin with women. In the eyes of another Islamic activist, Jamaluddin Mohammad, this repressive implementation of the *shariah* results in turn in a negative image of Islam as a religion that is “hostile to local cultures, power-oriented, and self-congratulatory” in its claim to be the solution to all kinds of problems in life.⁸

This brings us to question what Indonesian women’s role has been in the formulation and implementation of decentralization or regional autonomy. Considering that women played a pivotal role in the struggles to topple Suharto during the critical early years of *Reformasi*, it is striking that, as the processes of democratization and decentralization are under way, women seem to have no voice in the process of shaping the laws on regional autonomy which are eventually used as instruments to marginalize and oppress them as women. In addition to differences of ideology and difficulties in forging alliances among women’s organizations, as described in Chapter One, Suryakusuma and Tan point out that women and issues related to them were sidelined, as those in decision-making positions were busy debating the issue of post-Suharto national leadership, resulting in the relegation of the struggle for gender equality to a

⁷ Ibid.: *Gagasan awal otonomi daerah (otoda) adalah membangun demokrasi dengan ciri utama partisipasi seluruh masyarakat, termasuk di dalamnya perempuan untuk meningkatkan kesejahteraan sosial masyarakat yang selama ini terabaikan... Namun, setelah tujuh tahun pelaksanaan otoda yang terjadi alih-alih mensejahterakan, malahan membuat masyarakat, khususnya kaum perempuan terpinggirkan dan jauh dari ukuran sejahtera.*

⁸ Mohammad, “Perda Syariat dan Islam Kultural” (2006).

secondary place in the struggle for democratization.⁹ With respect to decentralization, Edriana Noerdin noted that women's participation in the revitalization of customary laws and institutions in various regions has been marginal, which reflects the exclusion of women from political processes. Even in civil society there is a visible reluctance to involve women in the socialization and implementation of regional autonomy.¹⁰

This chapter explores how some women writers come to terms with this disadvantageous situation in regard to women's participation in debates on regional autonomy, in which religious revivalism and *adat* revitalization became the two most prominent issues. As political processes have marginalized Indonesian women, some have found an alternative space to voice their concerns and ideas regarding these issues in literature. Literature was at the forefront of the explosion of cultural production during the *Reformasi* era and provided a vast and fertile ground for women writers to speak their minds in critiquing or supporting the roles played by religion and *adat* in the establishment of regional autonomy. Two literary works are discussed in this chapter, namely, *Tarian Bumi* (*The Earth's Dance*, 2000) by Oka Rusmini, and *Di Selubung Malam* (*Under Cover of the Night*, 2004) by Novia Syahidah. Oka Rusmini is a Jakarta-born Balinese woman writer who has published several novels on the problematic aspects of the Hindu-Balinese *adat*. *Tarian Bumi* tells the story of an aristocratic woman who has to bear the harsh consequences of marrying a commoner. Oka's novels are consistently critical towards *adat*, which has resulted in her being 'excommunicated' from the land of her ancestors. Syahidah, born in Payakumbuh, West Sumatra, interestingly chose to write a novel with Lombok Island in West Nusa Tenggara as the setting. It revolves around the tension between the traditional *adat* of the Sasak people in Lombok, and Islam, which came to the island in the

⁹ Suryakusuma and Tan, "Confronting *Kodrat*" (2004a), pp. 128-29 and 136.

¹⁰ See Noerdin, "Customary Institutions, Syariah Law and the Marginalization of Indonesian Women" (2002), pp. 187-97.

sixteenth century. Islam is positioned as a solution to many of the unsolved social problems in Sasak society. While *Tarian Bumi* takes issue with how the caste system (*kasta*) in the Hindu-Balinese tradition has marginalized women, *Di Selubung Malam* seems to indicate that introducing Islamic teachings into ancient traditions in Lombok helps to neutralize the violent aspects of the indigenous *adat*. In both novels readers can find aspects of significance in everyday life that tend to be overlooked at the macro level of policy debates on regional autonomy. The stories show how women have to bear the consequences of such oversight.

Tarian Bumi: Rebellion vs Karma

Bali is unique in many aspects. It is the only region in Indonesia where Hinduism predominates, and the practice of Hindu-Balinese religion is highly visible in the everyday life of the Balinese. It is also the place with the highest exposure to tourists and cosmopolitan culture, along with Jakarta. In fact, the co-existence of Hindu-Balinese rituals and constant exposure to foreign tourists with their different lifestyles has probably been the most striking phenomenon in Bali since the 1920s. Equally amazing is the fact that, while foreign artists have been inspired by Balinese culture, often exotizing and sexualizing it, such spectacular cultural encounters have seldom drawn the interest of Balinese writers, whose writings lack portrayals of the encounter with Westerners. Balinese writers prefer to choose non-Balinese topics, as is the case with Putu Oka Sukanta, or when they do write about Bali their perspectives tend to be inward-looking, as demonstrated by the works of Putu Wijaya and Oka Rusmini. The Hindu-Balinese *adat* remains pervasive as an issue that always attracts writers' attention, and there may be good reasons for such an obsession with *adat*. Visitors to Bali as tourists hardly notice the reality of Balinese society, which is segregated along class-lines. Hindu-Balinese *adat* is erected upon a very

important foundation that serves as the underlying prime-mover of Balinese culture, namely the caste system or *warna*, which divides the society into four specific categories based on profession: the *brahmana* (aristocratic priests), the *ksatria* (warriors), the *weisya* (merchants), and the *sudra* (commoners).¹¹ Oka Rusmini's works often deal with the tension, interaction, and interstices between the *brahmana* and the *sudra* within the Hindu-Balinese *warna* system.

Oka's works are ingenious in the sense that they focus almost solely on female characters and convey feminine perspectives in a consistent and provocative manner. In addition to critiquing the caste system, which in her view is very much shaped and controlled by patriarchy, Oka depicts competition and tension among her main female characters, and this competition can often be fierce, sometimes even violent. She explores without reservation the positive as well as the negative qualities of Balinese women from both social camps, but at the same time she never forgets to reiterate that patriarchy bears the ultimate responsibility for the social problems related to the caste system. In *Tarian Bumi* (2000), the plot focuses on several female characters belonging to different generations and different *warna*. Ida Ayu Telaga Pidada is at the center of the narrative and the other characters evolve around her: Jero Kenanga, a.k.a. Luh Sekar (Telaga's mother), Luh Gumbreg (Telaga's mother-in-law), Luh Kenten (Luh Sekar's best friend), and Luh Kambren (Telaga's dance instructor). The male characters, who generally play marginal roles, are Ida Bagus Tugur (Telaga's grandfather), Ida Bagus Ngurah Pidada (Telaga's father), and Wayan Sasmita (Telaga's husband).

Luh Sekar is originally a *sudra* woman. Her ambition is to marry a *brahmana* man. When her dream comes true, she acquires a new name 'Jero Kenanga' that signifies her passing into the *brahmana* class. Unfortunately her husband, Ida Bagus Ngurah Pidada, is a spoiled, reckless man

¹¹ The *warna* system is based on the Indian caste system, but there is a fundamental difference between the two. The caste system in Indian Hinduism is far more rigid because it is preserved through bloodlines, whereas in Bali it has more to do with the profession/vocation chosen by an individual.

who spends most of his time drinking and cockfighting without any care for his wife. Their daughter, Telaga, does not have much respect for her father, as is evident in the quotation below:

For Telaga, he was the idiot whom she was supposed to address with a revered title, *Aji*, Father. How disgusting! A man who didn't know how to behave! A man who could only take pride in his manhood. How could he be trusted? It was his stupidity that had made a little girl named Ida Ayu Telaga Pidada regret the fact that she had to address that man with an honorable title. Because Telaga's father had a father whose name was *Ida Bagus* and a mother named *Ida Ayu*, people said that his nobility level must have been really high. To address the man whom she never knew, Telaga had to add the term *ratu* (master).¹²

In the *griya* (*bangsawan* house) where she lives, Telaga finds herself trapped between her grandmother and Kenanga, her mother. Her grandmother was disappointed when her only son married a *sudra* woman and never liked Kenanga because of her lowly background. She blames Kenanga for the misfortunes that befall her son, making life in the *griya* hell. The mother-in-law is in full control of the entire household. She herself was the daughter of a rich and highly respected *bangsawan* family. However, because the family did not have a male heir, they arranged a marriage for her with Ida Bagus Tugur, a man of modest background. However, since this grandmother had been formally made the rightful heir to the family's estate, according to the Balinese *adat* she had to be the one who acted as the head of her family, and thus she took on the masculine role. This explains why Telaga's grandfather tends to appear in the margins of the

¹² Rukmini, *Tarian Bumi* (2000): *Bagi Telaga, dialah lelaki idiot yang harus dipanggil dengan nama yang sangat agung, Aji, Ayah. Menjijikkan sekali! Lelaki yang tidak bisa bersikap! Lelaki yang hanya bisa membanggakan kekelakiannya. Bagaimana mungkin dia bisa dipercaya? Ketololannya lah yang membuat seorang perempuan kecil bernama Ida Ayu Telaga Pidada menyesal harus memanggil lelaki itu dengan panggilan terhormat. Karena ayah Telaga memiliki ayah seorang Ida Bagus dan ibunya Ida Ayu, kata orang nilai karat kebangsawanannya sangat tinggi. Untuk memanggil laki-laki yang tidak pernah dikenalnya itu Telaga harus menambahkan kata 'ratu' (p. 7).*

plot. Furthermore, because of the arranged marriage, Ida Bagus Tugur never truly loved her, although he always respected her as the lady of the house. From the beginning of the story, the two male figures in the family are portrayed as either useless or inferior, and this means that the female characters have ample space to develop, as well as to compete for control.

Both grandmother and Kenanga have high expectations for Telaga, but for different reasons. Grandmother does not want Telaga to share her fate, of having had to marry a man chosen by her parents, a man whom she did not love and who did not love her. Before her death, Telaga's grandmother tells her never to marry a man out of necessity, but rather to choose a man who can give her love and peace of mind.¹³ This advice reveals the grandmother's contradictory attitude: on the one hand, she urges Telaga to marry the man of her heart's choice, while on the other she is known to have been disappointed when her only son decided to marry Luh Sekar, the woman of his choice. Is gender a key factor in explaining such a contradiction? Because Telaga is a woman, it is all right for her to choose whom she wants to marry, since as a woman, she is not expected to carry on the scepter of the family dynasty. A male heir must not marry an outsider and contaminate the noble blood. This is where we glimpse the hidden face of patriarchy in the Hindu-Balinese caste system. Kenanga, in contrast, wants to see Telaga marry a *bangsawan* man, because if she marries a *sudra* man she will have to abandon her nobility and become a commoner like her husband. In other words, she would become a *sudra* woman, just like Kenanga before she married Ida Bagus Ngurah Pidada. Telaga finds herself situated in the middle between two conflicting demands, from the two women whom she loves equally: one urges her to search for her own freedom, even if she will have to sacrifice her noble status, while the other insists that she should remain faithful to the system, even if it costs her her happiness.

¹³ Ibid., p. 13.

Telaga can never understand her mother's standpoint. In her view, Kenanga is obsessed with the glory of nobility. Before Luh Sekar married a *bangsawan* man, she confided to her close friend, Luh Kenten, that she would never marry any man if she could not find a *bangsawan* as a husband, and she had a good reason for her persistence. Because her father was a member of the Indonesian Communist Party, which was banned in 1966 after the coup against Sukarno, she was considered by the villagers as the daughter of a traitor. Marrying a *bangsawan* man would be her ticket to redemption and respect.¹⁴ Consequently, she grew up as an ambitious girl who refused to give in to what fate seemed to have already determined for her, as a *sudra* girl who nearly became a pariah in society because of her father's involvement in the illegal communist party.

She has always remembered what her mother said to her about women in Bali, who “are not used to complaining” (*tidak terbiasa mengeluarkan keluhan*) and “would rather sweat” (*lebih memilih berkeringat*) from hard work, as it is the only way for them to stay alive.¹⁵ Luh Sekar changed her destiny by becoming a dancer (*penari joged*). Skilled female dancers who know how to exploit their beauty and attractiveness can easily find rich men of prestige among their admirers. This is how Luh Sekar met Ida Bagus Ngurah Pidada, her future husband, a fateful encounter that opened the door for her to pass to *bangsawan* status. Thus, in contrast to the male characters, Luh Sekar—like the other female characters in the novel—is portrayed as a strong-willed woman who never shies away from power. She even dared to pray and dance naked at the *pura* (place of worship) in order to demand that the gods grant her wishes, even though she knew that such an act amounted to sacrilege in Hindu-Balinese culture.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 16-17.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁶ In Hindu-Balinese belief, dancing naked in the *pura* is often associated with attempts to wield black magic (*ilmu pengeleakan*), *ibid.*, p. 29.

Her best friend as a teenager, Luh Kenten, is also portrayed as a strong, even masculine, woman. She is known in the village as a woman of steel, a woman “with the power of ten men.”¹⁷ She is beautiful, highly respected, and no one is foolish enough to mess with her. Like Luh Sekar, she disdains men, but whereas Luh Sekar is willing to use men to achieve her ambitions, Luh Kenten does not need men and never intends to marry one for any reason. The novel describes her as a woman with a lesbian sexual orientation. She feels sexually aroused by looking at Sekar’s naked body, but develops an aversion towards her own feminine body. However, although deep in her heart she wants to rebel against her *karma* as a woman by falling in love with another woman, she eventually has to hide her desire and succumb to society’s norms. She becomes anxious when people start to sense her unusual intimacy with Sekar and gossip begins to spread about them. Ironically, Sekar herself remains oblivious to Kenten’s feelings for her, as she is deeply immersed in her own preoccupations. While Kenten is continuously trapped in a psychological struggle with herself and unable to solve her moral dilemma, Sekar knows exactly what she wants and is never hesitant to act: “Because my life is full of misfortunes, I want to bet on myself. I want to defeat life. Life for me is a never-ending struggle. It won’t be over as long as I live. I have to be a winner. Until I can defeat life, I don’t want to die!”¹⁸

When finally Ida Bagus Ngurah Pidada proposes to her, she has to leave everything in her *sudra* life behind. In addition to her name change, she can no longer pray and eat at the same table with her own kin, and even her own mother, Luh Dalem, has to show respect to her as she would to any *bangsawan* lady. She is believed to begin a new journey as a *bangsawan*, and will

¹⁷ Ibid.: *perempuan yang memiliki tenaga sepuluh laki-laki* (pp. 21-22).

¹⁸ Ibid.: *Karena hidupku selalu sial, aku ingin bertaruh pada diriku sendiri. Aku ingin menaklukkan hidupku. Hidup bagiku adalah pertarungan yang tidak pernah selesai. Tidak akan pernah habis selama aku masih hidup. Aku harus jadi pemenang. Sebelum aku mengalahkan hidup, aku tidak ingin mati!* (p. 31).

be reincarnated as a *bangsawan* in her next life.¹⁹ Even though Sekar has mentally prepared herself for this moment, she finds it quite hard to adjust to her new social status, and the great distance between her and her relatives. What she finds most unexpected is her mother-in-law's attitude towards her. She forbids Kenanga to take her daughter, Telaga, to her *sudra* mother's house because, in her view, it would cause the *bangsawan* aura on her granddaughter to fade away.²⁰ Yet the whole *griya* still treats Kenanga as a *sudra* woman, and she has to address them in high-Balinese, and she cannot share her food and drink with her own daughter. In spite of her new name, she is not allowed to put the title *Ida Ayu* in front of it.

As time goes by, the tension between Kenanga and her mother-in-law intensifies. The latter is always critical of whatever Kenanga does in the *griya*. When Luh Dalem dies, Kenanga is prohibited from touching her mother's body, and has to sit on a pedestal to see the funeral procession from a distance.²¹ Throughout her entire childhood, Telaga witnesses the oppressive forces of *adat* and their impact on her mother, wondering if this is what it means to be a *bangsawan* woman. She can only oppose the practice silently, asking herself many questions while watching the harsh life that her mother has to endure as an *ex-sudra* woman who has dared to enter the sacred *brahmana* realm. Telaga's own daily life is mostly confined by the *griya* walls and the complex rules that regulate her almost every move. Telaga's state of mind with regard to all these restrictions is conveyed by free indirect speech. As she wishes her short-lived childhood could be rewound, we hear Telaga speak through the third-person narrator's voice:

Pity, that period cannot be borrowed by Telaga for long enough. Telaga has to give in and give back that period of life. If only she could protest! Often Telaga thinks of ways *Sang*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

*Hyang Hidup*²² can be cheated on. How she wishes she could steal her childhood back again. One or two more days. If only she had a chance. Telaga wants to hide it so that *Sang Hyang Hidup* won't be able to stalk her and force her to return her childhood. Unfortunately, *Sang Hyang Hidup* is very powerful. He can be neither persuaded nor lured into collusion. His rules are rigid. They can't be bent or slanted even a little.²³

The quotation blurs the narrator's voice and what occurs in Telaga's mind. The narrator is involved emotionally in Telaga's lament concerning her lost childhood because of her *bangsawan* status. Telaga is actually complaining about the gods' cruel decision to snatch her childhood so quickly from her, but such a complaint can only be uttered in the form of an 'interior monologue', and moreover, it is softened to the point that it sounds more like nagging than protesting, as if Telaga wants to be sure that it will not offend the gods. The second part of the quotation sounds like an affirmation of the sense of powerlessness experienced by human beings before the gods, yet at the same time it could be read as hinting at their cruelty and rigidity. This is a rare moment in the novel that critiques the Hindu-Balinese system of faith, but the mild tone is not at all comparable to the harsh and sharp critiques directed against *adat*, notwithstanding that *adat* and religion in Hindu-Balinese culture are so enmeshed with each other that the two become almost inseparable. For Oka Rusmini, it is less risky to criticize *adat*, particularly the *warna* system, than to openly criticize Hinduism, from which the system originates.

²² The God of Life in Hindu-Balinese belief.

²³ Rukmini, *ibid.*: *Sayang, masa itu tak bisa dipinjam Telaga lama-lama. Telaga harus mengalah dan mengembalikan masa itu pada hidup. Rasanya tidak ikhlas! Sering Telaga berpikir bagaimana caranya agar Sang Hyang Hidup bisa dibohongi. Ingin rasanya mencuri masa kanak-kanak itu lagi. Satu atau dua hari lagi. Kalau saja kesempatan itu ada, Telaga ingin menyembunyikannya agar Sang Hyang Hidup tidak bisa menguntit dan memaksa Telaga mengembalikan masa kanak-kanak itu. Sayang sekali Sang Hyang Hidup sangat berkuasa. Dia juga tidak bisa dirayu atau pun diajak kolusi. Aturan-aturan yang ditetapkanNya sangat kaku. Tidak bisa dibelokkan atau dimiringkan sedikit saja* (pp. 49-50).

The significance of *warna* remains controversial among the adherents of the Hindu-Balinese religion. Oka clearly relates the *warna* system to the caste system in India, hence its rigid and *karma*-oriented nature. In India, the Hindu caste system is tightly related to clans, and therefore once a person is a *sudra*, she/he remains a *sudra* for the rest of her/his life. Their offspring will be *sudra*, as intermarriage is practically impossible. In the Hindu-Balinese system, *warna* correlates more with professions and is thus less rigid. At least, this is the official position of the Council of Hindu Dharma in Indonesia (*Parisada Hindu Dharma*), the highest Hindu institution in the country. It means that people can be *ksatria* if they are warriors by profession, but if their sons or daughters decide to be entrepreneurs, for instance, they remain *kastria* in name only. In terms of profession, they are no longer warriors like their parents or grandparents.²⁴ It is not clear if Oka Rukmini misinterprets *warna* in Balinese culture as identical with the caste system in India, or if she criticizes such a misinterpretation among the adherents of Hinduism in Bali, but she certainly depicts *warna* in her novel as if it is similar to the caste system in Hinduism in India, as it is this rigid hierarchical social arrangement that serves as the catalyst of the conflict in the novel. Moreover, her novel presents *warna* as if it is related to one's *karma*, and therefore one's reincarnation is based on both. In contrast, the decree of the Council begins with the following statements:

It has been general knowledge that the teaching of Catur Warna (*Four Warna*), which is the revelation of God compiled in the holy book of Veda and other (Hindu) Veda literature, is a sacred teaching. However, its implementation has been misinterpreted into the caste system in India and the dynasty/clan system in Indonesia (Bali), which has

²⁴ See the official decree of the Council of Hindu Dharma of Indonesia (*Bhisama Sabha Pandita Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia*) on the meaning and implementation of *warna*, issued in 2002, which states that there has been misunderstanding about the meaning of *warna* and how it is implemented. The decree states that *warna* is not identical with caste, as *warna* is based on one's choice of profession rather than inheritance (http://www.parisada.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=26&Itemid=60).

deviated from the concept of Catur Varna. Such a deviation has seriously contaminated the true teaching of Catur Varna in providing guidance to the adherents of Hinduism. There have been many cases that were caused by such a deviation, whose impact is devastating to the image of Hinduism as the word of God and the oldest religion in the world.²⁵

Ari Dwipayana suggests that the concept was intentionally distorted by the dominant class in the fifteenth century, in order to solidify their own status and curb social mobility, especially the upward move of those who belonged to the lower classes. This is further reinforced by the use of the high Balinese language and invention of more complex *adat* ceremonies.²⁶

The misunderstanding of *warna* as a dynasty system rather than a reference to the grouping of professions is obvious among the characters in the novel. For this reason, Telaga's grandmother tells her that "building a dynasty is not an easy thing",²⁷ and she was disappointed when her son chose a *sudra* woman as a wife. This is also the reason why Kenanga has high hopes that Telaga will find a *bangsawan* man to marry her. Therefore, she is shocked when Telaga, still at a very young age, responds that she is not going to marry anybody or fall in love with any man. It is even more shocking because Telaga's words echo exactly what Kenanga's old friend, Luh Kenten, once declared, that is that she would never marry. Thus, it seems that the cycle of *karma* begins to turn, and this triggers the plot to develop further with the focus now on Telaga.

²⁵Ibid.: Sudah merupakan pengertian umum bahwa ajaran Catur Varna yang bersumber pada wahyu Tuhan Yang Maha Esa yang terhimpun dalam kitab suci Veda dan kitab-kitab susastra Veda (Hindu) lainnya adalah ajaran yang sangat mulia. Namun dalam penerapannya terjadi penyimpangan penafsiran menjadi sistem Kasta di India dan sistem Wangsa di Indonesia (Bali) yang jauh berbeda dengan konsep Catur Varna. Penyimpangan ajaran Catur Varna yang sangat suci ini sangat meracuni perkembangan agama Hindu dalam menuntun umat Hindu selanjutnya. Banyak kasus yang ditimbulkan akibat penyimpangan itu yang dampaknya benar-benar merusak citra Agama Hindu sebagai agama sabda Tuhan Yang Maha Esa dan merupakan agama tertua di dunia.

²⁶See Dwipayana, *Kelas Kasta* (2001), for a comprehensive analysis of the *warna* system from the ancient time to the present day, and the emergence of a new middle class in Bali.

²⁷ Rukmini, *ibid.*: membangun sebuah dinasti itu sulit (p. 12).

A new character, Luh Kambren, is introduced at this point. Luh Kambren is a dance instructor who trains Telaga in the art as part of her *bangsawan* education. Luh Kambren is depicted from Telaga's point of view as cold and intimidating despite her beauty. Later on it is revealed that when she was young Kambren was offered the choice to become a king's concubine, but she refused. This is very unusual, as other *sudra* women would have seized the opportunity. Kambren lied to the king that she was no longer a virgin and that she did not deserve the honor. As a punishment for her impudence, Kambren was instructed to train would-be concubines to dance for many years, a punishment that she embraced with excitement as dancing was her lifelong passion. Kambren confides in Telaga that she never allows any man to touch her. She once fell in love with a French artist who owned an art gallery in Bali. Unfortunately, he was a gay man who eventually died in jail, after his gallery was destroyed by angry villagers and he was beaten him up because they envied his artistic talent. From Kambren, Telaga learns how to cherish life and gain respect from others because of her achievement rather than for what she is in terms of birth. Telaga's relationship with Luh Kambren is short-lived, as Kambren is found dead in her modest hut, but her brief encounter with Kambren leaves a long-lasting impression on the young girl.

Unbeknownst to Kenanga, Telaga has fallen in love with a *sudra* man, Wayan Sasmitha, whom she first saw when she was fifteen. Sasmitha lives with his mother, Luh Gumbreg, who makes and sells rice-cakes, and his younger sister, Luh Sadri. Kenanga used to order rice-cakes from Luh Gumbreg, and Sasmitha would deliver the cakes to the *griya*. Rumor has it that Sasmitha is actually an illegitimate son of Ida Bagus Ketu Pidada, the patriarch of Telaga's family's *griya*. In the past, a *bangsawan* male was forbidden to take a *sudra* wife, so Ketu Pidada had a secret affair and fathered two children, Sasmitha and Sadri. Ketu Pidada expresses his

affection for Sasmitha openly, and nobody in the *griya* dares to harm the boy as they believe that the patriarch possesses supernatural power that can bring illness to his enemies. Ketu Pidada is the only person who knows early on about Telaga's feelings for Sasmitha, and he seems to approve of their relationship. However, the growth of that relationship heightens the tension between Telaga and her mother.

Both Kenanga and Gumbreg oppose their children's relationship, but for different reasons: Kenanga does not want Telaga to marry a *sudra* man because it will make her daughter lose her noble status, whereas Gumbreg is against her son marrying a *bangsawan* woman as it would only bring him misfortune. A turning point of the story takes place when it is found out that Telaga is five-months pregnant. A wedding has to take place, and Telaga moves to her mother-in-law's house as a result. Her mother, Kenanga, refuses to attend the wedding, and when Telaga leaves the *griya* she is not allowed to take her clothes and jewelry. Gumbreg and Sadri receive her with hostility, constantly giving her a hard time in the house, for they believe that Telaga has brought a curse with her. Yet Telaga is determined to confront her own fate. However, Sasmitha's sudden death brings a radical change, as she is blamed for the tragedy and has to cope with her mother-in-law without her husband to defend her. Gumbreg asks her to perform the *Pattiwangi* ritual, normally performed by a *bangsawan* member who is to leave the *griya* and abandon her/his nobility. As Telaga's marriage has not been blessed by her own family, Gumbreg tells her to perform the ritual. It is believed that this will end the string of misfortunes that has befallen the family since Telaga's arrival. Ten years have passed when Telaga visits her former house for the ritual, knowing that her mother will not welcome her. She has been disinherited and is no longer recognized as a daughter. The ritual serves as an example

for all *bangsawan* women not to follow her footsteps by marrying a *sudra* man, for they would be outcasts like her, enduring shame and misery.

