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Traditions Redirecting  
Contemporary  
Indonesian Cultural  
Productions



# Traditions Redirecting Contemporary Indonesian Cultural Productions

Edited by

Jan van der Putten, Monika Arnez,  
Edwin P. Wieringa and Arndt Graf

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and Arndt Graf

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## PREFACE

In 2015 the Republic of Indonesia celebrated the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its independence, an event that understandably filled the hearts of many Indonesian citizens with joy and pride. 2015 also marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of an attempted coup d'état and its horrifying aftermath in the mass killings of people associated with the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI) and other left-wing organisations. During the period after another regime change in 1998, a number of one-time victims and their children have come forward with their stories about the events of 1965, while commemorations of the victims have indicated that the wounds inflicted by the atrocities committed 50 years ago are deep and have yet to heal.

The year 2015 also witnessed the first time Indonesia presented itself prominently on the world literary stage by becoming the guest of honor at the annual Frankfurt Book Fair. Four scholars of Indonesian literature based in German universities took this opportunity to organise a conference about modern Indonesian cultural expressions since independence in direct connection with the book fair. This volume contains a selection of the papers that were presented during the conference, which focused on the topics of the Indonesian cultural production of the past 70 years and representations of the traumatic events of the mid-1960s.

Many parties have made this conference and this ensuing volume possible, for which we wish to express our sincere gratitude. First and foremost we thank all the presenters and other participants who made it a wonderful conference with critical discussions; the Goethe University of Frankfurt and its organising committee chaired by Holger Warnk, who hosted the event; the German Research Foundation (DFG) for providing the financial means for the conference; and the Departments of Southeast Asian Studies of the Universities of Frankfurt, Hamburg, and Cologne. The conference was opened with a speech by the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture and vividly continued with a performance of the group Servants of the Words, featuring Elisabeth Inandiak, Endah Laras, Jennifer Lindsay, Landung Simatupang, Tommi Simatupang, and Christina Schott. In this performance different languages, genres, and media were used in a fascinating combination, showing how creativity was triggered

by the travelling word through processes of media change and translation. This performance provided an inspiring start for the presentations and discussions that day. The second day was opened with a panel discussion entitled “Writing Political Violence and Trauma” led by Alex Flor and featuring the speakers Pam Allen, Ayu Utami, and Mery Kolimon. This discussion formed the prelude to the first session of paper presenters about Indonesian literary reflections on the tragic events of 1965 and their aftermath. We extend our sincere gratitude to all these performers and speakers without whom the conference would have been less special.

We are also grateful to the members of the group at Hamburg University, including Bettina David and Yanti Mirdayanti, who helped us with the first brainstorming session conceptualising our plans for a conference. Martina Heinschke, also a member of this group, assisted us all through the process of the organisation, for which we are very appreciative. Gratitude is also due to Mirko Wittwar, our English language editor, who has done wonderful work on such short notice and Kris Williamson, who checked the final edition.

# INTRODUCTION

JAN VAN DER PUTTEN

In the course of history, processes of cultural exchange and internalisation, adoption, and translation within maritime Southeast Asia and with other Asian regions resulted in the production and further distribution of knowledge in the form of narratives or texts in a variety of forms and manifestations. During early modern times new frames of religious and secular knowledge were introduced and developed with the help of writing systems used for the preservation and dissemination of materials. However, for a long time the production and dissemination of textual material were dominated by orality and stage traditions, while hand-written or epigraphic and iconographic texts seem to have arrived later and to have been limited to palace and religious temple traditions. Although transformed and adjusted in accordance with contemporaneous contexts, oral, stage and manuscript traditions have maintained successful positions as media for textual production. To give a few examples of these ongoing traditions, mention can be made of the continuation of oral expressions in religious prayers of different denominations, the ever popular declamation of poetry in public readings, the performances given by stage and dance troupes inside and outside theatre buildings, and hand-written copies made of older texts for religious and/or commercial purposes. Hosting an enormous variety of languages and detached ethnic groups, each with their own languages and cultural traditions, insular Southeast Asia is characterised by an extremely rich collection of local oral and stage traditions that in recent times have increasingly been fostered and vigorously preserved. In particular in Indonesia, this trend has continued and was enhanced in recent years as a consequence of regional autonomy laws that were implemented in the beginning of the new millennium and have boosted the nation's as well as the people's interest in their cultural heritage. Tellingly, since the mid-1990s, Indonesian researchers of oral and manuscript traditions have organised themselves in associations that coordinate research projects and organise conferences, the *Asosiasi Tradisi Lisan* (Association for Oral Traditions) and the *Masyarakat Pernaskahan Nusantara* (The Indonesian Association for Nusantara Manuscripts) respectively.

Only in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century printing became available on a large scale in Southeast Asia, not long afterwards followed by the technology to screen moving pictures that spawned the formation of cottage industries in the different colonial settlements in the region. Also radio and gramophones became increasingly popular in this period, to become part of an elite lifestyle but also to experience wider distribution through communal “listening sessions”. The 1920s definitely seem to have been a pivotal decade for an extensive growth of political organisations and awareness of the people, truly an Age in Motion (Shiraishi 1990). This political empowerment went hand in hand with an acceleration of the textual production in the region when newly-founded periodicals and newspapers started to disseminate short or serialised tales, theatre troupes travelled the region to stage highly commercial shows together with innovative and more critical dramas, while small film and music industries created stardom that were the pride of the budding pre-nationalist societies. The two most brightly shining stars of this period were Miss Riboet, who toured Southeast Asia with her Orion Malay opera troupe, and Devi Dja who started with the competing Dardanella theatre group and in the late 1930s continued her career in Hollywood (see Cohen 2006, 2010).

The colonial government of the Netherlands East Indies greatly expanded its territory, authority, and bureaucracy during the decades around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and a system of high colonialism with its so-called ethical policy encroached more and more upon the everyday lives of the colonised peoples. This policy entailed the infamous *mission civilisatrice*, which was complemented or partly substituted by “modernising missions” to enable the metropole to extend and enhance its domination over the colony and compensate for the negative economic standing on the world market by improving the exploitation and management of the natural resources of the colonies. Through a variety of education and training programmes, the Dutch authorities imposed European values and standards as the yard stick for the development of society in its colonies. Censorship and political control were designed to further make sure that the population would be introduced to modernity in a safe and peaceful way, but the genie of political emancipation had already escaped its confines and the people’s demands for political rights and self-determination became stronger in the 1920s, only to increase further during the 1930s.

In 1908 Dutch authorities had installed a committee of popular literature that was designed to look after the production and distribution of indigenous texts in Latin script. The Advisor of Native Affairs, Godard

Arend Johannes Hazeu, initially presided over this committee but was soon replaced by Douwe Adolf Rinkes, who became the founding director of the autonomous Bureau of Popular Literature, better known as Balai Pustaka, in 1917 (Jedamksi 1992). In the first decades after its establishment, the Bureau gradually became to be considered one of the means to curb a surge of popular literature churned out by local press media, and mainly written by authors of Chinese or Eurasian descent. Their main topics of crime, romance, and occasionally social criticism were not deemed to foster the right development of the native spirit that would be in tandem with the government's educational policies. The discourse about the future of the colony and the readiness of its population to embrace western-based concepts of state and nationhood formed the backdrop against which presumed differences between popular and serious literature were brought forward and discussed. Indigenous writers became infused with an awareness of values in literary writings that could build the people's pride and shape a future nation's readership. The mission of modernisation had caught on and was propagated through texts produced and performed by western-educated intellectuals (see Maier, this volume).

In 1928 political activists selected Malay as the language to unite the future nation. The propagation of Malay throughout the archipelago of the future Indonesian state was intensified, but its distribution to new geographic regions and sociocultural domains seems to have made real progress only during the Japanese occupation when Dutch was abolished and Malay was modernised at an accelerating pace. After the Japanese surrender there seems to have been little doubt what language was to be used for the newly proclaimed nation, while the ensuing revolution and its imagery as being fought by a budding generation of angry young men and women charged it with enough emotion to become the people's language (Anderson 1990, 139ff). In the independent republic, language authorities started to implement linguistic developmentalism in an attempt to somehow balance the propagation of the national language with its highly modernised registers with the maintenance of local languages in order to preserve traditions vested in these "regional" or "ethnic" languages. It will not come as a surprise to note that the discourse on the modern, developing nation was carried out in the supra-ethnic register of Indonesian, thereby enhancing its reputation of being the only means for modern communication in the post-war independent Republic of Indonesia. The textual production of that period followed this general development and was ideologised to serve sociopolitical groups that became increasingly polarised in the course of the 1950s. In a rather simplistic way of representing the complex and often chaotic situation on

the ground (Lindsay 2012), three groups of artists and cultural workers are most commonly distinguished: a first group embracing global or universal values and opening up to the world (Gelanggang group), a second group who wanted to develop the nation by saving the people from poverty (LEKRA, Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, Institute of People's Culture), and a third group of Muslim cultural activists striving to use their art for missionary purposes (LESBUMI, established in 1962). Of course, the reality was more complicated and a clear or strict distinction between different branches of the cultural production was non-existent, e.g. the most important film director of the 1950s, Usmar Ismail, was instrumental in the formulation of the first Cultural Manifesto of the Gelanggang group in 1950 (cf. Heinschke 1996). In the early 1950s he worked together with Basuki Resobowo, a well-known painter whom Usmar had asked to become art director in his newly established film company Perfini. A decade earlier, Basuki Resobowo had starred in the movie the "Laughing Mask" (*Kedok Ketawa*), and at Perfini he would design film sets as well as scripts, one of which was "Exalted Guest" (*Tamu Agung*, 1955), a faintly disguised satire about President Soekarno. He was a man of many talents who, at the end of the 1950s, would become a leading figure in the visual arts section of LEKRA.

The process of political and cultural polarisation peaked in the early 1960s when a group of writers issued a Manifesto Kebudayaan (Cultural Manifesto) in protest of the dominating and censoring practices of LEKRA that was affiliated with the Indonesian communist party. In 1959 President Soekarno had taken full control of the government and increasingly turned to the PKI for support. The PKI was the third-biggest communist party of the world, after the Chinese and Russian parties, and had developed its powerbase in the cities as well as in rural areas with its Indonesian Peasant Organisation (Barisan Tani Indonesia, BTI), demanding that land reform and crop-sharing laws should be more rigorously implemented, so that the conflict with the newly-established state of Malaysia, which began in early 1963, would be successful (cf. Mortimer 2006, 269). In 1964 BTI launched its aggressive campaign of one-sided actions (*aksi sepihak*) to evict landlords from their lands and divide the latter among small tenants who were members of the organisation, which increasingly led to violent clashes in the countryside. The same year LEKRA and its subsidiary organisations, such as the Indonesian Music Body (Lembaga Musik Indonesia, LMI), continued their pressure on the President to purify Indonesian cultural life from capitalist and imperialist influences, which resulted in the infamous bans on the distribution of Western pop music referred to as *ngak ngik nguk* by Soekarno (Rhoma 2012) and on the

import of American feature movies that in turn led to the shutdown of many movie theatres (Said 1991, 69-75).