When Telaga lays her offerings in front of the family's *pura*, none of the *griya* members shows up. In the ritual, Telaga also has to give up the title *Ida Ayu*. The name is no longer hers. Moreover, from now on, she is supposed to address everybody else living in the *griya* as *ratu*, a way for a *sudra* person to address a *bangsawan*. The last words that she utters to her mother when Kenanga refuses to come out of her bedroom to see her off sum up the whole problem with the *warna* system in Bali: "Mother, you must know, I don't regret that I became Wayan [Sasmitha]'s wife. What I regret is that there are so many people who behave as though they were *bangsawan* more than the true *bangsawan* themselves."²⁸ The ritual continues when Telaga arrives at her mother-in-law's house, where she is bathed with flowers and water, and formally transformed into a *sudra* woman. It is as if Telaga carries the burden of her mother's *karma*, restoring its cycle by becoming what Kenanga used to be. In the end, the harmony of the cosmos is restored with Telaga as its sacrificial scapegoat. The novel represents the Hindu-Balinese notion that human beings are endowed with a capacity to rebel against the will of the gods, but that eventually they have to succumb to a more powerful force that is beyond their control. The characters thus serve merely as puppets with predetermined roles to play. Kenanga and Telaga are both rebels in their own way. Kenanga deviates from *adat* by passing to the *bangsawan* class through marriage, whereas Telaga rebels against *adat* by marrying a *sudra* man, and therefore losing her *bangsawan* status. Kenanga's rebellion is not only against the local Balinese *adat* but also against the Hindu concept of *karma*. Telaga's rebellion, on the other hand, is to restore the purity of the *warna* system, which had been contaminated by Kenanga's passing.

²⁸ Ibid.: Meme harus tahu, tiang tidak menyesal menjadi istri Wayan. Yang tiang sesalkan, begitu banyak orang yang merasa lebih *bangsawan* daripada *bangsawan* yang sesungguhnya (p. 138).

In the final analysis, *Tarian Bumi* is a novel about the preservation of the *status quo*. *Karma* becomes the ultimate regulator of human life. While on the surface the characters, especially the female ones, seem to possess some sort of agency, it is an autonomous agency only in so far as it works within the boundaries allowed by *karma*. Kenanga's passing represents a transgression against such boundaries, and she and her offspring have to pay dearly for that. Telaga is the redeemer, whose purpose in life is to straighten out Kenanga's wrongdoings, even if it means that she herself has to suffer the consequences. The *Pattiwangi* ritual is a ritual of self-denial, self-sacrifice and redemption, so that harmony can be restored. The mother's sin has to be purged through the daughter's sacrifice. Telaga's words at the very end of the story are symptomatic of her realization of what her *karma* demands from her: "I've never asked for the role of Ida Ayu Telaga Pidada. If life continues forcing me to play that role, I have to be a good actor. And life has to be responsible for my brilliant act as Telaga."²⁹ Here we see the interplay of coercion and subversion that Judith Butler perceives to be the two key aspects that underlie the concept of performativity.³⁰ Telaga strongly feels that she is being coerced to play a role in life that is not of her own choice; nevertheless, she decides to do her best in performing that role, because she knows that she is dealing with forces that are far mightier than social and cultural norms. Her role is determined by the God of Life (*Sang Hyang Hidup*), thus it is her *karma*. But Telaga refuses to become a mere pawn of the God, as she insists that He must bear the blame for the consequences of her performance. When problems arise, it is not the actor that is to blame but those in the backstage in charge of directing the performance. Thus Telaga subverts the norms by freeing herself from all responsibility, and leaving it to the God to figure out what has

²⁹ Ibid.: *Aku tidak pernah meminta peran sebagai Ida Ayu Telaga Pidada. Kalaupun hidup terus memaksaku memainkan peran itu, aku harus menjadi actor yang baik. Dan hidup harus bertanggung jawab atas permainan gemilangku sebagai Telaga* (p. 139).

³⁰ For gender performativity theory, see Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" (1988), *Gender Trouble* (1990), *Bodies That Matter* (1993).

gone wrong. When she decides to switch from the role of Ida Ayu Telaga Pidada, the *bangsawan* woman, to just Telaga, bereft of all the privileges of nobility, she remains the same Telaga, but she crosses the line that separate the *bangsawan* from the *sudra*. In other words, she ‘creatively’ twists her role without breaking the rule, despite the great risk that such a twist entails, and after all *Sang Hyang Hidup*—Life itself—is the one that has to decide the outcome.

As the specter of patriarchy looms behind the chain of events, the casualties are not only the female characters, but also the male characters. Ida Bagus Tugur is an exemplary illustration, as he is ‘feminized’ by the system as a consequence of his passing to the *bangsawan* class. He does not have the right to the family’s inheritance, nor does he have power in his own house. His wife, as the formal heir to the dynasty, is the dominant figure in his *griya*. To a certain extent Telaga’s husband, Wayan Sasmitha, is also a victim of the system. He is not acknowledged as a legitimate son of Ida Bagus Ketu Pidada because his mother is a *sudra* woman, and as a result he cannot propose to Telaga. It is Telaga who has to abandon her title of nobility and lose all the rights that come with it in order to be able to marry him. However, it is clear that the *bangsawan*, especially the males, gain advantage from the patriarchal *warna* system that segregates society into various groups with unequal power relations. While protesting against the patriarchal construction of the *warna* system, the author does not go far enough in taking issue with its divisive nature. *Tarian Bumi* stops short at confronting the concept of *karma*, which rules, among others, that everybody has her or his rightful place in society and that the harmony of the cosmos can be disturbed if a transgression takes place, resulting in the suffering of many who are directly and indirectly involved in such a violation of the law of life. *Karma* remains intact from criticism though it sustains class divisions in Balinese society, which are blamed on patriarchy instead as it not only gives privilege and power to a particular class to assume the moral

leadership of society, but in particular to the men, who are freed from any social responsibility for their actions. This is depicted in the novel through male *bangsawan* characters who are generally timid, irresponsible, and lacking in leadership qualities, since the system allows them to behave in complacent ways.

Di Selubung Malam: Domesticating Adat

In her short biography, inserted on the last page of the book, Novia claims that this novel is specifically dedicated to the “glory and awakening of Islamic Literature” (*kejayaan dan kebangkitan Sastra Islam*).³¹ Thus, readers can conclude that Novia intends to use her fictional story to convey Islamic *dakwah* (preaching). Having developed as a writer in the Islamic literary community called *Forum Lingkar Pena* (FLP), Novia is understandably influenced by the *dakwah* style of writing, which has become characteristic of Islamic writers in Indonesia, particularly those who belong to the FLP circle. Her choice of Lombok Island and Sasak society as the setting of the novel is intriguing, considering that her ethnic background is Minang and she was born in Minangkabau, West Sumatra. Whether the setting relates directly to her *dakwah* mission is a possibility that should not be brushed aside too quickly. Sasak society is known for its adherence to *Watu Telu* (Three Times), a syncretic belief system largely featured by elements of pre-Islamic religions such as animism and Hinduism, as well as Islamic elements. As a result, the Sasaks pray only three times a day instead of five times as instructed by mainstream Islamic tenets, and sometimes they share a temple for worship with the Hindus living on the island. Bayan, the region frequently mentioned in the novel as the place of birth of Mandalika, the female protagonist, is believed by the Sasaks to be the birthplace of *Watu Telu*. Moreover, the Sasaks believe in the presence of supernatural power in nature and in many inanimate objects.

³¹ See Syahidah, *Di Selubung Malam* (2004), p. 288.

The highest mountain in Lombok, Mount Rinjani, is greatly revered for its power to bring blessings and to heal illnesses.³² Followers of *Watu Telu* do not have to fast during the month of Ramadan, and are allowed to consume alcohol and non-*halal* meat. There have been efforts to persuade the followers of *Watu Telu* to convert to mainstream Islam, sometimes even by coercion, but the local belief has proved quite resilient in resisting such conversion attempts, which intensified further after the New Order took power from Sukarno in 1966.³³ Nowadays, it is estimated that around 30,000 followers of *Watu Telu* live in Lombok, and most of them are concentrated in the Bayan area.

It makes sense, then, to assume that Novia chose Lombok because it fits perfectly with the mission of Islamic evangelization. *Watu Telu* is a compelling case for *dakwah* because *Watu Telu* incorporates Islamic elements, yet its practice and rituals do not always observe mainstream Islamic doctrines. The Islamization of Lombok—generally known as the “island of a thousand mosques”—will be considered incomplete by strict Muslims as long as *Watu Telu* cannot be fully incorporated into the mainstream. Minangkabau, where Novia Syahidah comes from, on the other hand, has been heavily Islamized. That is why setting the novel in Lombok makes Novia a mouthpiece of Islam and the novel becomes a means of ‘taming’ the non-Islamic elements of local *adat* and bringing it closer into the dominion of more orthodox Islam. *Adat* in this novel is portrayed as the source of many social problems and as serving only to perpetuate ignorance. It operates based on a strict social and feudal hierarchy that draws a clear demarcation between *bangsawan* (the aristocracy) and *orang biasa* (the common people), and this is fiercely

³² See Sendjaja, “The Traditional Sasak” (2009).

³³ For details regarding the contrast between *Watu Telu* and mainstream Islam, as well as the history of persecution endured by *Watu Telu* adherents during the New Order period, see Cederroth, “From Ancestor Worship to Monotheism” (1996) (<http://web.abo.fi/comprel/temenos/temeno32/ceder.htm>). Also see Mucipto, “Wetu Telu” (2001), pp. 10-20, and pp. 67-69 for the argument that *Watu Telu* is in fact Islam, but it also respects nature as inseparable from God.

reinforced through the practice of setting such an unbelievably high bride-price (*sajikrama*) for *bangsawan* women that even a *bangsawan* family on the groom's side finds it impossible to afford. Parents seem to prefer their daughters to become old maids rather than marrying them off easily by lowering the bride-price. The un-Islamic habit of Sasak men of not going to mosque to pray five times a day, and their supposedly insatiable addiction to gambling, further add to the bleak impression of *adat* as not only a manifestation of ignorance but also the source of all evils.

The conflict in the novel begins with the rape of the protagonist's mother, Saqnah, by Munahar, the local gangster leader. Mandalika, the protagonist of the novel, is sixteen when this takes place. The rape is actually the result of a deal between Gerantang, Saqnah's husband and Manadlika's father, and Munahar, as a way for Gerantang to repay the debt resulting from a series of gambling losses. Munahar threatens to kill Gerantang if he does not pay his debt, and in desperation Gerantang accepts Munahar's terms. Ridden with guilt and shame, the night after he has made the pact with Munahar Gerantang leaves Lombok and goes to live in exile on the neighboring island of Sumbawa. Gerantang disappears from his family, leaving Saqnah and Mandalika to survive on their own, since the eldest son in the family, Jagat Wira, had already left Lombok to find work elsewhere. This part of the story is conveyed in a flashback.

The novel opens with Jagat Wira coming home for a visit after years of absence. Saqnah and Mandalika have kept Saqnah's rape—which happened two years before—a secret from Jagat Wira for two reasons: first, they fear that Jagat Wira will lose control and search for his father to kill him as revenge for his shameful deed; secondly, he is considered an 'outsider' since he left Lombok and married a non-Sasak woman. From the perspective of *adat*, Jagat Wira no longer belongs to Sasak society. This issue of 'self-exile' constitutes the conflict between Mandalika and Jagat Wira, which gives shape to the structure of the narrative in addition to the main

conflict concerning *adat* and Islam. To complicate matters further, Apti, Saqnah's older sister who has remained unmarried because of the bride-price issue, comes to pay a visit from her hometown in Bayan Timur, where she resides with their aging father, Sigeti, a patriarch who remains hard-headed in preserving *adat*, disregarding the fact that his family has disintegrated as a result of his stubbornness. He disinherited Saqnah because she chose to elope with Gerantang to avoid a bride-price payment. Apti, who remained obedient to her father, had to bear the consequences of becoming an elderly spinster as a result. It is during her visit to her younger sister's family that she meets Maq Sudir and accepts his proposal. Naturally, Sigeti disagrees with this marriage, but in his old age he cannot stop it. The couple prefers an Islamic wedding ritual in which no bride-price is required and the procedure is much simpler than observing *adat*. The egalitarian spirit of Islam in this scene is shown to be superior to the rigid social hierarchy of Sasak society.

The class system of Sasak becomes the major target of critique in the novel. The author explicitly indicates that there is a direct connection between the class system and *Watu Telu*, as illustrated by a conversation between Saqnah and Mandalika concerning their lives after Gerantang has disappeared, in which Saqnah balks at Mandalika's suggestion that they go back to Bayan:

“There's no guarantee that we'll live a better life there, daughter. They no longer recognize us as one of them. Not only would all of the *perwangsa*³⁴ at kampung Bayan Timur hurl their insults at us, but even your *niniq*³⁵ would no longer recognize *Inaq*³⁶ as his daughter.” Sadness is visible in Saqnah's eyes.

³⁴ Sasak aristocrats.

³⁵ Sasak word for 'grandparent' used by aristocrats.

³⁶ Sasak word for 'mother'.

Baiq Mandalika did not say a word. She knew that her ancestors in Bayan adhered to belief in *Watu Telu*, which is different from the way of life of the rest of the Sasaks in general. That included the Sasaks living here in Meninting. And her mother had told her about this many times.³⁷

Another critique of the old belief is conveyed through Aпти during an argument with her father concerning the vanity of maintaining the glory of the aristocrats, which, according to Aпти, is against the spirit of egalitarianism. Aпти uses an Islamic perspective in her argument, as she makes a reference to Adam as the first man (who is considered the first prophet in Islam), and is very critical of the common practice of letting ancestors who have been dead for hundreds of years make decisions for the living. This understandably upsets Sigeti, who then warns Aпти of the curse of the ancestors that will fall on those who dare to question *adat*.³⁸ In this instance, *adat* is implicitly juxtaposed and contrasted with Islam: the former is oppressive, backward, and irrational, while the latter is egalitarian, logical and ‘modern’. Because of her obedience to *adat*, Aпти has to bear the burden of becoming a *dedare toaq* (old maid). She feels that all of her efforts to be a dedicated daughter have been futile. This is why she decides to go to visit her long lost sister after twenty years of separation.

Aпти’s husband-to-be is a case in point regarding the superiority of Islamic teachings over *adat* rules. Maq Sudir used to work for Munahar, the merciless loan shark who preyed on gamblers running out of cash and lured them into enormous debt. Gambling and excessive drinking are portrayed in the novel as widespread social illnesses common among Sasak men.

³⁷ Syahidah, *ibid.*: “Belum tentu di sana kita akan hidup lebih baik, Nak. Kita sudah tak diakui lagi di sana sebagai bagian dari mereka. Tak hanya para perwangsa di kampung Bayan Timur yang akan menghinakan kita, niniq-mu pun sudah tak mengakui Inaq lagi sebagai anaknya.” *Kesenduan membias di sorot mata Saqnah*.

Baiq Mandalika terdiam. Ia tahu bahwa cara hidup leluhurnya di Bayan sana, yang menganut keyakinan Watu Telu, memang berbeda dengan cara hidup orang Sasak pada umumnya. Termasuk orang Sasak di Merinting ini. Dan itu sudah diceritakan ibunya berulang kali (pp. 54-55).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

When men are involved in gambling, they tend to forget to say their prayers or go to the mosque. Maq Sudir pledges allegiance to Jamanik, Munahar's son, who came to defend Mandalika when Munahar was about to sexually violate her, after he had raped Saqnah and killed his father.³⁹ Jamanik is a pious and generous man, the Islamic ideal. He teaches the boys in his village to recite the Qur'an in the mosque every evening, and claims to be against violence. The fact that Munahar died at his hands causes him endless guilt, and he eventually surrenders to the law, but he is successful in converting Munahar's thugs to Islam and transforming them into good Muslim men. He sets a requirement for his men: "Everybody who works for me has to pray five times, especially the Friday prayer in the mosque. No more drinking, and never tell a lie to me even once."⁴⁰ When Maq Sudir looks dejected because he thinks he is so sinful that it is not appropriate for him to enter the mosque, Jamanik says further: "Of course it is appropriate. It's even highly appropriate. You're all Muslims, right? Without question, it is appropriate. It would be illogical, on the contrary, if you claim to be Muslims but never say your prayers, never go to the mosque, never recite the *Qur'an*, and so on."⁴¹

Through Jamanik's teachings of the basic Islamic principles and the conversion to Islam of the former bodyguards of his late father, the novel confronts the tradition of *Watu Telu* with the doctrines of Islam. Implicit in his advice to these men is a critique of *Watu Telu* as deviating from the true teaching of Islam. In contrast, in *Watu Telu* the laws of the ancestors are more important than the Qur'an, and elements of Hinduism are more dominant than those of Islam.⁴²

Unfortunately, even Jamanik cannot fully escape from a tendency to violence, which seems to be

³⁹ Only near the end of the novel do readers find out that Munahar was not Jamanik's biological father, as Jamanik is in fact a child pre-maritally conceived.

⁴⁰ Syahidah, *ibid.*: *Setiap orang yang bekerja pada saya harus mau shalat lima waktu, terlebih shalat Jumat di masjid. Tidak boleh mabuk-mabukan dan jangan sekali-kali berbohong pada saya* (p. 93).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*: *Tentu saja pantas. Bahkan sangat pantas. Kalian semua orang Muslim, kan? Sudah jelas itu pantas. Justru aneh kalau kalian mengaku Muslim. Tapi tidak pernah shalat, tidak pernah ke masjid, tidak pernah baca Qur'an dan sebagainya* (p. 94).

⁴² Cederroth, *ibid.*

deeply rooted in Sasak society. In his attempt to save Mandalika from Munahar's attempted rape, he kills the man he believes to be his father. Jagat Wira also shows a tendency to violence when he swears to avenge his mother and sister for the disgrace caused by his own father, by making a pact with a gangster. He searches for Gerantang on Sumbawa, and his intention is clear: to kill the man as a payback. Mandalika, who at first urges Jagat Wira to take revenge, gradually changes her mind after she receives advice from Jamanik that only God can judge people's deeds.⁴³ She starts to wonder if matters can be settled once and for all with Gerantang's death, and if her peace of heart can really be restored. Mandalika decides to wear a *jilbab* to cover her head and study the Qur'an. During her lessons, she receives moral guidance from her friend, Biyu, and her religious teacher, Ustadzah Zahra, on the importance of forgiveness. Jamanik's advice resonates with what Biyu tells her with regard to revenge:

“Do you remember what Ustadzah Zahra said last month? She said that human beings will never be able to be perfectly just. Human beings possess many weaknesses, desires and other negative qualities, whereas Allah does not. Allah is completely perfect and free from all weaknesses and shortcomings. He is the only one capable of bringing just punishment.”⁴⁴

In this scene, *Allah* is directly and explicitly invoked, showing an unequivocal reference to Islam. Forgiveness and non-violence are associated with Islam, and contrasted with revenge, which represents common practice in the local *adat*. Although the protagonist undergoes a significant transformation from *Watu Telu* to Islam, the novel does not really depict the process

⁴³ Syahidah, *ibid.*, p. 124.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*: *Lika masih ingat apa yang dikatakan Ustadzah Zahra bulan lalu? Beliau mengatakan bahwa manusia tak kan pernah bisa bertindak seadil-adilnya. Manusia memiliki banyak kelemahan, memiliki nafsu dan sifat-sifat buruk lainnya. Sementara Allah tidak. Allah Mahasempurna dari segala kelemahan dan kekurangan. Jadi, satu-satunya yang pantas menghukum secara adil adalah Dia* (p. 179).

as a conversion, but a move closer to mainstream Islamic practice not contaminated by local pre-Islamic beliefs.

A similar process of transformation and redemption happens to Jagat Wira during his encounter with his father, whom he finds crippled, disabled, and powerless. Although he cannot forgive his father's sin, he calls off his plan to kill him and decides to go back to Lombok. While forgiveness does not take place, Jagat Wira's self-control at least overcomes the urge to commit an act of violence. Mandalika is relieved that her brother has had a change of heart. Her consoling words for Jagat Wira are clearly the result of the righteous teaching of forgiveness that she has received: "This is because God loves you, Jagat. I'm sure of that!"⁴⁵ She adds, "Because God doesn't want you to smear your hands with the blood of a sinner."⁴⁶ In addition, Jagat Wira receives some advice from his mother. Despite the misery that Gerantang has caused her, Saqnah remains steadfast in her conviction that hate is never a solution and that human beings have the capacity to change.

Honor is one aspect of *adat* that is highly upheld by Islam. However, when one's honor is undermined, *adat* solves the issue by settling the score—quite often in violent ways. Islam is portrayed in the novel as offering a peaceful resolution to restore honor, through forgiveness and non-violent mechanisms, and positive ways to preserve it, by praying, going to the mosque, and studying the *Qur'an*. One's dignity in Islam is supposed to be maintained through honesty and courage. This is shown in the novel by Maq Sudir's decision to meet Aпти's father in order to propose formally, despite knowing that Sigeti will be very upset as he and Aпти will not observe *adat*'s marriage rules. Aпти initially worries about Maq Sudir's plan, but he would rather be insulted by Aпти's father than elope with her without her father's blessings. Maq Sudir's response

⁴⁵ Ibid.: *Ini karena Tuhan sayang pada Kak Jagat. Lika yakin itu!* (p. 214).

⁴⁶ Ibid.: *Sebab Tuhan tidak ingin tangan Kakak kotor oleh darah seorang pendosa. Tuhan juga pasti lebih tahu cara menghukum yang seadil-adilnya.*

represents a blend of traditional masculinity and the ‘moral decency’ promulgated by Islam. Courage in this scene becomes a primary signifier for honor, but without any association with violence as it is in *adat*. In addition, Maq Sudir says: “I’m not a coward! [...] For me, this decision is taken precisely in order to uphold your dignity as a noble lady (*perwangsa*). If I marry you without your father’s blessing, it would mean that I don’t respect him. It would also mean that I don’t respect you.”⁴⁷

Issues concerning social class boundaries also appear throughout the novel. The quotation above shows that commoners such as Maq Sudir have human dignity and the ability to discriminate between right and wrong or good and bad, provided that they are enlightened by the teaching of Islam. In this respect Islam introduces egalitarian principles in human relationships along with enlightenment: almost all the major characters in the novel (Mandalika, Saqnah, Jagat Wira, Aпти, and Maq Sudir) eventually find ‘salvation’ in Islam, the exceptions being Gerantang, who dies alone far away from his family, regretting the sins that he has committed throughout his life, and Sigeti, who remains obstinate in his adherence to *adat*. Islam is offered as the solution to problems such as violence, inequality, excessive drinking, gambling, and what is perceived as superstition. It is depicted as a superior set of values that is introduced to the followers of *Watu Telu* through non-violent conversion, and easily accepted by the local people because it promotes ‘modern’ ways of thinking and rationality.

The introduction of these enlightened Islamic norms into Sasak society and its *Watu Telu* traditions is carried out in the novel through showing and telling (*dakwah*) rather than a series of formal regional bylaws that impose the Islamic *shariah* by means of penal sanctions. However, history shows that the Islamization of Lombok did not always take place through peaceful

⁴⁷Ibid.: *Saya bukan lelaki pengecut! [...] Bagi saya, justru keputusan ini saya ambil demi menjaga martabatmu sebagai seorang perwangsa, Denda. Jika saya menikahimu tanpa meminta restu Mamiq, itu berarti saya tidak menghormati mereka. Yang berarti juga tidak menghormatimu!* (pp. 241-42),

means. According to a palm leaf manuscript (*lontar*) called *Babad Lombok* (Chronicle of Lombok), Islam first came to the region in the sixteenth century as part of a military expedition from Java with the mission to convert the population of Lombok and Sumbawa to Islam.⁴⁸ It is not clear to what extent this record can be deemed reliable. Whatever the case was in history, in the aftermath of the coup against Sukarno's regime in the mid-1960s, a systematic process of Islamization occurred nation-wide. The New Order made adherence to one of the five recognized religions compulsory for all citizens, and information about one's religious background is included on a person's identity card. This is the period in which wholesale conversion to Islam was at its peak. A local government official claimed in an interview that since then *Watu Telu* no longer officially exists, as all of its followers were considered Muslims.⁴⁹ However, as time has passed, it has become clear that followers of *Watu Telu* have their own resilience against systematic attempts by the state to Islamize them. As Cederroth explains:

Nowadays, the attempts at conversion are no longer as crude as they were in the late 1960s, but the underlying principles remain the same. Instead of scaring people into accepting one of the world religions, a more long-term strategy - which in the long run no doubt will be much more efficient - has now been adopted [...] firstly [local government officials] try to sever the relations between Bayan and its peripheries, i.e. between Bayan and all those dependent villages with which the Bayanese centre by tradition has *adat* and *agama* connections. Secondly, because of the great difficulty of changing the habits of the adult *wetu telu* [sic], it will instead be much more convenient to target the children

⁴⁸ See Cederroth, *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Cederroth states in his essay that this declaration took place despite the fact that many of the followers of *Watu Telu* initially chose to be Buddhists rather than Muslims, but through intimidation and disinformation, they were forced to embrace Islam. In the Bayan area, community leaders were even summoned to come to the local military station to sign a declaration agreeing to practice Islam in its 'perfect' form. On the Friday following the declaration, for the first time ever the Friday prayer was conducted at the Mosque of Bayan. Previously the *Watu Telu* mosque of Bayan had never been used for Friday prayer.

and teach them about true *agama* [religion] so that at least the next generation will know what real Islam means.⁵⁰

In my reading of *Di Selubung Malam*, Novia conveys through her novel that it is better to introduce Islam to *Watu Telu* followers by means of teaching—a strategy similar to the one adopted by the state in the 1990s, as described in the above quotation—but also through example. The characters who are enlightened by Islamic teachings give positive examples of how to become good Muslims, and in doing so they inspire others to follow in their footsteps. As regional autonomy has currently been used as a vehicle for the imposition of *shariah* law in various regions in Indonesia, with an emphasis more often put on the punitive aspect of *shariah*, *Di Selubung Malam* suggests the use of ‘soft-power’ in the effort to bring the followers of *Watu Telu* closer to the ‘true’ teaching of Islam. As part of *dakwah* literature, the novel opens up an alternative space not only for expression of ideas by women in regard to how Islam can contribute to the process of revitalizing *adat* in the framework of regional autonomy, but also for rethinking the strategy for such a process. In the context of this novel, *Watu Telu* is not represented as an altogether different system of belief, but as a syncretized form of Islam, which only needs to be purified. But like what happened first in the sixteenth century, and then again during the shift of power from Sukarno to Suharto in the mid-1960s, the Islamization of Lombok has always been carried out by outsiders possessing the cultural and political capital to launch such a mission: a Javanese military expedition in the sixteenth century, and officials from the central government in the 1960s.