In retrospect, it seems logical that the intensifying polarisation of Indonesian society would lead to an inevitable detonation, which was triggered by the actions of the so-called 30 September Movement (Gerakan 30 September, G30S) in 1965. Although the actual motivation for the attempted coup by members of the Movement and the counter actions under the command of Major-General Soeharto will be forever unclear, due to the death of the key agents and the obliteration of a great deal of the historical documents, the tragic events as such are clear enough and have had a sweeping impact on the course of Indonesian history. In the night of 30 September 1965 a few leading communist figures in cooperation with a few army units abducted and killed seven top-ranking officers of the Indonesian army under suspicion of planning a coup themselves a few days later. Immediately army units came into action and the badly organised initial coup was put down within 24 hours. In the following months right-wing forces tried to purge the Indonesian society of all communist and left-wing elements by eradicating the members of the PKI and its subsidiary organisations through incarceration, exile, and murder. The estimated number of victims of the ensuing mass killings is about half a million people (cf. Cribb 1991, Roosa 2006). A staggering President Soekarno eventually relinquished state power to Soeharto on 11 March 1966, and immediately the new man in charge officially banned PKI, rounded up state ministers in the cabinet, and started to purge the army ranks and political bodies of elements sympathetic to Soekarno's left-wing inclinations. The economic crisis Indonesia had been experiencing over the previous years was one of the main concerns for the New Order regime that started arranging with foreign creditors to pay off its large debts and opening up the country for western investors to start new enterprises (accumulating bigger debts than before in the wake). The regime also gave free reign to army-run businesses, such as the Logistics Body BULOG and Pertamina oil company, monopolising the distribution of basic necessities of food and fuel, to further expand their operations and dominate the economy, which improved the state's economy while at the same time impoverishing its population.

Corruption became increasingly rampant, and student organisations that initially had supported the establishment of the new regime increasingly turned against it during the following decade. The government clamped down on political and cultural freedom, arguing that it was a hazard for stability and peace that were considered a prerequisite for an economically healthy nation. The regime designed policies for a top-down development



of economic and social fields, with Jakarta as its all-powerful centre and reconfigured a national culture that consisted of a selection of regional art forms put on a national stage and separated from its socio-religious context. Formal and structured indoctrination started when the authorities implemented their plans to make Indonesian citizens into loyal followers of the Pancasila state ideology. A special programme was introduced in 1978 that involved compulsory courses with examinations on all levels of the educational system and all government and army services. It was through these often scorned courses and seminars and the national history classes at school that the regime tried to homogenise the society and distribute an extremely one-sided and otherwise simplified view of the national history. This official history displayed the Indonesian armed forces as liberators of the nation, as they had defeated the colonial overlords in the struggle for independence or Revolution (1945-49) and the demonic forces of communism two decades later.

Further policies entailed that the public sphere was thoroughly depoliticised by reducing the role and number of political parties, thereby securing the central role of the government party GOLKAR, banning any political activities of students' and any other organisations, strictly censoring mass media, and severely limiting the freedom of arts. Left-wing cultural activists had been killed or imprisoned, and the remaining authors, filmmakers, playwrights, and other creative thinkers, were either co-opted by the government, had shifted to safer jobs that could earn them a living, or struggled further to make ends meet and try to encode their works with more subtle criticism that would not be immediately detected by the censorship boards. In literary writing and stage performances a lasting tendency towards surrealist and absurdist texts is apparent as having originated after the massacres of the mid-1960s. Works by Putu Wijaya, Danarto, Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, and also later Seno Gumira Ajidarma and Taufik Ikram Jamil are frequently set in a world that denies reality, while some works by Mangunwijaya, Kuntowijoyo, Putu Wijaya, and, more recently, Nukila Amal and Eka Kurniawan make use of a more magical realistic setting in which traditional characters can be seen as representing and commenting upon contemporary situations. However, realism remained the dominating narrative style throughout the period in which modern expressions were produced in Indonesia. The internationally well-known author Pramoedya Ananta Toer applied this style throughout his career, starting in the late 1940s. Being one of the top officials of LEKRA, he was imprisoned in 1965 and exiled to the island of Buru in the Moluccas, where he continued to compile and reconstruct stories from his memory which, for want of writing materials, he delivered

to his fellow exiles by word of mouth. Only at the end of his period in exile was he able to write those stories down that he revised, elaborated and edited into the four volumes of his famous “Buru Quartet” and the “Girl from the coast” (*Gadis Pantai*) in the early 1980s. The well-known poet and playwright Rendra is another cultural activist who continued to voice his critical views on the regime he encoded into his works. He paid dearly in the form of incarceration and being banned from performing. Many of Rendra’s poems and plays were written in the context of students’ protest and broached social ills and abuses wreaked by Soeharto with his family and cronies.

The authoritarian and technocrat regime focussed all its policies around the continuation of its power and wealth, using the concept of *pembangunan* (construction, development) as a mantra that everyone should yield to and work for. The complex of cultural performance and artefacts, which in the period immediately after independence had been at the heart of the building of the nation (Lindsay 2012, 6), was demoted to become an auxiliary to represent the nation abroad, attract foreign tourists and occupy some domestic recreational spaces, rather than function as an expression of the people’s psyche or enhance emotional attachment to the nation. As in many other fields of activity, Jakarta was made into the uncontested centre for the arts, where national institutions oversaw cultural spaces such as the Taman Ismail Marzuki, a cultural centre that was established in 1968 and funded by the local government. The town grew into a megacity where official permits for shows and publications had to be requested and “blessings” in the form of advice (*pengarahan*) from some high official or a nod from a senior member of one of the central art organisations could be obtained; without these forms of approval local cultural expressions would stand little chance of ever going beyond their local confines. As a consequence authors, dancers, stage groups, journalists, poets, et cetera flocked to the city of Jakarta, together with millions of other entrepreneurs and wanderers.

In the 1990s, when the New Order regime showed signs of slackening the reins of their hold over the public sphere, the infrastructure of the cultural world was by and large already in the hands of a few multinational businesses that incorporated media branches as one of the fields of their activities. When in 1988 the Indonesian government allowed commercial television companies to start broadcasting, Soeharto’s sons and his daughter, Tutut, viewed this new enterprise as a lucrative expansion of their huge business empires (cf. Sen and Hill 2000, 111-13). In the publishing sector the Kompas Gramedia group and the Tempo group came to control the market of newspapers, magazines and book publishing, and

recently they have also added television and radio stations to their already broad array of activities (cf. Haryanto 2011). The accumulation of cultural media in the hands of a few tycoons that started under Soeharto's reign has continued after he was forced to step down, but state censorship was lifted and a new era of feverish democratisation kicked in. *Reformasi* dawned, expectations and hope galore. However, despite all initial beliefs and anticipations that now the old regime had vanished, old structures soon would be reformed, it would take until the middle of the following decade, after devastating natural disasters had wrecked parts of Aceh and Central Java and took hundreds of thousands of casualties, that a slow democratisation process seems to bear fruit. Furthermore, the election of President Joko Widodo in 2014 seems to have returned hope to many Indonesian hearts.

Probably the most conspicuous characteristic that has marked the public sphere in all its aspects of sociopolitical and cultural activities since the end of the New Order regime is the increasing visibility of Islam. Already in the initial stage of Soeharto's reign, Islam became a slightly more apparent part of the public sphere, particularly after the oil boom of the early 1970s and the Iranian revolution of 1979 had changed Islam's prominence on a world stage. In the 1980s the government further institutionalised Islam in the educational system and in social life, while the organisation of Muslim intellectuals (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Se-Indonesia, ICMI), established in 1990 by later President Habibie, has had far-reaching influence and impact on the political and bureaucratic system. Since the power change of 1998 Islam has increasingly permeated social life, and although officially a religiously pluralist society, nationalist and especially regional politics have gravitated towards stricter adherence to Islamic tenets, with several Islamic organisations and pressure groups striving for even stricter rules to regulate the social life of Indonesian citizens. Similar attempts to persuade the vast Islamic majority of the population to follow a more pious lifestyle is ubiquitous in popular cultural expressions such as religious soap series (*sinetron*), reality shows featuring competitions to become the best *imam* or the youngest prodigious child to memorise the text of the Qur'an on television, while hundreds of didactic stories are churned out in cheaply produced books, some of which have made it into mainstream blockbuster movies as well. In short, many cultural workers have made Islam an important part of their cultural identity that they express and shape through their works, which increasingly forge a more general cultural identity of the nation.

The second prominent creative force of the formation of the cultural realm that has come to the fore during the past few decades is the

increasing importance and number of female cultural activists who have become leading members of Indonesian society. After the organisations striving for women empowerment had considerable success during the reign of President Soekarno, the New Order regime turned back the clock by banning organisations such as *Gerwani* (*Gerakan Wanita*, a left-wing women's emancipation movement) and reverting the official state's imagery of women into merely the supporters of their husbands and mothers of their children. After increasing national and international pressure on the regime after widely publicised crimes, such as the brutal murder of the factory worker Marsinah in 1993, this imagery became increasingly contested by political activists such as Dita Indah Sari and Rotua Valentina Sagala, theatre directors and social activists such as Ratna Sarumpaet, filmmakers such as Mira Lesmana, journalists and novelists such as Ayu Utami, and many others. Ayu's novel *Saman* can safely be considered one of the important factors that changed and innovated the cultural paradigm of Indonesia in the new millennium. The novel relates the story of the renegade priest Saman who becomes a social activist defending the rights of plantation workers in south Sumatra. Assisted by four, very liberal-minded women, he eventually succeeds in fleeing abroad before the security services are able to capture him. This tale, published in the advent of the power shift of 1998, pioneered a host of other novels and works created by women in the excitement of entering a new era of political and cultural freedom. Unsurprisingly, the novel also triggered vehement criticism from conservative Muslim quarters and remnants of the old regime, who considered the open sexuality and active political roles of its female characters unbecoming or even "unnatural" for Indonesian women. Even though the initial enthusiasm and newly attained freedom of the *Reformasi* period soon drifted towards disillusionment, female cultural activists have become a permanent characteristic of the cultural world, exploring the freedom that had been achieved after the change of power.

### **Traditions redirecting the present**

This volume is the result of a conference organised by staff members of the departments of Southeast Asian Studies of the Universities of Frankfurt, Hamburg, and Cologne in October 2015 on the eve of the largest trade fair for books in Frankfurt with Indonesia being the guest of honour. In the preliminary outline and plans for this project we thought of charting the main ideas about modern Indonesian literature since independence and give a survey of the main studies and works of

Indonesia's cultural production of the last 70 years. As a matter of course, these plans turned out to be a little too ambitious, and therefore we soon decided upon taking stock of what was considered important in Indonesian culture in the year 2015, with the official Indonesian contribution to the book fair in Frankfurt as an important indication of what cultural authorities of Indonesia considered important.