In the case of *Di Selubung Malam*, written in 2004, a Minangkabau writer chose Lombok as a fertile ground for her ‘Islamization project’, and we must remember that this is an outsider’s perspective. The novel shows that women such as Ustadzah Zahra and Mandalika play an

⁵⁰ Ibid.

important role alongside men in the processes of *syiar* and *dakwah*, thus making a significant contribution to decentralization, as understood from the Islamic perspective. Novia belongs to a group of young writers who dedicate their works to the Islamic proselytizing mission, *Forum Lingkar Pena* (FLP, Pen Circle Forum). The aim of this organization is to train writers who want to spread Islam through literature. To date, the FLP has more than five thousand active members and has earned an important place in Indonesian literary circles.⁵¹ Such a background explains Novia's choice of angle for dealing with the issue of revitalization of *adat* in the decentralization era. Moreover, it is important for her to fight the growing public opinion in Indonesia of Islam as a religion that promotes intolerance and violence by presenting a different face of Islam that can counter the negative image, as is demonstrated by her novel. In this way, Novia foregrounds the liberatory and egalitarian aspects of Islam that have been voiced by many Islamic feminist scholars such as Asma Barlas and Leila Ahmed. Barlas argues that since Allah is compassionate and egalitarian, it does not make sense that He would want Islam to be oppressive. Thus Islamic teachings need to be interpreted and understood in this spirit. Meanwhile, Ahmed traces the early history of Islam and finds that Islam used to be egalitarian until a certain group of men claimed monopoly on interpreting the sacred texts and injected patriarchal interpretations into these texts.⁵²

Conclusion

These women writers have responded in diverse ways to decentralization and regional autonomy, processes that tend to sideline them and leave them in the margin. They want to have a say in these matters through their writings, but their voices are far from united. In the case of

⁵¹ See Arnez and Dewojati, "Sexuality, Morality and the Female Role" (2010), pp. 13-14.

⁵² See Barlas, *'Believing Women' in Islam* (2002), and Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992).

Tarian Bumi there is a constant questioning of how the traditional values of *adat* are implemented in the everyday lives of the people. Whether *adat* needs to be revitalized or changed is the most crucial issue in the novel, but certainly it does not try to persuade us that *adat* must be abandoned as obsolete. The situation in Bali, as described in *Tarian Bumi*, is highly complex because *adat* has been deeply enmeshed with Hinduism.

On the contrary, in *Di Selubung Malam*, the idea of decentralization is accompanied by religious revivalism and *adat* revitalization, and viewed as an opportunity to introduce ‘modernity’ to the practice of *adat*. In this novel, the term ‘modernity’ refers exclusively to Islamic religious values, which are deemed to be more advanced than the traditional norms of *adat*. Islamic modernity serves as a beacon in transforming *adat* from a ‘primitive’ phase into a more ‘civilized’ one. In this scheme of things, *adat* can be improved, and the means for achieving perfection is Islam. The introduction of the teachings of an organized religion is portrayed as a favorable policy in revitalizing *adat*. Bringing changes to *Watu Telu*, as conveyed in *Di Selubung Malam*, may not be as complex as changing the *warna* system in Bali because, after all, *Watu Telu* is a residual culture that survives only among a minority in contemporary Sasak society. Islam is the dominant system of faith in Lombok, and bringing the followers of *Watu Telu* closer to Islam can be perceived as part of an acculturation process. But proposing changes to the *warna* system in Hindu-Balinese society is certainly a different matter. The voice of critical Balinese writers like Oka Rusmini is that of a minority against the dominant power of Hinduism, which has formed a solid alliance with *adat* since time immemorial. Even the Council of Hindu Dharma, which officially holds the highest power in the practice of Hinduism in Indonesia, seems to find it difficult to change the understanding of the *warna* system in Balinese society.

Novia Syahidah's critique of *Watu Telu* is a mild one, intending to persuade *Watu Telu* followers to see how Islam offers superior and more egalitarian values than the traditional beliefs. Oka Rusmini, on the other hand, launches what seems to be a much sharper critique of *adat*, but her position is much more ambiguous than Novia Syahidah's. Oka does not have a concrete alternative to offer, since she is deeply entrenched in the teaching of Hinduism, and her critique of *adat* stops short at the patriarchal aspects of the *warna* system, without any intention of going further to question the *raison d'être* of the system *per se*. The issue in *Tarian Bumi*, therefore, is not perfecting one system of faith by imposing another system of faith which claims to be more modern and sophisticated than the older one, as propagated in *Di Selubung Malam*. It is more an issue of negotiating with *karma* without stepping out of the boundaries it sets.

What is evident in both novels is that the female characters play more active roles and assume more central positions than the male ones in shaping and influencing the development of the plot. Women have agency and an articulate voice that is worthy of the readers' attention and appreciation. Novia and Oka, in their own ways, have carved some alternative spaces for women to take part in defining and formulating issues such as regional autonomy, religious revivalism, and the revitalization of customary laws, through literature, even though the impact of these voices from the margins has yet to be seen. Neither of these writers, in my opinion, has any illusion that their works have effectively given shape to various policies on how regional autonomy needs to be implemented by taking religion and *adat* into account. But both authors have effectively used the marginal space provided by literature to invite, if not provoke, their readers to examine further both the advantages and disadvantages of bringing religious values into the implementation and modification of *adat*, as well as the need to preserve local wisdom in the era of regional autonomy in Indonesia. These remain divisive issues among politicians and

activists alike, as many women activists not affiliated to any religious belief are wary of the ways in which decentralization has been implemented so far. ‘Revitalization of *adat*’ is often used by local government officials as an opportunity to revitalize institutions and practices that are discriminatory to women, and to implement the Islamic *shariah* in the name of Islamic revivalism. In general, Muslims in Indonesia believe that in the Suharto era their religious freedom was curtailed, because the government considered that Islam posed a serious challenge to the state ideology which put loyalty to the nation above loyalty to one’s faith.⁵³

Contrary to what is described in Novia Syahidah’s novel, where women are given an important role and status, it is often argued that the implementation of *shariah* law in many regions in Indonesia has caused women to lose their freedom and “access to decision-making”. Thus, women’s “rights and interests” are seriously undermined.⁵⁴ Put in this perspective, a *dakwah* novel like *Di Selubung Malam* can be read as an attempt by an Islamic woman writer to shift the emphasis of *shariah* from its punitive dimension to its non-violent and non-discriminatory aspects. These aspects are often overlooked in the many debates regarding the formulation and implementation of the *shariah* law. Similarly, activists realize that ‘local wisdom’ can be a double-edged sword, especially when the elements that are revitalized are those that promote patriarchy’s hostility to women. Searching for elements of local wisdom that liberate and empower women must become an inseparable part of the process of revitalizing *adat*, as women were among those that were marginalized by the New Order.

⁵³ See Noerdin, *ibid.*, pp. 179-82.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

Chapter 5

Ethnicity and the Performance of Identity

Introduction

As a post-colonial nation consisting of over three hundred indigenous ethnic groups, Indonesia has witnessed a series of ethnic conflicts and tensions during the six decades since independence from colonial powers. Ethnic conflict is especially rife since the *Reformasi* of 1998 as a result of the loosening grip of a central government that had been authoritarian in nature for over thirty years. As the country's economy crumbled in 1997-1998, the Suharto regime lost its political legitimacy, and demands for more autonomy in the provinces could no longer be ignored. Ethno-nationalist sentiments that were dormant for years were reawakened during the tumultuous first five years of the *Reformasi*, as became apparent in several violent conflicts between various ethnic groups, especially on the islands of Kalimantan and Ambon, as well as in the capital city of Jakarta where people from different ethnic backgrounds coexist in at times uneasy relationships. West Kalimantan was devastated by a bloody conflict between the Dayaks, Malays and Madurese between February and April 2001; Ambon was ripped apart by what seemed to be a religious conflict between Muslims and Christians from 1999 to 2001, though it actually was as much an ethnic conflict as it involved the Ambonese, Buginese, and Javanese. Jakarta, as the main hub of the country, is not an exception as the native Betawis have been involved in a series of clashes with Madurese migrants. To discuss the genealogies of these conflicts would be too complex an endeavor: suffice it to say that, despite the severity of the conflicts and their prolonged impact on the sense of unity of the nation, it is remarkable that Indonesia has survived potential balkanization like that in the former Soviet Union and the

Balkan states. The history of ethnic violence in the archipelago, however, dates far back to the colonial period, especially where the ethnically different Chinese group is concerned.

The first and most significant massacre of Chinese in the archipelago during Dutch rule took place in 1740, when thousands of Chinese in Batavia (the colonial name of Jakarta) were killed by the Dutch.¹ Violence against the Chinese also occurred during the Java War (1825 – 1830) between the Dutch and the Javanese sultanate of Yogyakarta, and in the period of the Revolution between 1945 and 1949. It continued throughout the 1950s as a result of the repatriation policy issued by Sukarno's administration, and also between 1965 and 1966 after the failed coup attempt by the communists.² The Chinese were seen by the New Order regime as a potential threat to its anti-communist ideology. Suharto, in his efforts to solve the so-called 'Chinese Problem', issued a strongly assimilationist law in 1967 that prohibited any practices related to Chinese culture.³ Although the pretext of the law was to accelerate the assimilation of the Chinese into Indonesian society, in reality the Chinese continued to be considered as 'non-indigenous citizens' (*bukan warga asli*), and therefore hostility towards them never really ceased to exist, particularly since the Chinese in general have excelled in economic achievements.⁴ The most recent incident occurred in May 1998, at the brink of a momentous political shift of power, when hundreds of Chinese women were reportedly raped, and rioters looted and burned hundreds of shops and buildings belonging to Chinese residents. What has not always been fully realized is that most of the prominent Chinese businesses in Indonesia are owned by *totok* (full-blood) Chinese, the "less-assimilated recent immigrants", yet anti-Chinese sentiment is often extended

¹ The Dutch colonial period in the archipelago officially began in 1800, but the Dutch East India Company (VOC) had already had control of the region since 1602 until its bankruptcy in 1800, when the Dutch government in the Netherlands took control.

² See Lohanda, "Masalah Cina" (2002).

³ *Ibid.*, pp.68-69.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

to *peranakan* Chinese, whose ancestors have lived in Indonesia for generations and who are therefore more assimilated. Most *peranakan* Chinese own smaller businesses and enjoy less protection from the government.⁵ There is a wide consensus among scholars that the 1998 outbreak of ethnic violence against the Chinese in Jakarta and several other major cities is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the deeply-rooted social envy and resentment towards the Chinese that were cultivated by the New Order's politics of ethnicity.⁶ The New Order used the Chinese as a cash cow to enrich a few powerful individuals in ruling positions, rather than as a potential force for economic development that could have helped to improve the nation's prosperity as a whole.⁷

The two novels discussed in this chapter, *Perempuan Kembang Jepun* (*The Women of Kembang Jepun*, 2006) by Lan Fang and *Dimsum Terakhir* (*The Last Dim Sum*, 2006) by Clara Ng, both of whom are of Chinese descent, can be read as direct responses to discriminatory practices against the Chinese in Indonesia. Lan Fang's novel focuses on a Japanese female geisha who went to the Dutch East Indies at the height of the Pacific War to disguise herself as a 'comfort woman' for a Japanese army general, but the novel is as much about the Chinese as it is about this particular character, because she decides to assume a false identity as Chinese. A good part of the novel tells the struggle of this Japanese character to cope with her split ethnic identity, and through her eyes the readers come to understand how the Chinese experienced segregation and discrimination even during the Japanese occupation, prior to the birth of an independent republic. Clara Ng's work looks into the life stories of four girls who were born as quadruplets in a Chinese-Indonesian family that still upholds its ancestral traditions, and how each of these

⁵ See Lim and Gosling, "Strengths and Weaknesses of Minority Status for Southeast Asian Chinese" (1997), pp. 297-300.

⁶ See Nadj, "Problematika Segregasi Sosial" (2002), p. 102.

⁷ See Nawar, "Kekuasaan dan Dilema Etnis Tionghoa" (2002), pp. 144-45.

characters deals with her personal problems as well as her Chineseness in a society that has yet to accept them fully as integrated members. In both works the readers are exposed to the complex intersections between gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, and the conflicts resulting from them. Both authors approach their characters as individuals who seek to establish their sense of self and agency amidst the various forces that try to subjugate them, rather than as characters that represent a certain collective identity. The narrative style in both novels allows the reader to have ample access to the inner struggle of each of the characters and witness how internal contradictions and dilemmas are dealt with.

Perempuan Kembang Jepun: Ambiguous Citizens

Perempuan Kembang Jepun tells the life stories of its two female protagonists, Lestari (a.k.a. Kaguya) and Matsumi (a.k.a. Tjoa Kim Hwa) by continually shifting between the past and the present, thus gradually revealing the characters' past traumas which influence the way in which they cope with reality today. Lestari is the lost daughter of Matsumi, a Japanese geisha shipped to Surabaya during World War II to entertain a Japanese army general. However, since geishas exist only in Japan, Matsumi had to disguise herself as a Chinese by the name of Tjoa Kim Hwa, working as a 'comfort woman' in a brothel located in the Kembang Jepun district. Matsumi has an affair with a Javanese man, Sujono, and later lives with him and has a child. Due to his possessiveness, as well as the defeat of Japan in 1945, she abandons her daughter, Kaguya, and returns to Japan alone. Sujono raises this daughter with his Javanese wife and family and names her Lestari. She is endlessly tortured by Sujono's wife, Sulis, and raped by Joko, her stepbrother, when she has just entered reached puberty. Many years later, the grown-up Lestari runs an orphanage and adopts a young girl, Maya. Maya befriends a young Japanese

photographer, Higashi, when he visits Kembang Jepun to take some photos. They fall in love, and Higashi visits Surabaya again with his mother to propose to Maya. The encounter of the two single mothers turns out to be fortuitous, because Higashi's mother is none other than Matsumi. Like Maya, Higashi was also adopted. Matsumi has fostered him since the age of five when she returned to Japan at the end of the war. Guilt, anger, and happiness blend as they both struggle to come to terms with everything that has happened.

Lestari is sixty years old and Matsumi is in her eighties. They are not only daughter and mother but also each other's in-laws. *Perempuan Kembang Jepun* is a compelling novel in the way it presents the muddling of identities and how the characters struggle with adversities, trauma, and contradictions in order to arrive at reconciliation. The most prominent male character is Sujono, a man without a permanent job who in 1945 is deluded by his pretentious illusion of becoming a revolutionary hero who will liberate his nation from foreign oppression. While Sujono significantly helps to shape the lives of both Matsumi and Lestari, in the end the two women have to find their own ways towards a mother-daughter reunion that allows them to make peace with their dark past. Through the flashback technique, the novel takes the characters back to the past to encounter and conquer their demons so that they may move forward for the sake of their children's happiness.

Matsumi arrives in Surabaya in 1942 along with the Chinese immigrants who fled their country because of the Japanese invasion. Her adopted Chinese name, Tjoa Kim Hwa, is given by her Japanese contact in Jakarta who helps to arrange her travel to East Java. *Kim Hwa* means 'golden flower', while *Tjoa* could mean 'snake'. In this context, we can interpret 'snake' as referring to the ability to shake off one's skin and develop a new one, whereas 'golden flower' is a tribute to Matsumi's beauty, for she is the most beautiful comfort woman in the whole of

Kembang Jepun. *Kembang Jepun* is a Malay phrase which means ‘Japanese Flower’, again a reference to the beautiful geisha who was said to have once lived there. Although present-day Kembang Jepun is in reality an important trading area in Surabaya, according to the novel in the past it was mostly inhabited by Chinese immigrants, and famous for its brothels. Matsumi is forced to hide her Japanese identity, because the presence of a Japanese geisha in Java would be scandalous and bring disgrace to Japan, which saw itself as the leader of Asia during the war.⁸ Matsumi upholds the geisha ethics until she meets Sujono. A geisha’s most sacred duty is to serve her client, to entertain him, and to provide him with the utmost satisfaction, but she should not fall in love with any customer.

Her conflict begins when she lands at Surabaya harbor. She despises her assumed Chinese identity, as she has fixed biases and prejudices against the Chinese. In her view, they are “dirty and messy” (*kumuh dan lusuh*), and “their mouths and bodies stink” (*tubuh dan mulut mereka berbau tidak sedap*). She particularly loathes that she has to disguise herself as a Chinese woman, because “their feet are tightly bound with cloth until they become so small” (*kaki mereka dibebat kain sehingga menjadi kecil sekali*) so that “they cannot walk quickly, let alone run fast” (*mereka tidak bisa berjalan lincah apalagi berlari cepat*), unlike Japanese women who are able to move with agility when they wear kimonos and wooden sandals. Moreover, Chinese women “like to shout with a deafening and rude voice” (*suka berteriak-teriak dengan suara nyaring dan kasar*).⁹ Her geisha friend’s words remain fixed in her head, that once Japanese she will always be Japanese despite her newly given identity.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Matsumi cannot help

⁸ Lan Fang (2006), p. 94.

⁹ Ibid., p. 93.

¹⁰ Yuriko, Matsumi’s mentor in the geisha house in Tokyo, instilled in Matsumi’s mind the need to preserve her nationalism and determination to eventually go back to Japan regardless where she is because, in Yuriko’s words, “Japan is life” (*Jepang adalah hidup*), and “no matter how dark the sky is, Japanese will seek the sun, because the sun is life” (*segelap apapun langit, orang Jepang tetap akan mencari matahari, karena matahari adalah hidup*) (p. 106).

being shocked to see the terrible conditions of the comfort women who live in the same brothel but are forced to serve many soldiers every day, unlike her, who only serves the highest bidders. This is the first time she develops a sense of solidarity with the other women who are not Japanese, and is able to say to herself, “At least I’m also a woman. I’m also a woman who has to serve men for their ultimate satisfaction. But I don’t have to merely open my legs to be penetrated by tens of soldiers every day.”¹¹ Furthermore, she ponders:

My woman’s heart often cried out when I heard stories about those comfort women at the brothel house. Even though they’re Javanese, Chinese and Korean, they’re also women. Just like me. What is worse, they had to do their job against their will and under threats. It would be shameful and inappropriate for me to take pride in becoming the prima donna of the most expensive nightclub in Kembang Jepun.¹²

It is interesting to note that Matsumi specifically uses the phrase “my woman’s heart” (*hati perempuanku*), which underlines her sense of solidarity and sisterhood with the non-Japanese comfort women who have to bear the worst treatment. This critical reflection emerges despite the fact that she only “hears stories” about those women and never sees their real conditions with her own eyes, as she is isolated from the others and placed in the best brothel in the area. What happens at this point is contrary to her initial attitude towards the Chinese comfort women. Matsumi ascribes her fortunate situation to the fact that she is Japanese, and not a Javanese, Chinese or Korean, even though at that time she has taken on the identity of Tjoa Kim Hwa. Her sense of Japaneseness is further reinforced by Hanada, the owner of the nightclub where she

¹¹ Ibid.: *Setidaknya aku juga perempuan. Aku juga perempuan yang melayani laki-laki untuk mencapai kepuasan tertinggi. Tetapi aku tidak hanya sekadar menganggang untuk dimasuki puluhan laki-laki dalam sehari* (p. 115).

¹² Ibid.: *Hati perempuanku kerap menangis bila mendengar cerita tentang para jugun ianfu di kurabu. Walaupun mereka orang Jawa, Cina dan Korea, mereka juga perempuan. Sama seperti aku. Apalagi mereka menjalani tugas itu karena terpaksa dan di bawah ancaman. Sungguh memalukan dan tidak pantas kalau lantas aku berbangga diri menjadi primadona di kelab hiburan termahal di Kembang Jepun* (p. 135).

lives, who tells her that the Japanese general does not want a comfort woman (*jugun ianfu*). He wants a geisha instead, but nobody is allowed to find out that Matsumi is Japanese. As Matsumi utters, “Now I’m Tjoa Kim Hwa...I’m a Chinese woman” (*Sekarang aku Tjoa Kim Hwa...Aku perempuan Cina*), she embraces her new identity with mixed feelings but accepts it as a fact which she does not deny or reject.¹³

However, she also knows that Chineseness is an identity that she is expected to *perform* rather than adopt. The war, her patrons, and her dedication to her profession as a geisha demand that she be a Chinese comfort woman in public while remaining a geisha in private. Thus, Matsumi is displaced on two accounts: she is a Japanese disguised as Chinese, and she is a geisha displaced to an island far away from her homeland because of the war. As the plot unravels, Japan is on the verge of losing the war, and all the Japanese rush back to Japan in fear of retaliation from the local people. For a while Matsumi is safe as a Chinese, but she fears that sooner or later people will find out who Tjoa Kim Hwa in fact is. With the help of some kind-hearted Chinese she manages to board a ship to Japan, leaving Kaguya behind with a Chinese couple. Sujono eventually finds Kaguya in the temple based on the information given by some people who happen to see her there. Matsumi never stops blaming Sujono’s possessive and abusive behavior for her having to leave Kaguya on Java. Aboard the ship, along with terrified refugees, Matsumi comes to the realization that she is indeed not different from the Chinese immigrants whom she saw at the port a few years before. She no longer feels that she is performing a Chinese identity, but that she is one of them:

Now I’m on a ship, but in a different condition and situation. I don’t see the tired looks of the Chinese who strive for a new living. But I am a Chinese with a hopeless face, tired and worn-down, with eyes searching for the sun [...] I’m not different from those

¹³ Ibid.

Chinese whom I once pitied. In fact, now I'm the one who needs to beg for their sympathy. Now I'm crouching in a corner of this ship with nothing to own except a drop of breath and life as thin as a piece of paper.¹⁴

This is not a case of identity swap, but rather a poignant realization that comes out at the time of crisis, and it allows Matsumi to experience directly what the Chinese refugees had to endure several years before when they landed in Surabaya. This new sense of being 'in the same boat' with the Chinese goes beyond not only ethnic boundaries but also gender demarcations: men and women, Chinese and Japanese, all were innocent victims of a terrible war that changed their lives and took everything away from them against their will. At this point, Matsumi and Tjoa Kim Hwa are no longer two distinct identities but become blurred. What began as the performing of a fake Chinese identity has turned into a mind-opening experience, as a sense of solidarity and empathy develops.

Lestari, on the other hand, has to follow a completely different trajectory as she struggles to continue living with a sense of abandonment, having to take care of her ailing father who could never let go of the Japanese woman he loved till the end of his life. The half Javanese-half Japanese character never considers herself Japanese. In fact, her Japanese side contributes to the misery that she has to endure during her childhood. Ever since Matsumi abandoned her, 'mother' has become an alien word for her. After her subsequent reunion with Sujono, she blames her lost Japanese mother for her childhood hardships. Later in life she initially opposes Maya's relationship with Higashi because it reminds her of her own childhood trauma.¹⁵ Their marriage

¹⁴ Ibid.: *Sekarang aku juga berada di dalam kapal, tapi dalam kondisi dan situasi yang berbeda. Aku tidak melihat wajah letih orang-orang Cina yang mencari penghidupan baru. Tetapi akulah orang Cina dengan raut putus asa, lelah dan lesu, dengan gurat mata yang mencari matahari [...] Aku tidak ada bedanya dengan orang-orang Cina yang dulu kukasihani. Justru sekarang akulah yang perlu dibelaskasihani oleh mereka. Saat ini aku meringkuk di pojok kapal tanpa memiliki apa pun kecuali seup napas dan selembur nyawa setipis kertas* (pp. 120-21).

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 21-23.

not only serves as a symbolic union between a man and a woman but also as a reconnection of the tie between Lestari and Matsumi. As the mother-and-daughter relationship is eventually restored, Lestari re-embraces her Japaneseness by addressing Matsumi as *Okasan* ('mother' in Japanese). She accepts that Matsumi's calls her Kaguya, her old Japanese name which she has been struggling hard to bury along with her dark past: "She calls me Kaguya! Again, that name sounds unfamiliar to my ears. But I can't help feeling that *Okasan's* quivering voice has brought fresh air to my soul that had been hollow for so many years".¹⁶ The reinstatement of the Japanese name that marks the reconciliation of mother and daughter also signifies the reestablishment of the mother-daughter generational hierarchy, and hence the performing of the role of daughter, with all of the etiquette that comes with that status. Lestari's renaming as Kaguya, therefore, is not just a "reenactment" of "a set of meanings" that is already socially established and defines parenthood. It is, at the same time, a "re-experiencing" of that set of meanings by both the name-giver and the recipient. Butler uses these concepts to describe gender as an "act" which requires the repetition of its performance in order to obtain legitimacy. Within the patriarchal system, the aim of such an act is to maintain "gender within its binary frame", which in turn serves to constitute the formation of a subordinate subject.¹⁷ In the case of Lestari's renaming, however, it is also a reenactment of a past action in which Matsumi—without Sujono by her side—named her baby girl Kaguya. Both in the primal event and its repetition, a masculine father-figure that should have marked the moment as an affirmation of the dominant "heterosexual matrix" is absent. But this does not mean that the consequence of the act is less repressive for Lestari than it would otherwise be if the act were carried out by a father-figure.