Presenting itself as the biggest archipelagic state of the world under the motto of "17,000 Islands of Imagination", the Indonesian national committee presented a host of literary and other artistic events at the special pavilion designed in style as seven interconnected islands dedicated to different aspects of its culture: manuscripts, comics, cooking, book display, interviews, and performances, digital learning, and oral performances. Many more events took place in other venues within the book fair's enormous premises and also in other institutions in Frankfurt, Bonn, Berlin, and some other German cities. The committee managed to cleverly compensate for a lack of newly translated Indonesian books into German—an absolute prerequisite for the German book fair—with numerous performances by authors, artists, puppeteers, musicians, dancers, filmmakers, theatre groups, and other cultural performers. The two major topics of the articles compiled in this volume—the nation's trauma after the horrific events in the context of the 1965 political turmoil and the impact of globalisation on cultural productions—form a fair representation of the most important trends in Indonesia's artistic expressions in recent years.

Henk Maier's opening piece "Indonesian Literature—A Double History" sets off this volume with an overview of modern Indonesian literature by tracing and playing with the different Indonesian terminologies for the concept of literary writing. Maier explores important strands in the literary history of Indonesia by discussing a number of key figures responsible for the textual production and literary criticism in Indonesia who selected and emphasised certain trends of writing while side-lining others, thereby clearly enhancing efforts to make Jakarta into the political and cultural centre of the nation after independence was reached. One of the most obvious victims of these canonising practices was trashy reading materials churned out by the hundreds of thousands at ubiquitous small print-shops and sold by the kilo on markets or distribution centres such as Pasar Senen in Jakarta. Authors such as Mira W., Fredy S., Ashadi Siregar, Eddy D. Iskandar, Teguh Esha, Titiek WS., and many other producers of a *sastra pop* genre, which translates into "popular literature", only now become a little better appreciated since academics have parted with the view that only "high" literature would be worthy of scholarly inquiry. This genre encompasses the popular stories

from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century predominantly produced by people of Chinese-Malay or Indo-European origin, to the romances of the 1930s and 1950s produced in and distributed from urban centres such as Bukittinggi, Medan, Makassar, Singapore, to name a few, to the Islamic didactic stories produced by large publishers, comics, and cosmopolitan chick lit or *metropop* of the main Indonesian publisher, the Kompas Gramedia group.<sup>1</sup> Maier ends his thoughtful essay with suggesting that the very idea of literature, or Indonesian *kesusasteraan*, has changed from a writer and literary critics driven or controlled collection of apposite stories into a market of products that is determined by buyers and readers.

### **Shards of memory: Representations of 1965 and its consequences**

The first part of the book furthermore comprises five chapters that all deal with reflections on the traumatic experiences of the Indonesian nation caused by a failed coup on the eve of October 1, 1965. Especially since 1998, when Soeharto was forced to step down, there has been a steady flow of fictionalised and factual ego-documents that has triggered much scholarly attention in recent years, particularly with regard to female victims once active in the emancipatory Gerwani organisation.<sup>2</sup> In more general theoretical terms, this topic connects to the field of memory studies, which in the past decades has made an academic comeback based on the works of Pierre Nora as well as Jan and Aleida Assman. Recent years have witnessed the publication of stimulating works by scholars such as Chiara de Cesari, Ann Rigney, and Astrid Erll.<sup>3</sup> The focus of these studies is how certain, often traumatic, events are represented in narratives in a variety of media that are periodically renewed, changed, rehearsed, repeated, performed, remediated, et cetera, in order to become or stay part of the collective memory of a certain group of people. As may be expected, elements in a nation's society have a certain interest that a particular narrative will continue to stay in the core of this collective memory and therefore will try to manipulate the maintenance of the so-called "site of memory". Individual memories and narratives have little chance to enter into this site of memory if no political clout is generated to mobilise certain powers. Those in power will like to stay in power and are

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<sup>1</sup> See Diah Arimbi's contribution in this volume.

<sup>2</sup> Reference is made here to studies by Saskia Wieringa (2010, 2011), Kate McGregor and Vanessa Hearman (2007), Kate McGregor (2012), Vanessa Hearman (2012), and Anett Keller (2015).

<sup>3</sup> Please refer to de Cesari and Rigney 2014, Erll and Rigney 2009.

very reluctant to share with other parties. As time passes, a younger generation who has not experienced the events themselves but heard about it through the media as well as from the members of the older generation will possibly start questioning the version that dominates the collective memory because new power relations are established, new information is unearthed, or other possible factors that trigger change in the configuration of the site of memory.

The 1965 traumatic experiences are no exception from this general picture, and in the first contribution Pam Allen discusses two recent novels by the Indonesian authors Laksmi Pamuntjak (*Amba*, 2012) and Leila Chudori (*Pulang*, 2012) through the lens of post-memory, which refers to memories and narratives produced and experienced by members of generations who have not lived through the events that are commemorated. Allen particularly looks into how these authors use the state of exile to explore the meanings of home, love, and betrayal. Both novels have a love relation at their core, and their main protagonists have places where they were exiled to: the prison island of Buru in *Amba* and Paris in *Pulang*. This second novel—and especially its geographical and historical setting—is also the topic of Henri Chambert-Loir's chapter. Chambert-Loir gives a critical assessment of how in Chudori's *Pulang* the place of exile is romanticised to an extent that it has little connection with the historical place of Paris, especially when it refers to the revolutionary time of the 1960s that is used as the setting for a first encounter of the main Indonesian protagonist with his future French wife. He also problematises the fictionalisation of the historical characters of exiled Indonesian intellectuals, which is too distanced from their real lives and ideas the author examined and used to shape the fictional characters of the novel.

Jan van der Putten explores the most frequently watched movie of the Indonesian national cinema, *Treachery of the 30<sup>th</sup> of September Movement*, which was compulsory viewing for a generation of Indonesian citizens, from primary school to university students, government civil servants as well as military personnel. The chapter discusses how this film forms one of the cornerstones of the site of memory that was constructed and maintained by the New Order authorities in close connection with the educational system and a special programme for indoctrination. The film is further analysed from a filmic point of view in connection with Astrid Erll's notions of remediation and premediation (Erll 2009), while also the issue of the enhancement of the film's authenticity is discussed with reference to Sara Jones's work on East German Stasi documents (2014). As the last part of the chapter a concise comparison with the cinematographic work of Joshua Oppenheimer is given, where it is argued that his movies

have the potential to shake Indonesians out of a stupor of suspended disbelief caused by the grand partisan narrative the New Order regime constructed and implanted in the minds of millions of its citizens.

In the next chapter Monika Arnez deals with Ahmad Tohari's trilogy *The Dancer of Paruk Village*, which features a traditional female dancer in a small village on Java's south coast during the period of political and military upheaval as a consequence of the 1965 takeover, while focusing on the film *The Dancer* that was based on the novels and released in 2011. Using anthropological works by Spiller (2010) and Wessing (1999), she analyses how the novel and film depict the tradition of eroticism in dance performances that are immediately connected with fertility rites in the Javanese countryside. Arnez also explores the visualisation of emotions that is used in the movie to express the traumatic experiences depicted in the narrative. Rather than silencing and thereby perpetuating the trauma, the director has tried to show the feelings of somewhat naive traditional village dwellers under attack of modern, left-wing political forces that not even reformist Islamic power could quell.

The last chapter in this section of the book is by Mikihiro Moriyama who revisits Ajip Rosidi's book *Child of the Homeland*, published in 1985. The book has distinct autobiographical characteristics in depicting how a young Sundanese artist moves to Jakarta in the early 1950s to carve out a life for himself in the volatile political and cultural capital of a nation in turmoil. However, Moriyama is not that interested in the possible historical roots of the novel, although these are not fully discarded. Instead, he rather zooms in at a few other themes that are also clearly recognisable in the novel, such as the propagation of religion, national politics during the Soekarno and Soeharto regimes, and ethnic and social issues that played at the time the novel is set.

### **Instances of globalisation: Managing the heritage in local and global trajectories**

The second part of the book comprises another five chapters containing essays about how forces of globalisation have impacted upon the local and linguistically surprisingly homogeneous cultural productions of Indonesia. Inspired by the seemingly contradictory terms of "cosmopolitan patriotism" (Appiah 1997) and "rooted cosmopolitanism" (Kymlicka and Walker 2012), Michael Bodden lays out the premises of this section about how Indonesian modern authors and theatre makers display cosmopolitan identities to frame their narratives replete with local traditional images and experiences. In intriguing ways these authors negotiate between the national level—which



they principally identify with by using Indonesian, the local plane through myths and experiences displayed in their texts—and a global plane by imagining themselves as part of and on a par with a universal human culture. To argue and explore these themes, Bodden analyses Pramoedya Ananta Toer's 'Buru' tetralogy (1980-88), Manguwijaya's *Burung-Burung Rantau* (Migratory Birds, 1992), and Ayu Utami's *Bilangan Fu* (The Number Zero, 2008), which all demonstrate their own divergent forms of rooted cosmopolitanism.

After a concise recapitulation of the history of modern Indonesian national theatre that initially was considered western and elitist, and after explaining that during the New Order regime theatre makers increasingly explored local traditions to circumvent censorship, Barbara Hatley's article continues by discussing performances of three Javanese theatre companies. After Soeharto's dismissal, theatre practitioners needed to readjust to the changed sociopolitical climate, which had become less authoritarian and was characterised by regional autonomy that foregrounded and stimulated local culture and identity (see also Hatley with Hough 2015). As a consequence, new forms of performances emerged, mobilising neighbourhood communities and focusing on local stories and places, though very much in conversation with global cultures. These activities resulted in hybrid forms such as street parades reclaiming public spaces in which traditional hobby-horse trance dances are mixed with hip-hop-style musical performances, celebrating an eclectic admixture of the local and the global.

In the next chapter Andy Fuller discusses the works of two prolific authors who have built substantive oeuvres in the past few decades: Seno Gumira Ajidarma and Afrizal Malna. Fuller discusses the ways in which these authors negotiate the ever problematic relationship with city life in Jakarta, which is considered not only a megacity populated by tens of millions of inhabitants but also a cultural entity constituted by the writings of these two authors and their precursors. The article focusses on Seno's ironic *Cosmopolitan Fart* (*Kentut Kosmopolitan*), which explores the ways Jakartans deploy to get by when enduring the often harsh living conditions found in the city. Seno uses the city as a site for intellectual and theoretical investigation, exploring ideas of western postmodern thinkers such as Barthes, Althusser and Appadurai in his urban explorations. The relationship of the poet, playwright, and essayist Afrizal with Jakarta is much more problematic. He considers Jakarta a site of expectation, novelty, and ambition, but represents it through images of student riots in 1974 and 1998, which gravely affected his life as a poet. His poems draw on a combination of montage and surrealism in which the language gives a

highly fragmented and extremely ambivalent view on modern Indonesian life in the city.

The authors Diah Arimbi discusses in chapter 10 have a much less ambivalent and more positive view of life in the big city of Jakarta. Clearly belonging to a body of literature that is meant to entertain readers rather than trouble them by depicting the social ills of modern city life, the *metropop* novels Diah examines predominantly deal with women who have successful careers and relational problems or take issue with, and by and large abide by, the norms of the patriarchal Indonesian society. Still, it is Diah's contention that the authors of these novels also carve out a cosmopolitan identity by using a mixture of colloquial and standard Indonesian peppered with English words. This last feature is agonisingly obvious in the titles of the novels, which frequently make use of common English expressions with a pinch of Southeast Asian hybridisation. These novels and their authors are intimately connected with social media, which in the case of one novel are used as the medium and format to present the story.

The globalised world is very much part of modern Indonesian imaginations that are constituted in cultural productions. Although it may seem that connecting to a more global discourse outside Indonesia is a rather modern phenomenon, it may be argued that for a very long time the whole cultural configuration of maritime Southeast Asia has been characterised by the localisation of outside cultural and societal traditions and practices. One very conspicuous and highly influential tradition introduced in the region is Islam, which also was briefly mentioned by Michael Bodden as providing a source for another form of cosmopolitan identity in modern Indonesian productions, by perceiving Indonesian Islamic practices as flawed as compared to a religious centre while at the same time being very much embedded in Indonesian culture, as observed in El-Shirazy's best-selling novel *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (Verses of Love). In the last chapter of this book Edwin Wieringa analyses the most salient features of a number of poems by one of the best known Indonesian poets who has foregrounded a clear Islamic identity during his poetic career of the past 50 years: Taufiq Ismail. Wieringa elucidates that in complete agreement with his religious moralistic and didactic mission, Taufiq raises his poetic voice against the ills he detects among the people of his beloved Indonesia, when it comes to social behaviour, politics, or culture. The poems were selected from the three-volume bilingual edition of his complete poetical oeuvre that was published in 2014 with translations by the late Amin Sweeney who candidly mentioned in the introduction that he was not always that favourably disposed towards the content of some of

the poems. Rather than focusing on those of Taufiq's poems that contain social criticism, Wieringa thoughtfully and thoroughly explores the meanings of some of his more religious and philosophical poetry which, as he rightfully acclaims, is one of the most prominent characteristics of Southeast Asian cultural productions from days of yore up to the present day.

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CHAPTER ONE

INDONESIAN LITERATURE:  
A DOUBLE HISTORY

HENK MAIER

*Kesoesteraan* was a word that emerged in conversations and publications in Batavia, administrative centre of the Dutch Indies, in the early 1930s. And before long, it was appropriated by local literati, Dutch-trained, tried and tested in European forms of thinking and very much aware of the fragile force of their own ways of life; involved they were in the activities of the colonial administration-sponsored publishing house of Balai Poestaka and eager to develop the ideas about a “new literature” explored by Poedjangga Baroe, a little magazine founded in 1933. *Kesoesteraan*. In Malay conversations it was used to refer to *literatuur*, a Dutch term that primarily stood for “artful kind of writing”, or “fiction” perhaps. And discussions about the question of which writings should be included in *kesoesteraan* were to be as lively as the dialogues about their relevance in the sociocultural context of the Dutch Indies and, later, Indonesia. By the early 1940s—the wonders of print, mail services, and radio—some authors had become actively familiar with *kesoesteraan*, and they explored the reach of the word in their writings and performances. Others, however, ignored it, unwilling or unable to join the conversations among this small crowd of literati centred in Batavia, Dutch-oriented, alienated from the people. Why would the flood of printed tales rolling over the islands, entertaining readers, showing new possibilities in living life, need such a lofty name? Why not simply stick to the term *roman* and keep on writing new ones, inspiring critical thinking among their readers? What would readers gain from using this new word? And what to say of the murmurings of Muslim teachers who were already very critical of *roman* anyway? And how did the language used by these intellectuals, based in Batavia, relate to the world of local farmers, workers, traders and teachers? Writers in the Indies may have shared the dream of an independent nation, yet most of them were silently or publicly

wondering what the role of their work might be in this so-called *kesoesasteraan*, intimidating and elitist as the word sounded.

*Kesoesasteraan* was a novel word. A grandiose word. A grandiloquent word. *Kesoesasteraan* carried echoes of other words. Echoes of *sastera* or *sastra* most of all, of course, a word that can be found in older Malay texts with reference to “sacred scriptures”, “books of divination”. To books, that is, which are consulted by rulers and courtiers to make sense of the future, as yet unknown and unexperienced by humans—and at school the writers around Poedjangga Baroe must have been told that this older Malay word *sastera* refers to the Sanskrit term *shastera*, “rules, writing about philosophical matters”: writing the future acts on rules. *Kesoesasteraan* also carried echoes of *poestaka*, “ancestral books and sayings”, the word that was used by the publishing house of Balai Poestaka, whose Malay novels helped shape the basis of *kesoesasteraan*, the roots of the tree of literary writing, so to speak. And echoes of *luh mahfuz*, the book in which, according to Muslim teachings, past, present and future of humans are laid out. And then, there is the word *literatuur*, a term that was used for certain kinds of texts not only by Dutch-speaking intellectuals in the Dutch Indies, but also by some Malay writers who, aware of their Chinese ancestry, used it to refer to their own artful texts, which presented their readers with a wide variety of pictures and images of the multi-cultural colonial world in which they lived.

*Kesoesasteraan* is a monumental term. A brilliant term. The word *sastera*—evocation of tradition, reminder of the future—is embellished with Sanskrit *soe*, a word that refers to “good” and “beautiful” at same time, and that embellishment seems to give *sastera* an intriguing ambivalence: not every form of writing, no matter how sacred and futuristic, is necessarily good and beautiful at the same time. And not all “good and beautiful” writing is necessarily “literatuur” as Dutch dictionaries must have told local readers in the Indies: “literatuur” refers to “the written works of art in a particular language”, but also to “all the writings in a particular language”. That looks like a double-edged definition, and intellectuals in the 1930s, leaning on their Dutch education and creating novel Malay words and concepts on the waves of nationalistic fervour, may have thought that the addition of *soe* would neutralise “literatuur”’s ambivalence. But then, it creates another ambivalence that they, in turn, may have thought to balance by foregrounding contrastive notions of, respectively, “artful” and “relevant” over connotations of “beautiful” and “good”. And then, around this *soesastera* another affix is added: the circumfix *ke-an* is supposed to give abstraction, generalisation and comprehension to *sastera* and *soesastera* alike. *Ke-soe-sastera-an*, in

short, evokes the configuration of relevant and artful writings that primarily point to the future, confirming and challenging the sociocultural context in which they emerge.

*Kesoesasteraan* was the Malay equivalent to the Dutch word “literatuur” for those who used it; perhaps it should be called a translation. But then, translation is always a matter of deficiency and exuberance; in contextual retrospect, *kesoesasteraan* could perhaps most effectively be translated by “geschriften”, “writings”, or by “literair leven”, “literary life”: writing connects authors and readers who experience the labyrinth of lines and sentences as “good and beautiful” within a certain context, and these lines and sentences, adventitious by definition, open up to more writing, bushes in a mangrove forest, expanding the network of interconnections and intersections in the process. And writing, the serialisation of utterances, of entangled interactions, always operates in a socially specific environment in order to be recognised as “relevant”, to be appreciated as “literature”.

Configuration of relevant and artful writing, *kesoesasteraan* was modified in the context of independent Indonesia. “Malay” had become “Indonesian”, and *kesoesasteraan* became *kesusasteraan* and *kesusastraan* with the introduction of a new spelling of the national language, “Indonesian”, in 1947: another half-hearted intellectual disengagement from colonial surveillance. And then, in the 1970s, *kesusasteraan* was superseded by *susastera*, *susastra*, *sastera* and, most prominently, *sastra*, indicating further modifications in the appreciation of “good and beautiful” writing, of artful and relevant writing in “Indonesian”. And in the 1990s, *kesusasteraan* largely vanished from the scene. And whenever it emerges in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it primarily invokes the adventures of a cultural and linguistic project that started in the 1930s and effectively came to an end in the early 1990s, in the final years of the so-called New Order. The reduction of *kesoesasteraan* to *sastra* runs parallel to the shrinking reach of “literary life” in Indonesia and, concurrently, to the greatly diminishing relevance of “literature” in the ideological construction of the nation-state of Indonesia. It is as if *kesoesasteraan* is petering out, its grandiosity being overgrown by *sastra*. A tree hesitating to grow, mangrove bushes emerging around it: a history of Indonesian literature of sorts.

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In the emergence of *kesoesasteraan*, two publications stand out, and not only so because they use that monumental term in their titles: they both



show a strong preference of poetry over prose, with far-reaching consequences for the tree-like growth of “Indonesian literature” towards comprehension and coherence, brevity and exclusion. In *Pandji Poestaka*, a Malay sociocultural journal supervised and disseminated by the colonial publishing house of Balai Poestaka, Sutan Takdir Alsijahbana started in 1932 a series of articles about “new” literary writing, printed under the title of *Menoedjoe Kesoesteraan Baroe* (For a New Literature), and there he limited himself largely to making suggestions of how to write “good and beautiful” and “new” poems and how to use appropriate and comprehensive metaphors: the “new literature”, so it seems, was to be primarily a matter of poetry and poetic forms. Read against the background of Takdir’s ongoing explorations of a “new literature” in a “new culture” in *Pandji Poestaka* and Poedjangga Baroe, Armijn Pane’s essay in two parts, *Kesoesteraan Baroe* (New Literature), published in Poedjangga Baroe in 1933, still is a key text for those who try to understand what this “new literature” was meant to mean and be. The essay foregrounds poetry as the superb, if not ultimate manifestation of “new literature”, even so much so that other forms of writing are given hardly any attention at all: prose was to be of secondary importance within this “new literature”, so it seems, and so were drama and essays. *Soekma*, another word of Sanskrit origin, is the keyword in Armijn’s arguments; referring to “spirit”, “inspiration”, *soekma* is of an individual and a collective character at the same time: it evokes the individual desire to escape from the confusing and repressing (colonial) reality and to express societal (national) experiences in recognisable ways (“a servant of the arts lives in a society, becomes an expert of that society. He is a child of his society, he is a picture of that society”). And these “literary” expressions of individual emotions and societal experiences are necessarily embedded in “tradition”.<sup>1</sup> The “new writing” that Armijn was looking for should speak for itself and defy further conversations: the poems he discusses intend to be self-contained entities, self-sufficient comprehensions, touching upon ultimate reality, composed of lines that ask neither for response nor dialogue. As if they are soliloquies. Poems are dots. And apparently in the “new literary life” Armijn envisaged, prose writing, loose networks in the labyrinth of lines and linkages, sustained and extended by every piece of prose anew, intends to dance around poetry. “Literary

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<sup>1</sup> It is tempting to read *Kesoesteraan Baroe* as a not too far cry of T.S. Eliot’s celebrated essay “Tradition and the individual talent” which equally focuses on the idea of poems as self-contained units and on tradition as the overarching entity every poem, every poet and every reader has to come to terms with: the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is moulded by the past.

writing” is circling around and beyond poetic lines and sentences of, it seems, an absolute and hermetic character, based on “High Malay”, the form of Malay that was concurrently being promoted as the standard through the novels that were published by Balai Poestaka.