¹⁶ Ibid.: *Ia memanggilku Kaguya! Lagi-lagi nama itu terasa asing di telingaku. Tetapi yang tak mampu kuhindari adalah ketika merasakan getaran suara Okasan begitu menyegarkan jiwaku yang kosong berpuluh-puluh tahun* (p. 238).

¹⁷ See Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1990), p. 140.

While Lestari decides to use this highly emotional event to free herself from the burden of the past, she is baffled by Matsumi's refusal to talk about Sujono or acknowledge the sacrifices he has made in bringing up Lestari: "I have revealed the darkest side of my life. I feel as if I'm free from thousands of tons of heavy burden that has weighed down my life [...] Is Okasan just like me? Keeping all the wounds for herself. Choosing to forget them because she cannot forgive?"¹⁸ Lestari manages to come to terms with all of her internal conflicts, but Matsumi still drags her unhappy past behind her even after the reunion with her lost daughter. Lestari chooses to be quiet about it, trying to understand why Matsumi is behaving in such a way without asking questions. For Matsumi, Sujono is not part of the past that she has been trying to reenact in order to free herself from guilt. She regrets that she easily fell in love with Sujono, who was a frequent visitor of the brothel in Kembang Jepun, and ran away with him. For Lestari, the reunion with her mother is a bittersweet event. Freed from the ghosts of the past, she now has to learn to perform as an obedient daughter, after having lived as a woman who grew up independently without a mother's presence. She does so, if not for the sake of the newly restored relationship with Matsumi, at least for the sake of Maya's happiness. This may explain why at the end she admits that she experiences happiness, yet deep in her heart she also stores some feelings of disappointment: "To be honest, it's not hatred that I'm feeling, but a wave of disappointment that's welling up in my mind. But I don't know what this disappointment is for..."¹⁹ Lestari is a survivor, but Matsumi continues to be shackled by the past.

¹⁸ Ibid.: *Bagian paling hitam dalam lembaran hidupku sudah kubuka. Aku seakan-akan lepas dari ribuan ton beban yang selama ini menggelayuti batinku [...] Apakah Okasan juga seperti aku? Menyimpan luka itu sendiri. Memilih melupakan luka itu karena tidak bisa memaafkannya?* (pp. 257 and 261).

¹⁹ Ibid.: *Bila ingin jujur, bukan rasa benci yang kurasakan, melainkan tumpukan kekecewaan yang menggunung di batinku. Tetapi aku tidak tahu kekecewaan itu untuk siapa... Kecewa untuk hidupku sendiri. Mungkin lebih tepatnya, kecewa untuk sebuah masa lalu* (p. 277).

The novel provides the readers with a window into Sujono's life with his wife Sulis, and her struggle to save herself and her son from poverty. While she is portrayed as a villainous character, Sulis is actually a much fiercer fighter when it comes to defending her child than Matsumi was. As Sujono remains obsessed with how to free the country from foreign oppression, Sulis has to sell traditional herbal medicines from one *kampung* (city district) to another to survive. For her, the most urgent issue is how to feed her son. Scarcity and poverty are far more concrete problems than fighting for the nation's independence.²⁰ Sulis does not care for her own safety, but sticks to defending Joko to the end, even when it means losing Sujono. Her indifference to the Revolution and independence is founded on a very sound basis: a maternal instinct to protect her son in time of danger. Such a motherly predisposition was absent in Matsumi. Her loyalty to Japan prevails over her love for Kaguya, and she blames Sujono for her failure to choose her daughter over her homeland. The mother-daughter reconciliation does not entirely heal the scars of the past, although it reconnects the two characters.

According to Butler's theory of performativity, "the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time",²¹ so gender performativity is effective "only to the extent that it is performed".²² Elsewhere, Butler discusses sex also as performative, by arguing that sex is not "a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms". This reiteration is essential because it indicates that materialization is "never quite complete", as "bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled".²³ In this novel, each female character has to deal with

²⁰ Ibid., p. 74.

²¹ Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" (1988), p. 523.

²² Ibid., p. 527.

²³ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (1993), p. 236.

an aspect of her gender but their problems are not exclusively related to sex: Matsumi is a geisha who disguises herself as a comfort woman, Lestari is an 'unwanted' daughter who experiences a sexual assault committed by her step-brother, and Sulis is committed to her duty as a mother but rebels against the pressure to be a submissive wife. Butler's theory contributes to our understanding of the characters, not because of their sex and/or gender, but rather because of the attention it draws to the elements of coercion and subversion involved in performativity. The characters accept the dominant social norms, but in the process they "rearticulate" some aspects of those norms and, as Butler suggests, this opens up a possibility of subversion.²⁴

Matsumi does not like disguising herself as a Chinese comfort woman, but her code of honor as a geisha compels her to carry out her duty without protest. What saves Matsumi from the tragic fate that the other comfort women meet is not the gender/sexuality she performs but her double identity. During the war she was safe because of her privileged status as General Kobayashi's mistress, and after the war she was safe because of her successful performance of being Chinese. Had they known that she was Japanese, nobody would have been able to guarantee her safety, as anti-Japanese sentiments were strong. Further, she is able to develop a sense of gender solidarity with the other women, which goes beyond racial or ethnic boundaries. It helps her develop a critical awareness of the Japanese soldiers' brutal treatment of those women. That Matsumi is eventually re-interpellated by the call of Japanese nationalism demonstrates that, even if there are subversive moments and possibilities in performing an alternative identity, in the end the hegemonic force is reinstated and strengthened. Matsumi's actions are frequently dictated by circumstances that thrust themselves on her, as she admits:

²⁴ Ibid.: In Butler's view, the performativity of norms and laws always carries the possibility of turning the norms against themselves. Thus, the reiteration of the regulatory practice reinforces the norms, yet at the same time it can also bring about re-examination of the norms.

“[...] I always let Life control my life. I never protest or say no”.²⁵ The only time she feels that she makes her own decision about her life is when she decides to leave the brothel and live with Sujono, only to find out later that her dreams are shattered by his possessive behavior.

Lestari enjoys adult life as an unmarried woman despite the absence of a mother-figure. She has more affection for Sujono than for Matsumi, and her love for him remains intact, in spite of the terrible stories she hears about him from Matsumi. Her ambiguous feelings towards Matsumi notwithstanding, Lestari agrees to readopt her Japanese name and reenact the role of daughter, which entails love and obedience towards her mother. She resists the urge to question Matsumi about her motives for abandoning her or to try to persuade her to forgive Sujono. She simply chooses to settle with a conclusion that “only the love between a mother and a child is the sweetest and most beautiful kind of love. Love of the deepest kind. Happiness”.²⁶ This may be the only sensible option for her if she wants Maya and Higashi to be happy, for any rift between Lestari and Matsumi may affect their happiness as well. Thus, any subversive potential in Lestari’s performance as a daughter has to be suppressed so that order, peace, and happiness in the family may not be jeopardized.

Sulis is the only character who chooses to commit herself fervently to her performance as a mother. Her life focuses entirely on raising Joko, and Sujono only occupies a marginal space therein. She gradually loses her respect for him, and that lack of respect quickly turns into hate when Sujono brings Lestari home. Chandra Mohanty writes that ‘women’ should not be understood as a homogenous group with shared labels such as “powerless, exploited, sexually

²⁵ Lan Fang, *Ibid.*: [...] aku selalu membiarkan Sang Hidup yang mengatur jalan hidupku. Aku tidak pernah membantah dan berkata tidak (p. 140).

²⁶ *Ibid.*: Hanya cinta ibu dan anak yang paling manis dan indah. Cinta dari seluruh rasa terdalam. Bahagia (p. 279).

harassed”.²⁷ She criticizes the ways in which western feminist texts represent “Third-World women” as being dependent and apolitical, as well as “victims of race, sex, and class”.²⁸ Sulis refuses to see herself as a victim, she is not suffering from dependency, and she has a strongly articulated political standpoint. Moreover, gender equality is not the main issue for her, and mothering is not an evidence of oppression but a meaningful activity. Sulis is a manifestation of women as constituted by a “complex interaction” between many different issues, including “class, culture [...] and other ideological institutions and frameworks”, as Mohanty argues, and not a monolithic group that is solely constituted by its gender.²⁹ To the end, Sulis remains unequivocal about mothering even if she has to lose Sujono, as she tries to rescue Joko from his wrath in the aftermath of Lestari’s rape. Her performance of mothering, while conforming to social expectations, defies the conventional mothering norms which require the constant and dominant presence of a husband as a breadwinner and head of the family. It further subverts the dominant norms by revaluing mothering not as an act of necessity but as an expression of unconditional love.

Dimsum Terakhir: Negotiating Chineseness

Dimsum Terakhir revolves around the lives of fictional quadruplets with contrasting personalities and traits, born into a Chinese-Indonesian family that struggles to preserve its ancestral traditions. Each of the four female characters, Siska, Indah, Rosi, and Novera, has her own personal problems and secrets to deal with. Siska lives and works in Singapore as a CEO of a flourishing company, Indah works in Jakarta as a journalist and novelist, Rosi runs a rose plantation in Bogor, and Novera is a school teacher in Yogyakarta. They are reunited in the old

²⁷ Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes” (2003), pp. 22-23.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 30.

family house in Jakarta because Nung, their father, is terminally ill. The reunion turns out to be eventful, as their secrets and individual conflicts are gradually revealed. The plot oscillates between the present-day predicaments that the characters are facing and reminiscences of past events which significantly influenced the paths taken by each of them, and how they struggle with their identity problems. Amidst the frequent switches of time and points of view, the reader finds portions of the story narrated by the ghost of their late mother, Anas, who pays a visit to the house during the celebration of the lunar New Year. In addition to the quadruplets and their parents, some secondary characters are introduced: Dharma, Rosi's same-sex partner; Antonius, a Catholic priest who impregnated Indah but refuses to bear paternal responsibility; and Rafy, whom Novera asks to pretend to be her boyfriend in order to make Nung happy during his last weeks. The catalyst of the conflict is Nung's final request that his four daughters be married before he leaves this world.

Siska, the oldest quadruplet, is an outgoing and sexually active single woman with solid self-confidence. She successfully manages her own company and travels frequently to meet with clients. When Indah calls her to inform her about their father's condition, Siska is in the midst of making love with a male client in a hotel room in Hong Kong. This one-time exception to her rule not to get involved with clients will later cause her trouble, as she is set up and accused of sexual harassment. Being a successful, independent woman, Siska does not believe in marriage. Her dismissive attitude towards it is partly due to her past, unpleasant experience of being jilted by her fiancé who, unbeknownst to her, had an affair with another woman. Siska swore to never again attach herself to just one man: "She doesn't need a boyfriend, let alone a husband [...]. She doesn't need to be a loyal wife, cook, and raise a bunch of cute children. She doesn't need the

title ‘wife’ or ‘missus’ or ‘mommy’. She is Siska Yuanita, CEO with only one title: *freedom*”.³⁰ She strongly objects to her father’s wish to see all his daughters married before he dies, whereas all her sisters scramble in panic to find ways to avoid having to fulfill the wish. In her own words, Siska asserts with confidence and determination, “I don’t want to set a target for marriage because marriage is not a life’s target [...] nobody—including Daddy—can set a target for my personal life”.³¹

Underneath her seemingly complete confidence, however, Siska is struggling with her Chinese-Indonesian identity. She suspects that her Hong Kong clients like to gossip behind her back about the fact that she looks Chinese but cannot speak the language; among overseas Chinese it is common knowledge that Chinese-Indonesians very likely do not speak Chinese. Yet at times she can fiercely defend her Chinese identity, especially when it is under attack. She balks at the idea of Novera receiving Catholic baptism, and thinks that her sister has brought shame and disgrace to the Chinese by converting to Christianity.³² Although she is aware of her marginalized position in Indonesia as a Chinese, she refuses to condemn the government, which she thinks is mainly responsible for the prolonged discriminatory practices against minorities. She prefers to work hard and not blame anybody for her situation, and realizes that poor descendants of Chinese in Indonesia live in even worse conditions than recent immigrants, as they had to endure both poverty and discrimination.³³

³⁰ Clara Ng, *Dimsum Terakhir* (2006): *Dia tidak butuh pacar, apalagi suami [...]. Dia juga tidak perlu menjadi istri yang setia, memasak dan membesarkan sepasukan anak yang lucu-lucu. Dia tidak perlu gelar ‘istri’ atau ‘nyonya’ atau ‘mami’. Dia Siska Yuanita, direktur eksekutif yang mempunyai satu titel: freedom* (pp. 89-90).

³¹ *Ibid.*: *Aku tidak mau memasak target soal pernikahan karena menikah bukanlah target hidup [...] siapapun—termasuk Papa—tidak dapat menentukan target itu terhadap hidup pribadiku* (p. 149).

³² When Novera discloses to the family that she is converting to Christianity, Siska is amongst those who strongly oppose the idea. She says, “*Jangan bikin malu orang Cina. Tidak usah pakai acara baptis-baptisan*” (Don’t disgrace the Chinese. Forget baptism) (p. 72).

³³ See Ng, *ibid.*, pp. 230-32.

In contrast to Siska, Indah has low self-esteem, which is partly caused and reflected by a speech impediment that makes her stutter, especially when she is under pressure. On the other hand, she is described as a perfectionist, which can be interpreted as a means to compensate for her feeling of inadequacy. She has successfully published her first novel but is suffering from a crisis as she is unable to start a second work of fiction while her fans urge her to produce a new book. As the second oldest of the quadruplets, Indah never stops wondering how she could be related to her sisters, Rosi and Novera, whom she thinks are totally incompatible with her in terms of personality and preferences. In addition, she often loses her patience when she has to deal with Siska's eccentricity, and has considered Siska her natural enemy since birth. Carrying the main burden of taking care of her father and the family house on her shoulders, she feels that it is not fair. Therefore, disregarding her sisters' objections, Indah insists that they all stay in Jakarta during Nung's treatment. Aside from her writer's block and Nung's poor health, Indah has to come to terms with the fact that Antonius, her secret lover, cannot make up his mind about whether he should leave the Catholic priesthood and marry her. He believes that he is already married to the Church, and thinks that Nung will not approve of their relationship even if he leaves the priesthood, because he is Javanese.

Although she looks weak, Indah actually has a cunning mind. She manages to make her sisters stay in Jakarta despite their grudges, she lures Antonius into a romantic relationship with her, and in the process of writing her first novel she was able to exploit her Chineseness to make it a best-seller. That book concerned the Chinese in Indonesia and their social-political struggles, based on her own diary, and she has to admit that the novel sold well because no other Indonesian writer had explored the lives of overseas Chinese before.³⁴ Regardless of her weaknesses, however, Indah—in Novera's eyes—serves as the glue that binds the family

³⁴ Ibid., see pp. 207-08.

together and preserves its traditions. Indah's development as a character is visible in the ways in which she deals with each of her personal problems. When she finds out that she is pregnant, she decides not to abort the fetus: "Her decision to complete her pregnancy is not an easy one. Frankly speaking, at first she didn't really want to keep the baby [...]. The closer the delivery time comes, the more complete her suffering and happiness are. Mixed into one. Muddled".³⁵ She is able to stand up to Siska, who tries to persuade her to have an abortion. Indah finds the idea repulsive: "...abortion? That word feels like a cold wind that causes her heart to freeze. To abort means to murder. Realizing the similarity, Indah's heart bleeds. It's hurt".³⁶ During Nung's funeral, when Antonius shows up and tries to talk with her, Indah is able to overcome her feelings for him and indicates that she will do just fine bringing up the baby alone without him. Even though Indah's pro-life view may be considered 'conservative', she is transformed into an independent woman with self confidence. She no longer aims at perfection, which was a driving force behind her success as a novelist but also an impediment to her efforts to gain confidence and find out what she really wants as a woman.

Rosi, the third sister, has the most complex gender identity problems, compared to the others. She likes to dress like a man, has her hair cut short, and at first she is living as a lesbian. She keeps her girlfriend, Dharma, secret from her family, as she does not want them to find out about her sexual orientation. She first became aware of her difference when she was twelve years old, and began to hate her female body. She did not want to be a woman. She was happy that her first period did not come until late, at the age of twenty, as she feels that she is trapped in the wrong corporeality, she is actually a man in a woman's body. This forces her to live a split life:

³⁵ Ibid.: *Keputusannya mempertahankan kehamilan memang bukan keputusan mudah. Terus terang, mulanya dia memang tidak sungguh-sungguh menginginkan bayi ini [...]. Semakin tua usia kehamilannya bertambah, semakin lengkap penderitaan dan kebahagiaan Indah. Bercampur rata. Teraduk-aduk* (p. 316).

³⁶ Ibid.: *Menggugurkan? Kata itu bagai angin dingin yang langsung membekukan hati Indah seketika. Menggugurkan berarti membunuh. Menyadari sinonim kata tersebut, hati Indah berdarah. Sakit rasanya* (p. 270).

to herself she is Roni, not Rosi, but only Dharma knows this secret and calls her by her male name. Rosi's problem becomes even more complicated, as being Chinese she also has to come to terms with discrimination against ethnic minorities, and her sexual orientation makes the situation worse for her. To escape from the contradictions and injustice she faces, Rosi feigns indifference: she does what she wants to do, and disregards anybody else. In short, she wants to break all the rules because, in her opinion, rules are made by those who consider themselves 'normal'.³⁷ However, she realizes that her primary enemy is herself: "She is on the verge of her deepest and steepest self, which remains hidden and messed up. Her split self. The self she's been trying to get rid of for years. The self that manages to survive, living inside her body".³⁸ Roni is introduced for the first time in the narrative when the plot switches to a flashback, when Rosi was eighteen:

Roni is masculine and handsome, even though his personality is a reflection of Rosi's. Roni is Rosi, in the 'truest' manifestation. Roni has been present inside Rosi since the girl reached adolescence, when the awareness of her existence began to surface. At first, Rosi prevented Roni from coming out, leaving him imprisoned quietly deep down under her subconscious. When finally Roni dared to show himself, Rosi could hardly do anything to stop him.³⁹

Although Rosi tries hard to hide her transgender identity, her sisters have some inkling of her split selfhood. She almost gives away her sexual preference for women when she

³⁷ Ibid. See p. 45.

³⁸ Ibid.: *Dirinya yang berada di dalam jurang sanubari terdalam, sembunyi dan mengacak-acak jiwanya. Dirinya yang terbelah. Dirinya yang berusaha dia usir selama tahun-tahun belakangan ini. Dirinya juga yang berhasil bertahan, hidup di dalamnya* (p. 41).

³⁹ Ibid.: *Sosok Roni gagah dan tampan, walaupun pribadinya adalah pantulan cermin Rosi. Roni adalah Rosi, dalam bentuk yang 'sebenarnya'.* Roni memang telah hadir dalam diri Rosi semenjak gadis itu mencapai usia puber, ketika eksistensi diri mulai muncul ke permukaan. Mulanya Rosi mencegah Roni muncul ke permukaan. Membiarkan dia terpenjara diam-diam di alam bawah sanubari. Ketika akhirnya Roni benar-benar berani menampakkan diri, Rosi nyaris tidak dapat berbuat apa-apa (p. 121).

accidentally says in front of her sisters that making love with men is disgusting.⁴⁰ Indah sometimes wonders why Rosi has her hair cut very short, for that makes her look both beautiful and handsome in her eyes.⁴¹ Siska has been suspicious that Rosi is hiding a secret about her sexuality, since she caught her wrapping a piece of cloth around her body to flatten her breasts. On another occasion, Siska rescued Rosi when she tried to commit suicide by taking an overdose of pills. Rosi finally reveals to Siska that she believes she is actually a man who likes women, although at first she thought she was a lesbian: “admitting that she’s a lesbian is easier. Nowadays, lesbians and gays are becoming more acceptable in society [...]. But women who become men? They’re hiding, not easy to identify, and no matter what, there will still be many who cannot understand them”.⁴² Rosi feels that she is one hundred per cent male, a man who desires women,⁴³ and that she is ‘normal’ because she is not a lesbian. Throughout her period in the closet, she takes advantage of the fact that society more readily accepts women who dress and act like men, rather than the other way around. It helps her avoid society’s condemnation. It would have been different if she were physically a man but wearing women’s clothes and cosmetics.⁴⁴ Her relationship with Dharma was at a low point when Dharma criticized her indecision and accused her of being subservient to patriarchy. Rosi was offended, and her Chineseness came up in defense of the Confucian value of filial piety, which applies to both sons and daughters, that her family has upheld for a long time: “This isn’t patriarchy. This is Chinese culture. Chinese kids have an obligation to respect their parents. [...] It’s my obligation, taught by Mommy. I must not neglect Daddy. It’s bad *feng shui*. Bad karma. [...] Don’t insult the

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 215.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 80.

⁴² Ibid.: *Mengaku lesbian jauh lebih muda. Pada zaman sekarang, sudah semakin banyak masyarakat yang dapat mengerti dan menerima lesbian dan gay [...]. Tapi perempuan yang menjadi lelaki? Mereka lebih tersembunyi, sulit dikenali, dan sampai kapan pun, masih banyak orang tidak dapat mengerti* (p. 224).

⁴³ Ibid., p. 182.

⁴⁴ Ibid.. See pp. 182-83.

strength of Chinese culture. You've insulted an extraordinary people".⁴⁵ Thus, for Rosi, her ethnic identity is by no means less important than her sexuality, and she is willing to fight for it even if it puts her relationship with Dharma in jeopardy.

Nung discovers that Rosi thinks she is actually a man trapped in the female body, as he has a chance to talk with Dharma when Rosi is not present. Although Nung admits that it is a shocking discovery, he gives his blessing to their relationship: "I just want to be frank, that I don't have any clue about this stuff. In my era, we never heard of women wanting to be men or women falling in love with other women. As a parent, at first I was confused. What should I do? But no matter what, Rosi is my daughter whom I love very much".⁴⁶ When Nung dies, the quadruplets agree that Rosi should be the flag-bearer leading the funeral procession, a tradition carried out by the eldest son at a funeral ceremony among Chinese-Indonesians. This signifies their acceptance of Rosi as an inseparable part of the family and as fulfilling a male role:

The smoke of the incense stick rises to the air. Its fragrance slips into her heart. The deafening noise of cymbals sounds like music to her ears. Strange songs in an alien language flow in perfection [...]. Rosi is lying on the ground. This is an extraordinary event. It's an orchestration of the recognition of her sexuality regardless of what people might say.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid.: *Ini bukan budaya patriarki. Ini budaya Cina. Anak-anak keturunan Cina diwajibkan menghormati ibu-bapaknya. [...] Itu kewajibanku, yang diajarkan oleh mamaku. Aku tidak boleh menyia-nyiakkan papaku. Feng shui jelek. Karma buruk. [...] Jangan menghina kekuatan budaya Cina. Kamu menyinggung bangsa yang luar biasa ini* (pp. 192-93).

⁴⁶ Ibid.: *Oom cuma mau terus terang, sebenarnya Oom nggak ngerti yang beginian. Di zaman Oom, nggak pernah kedengaran perempuan yang mau jadi lelaki atau perempuan yang naksir sama perempuan lainnya. Sebagai orangtua, Oom bingung mulanya. Mau diapain? Tapi biar bagaimana, Rosi anak perempuan Oom yang Oom sayangi* (p. 321).

⁴⁷ Ibid.: *Asap hio mengepul di udara. Wangi, masuk menyelinap di hatinya. Suara kerencengan berbunyi bagai lagu di telinga. Nyanyian aneh berbahasa asing mendayu sempurna [...]. Rosi rebah, kepalanya serata tanah. Ini peristiwa istimewa. Ini orkestra tentang pengakuan atas seksualitasnya. Masa bodoh apa kata orang-orang* (p. 348).

Novera, the youngest quadruplet, is by nature shy and reserved, but she can be very persistent. Like Indah, she suffers from an inferiority complex, and compared to the rest she is the least ambitious. When they were small, Novera was the one who often fell sick. Although they look physically alike, Novera has always thought that she does not share anything with her sisters and hates it when people compare them in order to find similarities. She is the only one in the family who converts to Catholicism, in spite of her mother's and sisters' opposition. Anas feared that once Novera became a Catholic, she would not want to touch incense sticks anymore, and might later force her to be a Catholic, too. Only Nung was sympathetic to Novera's conversion, because he believed that Catholicism would help her to be a woman with a modern mind.⁴⁸ At one point in her life, Novera decides to be a nun. She is convinced that this is the most courageous decision she has ever made in her life, for she has always perceived herself as a person with a lack of bravery. It is noteworthy that even though Novera is converting to Catholicism, she is the only one who continues the family tradition of fasting during the *Ce It* and *Cap Go* celebrations after Anas' death.⁴⁹ Novera's persistence is visible in her steadfast adherence to Catholicism, as well as her strong sense of attachment to tradition. She does not care that her sisters think that their family traditions belong to the Stone Age and are no longer relevant in the present time.⁵⁰ However, when Nung announces his wish to see his daughters married before his death, Novera makes up a fictional relationship. This is where Rafy, a fellow teacher in Yogyakarta, comes into play, as he has to pretend to be Novera's boyfriend, with the expectation that upon learning about the relationship Nung will be able to die peacefully.

⁴⁸ Ibid., see pp. 71-74.

⁴⁹ *Ce It* refers to the first day of the first month in the New Year in the lunar calendar, whereas *Cap Go* refers to the fifteenth day leading towards the *Imlek* celebration, the most important celebration amongst overseas Chinese in Indonesia.

⁵⁰ Ibid., see pp. 155-56.

Like her sisters, Novera has a personal secret that is revealed to the readers nearly halfway of the story. She is unable to bear children, as she had a hysterectomy when doctors found a malignant tumor. Novera considers the womb the most valuable possession that women have: “If her womb is taken away, what else remains of her? Her sense of self and identity will be robbed in a degrading way. She is nobody without a womb. She’ll stop being Novera”.⁵¹ This sense of being an incomplete being is her main reason for turning to religion and wanting to become a nun. Religion gives her hope, a metaphorical new womb that offers her a new kind of future. She feels that if people know of her hysterectomy, she will become an object of pity as it will be almost impossible for her to find a husband. She fears becoming an old maid, and in order to fight that fear, she makes the decision to be a nun: “Old maid, is that how they call it? I don’t want any pity. I really don’t mind being unmarried. Why do women have to marry?”⁵² Like Rosi, Novera once tried to kill herself by cutting her wrist, but Siska appeared in time to stop the bleeding and save her life. Novera discloses her plan to enter the convent to Rosi, when Rosi tells her that she is really Roni. Novera eventually comes to the point where she can survive without marriage and be an independent person, but her reason for coming to such a conclusion is based on frustration and disappointment rather than clear reasoning. She can never recover from her broken heart, because her former boyfriend left her after discovering that she cannot have children. What Novera does not realize is that Rafy is willing to come to Jakarta and pretend to be her boyfriend in front of her family, because he loves her as she is.

From the perspective of Butler’s theory of gender performativity, these quadruplets find themselves in situations that are not of their own making: they are born Chinese and therefore

⁵¹ Ibid.: *Jika rahimnya diangkat, apa yang tersisa pada dirinya? Jati diri dan identitasnya dirampas dengan tidak hormat. Dia bukan siapa-siapa tanpa rahim. Dia bukan Novera* (p. 160).

⁵² Ibid.: *Perawan tua, begitu kan istilahnya? Aku nggak mau dikasihani. Aku sungguh nggak keberatan tidak menikah. Mengapa perempuan harus menikah?* (p. 256)

marginalized by Indonesian society, and they are women who have to live up to their culture and society's expectations with regard to sexuality, femininity, marriage, and motherhood. They refuse to succumb to society's stigmatization of the Chinese as descendants of 'immigrants', who are not considered patriotic enough as loyalty is assumed to be divided. They perform their Chineseness fiercely, complying with society's perception that the Chinese cling steadfastly to their ancestral traditions, and at the same time disproving the stereotype that the Chinese are not loyal and hard-working citizens of Indonesia. In addition, each of them has to deal with past traumas which provide them with the force to keep going, but at the same time prevent them from living without masks and pretense. Siska draws her confidence and independent spirit from her former boyfriend's betrayal. Indah looks indecisive, but she knows how to exploit her Chineseness to publish a novel and make herself a 'celebrity' writer. Rosi has to perform as a woman and deny her sexuality and identity as Roni. Novera, the youngest, spends much of her life on the run, trying to escape from having to confront her ethnic identity problem and her sense of inadequacy. She finds that religion and teaching pre-school children provide her with a safe haven and an opportunity to continue living.

As a result, these characters perform multiple identities simultaneously: the identities assigned to them by their gender and ethnicity, as they deal with their struggle to be fully accepted as Indonesians; and their duty to preserve the family's tradition by honoring their father. In their efforts to carry out these complex and often conflicting demands, they have to sacrifice their personal desires and dreams. Finding and carving out a niche for self-fulfillment amidst all these constraints is an endeavor that each of the quadruplets undertakes. Underneath her cosmopolitan attitude, Siska feels the need to be in touch again with her roots: her family and her Chinese-Indonesian identity. Indah realizes that her obsession with producing another

masterpiece and forcing Antonius into marriage might in the long run destroy her, so she decides to return to the role she can perform best: to be the ‘glue of the family’ and guardian of tradition. Rosi finally manages to resolve her split gender identity by allowing Roni to gain his rightful existence as a male transgendered person, even though it means that she essentially falls back into the conventional gender binarism. Novera stops running and comes to terms with the fact that there is a man who truly loves her, so she may end up fulfilling Nung’s wish, reiterating the heteronormative norms of marriage and family building. The characters follow circular trajectories that eventually lead them back to conventional norms, and although there are moments of rebellion they do not significantly shake the foundations of those norms. In the end, each one’s personal quest reinforces to a large extent a conventional performance of their gender and ethnic identities, with Rosi/Roni switching sides. All is done for the sake of family unity. This is aptly illustrated by the description of the family house, which “really smells of the past. As if the house didn’t move forward to the future. Time freezes in this house, it doesn’t move even a second. [...] The house is a time machine to travel back to the past”.⁵³

A year after Nung’s death, the quadruplets get together again in a family reunion at the old house to celebrate *Imlek* and have early-morning dim sum. Tradition is preserved and the house remains alive: Dharma, Rasya, and Indah’s baby have become new members of the family, with Nung’s and Anas’ spirits watching contentedly from a corner of the house. This confirms Siska’s conviction that the family and its traditions will survive: “I don’t believe in the last dim sum. [...] Daddy and Mommy will always be present at our *Imlek* celebrations”.⁵⁴ This is what Nung and Anas have always wanted to see, and may be the reason why their ghosts linger in the

⁵³ Ibid.: *Rumah ini benar-benar berbau masa lalu. Seakan-akan rumah ini tidak bergerak menuju ke masa depan. Waktu di rumah ini membeku, tidak maju sedetik pun. [...] Rumah ini adalah mesin waktu untuk kembali ke masa lalu* (p. 156).

⁵⁴ Ibid.: *Aku tidak percaya dimsum terakhir. [...] Papa dan Mama akan selalu hadir dalam perayaan Imlek kita* (p. 339).

house. For them, the house contains not only the history of their lives but also that of the lives of their ancestors, since their arrival in this land in the sixteenth century. From then on, the house has served as a center that holds everything together, as well as a point where Chineseness and Indonesianness blend. Nung had already given two names to his daughters: Chinese names that he personally picked, and Indonesian names which he and Anas entrusted their indigenous housemaid to choose for the girls. Chinese friends and neighbors criticized them and protested that calling the girls by Indonesian names was an act of betrayal of their Chinese identity.⁵⁵ But Nung remained firm in his belief that “names won’t change them into somebody else. In their bodies runs Chinese blood. [...] An overseas Chinese won’t stop being Chinese...with or without a Chinese name”.⁵⁶ Although Nung’s notion of Chineseness is obviously rife with essentialism, it makes sense in the context of their survival amidst the suppression of the Chinese during the New Order era. The government issued an edict that strongly urged Chinese-Indonesians to fully assimilate themselves into the Indonesian society by adopting Indonesian names and abandoning ancestral practices.⁵⁷ Nung uses “strategic essentialism”⁵⁸ to cope with the dilemma of preserving tradition on the one hand and complying with the demands of an oppressive regime on the other. His daughters’ public names no longer refer to their ethnic identity, but Chinese traditions continue to be practiced and celebrated in the family. Thus, naming becomes an

⁵⁵ Ibid., see pp. 203-05.

⁵⁶ Ibid.: *Nama tidak akan mengubah mereka menjadi orang lain. Di dalam darah mereka mengalir darah Cina. [...] Seorang keturunan Cina tidak akan berhenti menjadi Cina...dengan atau tanpa nama Cina* (p. 206).

⁵⁷ In December 1966, following the massacres of hundreds of thousands of suspected communists, including many Chinese-Indonesians accused of working for Red China as collaborators and spies, the government issued a regulation on name changing for Chinese-Indonesians. This was followed by another decree a year later, which prohibited the practice of Chinese beliefs and rituals, as well as the use of the Chinese language. *Imlek* could only be celebrated within the family. In the year 2000, after the *Reformasi*, the decree was revoked by Abdurrahman Wahid’s administration. See Lohanda, “Masalah Cina” (2002); Nadj, “Problematika Segregasi Sosial” (2002); Subiako, “Ketika Produk Hukum Melegalisasi praktek Diskriminasi” (2002); Lie, “The Chinese Problems” (1999a) and “On Assimilation” (1999b).

⁵⁸ The phrase is coined by Gayatri Spivak in *The Post-Colonial Critic* (1990) to refer to the inevitability of essentialism in certain situations, but at the same time there is also awareness that it should always be a provisional measure taken to deal with the situations.

instrumental part of performative politics, and they are adopted and adapted as a survival strategy, detached from their main role as signifiers of ethnic identity. In this respect, a name is like a mask that an actor puts on to act out a role that does not conform to his or her own real life persona. In the case of the quadruplets in *Dimsum Terakhir*, however, the Indonesian names with which they are identified in their daily lives have a significant impact on the characters' attitudes and standpoints regarding their sense of citizenship and hybrid identity. They strongly feel that they are Indonesian, in spite of their experience of discrimination and prejudice. In this sense, the new names have a performative function of changing the faces behind the masks. Furthermore, their Indonesianness does not clash in any way with their sense of Chineseness, although it adds complexity to the intersections of such multiple hybrid identities.

That they cannot speak Chinese does not make it easier for them to celebrate their hybridity. In Chinese communities in Indonesia, not speaking Chinese is a sign of disrespect to the ancestors and makes one an 'outsider' in the eyes of the ethnic community of origin as well as the indigenous majority. This dilemma is described by Ien Ang, who as an overseas Chinese who does not speak Chinese explores the "indeterminacy of Chineseness as a signifier of identity".⁵⁹ For Ang, Chineseness is "a category whose meanings are not fixed or pregiven, but constantly renegotiated and rearticulated".⁶⁰ Ang talks about Chinese communities in diaspora, who share collective memories of the 'homeland' and tend to develop a "diasporic identification" with it. However, such diasporic experiences put a limit to how far 'Chineseness' can be transmitted and negotiated. The quadruplets in *Dimsum Terakhir* do not have any collective memory of the 'homeland', as they were born and grew up in Indonesia. Any notion of 'home' in their minds relates to Indonesia. Their problem is not only how to be at home and

⁵⁹ See Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese* (2001), pp. 21-51.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

accepted in Indonesia, but also the sense of being ‘impure’ in the eyes of other Chinese for not being able to speak the language. They are, as Ang puts it elsewhere, “too Chinese” and simultaneously “not Chinese enough”.⁶¹ This explains why a strategically essentialist position has to be taken in tandem with a negotiated compromise, as reflected in Nung’s decision to give his daughters two names, refusing either one as exclusive.

Conclusion

Most of the female characters in *Perempuan Kembang Jepun* and *Dimsum Terakhir* opt for reconciliation, to preserve their family’s unity at the expense of their personal freedom, and sometimes even their individuality. In the first novel, only Matsumi remains unchanged by time and events, as she firmly believes to the end that her Japaneseness is important above everything, and therefore gives up her child and returns to Japan. Lestari is willing to re-adopt the role of a devoted daughter to restore her relationship with Matsumi and ensure that Maya may live happily with Higashi. Sulis dedicates her whole life to mothering and disregards the nationalist call to join the cause of independence. In the second novel, the quadruplets have personal identity struggles to deal with, but at the critical point when the family unity is threatened they are ready to set aside their individual ambitions and aspirations in order to preserve their family’s tradition.

The characters in these novels may look conservative and submissive vis-à-vis familial duties, which represent traditional values that are sometimes considered oppressive to women’s aspirations for equality. However, such a conclusion may be hasty, and misguided by dominant, liberal feminist discourses from the West. As Mohanty points out, they tend to dismiss everything that impedes women’s struggle for gender equality as “oppressive”, whereas for

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 32.

many women in the so-called 'Third-World' gender equality may not be a priority in their lives.⁶² The family, motherhood, and the household economy may be more urgent issues for them to face in everyday reality than fighting for personal rights and freedom, or for the nation's freedom from foreign oppression for that matter. These women refuse to be lured by either nationalist glory, as shown by Sulis in *Perempuan Kembang Jepun*, or by the promise of 'personal freedom' that the quadruplets abandon in *Dimsum Terakhir*. This does not necessarily mean that they do not value personal freedom and individuality, but these qualities are not considered more valuable or important than family tradition and values. The characters in these two novels find in their own ways that identity may be a crucial issue, yet it is an issue that cannot be dealt with separately from other issues surrounding their everyday lives. They may be ready to adopt an essentialist standpoint with regard to one problem in order to confront another problem, as the quadruplets do in trying to make space for their Chineseness amidst the conflicting demands of preserving family unity and affirming their loyalty to Indonesia.

In the context of post-1998 Indonesia, these two novels contribute to a critical reexamination of the ethnic politics sanctioned by the New Order, which tended to use the Chinese as a cash cow when the economy flourished and a scapegoat when the economy was in crisis. While the May 1998 mass rape of Chinese women has resulted in a radical overhaul of government policies that disadvantaged the Chinese community in Indonesia, discriminatory practices against them by both public officials and fellow citizens still take place from time to time. The Chinese have come out from hiding, and more voices from within the community have been heard that demand an end to the treatment of the Chinese as second-class citizens. Since 2000, the government allows *Imlek* to be celebrated in public, along with the performance of lion dances, which used to be prohibited during the New Order era. Chinese political participation has

⁶² See Mohanty (2003), *ibid.*

increased ever since, as is evident in the establishment of several Chinese social organizations and political parties. The controversial law which ruled that the Chinese had to carry a special document as proof of their citizenship has already been revoked. In addition, Confucianism has been officially recognized by the state as one of the major religions.⁶³

However, what is more important than tokens of official recognition of Chineseness as part of Indonesia's multiculturalism is the sense of being a permanent part of Indonesia, and not just a supplement to it. An appreciation of their cultural tradition can be seen as enriching the repertoire of Indonesian cultural heterogeneity, rather than a dangerous, imported alien culture. In *Dimsum Terakhir*, this sense of being 'at home' does not lead to an overtly nationalistic attitude. Rather, it finds its manifestation in a family reunion that brings the four sisters together every year when they celebrate *Imlek* in the old family house. As the number of family members expands, the family becomes more inclusive. Dharma and Rafy are not Chinese, and Indah's baby is of mixed-race, but all of them are part of a family and of a new Indonesia that is not defined by ethnicity but by a spirit of togetherness.

A similar notion of 'nationality' is also visible in *Perempuan Kembang Jepun*, as the three generations of an inter-ethnic family reunite: Lestari, also known as Kaguya; Matsumi, who used to be called Tjoa Kim Hwa; Maya and Higashi, who have been adopted into the family. Thus, the family in both novels serves as a new configuration of the nation on a micro level. This carries the message that future generations will no longer be identified by their ethnicity, a vision which Y.B. Mangunwijaya refers to as "post-Indonesia", where "tradition and

⁶³ Before the *Reformasi*, five religions were recognized by the state: Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Confucianism has become the last system of belief to be accommodated by state law. The Indonesian Constitution rules that every Indonesian citizen has to adhere to one of the religions that are recognized by the state. However, there are actually hundreds of other systems of belief that exist in Indonesia that do not fall into one of the major categories. The state considers them as 'sects' (*aliran kepercayaan*), but allows them to be practiced since these so-called 'sects' have been around for centuries in the archipelago long before modern and organized religions came in.

nationalism [...] are given new meanings” and viewed through a completely different set of lenses from the ones used by our forefathers and foremothers.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ See Mangunwijaya, “Menghadapi Budaya Pasca-Indonesia” (1999), p. 273.

Chapter 6

Cosmopolitan Ambivalence in a Quest for Global Citizenship

Introduction

The New Order regime inculcated discourses of patriotism and nationalism through doctrines establishing what constitutes “*manusia Indonesia seutuhnya*” (a truly Indonesian person) and “*kepribadian bangsa*” or “*kepribadian nasional*” (national identity). These concepts depicted Indonesia as a nation-state consistently portrayed as unique. From the geographical point of view, the Indonesian archipelago was perceived as the center of the Southeast Asian region as well as a bridge connecting Asia and Australia, because of its strategic location between the two continents and two oceans, the Indian and the Pacific. From the cultural perspective, Indonesia was deemed to be unique because it houses hundreds of ethnic groups speaking various languages and practicing diverse customs and traditions. From the political standpoint, Indonesia was represented as a ‘miracle’, since such a rich and complex diversity could be successfully united under one political umbrella called the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (*Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia*). Economically speaking, these portrayals of Indonesia were even more compelling when, in the 1980s and early 1990s, Indonesia was considered as one of the emerging “Asian Tigers” due to its astonishing pace of economic growth.³³⁶

³³⁶ The World Bank issued a report in 1993 identifying Indonesia and four other Southeast Asian economies as the new emerging “Asian Tigers”. Indonesia capitalized on the oil and gas booms in the mid 1980s to jump-start its economic growth, but the fact that the country quickly succumbed to a severe monetary crisis in 1997-1998 indicates that the “Asian Tigers” might have been just a myth.

The notion of “a truly Indonesian person” can be clearly and easily traced in a series of official documents called *Garis-Garis Besar Haluan Negara* or GBHN (Broad Guidelines of State Policy)³³⁷, produced by the *Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat* or MPR (People’s Consultative Assembly)³³⁸ every five years, usually in conjunction with the appointment of the President, to serve as the guidelines for the country’s executive body in running the state. In fact, “a truly Indonesian person” and “national identity” had always been key elements in many official discourses since the early 1960s Sukarno era, but they became further solidified during Suharto’s New Order through their insertion and reiteration in GBHN. For example, the two notions appeared in GBHN 1973 and GBHN 1978, in which “a truly Indonesian person” was defined as a “person who believes in God, is civilized, intelligent and skilled, physically and mentally healthy, and possesses a national identity.”³³⁹ Even the GBHN of the *Reformasi* era, GBHN 1999, still contained a similar notion of “a truly Indonesian person”, even though the term “*seutuhnya*” (truly) was absent, and “Indonesian” was defined in this document as a “person who is healthy, independent, faithful and devoted to God, who upholds high moral standards, loves the fatherland, obeys the law and preserves the environment, masters science and technology, and possesses a high level of work ethic and discipline.”³⁴⁰ “National identity” is even more nebulous in terms of definition, and seldom defined in as specific a manner as “a truly Indonesian person” in various official discourses. Nevertheless, the term had been

³³⁷ GBHN was one of the most important products of the People’s Consultative Assembly (MPR), and the performance of the President during his five-year term was basically measured by the extent of his adherence to the guidelines.

³³⁸ MPR was the highest state institution that holds the authority to appoint and impeach the President, as well as to provide the President with a set of broad guidelines to lead the country.

³³⁹ See the Decree of MPR (Tap MPR-RI) No. IV/1973 on GBHN 1973, and also the Decree of MPR No. IV/1978 on GBHN 1978. The formulation of “a truly Indonesian person” in these two documents reads as follow: “*manusia bertuhan, berbudi pekerti luhur, cerdas dan trampil, sehat jasmani dan rohani, serta berkepribadian nasional.*”

³⁴⁰ See the Decree of MPR No. IV/1999 on GBHN 1999. Here, “Indonesian” was defined as “*manusia Indonesia yang sehat, mandiri, beriman, bertakwa, berakhlak mulia, cinta tanah air, berkesadaran hukum dan lingkungan menguasai ilmu pengetahuan dan teknologi, memiliki etos kerja yang tinggi serta berdisiplin.*”

constantly employed as jargon and incorporated in many official documents, especially in light of the perceived threat from ‘foreign cultures’ (*budaya-budaya asing*). The term appeared in several GBHN from time to time, including the last one in 1999.³⁴¹ In tandem with “national culture” (*kebudayaan nasional*), the term “national identity” became the regime’s most powerful weapon to be used in combating the onslaught of foreign cultures, especially those from the West.

During the New Order era, the Ministry of Information was headed by Harmoko (1983-1997), who was known for his notorious campaigns against the intrusion of foreign cultures into indigenous Indonesian culture. The Ministry stood at the frontline of a war against everything ‘foreign’. Harmoko fiercely tried to impose government control over both print and electronic media during his terms as Minister of Information. When he was appointed Speaker of MPR in 1997, he succeeded in inserting a specific clause regarding “national identity” and “national culture” in GBHN 1998, which explicitly served as an antidote aimed at “fending off the invasion of foreign cultures.”³⁴² An atmosphere of moral panic with regard to the invasion of foreign cultures was created in order to spread a sort of ‘siege mentality’ amongst the people, as Indonesian authenticity and uniqueness were perceived to be under attack. In this sense, identity failed to provide an understanding of ‘self’ in relation to, and as part of, the other nations in the world; instead, it was used to build a cocoon to protect Indonesia from anything that originated

³⁴¹ GBHN 1999-2004 is the last GBHN. Since 2004, along with the reorganization of MPR, which no longer has the authority to appoint or impeach the President, the task of formulating guidelines has been transferred to the office of the presidency.

³⁴² In GBHN 1998, “national identity” was defined as the “ability to form and develop socio-cultural life for Indonesians who are faithful and devoted to God, peaceful, united, patriotic, highly qualified, modern and prosperous, possessing balanced and harmonious lives, and the ability to fend off the penetration of foreign cultures that are not compatible with the national culture” (*mengandung kemampuan membentuk dan mengembangkan kehidupan sosial budaya manusia dan masyarakat Indonesia yang beriman dan bertakwa kepada Tuhan Yang Maha Esa, rukun, bersatu, cinta tanah air, berkualitas, maju dan sejahtera dalam kehidupan yang serba selaras, serasi dan seimbang serta kemampuan menangkal penetrasi budaya asing yang tidak sesuai dengan kebudayaan nasional*).

from beyond its borders. This might be one of the reasons why it was very hard for many Indonesians to accept the fact that the Indonesian economy collapsed so quickly and easily when the Asian monetary crisis hit the country in 1997, for they were under the illusion that Indonesia was one of the Asian countries with the fastest economic growth. Indonesians found it appalling that the supreme leader of the country, Suharto, was forced to sign an ‘unconditional surrender’ to the IMF, in the presence of Michel Camdessus, then IMF Director, who stood before him with his arms folded across the chest. The image was widely circulated in various print-media and the signing itself was broadcast by many television stations. Instead of shaking Indonesians up from the long slumber caused by the illusion of sovereignty, the signing became the beginning of a prolonged nightmare as Indonesia plunged into a severe economic crisis, caught in the tight grip of the IMF. This crisis, coupled with wide-spread social unrest in the domestic arena, resulted in mass riots and lootings that were rampant during the second half of May 1998. The fierce denial by state officials of the mass rape of Chinese-Indonesian women following the riots, and a sense of disbelief amongst many Indonesians who could not accept the veracity of these reports, possibly occurred because people were slow to accept the fact that some Indonesians turned out not to be “truly Indonesian persons”, as they had thought they were. As a result, some considered the May tragedy as part of a ‘global conspiracy’ launched by foreign powers to destroy the unitary state of Indonesia.

This chapter examines how some women writers who emerged after Suharto stepped down re-imagine Indonesia in their writings. Some are concerned with how the nation could be reconfigured from the inside in order to liberate it from the spell of the New Order’s nationalist discourses of what constitutes “a truly Indonesian person”, “national identity”, and “national culture” through critical engagement with elements such as urbanism (Nukila Amal, Djenar

Maesa Ayu), *adat* and religion (Novia Syahidah, Oka Rusmini), and ethnicity (Lan Fang). However, a small number of writers, such as Fira Basuki and Abidah El Khalieqy, prefer to position themselves at the margin of the nation, in order to expand it, so that the nation may become an inclusive space rather than an exclusive one. These two writers create characters who travel to foreign lands and, in the process, not only broaden their horizons to acknowledge the outside world, but also transform their understanding of ‘home’. Efforts to decenter the nation from the unitary and monolithic construct of the New Order in order to open up its borders and enable it to reach out to the outside world have brought these writers into intense explorations of cosmopolitanism, as they adopt an outlook that allows them to be part of more than one place, rather than accepting the constraint of attachment unique to the ‘homeland’. It is from this vantage point that Abidah El Khalieqy and Fira Basuki attempt to wrestle with the New Order’s nationalist discourses on what is ‘authentic’ and what is ‘foreign’.

Cosmopolitanism, in the context of this chapter, is defined according to the three principles proposed by Thomas Pogge: individualism, universality, and generality. The ultimate units of concern are individual human beings, rather than family ties, ethnic affiliations, cultural or religious communities, or nations. All human beings have equal status regardless of their gender, social class, skin color, or religion, and this equality of status applies globally for everyone.³⁴³ These principles are grounded on the “recognition that we are all members of a common humanity”.³⁴⁴ Equally important is that cosmopolitanism as a lifestyle incorporates different elements from many parts of the world and a belief that every human being is a “citizen of the world”. Furthermore, cosmopolitanism welcomes encounters with peoples and cultures from different regions and involves the capability of moving fluidly from one cultural context to

³⁴³ Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights* (2002), qtd. in A. Dobson, “Thick Cosmopolitanism” (2006), p. 167.

³⁴⁴ Dobson, *ibid.*, p. 171.

another.³⁴⁵ In various parts of this chapter, other complementary perspectives of cosmopolitanism will be introduced in order to build up a better picture of what cosmopolitanism entails in relation to the works discussed.

Different aspects of cosmopolitanism have been expressed in other post-Suharto female authors' works. Michael Bodden has demonstrated that Ayu Utami's *Saman*, while presenting the reader with traditional cultural motives and local beliefs also tries to locate Indonesia in the web of global cultural and political issues.³⁴⁶ Elsewhere, Bodden writes about the theme of cosmopolitanism in the work of Djenar Maesa Ayu. In his analysis of *Jangan Main-Main (dengan Kelaminmu)*, Bodden argues that cosmopolitanism manifests itself in this short story collection in the form of consumerism and celebration of Western popular culture.³⁴⁷ The places in which the characters in the stories are located (discotheques, cafes, five-star hotels), the language they use (a mixture of Jakartan and Javanese slang with Indonesian and English expressions), the use of communication technology (cell-phones, text messages, the internet), and references to western culture all point to the presence of cosmopolitanism in Djenar's works. In addition, Bodden also reveals a "modernist, individualist-oriented aesthetic of artistic experimentation" in Djenar's collection of short stories, which blends with an exploration of themes that were deemed taboo, not only during the New Order period but also in the years following the New Order's collapse.³⁴⁸ The type of cosmopolitanism observed by Bodden in

³⁴⁵ Houk, "Cosmopolitanism", *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (2005).