Armijn did not only write about “new literature”, he also wrote “new literature”. He wrote poetry, essays, dramas, short stories, effectively showing that there is considerable space for various forms of writing around and beyond the dots, these self-sustained manifestations of emotion and authority, homogenous and unitary, and as such suspended from any interaction with other discourses, excluding themselves from the labyrinth. “New literature” was to be a constantly moving and shifting configuration of connecting and intersecting lines around and beyond those dots: every language is made up of many lines and layers, sociolects, dialects, speech-genres, and so is every piece of prose.<sup>2</sup>

In retrospect, Armijn Pane’s most decisive demonstration of the open-ended dialogic interchanges between and among sentences and lines of writers, readers and speakers around or above the shadows of unitary and monological poetry was *Belenggoe*, a novel first published as a separate volume of Poedjangga Baroe. *Shackles* (1940) had been rejected by his colonial part-time employers, Balai Poestaka, where it had allegedly been considered too unconventional in terms of plot, space and theme—a triangular relationship with an open end; one of the protagonists in the role of courtesan-singer, modern Batavia style; all three of them lonely people, trying to be free from one another, trying to break the shackles of colonial society; urban life of cars, radios, telephones—and too inappropriate in terms of language: its Malay carries as many echoes of the vernaculars of (urban) daily life, in tone as well as grammar, as of the High Malay that Balai Poestaka developed in the novels it had been publishing since the early 1920s.<sup>3</sup>

Through his publications, Armijn set out the lines for the “new literature” that he wanted to emerge: he foregrounded the authority of

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<sup>2</sup> “Representing the coexistence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth. These “languages” are intersecting each other in a variety of ways.” (cf. Bakhtin 1981, 291).

<sup>3</sup> Criticizing the growing authority of this very High Malay, artificial and superficial, in daily life as well as in “literatuur”, a protagonist in Kwee Tek Hoay’s *Drama di Boven Digoel* gives a good summary of the issue: “a language is created in the interest of human beings, and human beings are not created for a language. Why use a foreign language which for the main part is not in accordance with what we are used to?”

poetry, invocations of a perfected world, surrounded by the stylised and standardising prose of Balai Poestaka publications, circling around the question of the relevance of tradition in colonial life and beyond. But he challenged this very authority and stylisation with *Belenggoe*, presenting themes and topics in a language that tries to break or even reverse every form of authority and norm. “Literary life” was to be a matter of hierarchy, of the distinction between highbrow literature, modelled on poetry, and lowbrow literature, modelled on prose, in the service of the taste of a small group of literati. Exclusion rather than differentiation.

Not surprisingly perhaps, Armijn Pane was the first writer who tried his hand with a survey of the “new literature”, and perhaps it should not come as a surprise either that it was written in Dutch and published in a little Dutch magazine in Batavia, *De Fakkkel* (The Torch). *Kort Overzicht van de Moderne Indonesische Literatuur* (Short Survey of Modern Indonesian Literature) reads like a first attempt at canonisation: Poedjangga Baroe’s poetry and Balai Poestaka novels were central points in this project-like presentation of “new literary life”. Other writing is hardly mentioned at all. And “baroe” no longer referred to “new” alone but to “modern” and “Indonesian” as well.

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Already before the Japanese invasion in 1942, the term “Indonesia” was being substituted for “baroe” as a specification of *kesoesasteraan*. *Kesoesasteraan Indonesia* became the name of this “new literature”, this newly relevant and artful writing, this “new literary life” of writers and readers, this “modern literature”. The addition of “Indonesia” to *kesoesasteraan* opened up to ambivalences on its own, just as “Indonesian” does to “literature”.

“Indonesia” is a word that was invented around 1850 (cf. Elson 2005), serving first as a geographical term, later as a cultural term and eventually also as a political term, with reference to the archipelago controlled by a Dutch dominated administration and army—and the use of “Indonesia” by people of every political orientation in the 1930s was acknowledged by colonial administrators, although with great unease: was “Dutch Indies” not the more appropriate term for the Islands? As a political term, “Indonesia” ostensibly carried linguistic connotations: nationalist fervour tends to express itself in a certain language. At a meeting of Dutch-educated Indonesian youngsters in Batavia in 1928, the so-called “Oath of Youth” (*Soempah Pemoeda*, see Foulcher 2000) was accepted, later mythologised as an early statement of Indonesia’s independence-to-come,

stating that the “language of Indonesia”, “bahasa Indonesia”, was “the language to be revered” (in addition to the statements that “we, sons and daughters of Indonesia, have one birthplace, the land of Indonesia”, and that “we are one nation, the Indonesian nation”). Bahasa Indonesia was, in itself, a term that could have led to infinite heterogeneity and confusion: *bahasa* invoked the wide variety of languages in Indonesia, a nation-in-becoming, as well as the one and only language, and “Indonesia” could be read as a noun and as an adjective. Bahasa Indonesia was made a new “language”, “Indonesian”, meant to be the expression of a new culture and a carrier of a novel literature; and nationalists of every conviction were aware that this new “Indonesian” was not only a novel form of Malay, but also the new language of the nation as a whole<sup>4</sup>. Batavian literati agreed bahasa Indonesia should be seen as a single language, heterogeneous yet one, its various forms circling around a standard, called High Malay by their Dutch teachers: a grammar and a dictionary-under-construction based on Dutch notions and criteria, the as yet very abstract object of reverence of the Oath and Armijn’s poetry. Concurrently, *kesoesasteraan Indonesia* was clearly politically charged as well: the “literary life” of one nation, Indonesia, written and performed by people living in one land, Indonesia, written in one language, Indonesian, the most revered language of the nation-to-be. And, as Takdir and Armijn seem to have silently added in the wake of the poetry of Muhammad Yamin, Sanusi Pane, Amir Hamzah and themselves, this “Indonesian literature” should be circling around poetry, the most effective evocation of the new culture, of the new structure of feeling, the most comprehensive manifestation of “Indonesia”, land, nation, language—and as such the basis of any prospective literary historiography.

During the Japanese occupation, literary life contracted as the result of a strict censorship and a lack of writerly freedom, and hence it acquired a clearer profile (and hierarchy): parallel to strongly centripetal tendencies in political and administrative life, cultural and, more specifically, literary and linguistic activities in “Indonesian” became centred in Batavia, now Djakarta. And for a few years these activities remained largely restricted to a small group of insiders who were asked (if not forced) to prefer Indonesian over Dutch and were given the task to design a standard “Indonesian”, to think about *kesoesasteraan Indonesia* as being radically different from “Dutch literature”, and to develop ideas of “Indonesia” within the Great Asian Prosperity Sphere. In and around Batavia, Indonesian

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<sup>4</sup> Most relevant in this context was the Kongres Bahasa in Solo of 1938, where literati and politicians publicly explored and discussed the central position of “Indonesian” in the Dutch Indies, nation-in-becoming (see Samuel 1996).

poetry, drama and prose was performed that was supposed to catch the attention of people who wanted to serve the nation; only after the Japanese had departed, some of it was selected and published by H.B. Jassin in *Kesusasteraan Indonesia di Masa Djepang* (Indonesian Literature in the Japanese Period) and *Gema Tanah Air* (Echoes of the Fatherland). In retrospect, the two books read like growths on the roots of the tree-like canon of Indonesian literature—and it is telling that novels are not included. And then, in 1949, Armijn Pane saw his *Kort Overzicht van de Moderne Indonesische Literatuur* republished as a book by Balai Poestaka, the colonial canoniser, which now acted as a publishing house for the new nation, without direct interference by Dutch masters.<sup>5</sup> Once again, the work of “others” was largely ignored and dismissed as having “no sense of realism” and “lacking individual expression”. And poetry was still supposed to be the most prominent and centralising manifestation of the new nation of Indonesia, of the new language, of the new literature, the new writing.

In that new Indonesia, H.B. Jassin became the revered guardian of literary artfulness and the respected documentalist of “modern Indonesian literature”; his publications were to play the leading role in the centripetal forces in Indonesian literary life for many decades to come. Jassin had started his literary career as a reader and critic under the wings of Takdir Alisjahbana and Armijn Pane at Balai Poestaka and Poedjangga Baroe, just before the Japanese made an end to Dutch colonial rule, and like the literati around him he managed to remain actively involved in the discussions about the new Indonesian culture under a Japanese umbrella. After the departure of the Japanese, in Djakarta he became the editor of a number of cultural magazines, worked for publishing houses and the Ministry of Education and Culture, taught at Universitas Indonesia, and discussed Indonesian poetry and prose in easily accessible and deceptively understandable essays which, beginning in 1954, were brought together in a series of books, entitled *Kesusasteraan Indonesia Modern Dalam Kritik dan Esei* (Modern Indonesian Literature in Criticisms and Essays), a title that was retained through ever new editions in the 1970s and 1980s, at a time, that is, when the term *kesusasteraan* was losing ground to the more general, less monumental term of *sastra*.

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<sup>5</sup> H.B. Jassin’s *Pudjangg Baru: Prosa dan Puisi*, a retrospective collection of work of writers and authors that were seen as central in *kesoesasteraan Indonesia*, reads like a late reaction or expansion on Armijn Pane’s *Overzicht*, a belated confirmation of the hegemony of literary work that was published in Batavia and Djakarta.

Working in the spirit of Poedjangga Baroe, Jassin was primarily interested in poetry. His book on Chairil Anwar, the poet of the Revolution, *Chairil Anwar, Pelopor Angkatan 45* (Chairil Anwar, Trailblazer of Generation 45) became a classic, and the same could be said of his later book on the poet Amir Hamzah (Jassin 1962), a close associate of Takdir and Armijn and a trailblazer of Chairil. It is telling, however, that Jassin's interest in poetry, those dots of singularity, was complemented by a growing interest in prose, in particular the effect of his admiration of the prose of new authors such as Idrus, Mochtar Lubis, Achdiat K. Mihardja and, above all, Pramoedya Ananta Toer ("one sentence of his is stronger than a whole novel by Takdir Alisjahbana"). He was to define his reading method in terms of "universal humanism": "literature" should be evaluated on its own terms, on its own merits, beyond the restrictions of place and time—a kind of formalism, so to speak: there should be harmony between form and content, and individual imagination was to prevail over ideology and politics. It is equally telling that Jassin was primarily aware of publications that appeared in Batavia and Djakarta, ignoring publications from elsewhere, unfamiliar with the work of "others", and keeping them out of his "Indonesian literature".

Those "others" were many and variegated, in the critical parlance in Indonesia and elsewhere sloppily categorised on the basis of conflicting criteria: style, dialect, location, period, ethnicity. To begin with, "other" was the work of so-called "Chinese-Malay" writers, an unfortunate term that places a group of very able and active writers into a ghetto where they do not belong, given the wide variety of their topics and themes, the Malayness of their writing, and the heterogeneity of discourses and forms they used: the work of authors such as Lie Kim Hok and Tan Boen Kim at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century contributed as much to modern literary sensitivity as the work of A.F. von Dewall, Muhammad Bakir, F. Wiggers, and Tirta Adisoerjo did; the writings of Kwee Tek Hoay, Tan Boen Soan and Njoo Tjeong Seng were clearly as much engaged in the emergence of "Indonesian literary life" as the novels of contemporaries such as Abdoel Moeis, Noer St Iskandar and Takdir Alisjahbana. Countervoices they have been made, not too eager they were to hear lofty words such as *kesoesasteraan* and "High Malay", preferring vernacular forms of Malay instead (see Nio 1962 and Salmon 1981).

"The others" also have an historical dimension: Malay writing—novels, poetry, short stories—that was published and read before 1920, before the Balai Poestaka novels by Marah Roesli, Soeman Hs. and Noer St Iskandar; the work of Mas Marco, F. Kommer, Semaoen and many others was equally largely ignored in the creation of *kesoesasteraan* Indonesia. Just

like their Dutch teachers and colleagues, Takdir, Armijn and Jassin showed little familiarity with these earlier writings, let alone with “Chinese-Malay” publications; and driven by acts of selective forgetting they were unable to appreciate them as trailblazers of the “new literature” that they saw emerging in the 1930s. 19<sup>th</sup> century Malay writings—manuscripts, printed materials, translations, newspaper serials—were even more “other” in the discussions about *kesusasteraan* Indonesia. And as for contemporary “others”, writers in Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Bandung, Den Pasar, Bandjarmasin, Makassar whose work was locally published and hardly ever reached Batavia and Djakarta, they were only given occasional attention by Jassin and other “national” literary critics as well; and they would never acquire national notability through textbooks, literary surveys, and testimonies of literary history, accordingly. The same could be said of the work that appeared on the Peninsula where in the shadow of the “new Indonesian literature” a new Malay literature came into being, slowly and steadily; the work of Ahmad Talu and Syed Sheikh al-Hadi and many other Peninsulars was neither noticed nor mentioned by the Dutch masters and their students. And “other” was the heterogeneous choir of voices of the work by so-called “Medan authors” (Medan, Boekittinggi, Padang are the places from where their writings spread their wings over Sumatra and the other major islands), even though already in the late 1930s locally prominent writers such as Hamka, Tamar Djaja, Matu Mona, Anggia Murni, A. Damhoeri, and Joesoef Sou’yb had their work discussed as “literature”, equally driven as they were by notions of nationalism, and equally excited as they were about the development of new forms of Malay, new genres, new lineages. In particular the “other” publications of Medan authors and Chinese-Malay authors had several features in common: they were prose rather than poetry; they came like a “flood” rolling over the islands; their prose was as much related to Malay vernaculars as to the “standard”, so-called High Malay (a misnomer anyway); and their work had a considerably wider and more variegated scope than the Balai Poestaka novels and their theme of tradition versus modernity in the colonial world: adventures in faraway countries and big cities, killings, robberies, crimes, detectives, ghosts, spies, secret agents, undisciplined teachers, *silat* (martial art) experts, car accidents, and much more. And their (cheaply printed) tales usually reached a larger and more variegated public than any central Batavia publication ever did, creating a loud alternative to what they were told to regard as *kesusasteraan*, created by people around Balai Poestaka and Poedjangga Baroe in Batavia and Djakarta, operating in the Dutch shadow.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The term *roman picisan* (*dubbeltjesroman*) was used by R. Roolvink in the

“The others” were not only those who used Malay and Indonesian in their writings and performances. The emergence of bahasa Indonesia as the national language and the evocation of *kesusasteraan Indonesia* as the “national literature” was to have far-reaching consequences for sociocultural life in the archipelago, in particular for the many languages and many literatures, oral and written: after the declaration of independence in 1945, the literatures in the “other” languages of Indonesia were hardly ever mentioned in discussions about “Indonesian literature”. “Indonesian” was to take control over administration, education, political life—and it invaded daily life on the islands in very disruptive ways. Other languages were to be treated as regional languages; the texts and stories produced in these languages—Javanese, Sundanese, Balinese, Buginese, Toba Batak, Minangkabau, Acehese—were considered “other”; they were disregarded as being largely irrelevant in the life of the new nation, set aside as manifestations of “regional literature” and “traditional literature”, and as such of minor relevance, and of interest for Jassin and his colleagues only in so far as their echoes were heard in modern Indonesian writing in terms of imagery, stories and protagonists. An Indonesian author, no matter what his or her mother tongue was, was supposed to write in Indonesian.

With his common-sense appraisals—focused on the formal features of literary work and its balance between form and content—, his documentation, and his careful writing, Jassin was to become the “Pope” in Indonesian literary life (cf. Eneste 1987), in the virtual absence of other persistent pundits, few in number, vague in eloquence. In the opening years of independence, the only other long-term contribution to the discussions of literary history came from Andries Teeuw, a Dutch philologist who, leaning on Jassin’s appraisals, Takdir’s library, and Armijn’s survey, managed to make writing sense of the emergence of this new and modern Indonesian writing, for the benefit of students and other readers in Djakarta. *Voltooid Voorspel: Indonesische Literatuur tussen Twee Wereldoorlogen* (Completed Prelude: Indonesian Literature in between Two World Wars) was followed by *Pokok dan Tokoh dalam Kesusasteraan Indonesia Baru* (Topics and Figures in the New Indonesian Literature); and the two books were to serve as guides for those who were interested in the question of how “Indonesian literature” was growing. They both confirmed, it appears, the literary interest and taste of those who

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appendix (translation of Roolvink 1950) to A. Teeuw’s *Pokok dan Tokoh* (1952), with all the negative connotations that come with it; only much later it was considered to be a term of honour. See e.g. Sudarmoko, *Roman Pergaoelan* (Yogyakarta: Insist Press 2008).



belonged to the (mainly Dutch educated) group of intellectuals who in the first decade of Independence played a prominent role in the discussions about Indonesian culture and held a central place in the offices of the Ministry of Education and Culture in Djakarta—but they were to be increasingly challenged and interrupted by countervoices, in the writings, performances and statements of communist and Islamic writers in particular.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s the validity of Jassin's documentation and approach, if not cultivation of "Indonesian literature" was radically called into question by Pramoedya Ananta Toer, who clearly tried to give the very slowly expanding tree of "Indonesian literary life" a new shape, by foregrounding relevance over artfulness and including many "others". In fact, Pramoedya arguably tried to set up an alternative tree, with roots that reached beyond Poedjangga Baroe and Balai Poestaka, and with branches that reached beyond publications that were noticed in Djakarta. An interesting alternative, virulent conversations, but in the aftermath of the tragedy of 1965 Pramoedya was imprisoned on the island of Buru, where he hatched the historical novels that were to be published and banned in the 1980s; upon his return to Jakarta he had to conclude that the extensive and incisive surveys of Indonesian (and Malay) literature he had published in the 1960s had been completely silenced by the New Order regime and that Jassin and his students publicly disregarded his findings and conclusions. Discussions closed.

Teeuw was to expand and refresh his guide to "modern Indonesian literature" in *Modern Indonesian Literature* (1967, and later two volumes 1979) in English, a landmark for the next two generations of writers, readers and students of Indonesian literature, easy to quote, clear (and judgmental) in the description of poetry and prose. *Modern Indonesian Literature*—a history of sorts—shows a strong preference for "serious literature", a notion that had been slowly developed by Jassin in the 1950s; still with a deep respect for Balai Poestaka's endeavours, still in the shadow of Armijn and Jassin, the book presents Marah Roesli's *Sitti Noerbaja*, Takdir Alisjahbana's *Lajar Berkembang*, and Amir Hamzah's poetry as being more relevant and artful than Mas Marco's *Student Hidjo*, Kwee Tek Hoay's *Drama di Boven Digoel*, Matu Mona's *Pacar Merah*, and Roestam Effendi's poetry, and those preferences are further explored in the discussions of the poetry of Chairil Anwar, Sitor Situmorang, Ajip Rosidi, W.S. Rendra and Subagio Satrowardoyo, next to the prose of Mochtar Lubis, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Kuntowijoyo and Putu Wijaya, in the casual dismissal of the work of Hamka, Motinggo Boesje, and Nasjah Djamin, and in the mysterious silence about the work of Remy

Sylado, Ashadi Siregar, Eddy D. Iskandar, Teguh Esha, Marga T., Mira W., Titiek WS., and so many others.<sup>7</sup>

If anything, the selective (re)publications of Jassin's work and, almost concurrently, the critical and forgetful surveys of Teeuw, and the writings of all the critics who quoted their words and confirmed their authority as tastemakers and canon keepers of "Indonesian literary life", should leave readers and writers, outsiders and insiders, of *kesusasteraan Indonesia* with, at least, four impressions. Firstly, "Indonesian literary life" appears to have been a field of relatively few people who formed strongly personal networks: the number of writers, known and read, was relatively small; printed editions of novels, collections of short stories and poetry were relatively limited; and so was the number of readers and critics, most visibly centred in Jakarta. Secondly, efforts at literary canonisation and linguistic standardisation were made on a higher official level, in the framework of a cultural and national policy of centralisation, while on lower levels, in the "region", the heterogeneity and diversity of speech genres sounded forth, challenging the idea of a standard language and leading to conflicts and differentiation that were inevitably to result in various forms of censorship and, eventually, in the successive silencing of groups of intellectuals before and after the tragedy of 1965.<sup>8</sup> Thirdly, discussions and surveys of Indonesian literature were pervaded with the reading and interpretation of poetry, the search for comprehension of the world and well-balanced form, at the cost of social relevance. Fourthly, in the wake of the Jassin-inspired canonisation and, equally important, of the essays that ignored the voices from elsewhere, from "others" in the archipelago and the Peninsula, the history of cultural and literary life in Indonesia beyond Djakarta after 1950 has remained largely undescribed, unnoticed, and unmapped for later readers as well as for students of

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<sup>7</sup> This survey of Indonesian literature, building on Armijn's ideas of Indonesian literary life (strong emphasis on poetry, Djakarta publications, novels over short stories, well-balanced form), paved the way for Teeuw's almost unassailable authority in circles of Indonesian critics and authors towards the end of the century; his later publications, well-crafted, original, stimulating and definitely more based on theoretical considerations than most other works on Indonesian literature, could be more effectively read as explorations of *kesusasteraan Indonesia* than of *sastra Indonesia*.

<sup>8</sup> H.B. Jassin was involved in the two most prominent cases of public conflicts in literary life, first in the ban on the so-called Cultural Manifesto, a paper that defended universal humanism and freedom of speech in the late Soekarno days (1963), later in the accusation of blasphemy, in relation to a short story that was defended in the name of the "imagination" in the early Soeharto days (1968). (See Deakin 1976).