³⁴⁶ Unpublished paper, "Cosmopolitanism, Transgression and Public Debate about Culture in Contemporary Indonesia", presented at the International Convention of Asia Scholars V, held in Kuala Lumpur on August 2-5, 2007a.

³⁴⁷ See Bodden, "Shattered Families" (2007b), pp. 95-125.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 101-02. In his essay, Bodden concludes that the cosmopolitan standpoint helps Djenar to talk about sexuality and other taboo subjects and show that such repressions basically serve to disguise the "dysfunctional structures of New Order and post-New Order society (p. 118).

Djenar's stories is what Ulrich Beck refers to as "banal cosmopolitanism" since it is intimately connected with various forms of consumption.³⁴⁹

This chapter analyzes how cosmopolitanism helps shape alternative visions of Indonesianness in the works of Abidah El Khalieqy and Fira Basuki. Cosmopolitanism, here refers to a "moral perspective" that is supposedly "impartial, individualist and egalitarian,"³⁵⁰ since allegiance is given primarily to the "moral realm of humanity, not to the contingent groupings of nations, ethnicity, and class".³⁵¹ While prejudice ideally has no place in cosmopolitanism, "enthusiasm for the exotic" is not characteristic of it either.³⁵² My analysis focuses on the novel *Geni Jora (Star's Flame)*, 2004 by Abidah El Khalieqy and Fira Basuki's trilogy, *Jendela-Jendela (Windows)* (2001), *Pintu (Door)* (2002) and *Atap (Roof)* (2002). Cosmopolitanism appears not only in the vocabulary drawn from various foreign languages throughout the works of these two authors, but also at the structural and thematic levels. In *Geni Jora*, the events take place in Syria, Jordan, and Morocco, and Fira's trilogy is located in Singapore and America. The protagonists are individuals who leave their homeland (Indonesia) behind to quench their thirst for knowledge and experience a bigger world, beyond the boundaries of the state and one nationality, exposing themselves to different 'global' languages. The characters are portrayed as restless young women who feel confident and comfortable in communicating in more than one language with strangers wherever they go, and are never hesitant to make this fluidity a building block of their identity. The authors allow their characters to possess a versatility that enables them to switch from one language to another in their dialogues and monologues with a high degree of comfort, as if language is no longer a barrier

³⁴⁹ See Beck, *Cosmopolitanism Vision* (2006), p. 41.

³⁵⁰ See Synopwich, "Cosmopolitans, Cosmopolitanism, and Human Flourishing" (2005), p. 56.

³⁵¹ See Held, "Principles of Cosmopolitan Order" (2005), p. 10.

³⁵² Synopwich, *ibid.*

(and a limit) in their identity formation. The key issue is communication and interconnection with other 'global citizens', whom they encounter on a daily basis on their journeys to foreign places, rather than a determination to preserve the rigid notion of Indonesianness by insisting on using the Indonesian language in a consistent and exclusive manner. This is in direct contrast with the New Order discourse of Indonesianness that put an emphasis on the uniqueness of Indonesia and its national culture which, according to Afrizal Malna, is primarily identified with the Indonesian language.³⁵³

Both Fira and Abidah, members of the educated, urban middle-class, do not seem to have much choice but to express themselves mainly in the Indonesian language. However, they also seem to be aware of the problems raised by this linguistic monopoly. The strategy they employ to come to terms with it is not a regressive return to the local or ethnic language that served as their mother-tongue. Rather, they position the Indonesian language side by side and at par with other world languages, disrupting its dominant status. Indonesianness is no longer a sacred term that cannot be critically scrutinized and redefined, but is situated in a network of world languages and cultures. In the process, it loses its dominance as a 'national language'. At the same time, it is liberated from formal constraints and given a new, more egalitarian, status as part of a global identity built upon the principle of heterogeneity rather than identity or sameness.

³⁵³ Malna investigates his own experience with the Indonesian language in his work as a poet, and discovers that writing in the Indonesian language is a shaky experience for him because, ironically, such a national language causes him to feel that he does not possess any distinct personality at all and that everything that he expresses in that language reproduces what other poets have said, thus creating a uniformity of expressions. Furthermore, he feels detached from his fellow Indonesians who live in rural areas and still use their local languages as the means of communication in their everyday lives (2000:12).

Geni Jora: Islamic Cosmopolitanism

Abidah El Khalieqy attended an Islamic boarding school in East Java during her high school years, and graduated from an Islamic university in Yogyakarta. In addition to writing fiction, she has published poetry and essays. In 1999 she attended an Islamic women's conference in the Middle East, and this trip seems to be one of the sources of inspiration for her novel *Geni Jora*. It tells the story of an ambitious Muslim woman activist and scholar who rebels against her family's traditional values which, in her opinion, have marginalized women and prevented them from striving towards self-actualization. The story takes place in Indonesia, Syria, Jordan, and Morocco, tracking the protagonist's journey to those places and recording all of the events that occur during the journey which have significant impact on the development of the character.

Kejora, the protagonist of *Geni Jora*, is a problematic and ambivalent cosmopolitan. The name is a reference to the morning star, Venus, which shines more brightly, like a flame, than any other stars in the morning sky, reflecting the protagonist's drive to excel as a Muslim woman. Her journey to the Middle East and North Africa is not entirely a quest for self amidst the assortment of foreignness that presents itself to her, but rather a personal battle of conquest between her and Zakky Hedoury, her nemesis and lover. Her engagement with the far-away places that she visits is predicated on her fascination with the exotic, rather than a commitment to building a genuine rapport with the unknown. At the same time, there is a will on her part to go outside and beyond the narrow boundaries that confine her to Yogyakarta and the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in East Java. Those boundaries are not only concerned with nationality and social background but also with herself as a woman who is expected to support men emotionally, or else "the world would go upside down in a chaos like splinters of broken

glass”³⁵⁴, a metaphor that her grandmother often quotes. Kejora does not have a high opinion of her grandmother, the woman who, she considers, “left a scar on my heart.”³⁵⁵ She opines, “My grandmother still undergoes a physical evolution, but her mind never evolves. She always sits in her armchair giving orders, while I keep on running towards the future.”³⁵⁶

Names of places are frequently mentioned with awe and in a quite dramatic manner by the first-person narrator. Tangiers, in Morocco, for instance, is portrayed as an “ancient city” (*kota tua*) located on “the pillars of Hercules, eight miles from the coast of Spain”³⁵⁷, which in ancient times were called “the pillars of Gibraltar or Jabal Thareq and Jabal Musa, also known as the Gates of Hell”.³⁵⁸ Kejora observes, “After Damascus, this is the second trip to electrify my web of nerves. Morocco. A place full of contrasts and stunning beauty. A modern country with a modest soul”.³⁵⁹ This seems to imply that Kejora comes from a small world, Java, that does not have much to offer in comparison with these foreign places. Kejora embodies a character who has just been liberated from a cage and hungrily wants to devour anything presented before her eyes. Her visit to Morocco to attend a women’s international symposium takes place after a previous visit to Damascus, in Syria. The trip to several Middle Eastern and North African countries is like a dream come true: “At last time overturns reality. That dream doesn’t always hide behind the walls of fantasy. It is real, here. Waiting for me at Tangiers airport, Boukhalef, on the journey to Muhammad’s most western land.”³⁶⁰ The most impressive experience for

³⁵⁴ El Khaliqy, *Geni Jora* (2004): *dunia ini akan jungkir-balik berantakan seperti pecahan kaca* (p. 61).

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*: *telah menorehkan luka di hatiku*.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*: *Fisik nenekku terus ber-evolusi, tetapi pikirannya tidak pernah ber-evolusi. Ia tetap duduk di kursinya dengan perintah-perintahnya, sementara aku terus berlarian menyongsong masa depan* (p. 62).

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*: *pilar-pilar Hercules, delapan mil dari pesisir Spanyol* (p. 2).

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*: *pilar-pilar Gibraltar atau Jabal Thareq dan Jabal Musa dikenal sebagai Gates of Hell*.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: *Setelah Damaskus, inilah perjalanan kedua yang menggetarkan jaringan syarafku. Maroko. Sebuah tempat penuh kontras dan keindahan yang menakjubkan. Negara modern dengan jiwa bersahaja* (p. 1).

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*: *Akhirnya waktu membalik kenyataan. Bahwa mimpi tidak selamanya bersembunyi di belakang tembok angan-angan. Ia hadir di sini. Menungguku di bandara Tangier, Boukhalef, dalam perjalanan menuju ke bumi Muhammad paling barat*.

Kejora during her trip to Africa is her friendship and closeness with people from different races who live together in this ancient city:

Here I see Africans walk by holding hands with French people. The French play football with Arabs, and Jews sell tiger fangs to Berbers. Meanwhile, a crowd of Berbers carry Tazenakht rugs on their shoulders and original pearls and diamonds for sale to Africans. Together, people from different races and colors, black, brown and white, bring life to Morocco and shape its culture.³⁶¹

She is fascinated with the plurality of the citizens of Tangiers and a human connectedness that is not compartmentalized by national boundaries, but it seems to be the kind of fascination that is predominantly framed by the visitor's outsider gaze. There is no indication at this point that Kejora is ready to commit herself further to the place or situate herself within such a plurality as an integral part of it. This is one of the factors that make her cosmopolitanism highly problematic.

One of the aspects that she considers important when visiting a foreign place is the need to strictly observe the local "customs" (*tata-tertib*). She reprimands Zakky, her Indonesian boyfriend who is studying in the Middle East, for acting inappropriately because he always wants to be flirting with her, for she believes that a public display of physical affection runs against the local customs. In contrast, Zakky, a womanizer who never runs out of money due to his resourcefulness in acquiring funding as an international student in Syria, possesses a stronger affinity for cosmopolitanism, compared to Kejora, because he takes the local customs in a more light-hearted manner and feels at home wherever he is. Conversely, for Kejora, it does not matter

³⁶¹ Ibid.: *Di sini kutemukan orang Afrika bergandengan tangan dengan orang Perancis. Orang Perancis bermain sepak bola bersama orang Arab dan orang Yahudi menjual taring macan pada orang Berber. Sementara orang Berber berdesak-desakan menggotong permadani Tazenakht dengan permata asli dan berlian untuk ditawarkan pada orang Afrika. Berduyun-duyun manusia dari berbagai ras yang berkulit hitam, berkulit coklat dan berkulit putih, meramaikan kehidupan dan membentuk kebudayaan Maroko* (p. 2).

how long one has lived in a foreign country, one has the obligation to constantly observe the rules of that place. Zakky becomes the center of Kejora's life throughout the narrative, but also the source of her problems. He seems to open up new doors for her, but Kejora has never been entirely certain that those are the paths that she really wants to tread. In her own words, she describes Zakky in a way that reveals her own ambiguity vis-à-vis cosmopolitanism:

It's an easy thing to walk around Jema el Fina, the great square in Marrakesh, with *dabus* artists, story-tellers, magicians, fortune-tellers, flute-players, drum-beaters, or to train one's taste buds for some aromatic cuisine displayed on long tables, although there are tens of them. All of them cannot match the headache caused by Zakky's misdemeanors."³⁶²

Once again, we come across the outsider's stance as she is mesmerized by the exotic world before her eyes. That Zakky's misdeeds are seen as a 'problem' comparable to the dizziness caused by the animated cultural spectacles of Marrakesh reveals that, to a certain extent, all these exotic scenes are perceived by Kejora as a sort of 'problem', too. This visitor feels threatened by an overwhelming array of unfamiliar cultural elements that are very real and close to her, in the same way as she is threatened by Zakky's exasperating eccentricity and irresistible charm. Zakky challenges Kejora's sense of nationality and serves as the opposite of her ambivalence in regard to the new insights and possibilities offered to her. All of these new things are attractive but at the same time frightening, as Kejora still has to struggle to incorporate the foreignness into her own self. Her experience is similar to that of Julia Kristeva when she visited Huxian, China, and saw a huge crowd of Chinese women sitting on a square, who stared at the Western visitors

³⁶² Ibid.: *Adalah hal sepele jika harus mengelilingi jema el Fina, alun-alun besar di Marrakesh, bersama pemain dabus, pendongeng, tukang sulap, peramal, pemain seruling, pemain drum atau melatih kepekaan untuk beberapa aroma makanan yang dipajang di atas meja-meja panjang, sekalipun jumlahnya mencapai puluhan. Semuanya tidak melebihi rasa pusing yang muncul akibat ulah Zakky* (p. 6).

“wordlessly”, with “calm eyes [...] piercing, and certain of belonging to a community with which we will never have anything to do”.³⁶³ Kristeva was not unaware of her uneasy feeling about this encounter with foreignness, for a few pages later she asked herself a question: “Who is speaking, then, before the stare of the peasants at Huxian?”³⁶⁴ Yet the feeling was real, and it troubled her that she could fall into such a sense of alienation. Gayatri Spivak criticizes Kristeva for being preoccupied with her own identity rather than developing a genuine interest in the identity of the Huxian’s women peasants. Kristeva’s alienation, according to Spivak, is the result of her own ethnocentrism.³⁶⁵ In the process the women of Huxian were reduced to mere objects of gaze, rather than the reverse. Kejora, coming from Indonesia and visiting other developing Muslim countries, has a different experience of dis-placement.

In essence, Kejora is not well-prepared for a trans-national experience. She begins her journey as a provincial character, and exposures to foreign lands have made her dizzy with a superficial fascination with the foreign. Various kinds of North African cuisine, Middle Eastern music, nomadic tribes, names of places and cities, are played like a slideshow in the reader’s mind. There is an eagerness to keep a record of all the names, places and events that are caught by her perception, captured by memory and camera to be brought home as proof of her journey. However, at the stylistic level, such a cataloguing of foreign vocabulary and names without any specific thematic or aesthetic function could easily turn into a mere showcase of locations and geography—a set of ‘new knowledge’ brought home by the visitor in the aftermath of her trip to a foreign land, to be shown to those who stayed at home as part of her eye-witness report. Such cataloguing primarily serves to make the statement “I was there”; but such travel has yet to become a personally enriching experience that deepens her understanding of herself. In fact,

³⁶³ Kristeva, *About Chinese Women* (1986), p.11.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³⁶⁵ See Spivak, “French Feminism” (1987), pp. 140-42.

these places appeal more to Zakky than to Kejora as an arena of intense struggle, for he always reflects on the complexity of his relationship with Kejora through his acute awareness of distance—a crucial aspect in cosmopolitan life, considering that it is distance that Zakky consistently tries to conquer and transcend. In his frustration he says:

Kejora...so huge is the distance that I have to cross. So far is the distance that you lay down between us. And how your soul never stops so that I might kiss the softness of your hair and the warmth of your lips. So long is the stretched-out bridge, while we live here, the two of us, yet this never really happens. Only shadows...³⁶⁶

Even though Zakky is talking about the enormous distance separating him from Kejora, he refers to that distance as a “bridge” (*titian*), which means that regardless of how far the distance is between them, they are connected. Zakky views distance as a possibility and potential rather than a gap that makes encounter impossible. In the end, however, he is not very different from Kejora. Both are imprisoned in a mutual fascination with each other, and as a result, places and people only serve as background and the characters’ enthrallment with each other creates a narrow, romantic world that ultimately excludes everyone else.

Zakky depicts his relationship with Kejora through the metaphor of flying a kite. Kejora is viewed as a kite that flies ever further away and becomes smaller and smaller high up in the sky.³⁶⁷ Nevertheless, this metaphor recalls the notion of a bridge, because no matter how high the kite flies, it remains connected to the person holding its cord. Again, we see an awareness in Zakky of the necessity of transcending distance in order to maintain the relationship, despite the frailty of the link. In contrast, Kejora prefers to portray herself as a “hummingbird” (*burung*

³⁶⁶ El Khaliqy, *ibid.*: *Kejora...betapa jauh jarak yang mesti ditempuh. Betapa jauh jarak yang kau bentangkan. Dan betapa jiwamu tak pernah bersandar, untuk dapat kucium halus rambutmu, dan kucium hangat bibirmu. Betapa jauh nian rentangan titian, sementara kita hidup di sini, berdua, namun tak pernah benar-benar menjelma. Hanyalah bayangan...* (p. 8).

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

kolibri) that does not mind descending in order to “sip some nectar” (*mengisap sari bunga*) without losing its alertness, “floating in the air supported by its vibrating wings.”³⁶⁸ This image is a clear indication of a reluctance to commit herself to any place or person. In her effort to resist the temptation that manifests itself in Zakky, Kejora takes refuge in the doctrine of an omnipotent Allah who possesses the power to watch over every single deed made by human beings—a transcendental panopticon which is invisible, yet mighty nonetheless. She contrasts such a vision with Zakky’s:

In your frame of mind, is freedom a form of absent-mindedness with respect to the presence of God? Where, then, do we exactly live? Since when did you create the earth so that you can inhabit it with your absurd concept of freedom? Even on a grain of sand there is no free zone for love-making without sensing His presence.³⁶⁹

The novel is, in fact, loaded with Islamic references and from time to time there is a quotation from the holy Qur’an and Hadith, written in Latinized Arabic. However, while the novel obviously offers a strong Middle Eastern ambience, this is not an ‘Islamic novel’, as it does not contain direct *syiar* (evangelization) or *dakwah* (religious teaching). In addition to quotations from the sacred texts, the reader is introduced to excerpts from popular and sentimental Arabic songs sung by the legendary Egyptian artist, Ummi Kalthum. Such juxtapositions create tensions between what is heavenly and what is worldly, between the divine and the human, but both are packaged and presented in the Arabic language. Here lies the main conflict of the novel: on the one hand Kejora demonstrates a strong will to transcend boundaries and there is nothing in this world that she cannot deal with but, on the other hand, there is

³⁶⁸ Ibid.: *tetap terjaga dalam kepek sayapku bertahan di udara* (p. 10).

³⁶⁹ Ibid.: *Apakah dalam referensimu, kebebasan adalah semacam rasa pikun akan kehadiran Tuhan? Lalu di mana sebenarnya kita berdiam? Sejak kapanakah dirimu menciptakan bumi untuk kau tinggal bersama kebebasanmu yang absurd itu? Bahkan di atas sebutir pasir pun, kau tak memiliki zona bebas bercinta tanpa merasai kehadiran-Nya* (p. 11).

always-already an ultimate limit that she sets for herself to serve as her last bastion against the onslaught of worldly temptations: belief in Allah and the Muslim faith.

The Arabic language is given a privileged status in the novel,³⁷⁰ but not without some hint of doubt in Kejora's state of mind. Coming from a *pesantren* tradition in which a close proximity between the Arabic language and the word of God is established, Kejora clearly takes pride in the fact that she possesses a good mastery of that language that provides access to the divine mystery revealed in sacred texts, hence access to salvation *per se*. For instance, a debate occurs between Zakky and some other people in a mosque in Casablanca concerning the interpretation of the verse “*yadullahi fauqa aidiihim*” from the Holy Qur'an.³⁷¹ Another quotation from the Qur'an is concerned with adultery, and Kejora quotes it in order to stop Zakky from seducing her, “*Walaa taqrabuz-zina, innahu kaana faakhisatan wa saa'a sabiila.*”³⁷² Sacred expressions such as “*salamu'alaikum*”, “*bismillah*”, “*qulil haqqa walaw kaana murran*”, “*astaghfirullah*”, and “*wallahu'alam*”³⁷³ frequently appear in dialogues. In the same breath, however, *Geni Jora* also assigns the Arabic language a profane status that is far from any divine characteristics, when it presents the reader with popular, sentimental songs performed by Ummi Kalthum, such as “*Ya habibi, wa anta khamri wa ka'siy/ Wa munaa khaatiry unsy/ Wa fiika nutqy wa hamsy fii hawaaka yasbiqu umsy*”,³⁷⁴ a stark contrast with the divine status given earlier to the language. As a result, Arabic is positioned at an ambiguous intersection: it is an access to heaven, but it is also a path leading to earthly pleasure.

³⁷⁰ The novel provides a glossary for borrowed expressions and terms, containing seventy-nine entries, mostly in Arabic and some in Javanese.

³⁷¹ El Khaliqy, *ibid.*: “*the hands of God are upon them*” (pp. 4-5). This verse is one of the ambiguous verses (*mutasyahibat*) in the Qur'an that always invite endless heated debate amongst Islamic scholars and students.

³⁷² *Ibid.*: “*And do not commit adultery, for verily adultery is an inhuman act and a horrible conduct*” (pp. 132-33).

³⁷³ They mean respectively: “may the blessings of Allah be with you” (2004:29), “in the name of Allah” (p. 32), “tell the truth, no matter how bitter it is” (p. 36), “Allah, have mercy” (p. 49), and “only Allah knows” (p.205).

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*: “Oh my love, you are my opium and chalice. You are my source of inspirations and pleasures. To you I reveal a secret about our racing desires” (p. 209).

The Arabic language is a foreign language for Indonesians, yet it is also a language with a certain level of familiarity for Muslims. It helps articulate the split in Kejora's consciousness between the fact that she belongs to a nation-state called Indonesia and is at the same time a citizen of the universal *ummah*.³⁷⁵ The former is secondary vis-à-vis the latter, just as the Arabic language as a signifier of profanity in Khaltum's songs is secondary to its status as the medium of Allah's word in sacred texts. Kejora welcomes both with open hands, but it does not necessarily mean that her ambivalence is resolved by such acceptance. As a matter of fact, the problems that Kejora is facing in terms of her personal quest for freedom from the orthodox Islamic view of women as subordinates to men, and her intense yet stormy relationship with Zakky, become even more complicated. Godliness, which manifests itself in the *ummah*, turns out to be a stumbling block for Kejora in her attempt to transcend the limits set for her by society.

The divine dimension adds a different dynamic to Kejora's journey and brings more complexities to the cosmopolitan theme in the novel. A question that sounds simple yet begs for serious consideration is whether the presence of such a divine dimension in the narrative inevitably results in the incorporation of Arabic expressions borrowed from sacred texts. Kejora's cosmopolitan world is a miniature *ummah*, and consequently could be as small and self-sufficient as her religious boarding school in East Java, where she received her early education. The boarding school is pictured as a small but heterogeneous world. Twelve female students lived there, "with different characters and appearances [...] coming from all parts of the

³⁷⁵ Hamilton Gibb defines *ummah* as a "totality of individuals bound to one another, not by kinship or race, but of one religion in that all the members profess their belief in one God, and in the mission of the Prophet Muhammad. Before God and in their relation to Him, all are equal, without distinction of rank, class or race" (qtd. in Graves, *Aspects of Islam* (2005), p. 81.

country”³⁷⁶: from Bogor, Sumbawa, Padang, Bali, Kalimantan, Jakarta, Kendari, Ambon, and even from Malaysia and Brunei, to study under an “Arab *ustadz* (religious teacher) with Pakistani and Turkish mixed-blood running in his veins.”³⁷⁷ Such a small but heterogeneous world could also be seen as vast, because this is where the persona of God is sought and explored, with an Arab teacher as the focal point of knowledge and information. A kind of heterogeneity exists, but is framed by a certain form of ‘nationality’, i.e., Islamic *ummah*, which is distinct from the New Order’s concept of nationality; it can therefore be argued that this novel offers an alternative notion of Indonesianness that is not Java-/Jakarta-centric. Having said this, it is also clear that the new nationality formulated in this novel is, after all, a vision of a global community that is shaped by and embedded in Islam. That is why the novel’s description of the *pesantren* includes the Malay world, the Arab-speaking world, and other Muslim societies. Thus, despite its claim of inclusiveness, its primary foundation remains single and non-negotiable: Islam, which is perceived as “big, vast, and condensed, encompassing both the time and place dimensions”, as declared by Fatima Marnissi, a leading Islamic feminist, who is portrayed in the novel giving a fiery talk about women’s rights in Islam.³⁷⁸ Even Asaav Muscovich, Zakky’s Jewish friend who later flirts with Kejora, is portrayed as a Jew who embraces Islam and holds steadfastly to his new faith as a *mualaf* (convert), thus attesting to the inclusiveness of Islam.

On the other side, as a woman, Kejora has an independent spirit and is striving for self-development. If “men’s gravity lies in their journey”, as her friend Nadia suggests, then it is Kejora’s conviction that she is capable of competing with men in this particular respect, and this is evidenced in her self-confidence:

³⁷⁶ El Khalieqy, *ibid.*: *dengan bermacam karakter dan penampilan [...] dari seluruh penjuru negeri* (p. 41).

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*: *ustadz Arab keturunan campuran Pakistan-Turki*.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

By naming me Kejora, since the very start my parents have prepared me to be a star. This is contrary to my predisposition for nighttime. I'm not a person who can easily be somebody else's puppet, for my nights are longer than others'. The forest of my journey is vaster than a tiger's. My fantasy is as abundant as my thought. The left brain and the right brain compete against each other [...] 'Jora', that's how people call me. It sounds like 'juara' (champion) [...] Like the sky, it is so high. It takes thousands of hands to reach, thousands of *zikirs* (litanies) to end. I'm now in the midst of joining those hands and *zikirs* together. *Bismillah* (In the name of God)!³⁷⁹

Yet such a great self-confidence and rebellious spirit have to succumb to mighty and invisible hands that need to be "joined" together by Kejora's small hands. The heavenly boundaries of the divine can never be crossed by Kejora, and she never has the intention to do so, after all. Zakky is the one who never tires of pulling her out of that 'comfort zone' by teasing her and introducing her to the world:

Zakky meets me in the middle of the Saharan desert, amidst an ocean of strangers about whom I have no idea and whose names are unknown to me. He is the one who introduces me to the names, streets and alleys, cities. He chooses the food I eat and explains to me the nutrition it contains. He takes me to shopping malls, recreation centers, cinemas, concerts, conferences, and to devour books in the library.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁹ Ibid.: Dengan memberiku nama Kejora, sejak dini aku telah dipersiapkan menjadi seorang bintang. Ini sangat berlawanan dengan watakku sendiri yang menyukai malam. Aku bukan seseorang yang mudah disutradarai, sebab malamku lebih panjang dari semua orang. Hutan pengembaraanku lebih luas dari seekor macan. Khayalanku sebanyak pikiranku. Otak kiri dan otak kanan saling berpacu [...] 'Jora', begitu orang memanggil namaku, mirip 'juara' [...] Seperti langit, ia begitu tinggi. Membutuhkan ribuan tangan untuk menggapai, ribuan zikir untuk selesai. Tangan dan zikir itu, kini tengah kuuntai. *Bismillah!* (p. 32).