“Indonesian literary life”; leaning on the writings of Jassin and Teeuw, readers and students have been forced to see and describe the period 1950-1965 as a series of black holes, little dots, and broken lines; knowledge of literary (and cultural) activities in Indonesia’s urban centres such as Medan, Padang, Yogyakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, Bandjarmasin, Den Pasar and Makassar has largely vanished, and so has the information about performances and writing in regional languages, about writing life in the countryside, about new editions of older texts, about seemingly provisional publications, stencilled poetry and typescript prose, about translations, together sustaining the dialogical interactions that should have kept *kesusasteraan Indonesia* alive and growing, yet hardly noticed by literati in Djakarta and largely excluded.<sup>9</sup>

Explanations for this largely empty space and time have been unsatisfactory and incomplete until this day, leaving surveys of Indonesian literature with many black holes that await fulfilment and correction—or do these explanations account for the absence of black holes? In the 1950s, paper became scarce (and expensive) in Indonesia; successive governments introduced pressing tax regulations for authors and publishers; the book trade with the Malay Peninsula, a possible market, was curbed; authors could not live of their typewriters in a country that gradually slid into economic and political turmoil; the educational system did not produce a large active readership; literary awards were few and rare, and associations of artists did not gain some momentum until the 1960s; publishing new editions of older work was cheaper and less risky than publishing new work; religious texts had a vaster market than literary work; the number of people who tried to use the new language in writing instead of their own “mother” tongue did not yet dramatically grow; much “new literature” expressed itself in oral performances, radio programmes, and recitals, leaving no trace in writing, and the novelty still had a tough struggle with performances and recitals in local languages; and in so far literati believed in *kesusasteraan* as an important element in the development of a national culture and wanted to try out their own creative drive, didactic or imaginative, they tried their hand primarily with short stories, to be published in newspapers and journals, and preferred to work on translations and adaptations of foreign texts as well as on non-literary topics and themes rather than on longer original work that could have more dramatically moved forwards the labyrinth of literary life. Was there perhaps no crisis in Indonesian literary life in the early fifties, and is the relatively small production of noteworthy “literary” work in the first

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<sup>9</sup> A first attempt to cover Indonesian literary activities in the period 1950-1965 is made in Lindsay and Liem (2012).

twenty years of the Old Order an indication of the absence of literary vitality? Is the popularity of novels a wrong criterion for measuring “literary life”? Or was *kesusasteraan* too thin a tree, dropping too many leaves and branches too easily, a process of exclusion?

Taken together, these explanations may account for the silence and emptiness, but then, it is almost inconceivable that in a nation-state as large as Indonesia with, at the time, at least 150 million citizens there was no “literary life” of a considerable and heterogeneous size outside Djakarta and Java—and perhaps questions should be substituted for explanations: how comes that later students and readers are so badly informed about the 1950s if not as the result of the selective silence of critics such as Jassin and Teeuw and their protagonists as well as the New Order censorship that further helped to restrict memory, contain recollection? The main questions about “Indonesian literary life” in the 1950s—how come that so little is presently known, remembered and preserved of writing that was published and performed during the years of Soekarno’s Old Order? was there effectively a distinction between highbrow and lowbrow literature both of which were silenced by the evocation of black holes? and what about the role of poetry?—have never been addressed. And the tree of Indonesian literature was becoming stunted: a lot of dead wood.

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Already in the early 1950s, Jassin and others felt obliged to address the issue of crisis, summarised by the burning question of when (and how) great novels would emerge in the still so new Indonesian language: should a self-respecting nation like Indonesia not produce novels that could be read as more or less comprehensive allegories of national awareness, the nation’s structure of feeling? Jassin pointed at the poetry of Chairil Anwar and the poems of those who were doomed to work in his shadow, Sitor Situmorang and Toto Sudarto Bachtiar among them; to the Balai Poestaka novels, published before Indonesia had even won independence, and to the work that had appeared in Djakarta since 1945, by Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Mochtar Lubis, and Achdiat Kartamihardja. But like so many other observers and critics, Jassin, active in Djakarta and hence hardly “in the know” about activities elsewhere, appears to have worked from the assumption that the fire of Indonesian literary life was primarily measured in terms of short stories, frequently published in many self-respecting newspapers and magazines throughout the 1950s and 1960s, only occasionally brought together in compilations. Short stories of every form and presentation shaped the literary scene in Djakarta as well as elsewhere,

so it seems. And then, in juxtaposition with these short stories in newspapers and magazines, there were the poems and the occasional essays—and the articles and conversations about the function and relevance of *kesusasteraan Indonesia*, the national literature, the tree of reference in the national culture-in-becoming, an issue drowned in a cacophony of politically charged voices circling around questions of regionality, generations, social commitment, people's culture, silat books, comics, Islam, translations, adaptations, pre-Balai Poestaka writing, the work of the occasional new “serious” author, such as Iwan Simatupang, and novel serious work—poetry, short stories, novellas—by established authors, rare and few, by Pramoedya Ananta Toer most of all.

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It has been argued that the fall of the “Old Order” in 1965 and the establishment of the “New Order” in 1966 led to the emergence of a new generation of authors—Indonesian critics are strangely eager to categorise writers in terms of generations, if only so as to be able to silence those who came before—and to a new start of *kesusasteraan Indonesia*: in its reconstruction of socio-economic and cultural life after the increasingly combative and dialogue-rich Soekarno years, the New Order administration had a strong tendency to repeat Dutch colonial policies of the 1930s that included, as far as literary life was concerned, certain forms of censorship; the intimidation and imprisonment of critical intellectuals; the stimulation of the use of a standard, that is stylised, language; activities of a government-sponsored publishing house; the efforts to rewrite memories and knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

H.B. Jassin, *Angkatan 66: Prosa dan Puisi* (Angkatan 66: Prose and Poetry) was published, a compilation that restored the authority of H.B. Jassin as the eminent voice of Indonesian literary life after a short interlude in which he had become the most visible victim of virulent

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<sup>10</sup> Next to a revival of *Balai Pustaka* with rather opaque connections in government circles which made it possible to publish a series of novels that were treated as “serious” literature if only because of the name of their publishers and their well-designed covers, the successive Ministries of Education and Culture had an infinite and indefinite series of books published that presented in-depth discussions of “regional work” as well as solid literary appraisals and discussions of contemporary “Indonesian literature” of the *kesusasteraan* type. Strangely enough, these books were not allowed to be traded, and they remained largely unknown to the ever expanding group of readers (and critics), as if they were supposed to shape an alternative circuit of criticism, far from the public, an alternative *kesusasteraan*, so to speak.

discussions about the question of how to combine relevance and artfulness in literary work and literary criticism, produced and read in a nation in crisis: Jassin's defence of creative freedom and personal imagination brought him in conflict with those who demanded social engagement and service to the people—and the very message of social engagement brought great hardships to cultural workers and socially responsible literati like Pramoedya and many others after the tragedy of 1965, while the emphasis on artfulness made Jassin (and later Teeuw) prefer to make an effort or two to write these workers and authors out of the books and out of Indonesia's collective memory, together with their ideas and activities.

In particular in Djakarta—still the central place of newspapers, journals and publishing houses, a place of wealth and of social and political activities—more short stories than ever before appeared, and new and old poets published work that, monological, personal, neither answerable nor responsible, was loudly applauded by those who could make their soliloquies visible in newspapers and magazines, in the streets and in theatres. The work of Ajip Rosidi, Taufiq Ismail, Goenawan Mohamad, and later W.S. Rendra, Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, and Subagio Sastrowardjo was to leave new dots on the labyrinth of Indonesian literary life—these were texts that may address readers but not provoke a reaction, these were poems that are not so much responses to other texts than expressions of personal emotions and experiences, hanging in the air, disconnecting from the heterogeneity of language, resisting intertextualisation, obstructing interaction—and these new dots had to find a place in between and among the communicative, interactive lines and linkages in literary life, as they do in the literature in every language, in the literary history of every nation.<sup>11</sup>

Jassin's anthologies of the work of *Pudjangga Baru*, of the Generation of 1945 and the Generation of 1966, and of his essays that had appeared since the early Fifties in various and ever extending forms under the title of *Kesusasteraan Indonesia Modern dalam Kritik dan Esai* were re-

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<sup>11</sup> Chairil Anwar aims at true and perfect words, Bandaharo Harahap at words of the people, Sutardji Calzoum Bachri at autonomous words, Subagio Sastrowardoyo at eternal words, as the essence of poetry: the words of poems talk to themselves rather than interact with other words; they are not addressed to anyone, do not communicate: they create a vacuum around themselves—and that is why poetry is not a prominent form in literary historiography, the dynamic evocation and fragmentary configuration of texts that “refute, affirm, supplement and rely upon others, presuppose them to be known and somehow takes them into account”: “literature” is shaped on the interactions between utterances that are operating within a social context. (see Bakhtin 1981)

published and republished, for the obvious benefit of those who preferred to know about the tree with its stunted growth and to remain ignorant of the gamut of cultural activities in the Soekarno years. A canon took shape, confirmed in Teeuw's *Modern Indonesian Literature* of 1979. And as late as 1984 Jassin, apparently still in search for "great novels" but driven by the ever more selective forgetfulness characteristic for so many older and retrospectively historians and critics, gave a sigh of relief that in the New Order older novels—his canon—had become available again to compete with the stories, short and long, that in his view had so unfortunately been dominating his reading experience for three long decades:

Let us rejoice that we can now read again the great novels, in particular when we remember that in the 50s and 60s we only had a literature of short stories (*sastra cerita pendek*) or a literature of magazines (*sastra majalah*). At the time we could not imagine that the time would come that we would read books again as thick as *Sitti Noerbaja*, *Salah Asoehan*, *Lajar Terkembang*, *Belunggu*, *Atheis*, *Keluarga Gerilja*, *Mereka jang Dilumpuhkan*. (Jassin 1984)<sup>12</sup>

Older novels, novels rather than poetry, but why lament the "literature of magazines" and not mention the titles of "new novels" instead? Since the early 1970s many novels had been published, and Jassin had already warmly welcomed some of them, they were the serious novels, the ones that should be incorporated in the *kesusasteraan Indonesia*. The work of Y.B. Mangunwijaya, for instance, and of Kuntowijoyo, Putu Wijaya, Budi Darma, and Nh. Dini. Still the Papal voice, so to speak, highly respected, widely read, the voice that believed in the authority of *kesusasteraan* in cultural and sociopolitical life and did not realise that that term was losing its reach and grandiosity.

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*Sastra pop* was a term that emerged in the 1970s in conversations and newspapers in Jakarta, centre of authority in the Republic of Indonesia, and it was appropriated by metropolitan literati and academics, coming of age in the New Order, educated in a chaotic time, a-political, forced to be unaware of the virulent debates about culture and nation before 1965.

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<sup>12</sup> Every essay interacts with other essays, other writings: it is important to note that Jassin had the courage to mention the novels by Pramoedya Ananta Toer, at the time on the list of banned books; moreover, it would be interesting to explore the word "thick" with reference to early Indonesian novels and Jassin's own discussion of a crisis in Indonesian literature in the early 1950s.