³⁸⁰ Ibid.: Zakky menemuiku saat aku berada di gurun sahara, di tengah lautan manusia asing yang belum satu pun kukenali karakter dan bahkan nama-nama mereka. Ia yang mengenalkan nama-nama, jalan dan lorong-lorong, kota-kota. Ia yang memilihkan makanan dan menerangkan gizi yang dikandungnya. Ia mengajakku shopping, rekreasi, nonton konser, mengikuti konferensi, melahap buku-buku di perpustakaan (p. 116).

There are times when Kejora is drifting away into doubt and questioning herself: “Who am I? A drop of departing soul. Looking for pearls in a foreign ocean without any swimming skills. Where am I? Stranded on an ordinary island. But the wind is stormy, full of thunder and lightning wildly striking without bringing any news...”³⁸¹ At times like this, identity and self are represented by a place and space that are entirely foreign yet captivating, although they are also frightening like the “Saharan desert”, where one can be easily lost and forever gone. Eventually Kejora’s journey comes to an end at Zakky’s side when they get engaged, but she is still under the illusion that she has successfully obtained freedom, and this leads her back into the trap of the conventional norms which she strives to fight, and in whose face she declares: “Values won’t stop me from running away from norms and customs that are confining. Because I set out to hunt in the bright path of conscience.”³⁸² Yet Kejora does not really escape from grip of her faith, for strangely enough the divine power seems to be conspiring with patriarchy to squelch her rebellious spirit while allowing her to think that she has succeeded in overcoming their constraints.

To the end, she still firmly believes that she has achieved something and become somebody:

In my struggle to dethrone grandma’s myths, I have won a row of trophies in each phase of my life. There is not even a single dot that is left from those hideous and outdated old myths. About women as a garbage bin and defeat, subservience, weakness, ignorance, powerlessness. My fiery goggling eyes stare back, all now have evaporated. And this is

³⁸¹ Ibid.: *Siapa aku? Setetes jiwa yang tengah berangkat. Mencari mutiara di samudra asing tanpa bekal kemahiran berenang. Di mana aku? Terdampar di pulau biasa. Namun anginnya penuh badai topan, petir dan halilintar menyambar-nyambar tanpa kabar...* (p. 125).

³⁸² Ibid.: *Lariku tak bisa dihentikan oleh nilai. Norma dan istiadat yang menyekati. Sebab perburuanku di jalan nurani, benderang* (p. 146).

the second phase of a life full of passion. Life in a free world. When the rebellion has reached its culminating point.³⁸³

The “second phase” that Kejora refers to—freedom, which she also calls the “culminating point” of her rebellion, is in reality her reunion with Zakky and her willingness to accept the ‘womanizer’ who is used to “going to campus in a fancy Jaguar” and “dating different Syrian women every month.”³⁸⁴ Kejora’s ambivalence in refusing to choose between the two worlds and trying to harmonize them instead is the key problem of her life story. She is a reluctant traveler, a faint-hearted cosmopolitan who is determined to start out on a quest, but only in order to affirm that she is able to complete it with her man. But true cosmopolitans do not set out on a journey in order to conquer. They go out motivated by curiosity to seek peace with the foreign, without losing themselves in the process because their journey is an ever-lasting one. While cosmopolitanism is certainly not “a love affair of everyone with everyone”, as Ulrich Beck warns,³⁸⁵ it involves the obligations we have to others, especially to strangers, “whose lives touch ours sufficiently that what we do can affect them.”³⁸⁶ Kejora’s cosmopolitanism seems to try at certain moments in the narrative to transcend the exclusive and limited universality of the *ummah* and embrace a world that is “inhabited by continents, galaxies and planets, real and unreal worlds, values, suns and moons, civilizations and atrocities”, as well as “politics and

³⁸³ Ibid.: *Dalam rangka menjatuhkan mitos nenekku, telah kunikmati rangkaian piala berjajar-jajar dalam setiap fase kehidupanku. Tak ada se-noktah pun yang membekas dari mitos-mitos nyinyir yang usang dan lapuk. Tentang perempuan sebagai tong sampah dan kekalahan, ketertindasan, kelemahan, kebodohan, ketidakberdayaan. Ditentang kedua mata belokku yang garang, semuanya menguap kini. Dan inilah fase kedua dari hidup yang bergairah. Hidup di alam merdeka. Ketika pemberontakan telah mencapai puncaknya* (p. 214).

³⁸⁴ Ibid.: *kuliah naik jaguar mewah dan [...] mengencani perempuan Syria bergantian setiap bulannya* (p. 129).

³⁸⁵ Beck, *ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁸⁶ See Brock and Brighouse (eds), “Introduction”, *The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism* (2005), p. 3.

theatrical stages, money and power, men and women, rapes and oppressions, nuclear bombs and dying babies”³⁸⁷, but in the end the Islamic *ummah* prevails.

In light of other works by women writers in the post-Suharto era, *Geni Jora* shows an attempt to formulate and offer an alternative understanding of nationhood that is both novel and liberating. Nevertheless, the strategy of locating the protagonist within a circle whose parameter is non-negotiable, i.e., Islam, ironically results in the drawing of new boundaries that are equally confining. The ambivalent nature of *Geni Jora* seems to reflect post-Suharto ambivalence as far as nationhood is concerned, especially among Islamic writers. On the one hand, they try to distance themselves from a conception of nation obsessed with unity, but on the other the alternative that they seem to want to propose is *ummah*-based and predominantly inspired by a religious rather than humanist vision of community.

The Arabic language, in this regard, becomes a new signifier as a result of its conflation with Islam, as if Islamic identity or *ummah* as an alternative to national identity could be sufficiently represented by that language.³⁸⁸ This is by no means to say that the author falls prey to the ‘Arabization’ of the Indonesian language that has intensified since the end of the New Order, as is obvious in the increasing number of Arabic terms borrowed by the Indonesian language, especially in legal and socio-political vocabulary.³⁸⁹ *Geni Jora* does not succeed in freeing itself from the conflation of the Arabic language as a cultural component of the Middle East, with Islam as a form of revelation that emerged in the Middle East. Indonesianness, which needs to be wrestled away from the New Order’s ultra-nationalist, monolithic doctrines, is now

³⁸⁷ El Khalieqy, *ibid.*: *Dunia yang dihuni benua-benua, galaksi dan planet-planet, alam nyata dan tak nyata, matahari dan bulan, kebudayaan dan kebiadaban...politik dan panggung teater, uang dan kekuasaan, laki-laki dan perempuan, pemerkosaan dan penindasan, juga nuklir dan bayi-bayi yang terkapar* (p. 169).

³⁸⁸ This is a direct contrast with English language globalism, which is often associated with imperialism and whose process at times involved violence and imposition.

³⁸⁹ See Najitama, “Sejarah Pergumulan Hukum Islam dan Budaya” (2007), pp. 101-14.

facing a new threat in the form of a limited universality framed by Islamic doctrine. Abidah is not oblivious to such an irony, because every now and then her novel presents the reader with the juxtaposition of excerpts from the sacred texts that glorify Allah's omnipotence and lyrics from sentimental Egyptian songs which tell of love, laughter and anguish. In this way she 'secularizes' the Arabic language while maintaining the uninterrupted relationship between the language and Islam.

In the end, however, Kejora willingly lets herself step back into the realm of the sacred, a world that she initially struggles hard to overcome through her journey to foreign lands. It seems that the New Order's concept of the notion, founded on the Indonesian language as the national language, is replaced by a pan-Islamic identity based on *ummah*, with the Arabic language as its main pillar. The basic assumption that gives shape to such a totalizing Islamic vision³⁹⁰ is similar to the underlying logic of the New Order's notion of Indonesian society. That is why all members of the society are expected to contribute to the cohesiveness of its structure, whereas in cosmopolitanism, conversely, society is treated more as a "network of random connections and disconnections", as well as an "essentially infinite volume of possible permutations". An individual's "flexibility" to move between the local and the global is key to the dynamics of the society, rather than "conformity to rules".³⁹¹

Fira Basuki's Trilogy: Reluctant Cosmopolitans

Fira Basuki published her three novels *Jendela-Jendela*, *Pintu*, and *Atap* over a period of only two years, between 2001 and 2002. Born in 1972, Fira Basuki received her B.A. and M.A.

³⁹⁰ This is further supported by a quotation in the novel from Fatima Mernissi about Islam, which testifies to the greatness and all-encompassing nature of Islam: "Islam is huge, vast, and compact. It expands in space and time" (*Islam itu besar, luas, dan padat. Ia tersebar dalam ruang dan waktu*) (2004:14).

³⁹¹ See Bauman, *Liquid Times* (2007), pp. 3-4.

degrees from American universities and now lives in Singapore with her Tibetan husband and a daughter. Her exposure to international experience provides her with abundant material for her writing, and the trilogy discussed in this chapter is clearly inspired by her years of living in both the USA and Singapore. In addition to Jakarta, these two countries are the settings of the three novels. The novels revolve around the lives of June, the female protagonist, and her older brother, Bowo, who are studying and living in America, and what happens to both of them after they finish their study and continue with their lives elsewhere.

June, the main character in *Jendela-Jendela*, is a young woman who has not yet found a goal in her life. Her fanciful and imaginary world seems to be far more real to her than reality. That imaginary world is what the small windows (“*jendela-jendela*” of the title) of her equally small unit in the Housing Development Board’s apartment building³⁹² have to offer within their delimiting panes. It is an unreal world full of promises and vanity, “[...] at least I can see the sky, the blue color of the sky, or the bubbling clouds, also the seductive dance of hummingbirds [...]. Anything but the two rooms where we live [...]”³⁹³ This is how June describes how she comes to terms with her unhappy life in Singapore with her Tibetan husband, Jigme, whom she met in the USA when both of them were international students. Everything seems so real and close in June’s eyes, but what she forgets in her fascination with what is out there is that she can never really reach them (the blue sky, the bubbling clouds) or be like them (flying freely like a hummingbird).

June feels trapped in the present, unable to go back to the past, to her college years in Kansas, which she remembers as like the land of *The Wizard of Oz*, where she lived once but to

³⁹² High-rise apartment building provided by the government of Singapore for the city’s citizens.

³⁹³ Basuki, *Jendela-Jendela* (2001): [...] paling tidak aku bisa melihat ke angkasa, ke birunya langit, atau bergumpalnya awan, juga melihat gaya genit burung berkicau [...]. Pokoknya melihat apa saja selain dua ruangan tempat kami tinggal [...] (pp. 2-3).

which she can no longer return: “[...] I miss Pittsburg [...] so many memories. I can’t keep on reminiscing about the past and entertaining my dreams.”³⁹⁴ But the future, despite June’s rich fantasy and daydreaming, is a blank space that she cannot even fill in with anything, “I must leave this place! But how?”³⁹⁵ The story of June, in short, is her personal epic of escaping from her reality as a wife who stays at home and has to endure living in a barely decent apartment with a low-income husband, by sliding back to the Imaginary—the pre-symbolic realm in the Lacanian sense that is not accessible anymore—in which she may be able to find some consolation for her unhappy life. Thus begins her odyssey in which her path crosses those of different men: Dani in Bali, and Dean, her husband’s best friend, each being a recipe for disaster that pulls her deeper into a web of guilt, self-hate, and remorse, as she allows herself to be lured by the short-lived romantic adventures offered by these men. She indulges in an obsessive-compulsive shopping spree, a series of extra-marital affairs, and hours of watching the sky or birds from her apartment windows; when these can no longer save her from having to come to terms with reality, her life begins to crumble and she realizes that she has lost control. June eventually finds salvation in her syncretic Javanese and Islamic roots, and patriarchal norms establish dominance through ancient Javanese fortune-telling manuals, the figure of Allah, and the oppressive notion of *dosa*—sin.

Noteworthy here is the homologous relationship between June’s redemption and the economic and political chaos that Indonesia as a nation had to bear as the consequence of the collective sin committed by its citizens. This is where references to *krismon*,³⁹⁶ the *Reformasi*,

³⁹⁴Ibid.: [...] aku rindu pada Pittsburg [...] begitu banyak kenangan. Aku tidak bisa terus-menerus mengenang dan melambungkan angan-angan (pp. 22 and 25). June refers to the small town of Pittsburg in the heart of Kansas, not the Pittsburg which is the capital city of Pennsylvania and a much bigger city.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.: Aku harus pindah dari tempat ini! Tapi, bagaimana caranya? (p. 45).

³⁹⁶ An acronym for *krisis moneter* (monetary crisis) that hit Indonesia extremely hard in 1997-1998, which then triggered a multidimensional crisis in the entire country that has left a scar on the psyche of the nation ever since.

and the assumption that the whole nation is being punished by God gain relevance. Near the end of the novel, June reflects: “Yes, there are many sinners, and I’m one of them. While I often complain about so many things, while I am committing sins, I forget that lots of people have to face a much more dire situation in Indonesia...”³⁹⁷ In this sense, June is a problematic hero *par excellence*. She is poignantly aware of her own *hubris* yet unable to completely free herself from it, for she perceives herself as part of the ‘collective sin’ of society. Thus, a homology is established between the crisis faced by the protagonist and the degraded structure of the society to which the protagonist belongs. As the nation is sick, all of the individuals who are part of that nation are sick as well. Therefore, regardless of how much June consciously tries to distance herself from Indonesia, she eventually succumbs to the powerful force that draws her back to it. Indonesia may not be a ‘home’ in a positive sense, but it is the only home that always opens itself up unconditionally to her, unlike Singapore or the USA.

June’s relationship with Indonesia is ambiguous. When she graduates from college, she prefers to remain in America to find employment so that she does not have to leave the country of her dreams. Returning to Indonesia is never an option, as she feels that she cannot live here despite the fact that both her parents are there. She eventually agrees to move to Singapore after Jigme receives a job offer there. Moreover, Singapore is not so far from Indonesia, or from Tibet, where Jigme’s mother lives. However, Singapore as a ‘middle passage’ certainly is not June’s personal preference. In fact, she dislikes the country. It is for Jigme that June makes a sacrifice and agrees to move there, but she leaves her heart in Pittsburg: “Ah, there were so many

³⁹⁷ Basuki, *ibid.*: *Ya, banyak orang berdosa, termasuk aku. Sementara aku sering mengeluh soal ini itu, sementara aku berbuat dosa, aku terlupa bahwa banyak orang yang lebih malang nasibnya di Indonesia...* (p. 145)

festivities in Pittsburg... The reality is I am now in Singapore. And the sad thing is, I feel isolated. I have no friends, only my husband who is always busy with his work.”³⁹⁸

While Singapore is isolating, Indonesia, for her, is identical with chaos, sin and political turmoil. When the economic crisis hits the country, June watches from a distance in Singapore with the eye of an outside observer, rather than being emotionally involved with the unfolding events: “I’ve never liked politics. I’ve never wanted to know about politics... I think politics are dirty and inhuman.”³⁹⁹ But this does not prevent her from having her personal views on Indonesian politics and what is going on in the country during the chaotic *Reformasi* period. As a matter of fact, June has quite a sympathetic view of the New Order regime that had just collapsed at that time:

...Is it true that Suharto was the mastermind behind all the corruptions and atrocities? Is it possible that he was duped by his subordinates? Could it be that he is innocent? There are so many questions, and it even makes me want to be silent. Moreover, who am I to have the right to accuse others? Isn’t it only God who has the right to judge who is guilty and who is innocent? Besides, I don’t know why, but every time I look at Suharto, he reminds me of my late grandfather, *romo*, Mama’s father. People say Suharto is a quintessential Javanese, and many politicians even called him ‘*The Javanese King*’ or ‘*Semar*’. My grandfather was also very Javanese. Other than that, I’ve never cared about politics, but what you know is that during those thirty-two years Indonesia has seen much

³⁹⁸ Ibid.: *Ah, begitu banyak perayaan di Pittsburg... Kenyataannya aku kini di Singapura. Yang menyedihkan, aku merasa terkucil. Tidak ada teman, selain suamiku yang selalu sibuk bekerja* (p. 25-6).

³⁹⁹ Ibid.; *Dari dulu aku tidak suka politik. Dari dulu aku tidak mau tahu soal politik... Menurutku, politik itu kotor dan kejam* (p. 88).

progress. My grandmother in Yogya also agreed that, compared to the wartime period a long time ago, Indonesia is in better condition now.⁴⁰⁰

June's sympathy for Suharto and the regime comes from a blend of lack of knowledge of Indonesian politics, as she herself readily admits, her ethnic solidarity as a Javanese, and her personal affinity to her grandfather of whom Suharto reminds her, but also her Islamic-Javanese concept of God as the only true judge, as well as her positivistic ideas about progress. June is, in one word, a conservative. This is also apparent in her forebodings about Indonesia's future:

I'm afraid Indonesia will end up like Iran, for instance. This Persian country used to be very beautiful, modern, and open under the leadership of Reza Khan, and then his successor Mohamed Reza Pahlavi, until eventually the people were protesting and Ayatollah Khomeini who returned to Iran in 1979 took over.⁴⁰¹

She is especially attracted by historical events and develops a naïve and melodramatic view about the past, as is visible from her fondness for by-gone monarchies, such as the Reza and Romanov dynasties, whose aristocratic lifestyle fascinates her (2001:90-1). She also has a fondness for Yogyakarta, the heart of the Javanese monarchy and traditional culture. Thus it is quite baffling that she prefers living abroad to being close to her extended family in Central Java.

This ambivalent attitude is reflected in the narrative structure of *Jendela-Jendela*. In terms of geographical setting, Indonesia plays a marginal role compared to the USA, or even Singapore

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.: *Soal Suharto ini, aku juga memilih diam. Pantaskah aku mengomentarnya jika aku tidak tahu pasti, apakah ia terlibat langsung atau tidak, atas semua penderitaan rakyat? Betulkah Suharto yang mendalangi segala korupsi dan kekejian? Mungkinkah ia dibohongi anak buahnya? Mungkinkah ia tidak bersalah? Begitu banyak pertanyaan yang malah membuatku diam saja. Lagi pula, siapakah aku, beraninya menuduh orang? Bukankah cuma Allah yang boleh menyebutkan siapa yang bersalah siapa yang tidak? Ditambah lagi, entah mengapa, setiap melihat wajah Suharto, aku jadi teringat eyang kakung, romo, atau bapaknya Mama yang sudah meninggal. Orang bilang, Suharto sangat Jawa, bahkan banyak politikus yang menjulukinya 'Si Raja Jawa' atau 'Semar'. Eyang kakungku juga sangat Jawa. Selain itu, aku tidak pernah peduli soal politik, yang kau tahu, selama 32 tahun Indonesia jadi lebih maju. Apalagi eyang putri di Yogya juga setuju, dibandingkan zaman perang dulu, Indonesia jauh lebih baik (pp. 89-90).*

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.: *Aku takut Indonesia akan mengalami nasib mirip Iran, misalnya. Negeri Persia ini pernah demikian indah, modern dan terbuka saat kepemimpinan Reza Khan dan kemudian anaknya Mohamed Reza Pahlavi, hingga akhirnya rakyat protes dan Ayatollah Khomeini yang kembali ke Iran tahun 1979 kemudian memimpin (p. 90).*

for that matter. However, in terms of plot development, Indonesia—particularly Java—becomes more and more important as the story develops. Whether June is in Singapore or America, her mind is increasingly preoccupied with the country of her birth and she immerses herself deeper and deeper into the exploration of Javanese cosmology, as she embarks on a spiritual quest in search of her identity. She enjoys quoting passages from *Serat Jayengbaya*, a classical Javanese epic poem that tells the story of Jayengbaya, who loves imagining himself as being different persons but eventually decides to be what he is—a quest that June herself attempts to undertake.

It is essential to note that June seldom sees herself as an Indonesian. Rather, she is more at ease with adopting Javanese as her cultural identity. This absence of a ‘national identity’ certainly puts her in an ambiguous location: in terms of nationality, she identifies herself as a ‘citizen of the world’, yet she chooses to embrace Javanese as her cultural, if not cosmological, home. The notion of Indonesianness as a ‘national identity’ is almost absent in the entire narrative. The USA, on the other hand, is represented from a rather unusual angle: instead of using cosmopolitan centers such as New York, Chicago or Los Angeles as her setting, Fira Basuki puts her protagonist in the middle of “nowhere”, in a small town in Kansas. It is in this remote place that June feels really at home, and she wishes she could spend her entire life there. June adopts a low-profile place at the very margin of the world’s superpower as her home. In an ironic fashion, Pittsburg serves as a metonymy for all she feels deprived of in Singapore, where she spends her boring days in front of the window of her low-budget apartment: “Jigme gets busier. I begin to feel lonely, alone. At times like this I miss Pittsburg, not Wichita, or Jakarta.”⁴⁰² As a small town with a strong sense of community, Pittsburg provided June with a

⁴⁰² Ibid.: *Jigme makin sibuk. Aku mulai merasa sepi, sendiri. Kalau sudah begini, aku rindu pada Pittsburg, bukan Wichita, dan juga bukan Jakarta* (p. 22).

haven from loneliness and isolation, although she was far away from her family in Jakarta, and from the troubled relationship with her boyfriend in Wichita.

In the second novel, *Pintu* (Door), the reader is given a totally different perspective. *Jendela-Jendela* serves as a window for June to imagine the world outside and to have a glimpse of what is lost and inaccessible. *Pintu* provides a door to go inward. The main perspective switches from that of June to Mas Bowo, her older brother. Bowo's characterization tends to be flat and less complex than June's. His story is not the story of a hero in the making, for the gods have already been with him since the beginning, and he is adequately equipped with supernatural power to protect himself from any danger. The unfathomable, spiritual world that for June is a mystery is easily tamed and harnessed by Bowo, a '*bayi kuning*' (yellow baby)⁴⁰³ whose miraculous birth is no less spectacular within the Javanese context than the arrival of the baby Superman on planet Earth.

Although Bowo tends to be accident-prone throughout the story, emerging from one disaster only to fall into another, and learns very little from what has happened to him, he seems to be already preordained as a special man, so no matter what befalls on him, he is eventually able to emerge victorious. All kinds of *dukun* (traditional healers) and *orang sakti* (seers), including a native American-Indian shaman, a voodoo-master, and even *Ratu Laut Selatan*, the mystical goddess of the Southern Sea, prepare the way for his glory. Contrary to June, who has to struggle in order to find her way in life, to fall down and get up only to fall down again,

⁴⁰³ In Javanese mythology, *bayi kuning* is believed to be a newly-born baby who possesses supernatural power. He gets the name from the yellowish skin color that the baby has during delivery. From the medical perspective, the baby suffers from jaundice, but in Javanese traditional belief, the yellowish color is associated with the twinkling stars in the sky. Bowo describes his own birth as a miraculous happening: "Believe it or not, as soon as the soft membrane that covered my body was removed by the doctor, it is said that a very bright light filled up the whole delivery room. The doctor was confused, Mama was crying, and they said that a nurse even almost fainted" (*Percaya atau tidak, begitu selaput tipis yang menyelubungi tubuhku dirobek oleh dokter, konon cahaya terang memenuhi ruang bersalin. Dokter sampai bingung, Mama menangis dan malah satu suster dikabarkan nyaris pingsan*) (Basuki, 2002a:10).

Bowo's journey is an epic one to fulfill his predetermined destiny. This is a narrative of achievement and fulfillment rather than a story of discovery. In Bowo's eyes June is a fragile little girl who needs constant protection. He thinks that June is a typical woman, "emotionally unstable... [She] easily gets upset or is cheerful and laughing almost instantly. Her soul and mind are always focused on feelings. Just like any other woman, June always prefers feelings to rationality. However, in June, it sometimes gets overdosed."⁴⁰⁴ However, like June, Bowo feels that he cannot live in Indonesia, although he claims that he loves that country. Like her, he prefers living in America as his adopted home country. He identifies Indonesia with violence and lack of privacy, and believes that returning there would only make him lose his civility: "In Indonesia, I would possibly become wild again."⁴⁰⁵ For Bowo, Indonesia is marked by a series of question marks which prevent him from reconnecting to it, whereas in June the reader can recognize some reflexive capacity, which keeps the possibility open for Indonesia to be a home, *her* home.

Character development is secondary to the events in *Pintu*. Erna, Putri, Paris, the women who have been in Bowo's life, are 'human sacrifices' necessary for his individuation process. He has the capacity to feel guilty, to have doubts about himself, and even to submit himself to dreams, just like June, exhibiting all of the aspects that he perceives in his sister almost with contempt. But unlike June, Bowo is not a problematic hero, but a one-dimensional character with nothing much to offer. The advent of Paris, a girl he meets while in America as a student, offers him an opportunity to be less of a superhero and more human, and to make decisions without any divine intervention, but he is not strong enough to grasp the opportunity. However, like June,

⁴⁰⁴ Basuki, *Pintu* (2002a): ...*labil secara emosional... June mudah sekali marah, senang, tertawa dalam beberapa saat. Jiwa dan pikiran June selalu terfokus pada perasaan. Seperti layaknya perempuan lain, June selalu mendahulukan perasaan daripada rasional. Namun, untuk seorang June, porsi itu terkadang berlebihan* (p. 118).

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*: *Di Indonesia mungkin aku akan menjadi liar kembali* (pp. 135-36).

Bowo needs to go through a process of redemption. The fundamental difference between the two is that June undergoes a purging process in order to reaffirm and accept the humble, unattractive place reserved for her in society as a housewife, whereas in Bowo's case redemption serves as a prerequisite for raising him up to his masculine throne, as the master of both the natural and supernatural worlds.

In *Atap*, the third novel in the trilogy, the weak and the strong come together, as both June and Bowo are sitting on the roof of their parents' house in Yogyakarta: June, who always "whines" (*merengek*) and "laments" (*meratap*), is still continually in need of a helping hand, while Bowo is composed and in full control of himself, delving into "mysticism" (*kebatinan*) and "meditation" (*bertapa*).⁴⁰⁶ One is looking for love, for to her love is where home is: "People search for love. Until a true love can be eternally found, they will never be happy. At least, I won't."⁴⁰⁷ Bowo, in contrast, takes love for granted as an offering delivered to him, not in order to learn to love but to refine his masculine power further: "Is it true I love both women simultaneously? [...] [Aida and Putri] complement each other, the combination of both would be a perfect woman to me. Yes, I want both!"⁴⁰⁸

They tell each other about their personal journeys in far-away lands. However, with the unfolding of the plot the reader can see how June deploys the telling of her story to Bowo as a means of finding out who she is and what she aspires to. By listening to her own voice, she begins to see the big picture of her life and gain a better understanding of what she has been through. Bowo, on the other hand, uses his narrative as a means of washing away all sins, his own and his family's, and producing endless justifications and rationalizations for his

⁴⁰⁶ Basuki, *Atap* (2002b)., p. 3.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.: *Manusia itu mencari cinta. Sampai cinta sejati bertemu abadi, ia tidak akan pernah bahagia. Paling tidak aku belum* (p. 8).

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.: *Benarkah aku mencintai dua orang perempuan sekaligus? [...] [Aida and Putri] saling melengkapi, keduanya adalah kombinasi perempuan sempurna bagiku. Ya, aku ingin keduanya!* (p. 217).

contradictory actions concerning Aida, his wife from Minangkabau-West Sumatra, and Putri, a Javanese woman who is also his 'true' love. When Aida no longer serves any particular function in his narrative, he simply puts an end to her role by divorcing her on the pretext of her infidelity. It matters very little to him that it is actually he himself who never allows Aida to get into his world, the world of mystical gods and supernatural beings. Getting rid of Aida naturally opens up a door for Putri, the 'pure' one, to give him offspring that will be free from any impurity⁴⁰⁹ and prepare the way for the mythological Javanese figure of *Satria Piningit*, who is believed to be destined to lead the nation out of the bondage of sin to its golden age. And who may the *Satria Piningit* be? The narrative is never explicit on this particular matter, but since the reader is flooded with the overwhelming presence of a male superhero embodied by Bowo, who else could it be? Aida, no matter how lovable she is despite her shortcomings, is not Javanese. She does not have any affiliation with the world of spirits, and *darah biru* (royal blood) does not flow in her veins. She is therefore definitely not the right woman to accompany the *Satria Piningit* in leading his people. The purity of Javanese royal blood can only be maintained through a union with another Javanese. Aida is to be excluded from Bowo's idealized nation of the pure and dignified.

On a more profane level, in the world of ordinary beings in which the gods no longer have much interest, another process is taking place. After a series of disastrous extra-marital affairs with several men, June finally returns to her 'true' love, Jigme, her faithful and almost saintly husband. As the trilogy reaches its end, both June and Bowo find their long-lost home: a traditional family consisting of husband, wife, and child (Jigme, June and their baby, together with Bowo, Putri and their baby) under the same extended family roof in their parents' house, representing stability and unity: the absence of this structure would only bring catastrophe to

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 144.

individuals as well as society. The regressive movement of the trilogy's narratives towards such an outspokenly conservative vision of the world is, no doubt, a sort of anticlimax. The cosmopolitan promise that the reader may see at the beginning of the trilogy fails to be delivered. While June and Bowo might undergo a 'cosmopolitanization' process, in which multiple loyalties emerge and diverse transnational styles of life are experienced, they never embrace cosmopolitanism as an alternative to nationalism or ethno-nationalism. Cosmopolitanism is merely a strategy employed in order to help them cope with the sense of insecurity and uncertainty of living in a changing world that they sometimes fail to understand. Zygmunt Bauman describes this situation aptly when he writes:

The road to identity is a running battle and an interminable struggle between the desire for freedom and the need for security, haunted by fear of loneliness and a dread of incapacitation [...]. When security is missing, free agents are stripped of the confidence without which freedom can hardly be exercised.⁴¹⁰

June and Bowo are reluctant cosmopolitans who actually remain 'provincial' at heart. While a cosmopolitan lifestyle is irresistible because it seems to offer unlimited possibilities, it eventually causes June to plunge into a sense of loss and emptiness. Living freely "like a hummingbird" turns out to be too overwhelming for her. She comes to the conclusion that being a faithful wife who stays at home to support her husband provides her with a safe haven in a world that is full of uncertainties.

June's life story does not end at the completion of the trilogy, for in giving up her individual freedom for the sake of the security offered by marriage, she is yet to see whether eventually such security becomes "a prison"—to borrow Bauman's word.⁴¹¹ And we have reason

⁴¹⁰ See Bauman, *Liquid Life* (2005), pp. 30 and 36.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

to suspect that it would be so, as that is exactly what the reader has witnessed in the opening pages of *Jendela-Jendela*, as June sat alone in her stuffy apartment in Singapore, staring outside the window envying the freedom of the clouds and hummingbirds. As for Bowo, at best, he can be viewed as an instrument to help June continue her unfinished journey. Her encounter with Mak Umah, the loyal family housekeeper who has been working for them since June was small, seems to recharge her energy for continuing her quest. She is once again reconnected to other human beings and accepts responsibility as an individual with obligations to others. In her search for identity, June gains a renewed sense of responsibility, and this is a crucial element in cosmopolitanism, as Brock and Brighthouse suggest in the statement quoted earlier: “[Cosmopolitanism] guides the individual outwards from obvious, local, obligations, and prohibits those obligations from crowding out the obligations we have to those whom we do not know, and with whom we are not intimate, but whose lives touch ours sufficiently that what we do can affect them.”⁴¹² In the end, June’s version of cosmopolitanism is one that is shaped by empathy, stability, and moral obligation to others close by, rather than packed with adventures and distant journeys.

Conclusion

Both *Geni Jora* and the trilogy *Jendela-Jendela*, *Pintu*, and *Atap* explore new possibilities to imagine some kind of ‘nationality’ that is not overshadowed by the New Order ideology of unity. The citizens of the Indonesian nation-state in these novels are catapulted into a multilingual and multi-national world that does not operate on a rigid understanding of national identity. Cosmopolitanism is offered as an alternative to the monolithic homogeneity imposed during the New Order era and opens up an opportunity for a community without any formal

⁴¹² Brock and Brighthouse, *ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

national identity to emerge. In these novels the cosmopolitan world is portrayed through the journeys taken by the characters to distant lands and their struggles to position themselves amongst strangers in a foreign environment. The main character in *Geni Jora* discovers the possibility of reframing Indonesianness within a more universal idea of Islamic *ummah*. Such an alternative is not without its own problems. There is apparently a tension between the demands of the profane world which makes up the everyday reality of the protagonist, and the spiritual world oriented towards Islamic teachings. The protagonist tries to bridge the gap between these two worlds by engaging in transnational interconnections built upon heterogeneity and Islamic values that are integrated with global civilization. *Ummah*, therefore, is portrayed as an alternative community—an Islamic cosmopolitan community—that is more open and friendly to diversity than the one imposed by the New Order.

In Fira Basuki's trilogy, the reader can sense a hesitation in crossing boundaries and engaging intensely in global interactions. At certain points in the narrative, such boundary crossing is even vaguely portrayed as some sort of transgression. But a window has been opened to look at what lies beyond the border. Citizens can even climb up onto the roof to have a bird's eye view of the world outside of what is traditionally understood as 'home' or 'homeland'. The house and its structural components, therefore, not only serve as metaphors of the nation but also represent possibilities for expanding the inhabitants' horizons to take in the outside world. However, the trilogy serves as an eye-opener which shows that the pull to return to the rigid and confining version of nationalism is very strong, and the temptation to find a harbor in naive parochialism in times of uncertainty and hardship can be quite difficult to resist. Interestingly, Fira's trilogy does not consider Islam as a key issue in its exploration of ways in which the outside world can be integrated into a more cosmopolitan national identity, as we see in

Abidah's. What is clear about these novels is that they choose to speak about the possibility of reimagining the nation from the margins of the dominant national discourse. The margin here refers to the peripheral area where boundaries are drawn, but where one can also see what is on the other side of the lines. It is in this respect that Abidah El Khalieqy and Fira Basuki both make a contribution to the work of redefining the nation in the post-Suharto era.

Conclusions

The works of the post-1998 Indonesian women writers discussed in this study are not revolutionary, in the sense that they do not propose a radical break from the New Order's dominant ideology of unity, or expose its repercussions in relation to gender, class, or ethnicity in terms of 'nationhood' in general. None of these writers has any illusions that a regime that had been in power for more than thirty-two years and imposed its ideology systematically on a massive scale could be dismantled quickly and easily. It may even be valid to suggest that these post-1998 women authors write in response to the situation since Suharto left rather than to critique Suharto's authoritarian rule. Almost all of the works examined in this study contain doubts, ambivalences, even contradictions, in their critiques of the past and visions of the future. There is a common awareness among these writers that the New Order's oppressive and marginalizing practices have to end, yet they are not entirely sure of the next step forward, not because they do not have a clear idea of what to do and where to go, but because they know well that the end of the New Order era does not necessarily mean that the nation is in better hands. As part of a generation that grew up during that New Order era and began to write after its downfall, they have the privilege of retrospect: of being able to look back with a critical lens and see what went wrong. Yet they are also contaminated by the long-lasting effects of the old regime, which still influence their ways of looking at the future.

The fact that most of these writers come from an urban middle-class background further complicates their ambivalence. Nukila Amal is aware of this, as she describes the capital city in *Cala Ibi*. The sense of confinement that the protagonist is experiencing inside her vehicle during the traffic jam brings forth an awareness of the inadequacy of the capital city to represent the

entire nation. Jakarta serves more as a compartment that shuts the rest of the nation out than a center that embraces the periphery. Yet the protagonist is poignantly aware that she is part of the capital city, cut off from her family who live in a remote part of Indonesia. Even if she tries to reach out to them, Jakarta does not seem to allow such a reconnection, as the world outside the car is a dangerous place that has to be avoided, just like the far-flung islands where all kinds of conflict take place. Djenar Maesa Ayu demonstrates this sense of alienation further through characters who are overwhelmed by the hustle and bustle of the capital city that results in acute feelings of loneliness, isolation, and powerlessness. Out of desperation, some of these characters decide to plunge themselves into the hedonistic lifestyle that the city offers, or find safe havens within the walls of built edifices. They all feel disempowered by Jakarta and unable to do anything significant to change the situation.

The urge to break out of this paralyzing sense of confinement is materialized in Abidah El Khalieqy's and Fira Basuki's works. The narrow vision of the nation as a unique entity that is different from the rest of the world and cut off from any connection with it frustrates the characters and spurs them to transcend (and transgress) the rigid boundaries of nationhood by leaving the country to see the outside world. They find that the world is not only fascinating but also overwhelming. For them, Indonesia is no longer adequate as 'home', but they also experience the world outside, which is constituted by a global interweaving of cultures, peoples and languages, as alienating despite its vast diversity and borderless horizons. They are constantly tempted back by the conservative and primordial forces of religion that are inclusive for the in-group, but exclude others or tend to be inward-looking. These characters are initially awed by what the outside world has to offer, but find themselves mentally unprepared to embark on an all-out journey into the unknown. In decisive moments they allow themselves to be

reclaimed by a confining old world that offers certainty and security even if it puts constraints on their freedom and individuality. However, their views concerning the nation are no longer the same, as their experiences of the outside world provide insight into the limits of national boundaries.

Since the nation has embarked on a process of redefining itself through decentralization of power, contrary to the New Order's concentration of power in the personality of the leader, resistance to change means that the regressive pull towards conservatism and primordialism strengthens. The implementation of the decentralization program has produced the revitalization of *adat* and Islamic revivalism, both of which claimed to have been marginalized by the New Order and now demand that they be given what is entitled to them. In the face of such a challenge, women writers like Oka Rusmini and Novia Syahidah offer their own perspectives. There are hope and optimism that Islam can offer a different kind of modernity that promotes decency and prosperity, but also uneasiness in terms of how revitalized *adat* laws may preserve the New Order's oppressive practices, especially against women. By representing Islam as a positive force, Novia offers a different outlook on religious revivalism from the dominant one in the *Reformasi* era, which presents the image of Islam as a repressive and intolerant system of belief. Her novel may have an ambiguous effect: on one hand it shows that Islam can make a positive contribution to decentralization, but on the other hand it can also be read as a denial of the ugly fact that Islamic fundamentalism has changed the face of Islam in Indonesia, where it used to be more open to pluralism. Oka is less enthusiastic about the prospect of revitalization of *adat* in the context of Hindu-Balinese society, since she considers *adat* as part of the *status quo* rather than a catalyst for progress. Yet all the characters in her novel eventually have to succumb to *adat*, no matter how hard they attempt to resist its domination.

Hanna Rambe, Linda Christanty, and Nukila Amal present fresh perspectives on the nation by framing their representations in archipelagic contexts. Hanna redraws the picture of the country by creating a fictional island broken into smaller pieces of land by a river with many branches, resulting in a miniature version of the archipelago. This new metaphor for the archipelago embraces notions of both unity and diversity, as well as the elements of land and water. But her novel does not convey a sense of optimism for the future, and seems to predict that the archipelago will remain a contested arena for the battle between good and evil, even after the New Order has gone. Linda's view of the archipelago similarly presents us with the painful fact that Jakarta's domination has become too strong for a significant decentering to take place. Her message is that the best we can do is to accept the reality of Jakarta as a center, and at the same time keep alive the collective memory of what is lost. This 'decentering of the mind' may create a mental space for preserving the notion of the archipelago, resisting its miniaturization by the overpowering figure of the capital city. Nukila Amal takes her readers right into the midst of an ethnic and religious conflict on the remote island of Halmahera to allow us to gain an imaginary 'first-hand' experience of how it feels to be trapped in the epicenter of such a conflict, through the ordeal and death of the protagonist. The situation described in the story is marked by helplessness and violence, but Nukila seems to urge us not to give in to pessimism, as she presents a stark contrast between the deadly ethnic clash and the protagonist's steadfastness and resilience in coping with such violence. There is the recurring sense of being entrapped in an unfavorable situation beyond our control, but in contrast to the gloomy atmosphere of *Cala Ibi*, "Laluba" contains a much stronger will to a celebration of life in the face of grave danger—an appeal for the nation to persevere in its long hard journey to a better future.

Ethnic tension is a legacy of the New Order that will possibly continue to mark the trajectory of the nation towards the future. Decentralization and regional autonomy seem to sharpen the sense of regional identity that tends to be exclusive and hostile to those who are not considered *putra daerah* (literally, ‘a son of the region’, or indigenous person). But the end of Suharto’s era has brought about some progress in terms of how Chinese-Indonesians are perceived and treated. Lan Fang and Clara Ng, both of Chinese descent, reflect on the identity issue faced by the Chinese. Lan Fang takes her readers back to the colonial period in order to demonstrate the fluidity of identity, as well as its importance for survival in a dangerous time. The female characters of her novel face dilemmas related to their identity, but each has her own way of coming to terms with it. The path towards conflict resolution taken by each of them shows that either we deny that identity in a multicultural society like Indonesia is never a fixed signifier of self, or we accept it as a fact to celebrate, as our identity undergoes a constant process of renewal. Similar options are offered by Clara Ng, whose female characters are involved in a tug-of-war with their multiple identities, and find that the family is the most strategic locus for preserving and developing identity. Their Chineseness is preserved by the continuation of family traditions each time they celebrate the Chinese New Year, while their Indonesianess is solidified during such a celebration by the ever-expanding family that becomes more heterogeneous each year. Clara offers readers an optimistic outlook in regard to the solution to the “Chinese problem” that has dogged the nation for centuries, and particularly during the New Order period, but she is not blinded by the fact that external forces—both positive and destructive—will keep on playing a significant role in the process of defining the Chinese-Indonesian identity in post-Suharto Indonesia.

The element of ambivalence that is prevalent in almost all the works of the Indonesian women writers analyzed in this study is not simply a symptom of the writers' half-hearted stance in their attempts to re-imagine the nation and propose an alternative vision of it. Rather, all the ambiguities and dilemmas reflected in their female characters of their works are manifestations of the awareness that the nation must not be deluded by the progress in many sectors claimed by the different governing parties that have ruled the country since 1998, or be complacent with the euphoria of the *Reformasi*. From another angle, such ambiguous positions may also be caused by the difficulty faced by these writers in trying to resist the regressive force of New Order's residual power. This power had been concentrated for a long time in the hands of a single regime and, based on the Javanese notion of such power, it had the capacity to absorb anything in its surrounding for the purpose of the accumulation of more power, without limits. The New Order's power is far more difficult to overcome than the colonial notion of power that was based on the divide-and-conquer tactic, for power in the Javanese concept does not break its opponents to weaken it, but attracts them into its circle. The sense of unity established by the New Order through the application of such a notion of power in its ideology and policies is not a delusion. It concretely exists, but in a highly problematic sense, as it is founded on a dual principle of marginalization and reward. The New Order put constraints on the freedom of each group in society, and at the same time rewarded them with certain privileges in order to both compensate for what was taken from them and ensure their loyalty to the regime. The fact that Indonesia was quite successful in avoiding national disintegration during the Asian economic crisis and after, despite all the strong demands from many regions for more autonomy, indicates that the New Order had achieved a considerable success in forging unity among various groups.

This is why a considerable degree of caution is needed in our attempt to make sense of all the claims of marginalization and demands for freedom that are often made by all kinds of group nowadays. The only group that can rightly claim that they suffered from oppression under the New Order is the Communists, as Communism was—and still is—banned in Indonesia, and adherence to this ideology is considered a serious violation of the law. Efforts to revoke the anti-communist law have been made but with no result so far. It is worth noting that none of the works discussed in this study addresses this issue as its main theme. The rise of Islamism in this post-Suharto era has even brought about new waves of hatred and hostility towards heterogeneity that are less violent than the New Order's repression during their heyday. Christian churches, Islamic sects, and homosexuals have become the targets of the Islamists' attacks, which have intensified since the fall of the New Order. Hundreds of regional bylaws informed by the *shariah* have been produced in many regions and blatantly curb women's freedom of expression and movement. The politics of morality has begun to hijack the processes of democratization, even though corruption and political scandals among public officials, ironically, remain unchecked.

The women writers whose works are analyzed in this study seem to be aware of this, too. Hence the guarded optimism and doubt about the prospect of change that the readers may sense in these works. To be in the margin, in this case, is still a strategic position to take in order not to be carried away by the euphoria of the *Reformasi*, and to remain critical of the changes that occur in the name of democracy and freedom in this post-Suharto era. Their diverse perspectives on a wide range of social issues show that the views of these women writers of the post-1998 generation are in no way monolithic. Each has her own priorities, concerns, and ways of seeing. They are far from having a unified outlook on the nation, but this must not be interpreted as a weakness. In fact the strength of this generation lies in its plurality of voices: 'women' as an

analytical category is far from adequate to accommodate such a multiplicity of voices. This means that each woman writer who emerged in the *Reformasi* era has a unique perspective on the nation, and therefore their works cannot be sweepingly grouped together by narrow labels such as ‘*sastrawangi*’ (fragrant literature), which mixes up the lifestyles and appearances of the writers with their choice of themes, or ‘women’s fiction’—a term referring to the works of women during the New Order era, with its belittling connotations. Yet these writers have one thing in common: they do not see the margin as a space of the “abject”. For them, the margin is a site of possibilities and opportunities. Just as the importance of the archipelago and its far-flung islands needs to be restored, the strategic significance of the margin as an alternative space for writing about women and their relationship to the nation ought to be accentuated.

Marginality, therefore, is not a condition imposed by an external power in order to set a limit on the creative freedom and critical faculty of these post-1998 women writers. On the contrary, marginality is a necessary position that they consciously take so that creative freedom can be unleashed and critical responses to processes of democratization can be effectively produced. In the context of the New Order’s unity, which is founded upon the centrality of power in the hands of the ruling elite, marginality serves as a liberating agent that allows those who locate themselves in the margin to envision an alternative construct of the nation. In this respect, marginality is fundamentally different from ‘marginalization’, which implies an imposition of a marginal status by a superior, external force onto a weaker group. This reinforces Rey Chow’s notion of the margin as a ‘para-site’, a tactical space at the periphery where disruptions against the center can be initiated. However, valorizing marginality does not deny that to a certain extent it is also shaped and influenced by the dominant power, as both Mohanty and Ang point out. Thus, it is a form of ‘negotiation’ with the dominant power rather than an opposition to it. This

notion of marginality as a negotiated position is clearly echoed by the writers discussed in this study, as their works testify. It also allows these writers to deal with the New Order's seemingly contradictory logic of unity that preaches the importance of national integration on one hand, but practices discriminatory politics on the other, because they are not merely critical observers that look at the inside from a disinterested lens, but rather individuals with personal experience of the New Order's subjugation.

Feminist theories, particularly those that are concerned with women in the 'Third World', prove to be extremely helpful in understanding this notion of marginality, but equally important is how they help to show that the margin to a certain extent is always 'contaminated' by the dominant discourses of the center; taking up a position in the margin does not necessarily make us immune from their influences, as Ang and Mohanty point out. Such a limitation manifests itself clearly in the works of these Indonesian women writers of the *Reformasi* era, in the forms of doubt, ambiguity, and guarded optimism in regard to which path the nation needs to take in its journey towards the future. However, it is equally clear that marginality opens up new possibilities and ways of seeing that would be unthinkable if these authors took a different standpoint, as discussed by Chow, hooks, and Budianta. The position of marginality brings about awareness that the New Order has left many social problems that are detrimental to women, and that there is no simple way to address them. But the margin is possibly the only space left open for women to explore alternatives and new ideas based on distinctly feminine perspectives. The feminist theories used in this study have, hopefully, helped to avoid the biases frequently associated with male perspectives on women, which often judge women too harshly in terms of their shortcomings or overly romanticize them as heroines with no flaws. This study has attempted to challenge such narrow and rigid dichotomies that put women in opposing camps.

The female characters in the works analyzed here are not anti-Islam, anti-*adat*, anti-Jakarta, or anti-nationalism. It can even be argued that they are not against everything that has to do with the New Order. But these women certainly speak back to the dominant power on an equal footing, no longer accepting the secondary status given to them because of their gender. In my opinion, this is one feminist goal that the women authors in this study have managed to achieve through their works, whether or not they see themselves as feminists.

Along with adopting the strategy of marginality, the works of the post-1998 women writers studied here are almost uniformly marked by their striking contemporaneity. Most of these writers focus on current issues that are set in contemporary Indonesia. Only Lan Fang incorporates a past historical period into her work, and even so the emphasis is on the present-day. It is as if there is a common awareness among them of the need to use the present as a new starting point for the nation to continue its journey to the future, without reminiscing too long and too much about the past. This is significantly different from the works of prominent male authors during the New Order period, such as Pramoedya Ananta Toer and Y.B. Mangunwijaya, or a much younger male author from the *Reformasi* era, Eka Kurniawan, whose works reveal a high degree of fascination or preoccupation with the past. In their works, the past serves as a detour to make statements about the present. On the one hand, the absence of the past from the women writers' works may be interpreted as an indication of a lack of historicity, which might make them inferior to the works of their male seniors and counterparts. On the other hand, this can also be viewed as a commitment to the present, since all of these writers were born and grew up during the New Order era (except for Hanna Rambe), and this helps them to focus on the New Order and its legacy when tracing the source of all the problems that the nation has been facing in the last few decades. Focusing on the present could furthermore mean that the present

generation of women writers willingly accepts collective responsibility for the nation's problems, because after all they were part of the New Order's regime.

None of these writers specifically takes issue with poverty, although we see a glimpse of that problem appearing in Nukila Amal's *Cala Ibi*, as she describes the masses on the street. Is the urban middle-class background of most of these writers a factor in causing such 'blindness'? This study cannot adequately provide an answer to this question, and leaves it to other research to explore. Likewise, the silence surrounding issues related to Communism, or the possibility of discussing atheism in a country where belief in God has become one of the 'requirements' of citizenship, may be disquieting. Oka Rusmini's *Tarian Bumi* mentions in passing the persecution of Communists in the early days of the New Order, but it does not make any attempt to seriously discuss the issue. At best, the reference to the event only serves as minor background information to introduce a character in the story. The lack of engagement with these issues might also reflect the extent to which the authors have inherited the New Order legacy in terms of what can be freely expressed and what should be left unspoken, but there is not enough evidence in this study to support this suspicion.

All in all, the post-1998 generation of women writers' contribution to the *Reformasi* era is twofold: firstly, from distinct women's perspectives, they offer alternative outlooks on the nation and ways of dealing with its present and future challenges. Their voices are not articulated through creeds and slogans but by means of profound reflections on various issues that Indonesia is currently facing; secondly, they have opened up a symbolic space for women in the margins of both the Indonesian literary circle and its socio-political sphere, from which women have begun to assert their own subjectivity in relation to the nation. This is a space void of violence, anger, or inaction—the disheartening trends that have increasingly become dominant in Indonesia's

social and political arenas nowadays. In this new space that these writers have opened, there are disappointments, pessimism, and pain, but all these are expressed without much bitterness, and certainly with no thought of surrendering to the overwhelming pressures that strive to push them back to the obscurity of the second-class status imposed on them in the New Order's era.

This study sheds light on how these post-1998 women writers engage themselves in the formation of new discourses on nation-building and national identity, areas that traditionally used to be dominated by men and whose discussion often takes place in the masculinized realm of politics. The works analyzed in this study demonstrate how women have made significant contributions to rethinking the issues from feminine perspectives that are rich and varied, involving personal and subjective explorations in which diversity and a multiplicity of voices are celebrated rather than suppressed. In addition, this study argues that the post-Suharto generation of women writers are not only interested in rediscovering their long-suppressed sexuality and celebrating the female body that was associated with vulgarity and immorality during the previous era. It deconstructs the image of the group of women writers, who were tarnished by the unfortunate emergence of the *sastrawangi* debate in the early 2000s. It is my hope that this research has opened up new avenues for future scholarly work to address issues left untouched or underdeveloped here. These include the role of the publishing industry and translation in attaining recognition beyond the nation, as well as on-going tensions for women, as for men, between religiosity and secular humanism.

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