*Sastra pop* is obviously an abbreviation of *kesusasteraan populer*—urban Indonesians have always had a playful knack for abbreviations, shorthand signs that leave speakers and writers a lot of freedom of interpretation—and equally obviously *sastra pop* carried echoes of terms such as “popular literature” and *roman picisan* for those who used it. *Sastra pop* referred to the “flood of novels” that were not accepted by urban critics and “serious” readers as being part of *kesusasteraan*, reminiscent of the “flood of novels” that were published in Medan, Padang and Bandung in late colonial days and excluded by those who created *kesoesasteraan*; and just like the novels in the previous flood, *roman pop* exercised an influence on a growing group of readers whose reading fervour is hard to measure but cannot be underestimated. Books were becoming relatively cheap, more people were willing and able to spend their money on buying and reading books; a new creative energy emerged in the big cities once the political bickering was silenced by the iron fist of a regime that made concerted efforts to implement standardisation and uniformity in the culture of the nation and banned ideological discussions on the market place, in favour of conversations about religion.<sup>13</sup>

*Sastra pop* was a curious term. A cool term. A fun term for those who used it. *Sastra*, crisp, short and cheap, echoes *kesusasteraan* and *kesoesasteraan*. And *pop* carries echoes of *populer*, referring to “fashionable”, “simplified”, “convention” and “collective” at the same time, but also to “jumpy” and “fidgety”. *Sastra pop* suggests reduction rather than extension, diminution rather than invention, sentiment rather than emotion: literature as a commodity, for the many, for readers fast and slow, for the supermarket as much as for the bookstore, in urban terms. The commercialisation of publications that, in their sociocultural environment, were not so much appreciated in terms of social relevance as in terms of entertainment and escape: moral values and sociopolitical ideas are narrated in a more evasive manner, social engagement is on the backburner, and so is artfulness.

In the New Order’s days of commerce and capitalism, there was no little magazine to foreground poetry as the perfect manifestation of a national literature, there was no government-supported publishing house to disseminate stories about tradition, modernity and marriage in stylised and standardising Malay. National and regional newspapers there were, and

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<sup>13</sup> The so-called “perfected spelling of Indonesian” was introduced in 1972, in close cooperation with Malaysia; the new spelling and the well-orchestrated dissemination of the idea of “good and correct Indonesian” (*bahasa Indonesia yang baik dan benar*) are two examples of the New Order’s effective culture-engineering.



they published serials about daily life in and around the big city as well as the country side, written in forms of Indonesian that more or less deviated from “good and correct” Indonesian, the post-colonial High Malay proliferated by the New Order regime. Special mention should be made of two serials (open-ended short stories that grow into novels), which both appeared in *Kompas* in 1972, at the time the most prominent newspaper in Jakarta, serving the growing middle class, eager to read stories about recognisable if not knowable figures around them. The serials, Marga T., *Karmila* (Karmila) and, perhaps even more importantly, Ashadi Siregar, *Cintaku di Kampus Biru* (Love on the Blue Campus) were transformed into books, cheap paper, funky covers: immediate bestsellers. In retrospect, they were a turning point in literary life, in the conversations, that is, about the distinction between “serious” literature (*serius* is Jassin’s term) and the “others”. And about the pertinence of the canon that had been created by textbooks.

Trailblazers were *Karmila* and *Cintaku di Kampus Biru* for a wide variety of novels that the literary elite, writing critical articles in literary journals and literary columns in newspapers, noticed, though with growing unease and ever slighter condescendence: in the wake of earlier, equally short-cut ideas of “dime novels” (*roman pitjisan*) and serials of the 1930s, once again critics and “serious” readers initially assumed that these manifestations of *sastra pop* could be reduced to a limited number of simple plots (which they were not) and dealt with protagonists belonging to the higher class (which they did not); that they were focusing on events rather than characters (which they were not); that they were sensational rather than emotional (difficult to measure) and written in forms of Indonesian that followed the “good and correct Indonesian” that was promoted by the Indonesian government for the sake of homogeneity and unity (which most of them did not, in particular not in the often spunky dialogues that tend to be the backbone of these *pop* narratives). However, in circles of literati the awareness grew that this new form of novels—not so new on second thought, on second sight—were going to be part of their reading life.

With the emergence of *sastra pop* in the 1970s,<sup>14</sup> the word *kesusasteraan* was beginning to sound too grandiose, too grandiloquent, for a phenomenon that could no longer be considered a central and essential feature of Indonesian culture. And after thirty years of trial and error, “Indonesian culture” itself was becoming a somewhat jaded concept, now being conducted by a regime that shackled creative engagement and imaginative

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<sup>14</sup> Long short stories, written in rather informal language, eventful and spry about young heroes and heroines.

freedom, reminiscent of a colonial regime. “Literary life” was kept alive in the shadow of metropolitan literati and academics, but the social environment had changed; the interactions created new lines in the labyrinth of lines and linkages, dialogues were taking new directions—and the authority of so-called high-brow literature was loudly and visibly challenged by allegedly commercially rather than ideologically motivated publications. Until the present day, metropolitan literati have been lacking the critical tools to discuss novel forms of writing in a sensible and serious way, and in the press, too, often the personalities of authors have been substituted for Jassin-inspired closed readings and theoretical reflections on the literary landscape of one tree and many bushes.

As a matter of fact, the unconventional language was the only positive thing Jassin had to say of these new novels in 1985: for him the language of *sastra pop* was “fresh”, the style “dynamic” for young readers.<sup>15</sup> And in retrospect, since the emergence of notions of “literature” and “belles lettres” in the 1930s, difference in language could perhaps be the only sensible criterion for making a distinction between *kesoesasteraan* and *roman pitjisan*, between *serius* and *pop*, between “literature” and “dime novels”, dancing as they were around monological poetry, the form of writing that does not involve itself in communication and interaction, the two basic features of literary life.<sup>16</sup>

*Kesoesasteraan*, the monumental term, rooted in the early writings of Poedjangga Baroe and Jassin, had grown into a strangely shaped tree, leaving large parts of the trunk deformed, shedding too many leaves and dropping too many branches. And *sastra* has become a mangrove forest of bushes, initiated by *sastra pop*, a bush with adventitious roots that opened up to a wild variety of *sastras* that neither challenge nor silence each other, let alone the tree, each with its own characteristics—form, vocabulary, themes, topics—each shaping a network of interactions among more or less

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<sup>15</sup> “They are written with less sincere intention, their judgments are outside the judgments of literature. Their construction is less deep and less sincere, their coverage is less broad, their range is limited, their depth less intrusive” (Jassin 1985, 183). These casual remarks are not only condescending but also peculiar: as if Indonesian literature had not always primarily been for young and new readers – and as if, once upon a time, Jassin himself had not been a young reader who had enjoyed new forms of writing that had become *kesusasteraan* Indonesia, predecessor of *sastra pop*: a literary evolution of sorts, so to speak.

<sup>16</sup> A second distinction, it could be argued, has been the material appearance of the books: most *roman pitjisan* and *sastra pop* are sloppily printed on cheap paper, loosely held together by strangely drafted covers, whereas the serious literature, starting with the Balai Poestaka publications, usually found itself presented well-printed on clean paper, with conventionally attractive covers.

similar texts within and beyond the reach of the ever more loose configuration of *sastra pop*; each bush, each genre shows doubts about standard Indonesian, now called “good and correct Indonesian”, and challenges the relevance of “thick novels” and the artfulness of poetry, as it is held together in Jassin’s *kesusasteraan* and Poedjangga Baroe’s *kesoesasteraan*. *Sastra Islam, sastra daerah, sastra kontekstual, sastra pedalaman, sastra surau, sastra liar, sastra cyber, sastra wangi, sastra Riau*.<sup>17</sup> interconnected bushes of texts that have hardly more in common than the language, Indonesian, expanding into ever-growing heterogeneity. And all these *sastras* are circling around the work of writers of name, rising and fading, not only because of their work, but also because of their mention in the press: Taufik Ikram Jamil, Dewi Lestari, Seno Gumira Ajidarma, Helvi Tiana Rosa, Remy Sylado, Ahmad Tohari, Taufiqurrahman al-Aziziy, Ayu Utami, Habiburrahman El-Shirazy, Oka Rusmini, Clara Ng, Leila Chudori, Eka Kurniawan and so many more.<sup>18</sup>

Just one more time, in the early 1980s, *kesusasteraan* made itself heard and seen in all its grandiosity and monumentality: the public appearance and appreciation of the novels that Pramoedya Ananta Toer had written during his years of imprisonment on the island of Buru. In particular *Tetralogi Pulau Buru*, the four novels about the emergence of Indonesian nationalism, embodied in the adventures of what could be called the first Indonesian activist, were allegedly appreciated nationwide. They were publicly applauded as “serious” novels about social and legal issues, about Life and Love, about writing, journalism, and the vibrant beginnings of the nationalist movement in the colonial state (and Soeharto’s New Order), written in “good and correct Indonesian”. They were embedded in so much publicity and clouded in so much mystique beyond the Jakarta elite of literati that they could even be called national novels, tales that summarise the endeavours of a nation-in-becoming: the very novels critics and readers had called for in the 1950s when *kesusasteraan* was still in the early phase of growth, around the roots planted by Armijn Pane, Chairil Anwar and Jassin.

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<sup>17</sup> Islamic literature, regional literature, contextual literature, rural literature, prayer house literature, wild literature, cyber literature, fragrant literature, Riau Malay literature, respectively.

<sup>18</sup> An Indonesian literary historiography—writing of interactive writing—should make a choice from the work of some of these authors, thus evoking the dynamics of contemporary Indonesian “literature”, not so much different from the way a survey of *kesusasteraan Indonesia* could be written. Comprehension is out of order.

Pramoedya's novels appeared too late on the scene to give new vigour to notions of *kesoesasteraan* and *kesusasteraan*. Those terms had wilted as the expectations of great literature had been marginalised in a nation in turmoil and crisis, and national novels were no longer the narratives the literate children of Jassin and grandchildren of Armijn were seeking in the shadow of their search for perfect poetry. Literary life was to take on other meanings, other intentions. *Kesusasteraan* was reduced to *sastra*, making hardly any claims of artfulness and relevance beyond entertainment and tickle, operating in labyrinths of lines and linkages in which Pramoedya's conversations and utterances did not keep the high ground for long, not only because his books were banned but also because contemporary and younger readers were becoming increasingly hesitant to acknowledge the value of depth and volume, history and memory. The shaky state of *kesusasteraan* was probably best summarised by the casual remark Pramoedya himself made in an interview about the publication of his first great novel after some seventeen years of imprisonment: in order to reach the public, he had composed *Bumi Manusia* in the style, if not in the spirit of *sastra pop*: as if the shadow of Ashadi Siregar and Mira W.'s *sastra pop* was hanging over *kesusasteraan* rather than the other way around. Heterogeneity galore, and no more master narrative about the dots of poems and the labyrinth of lines and linkages.

Given this marginalisation of *kesusasteraan*, given the disenchantment with notions of national culture and communal dreams, given the inclusion of contemporary "dime novels" in the literary field under readerly pressure, does it still make sense to assume that there is an "Indonesian literature"? Of course it does: more novels, more *roman*, more compilations of short stories, more drama, more essays, more poetry have been published, more performances and recitals have been held than before 1998, than before 1966, and more noticed and more discussed they have been than ever before: there is more different writing than other writing—and the forest is no longer seen for the trees. What has primarily changed literary life in Indonesia is the foregrounding of readerly appreciation over writerly presentation, even so much so that literary life—could this still be translated as *kesoesasteraan*?—has dissolved: the single, deformed tree in a semi-arid land has been overgrown by bushes in a mangrove forest, caressed by the flood and ebb of readerly taste. Exploring this fragmentation, in this ever growing mangrove forest, older readers and outsiders may still be trying to shape a canon, clinging to that central tree that grows on universal humanism, imagination and comprehension—echoes of Jassin rather than of Pramoedya. But *sastra* is not *kesusasteraan*, "Writing" is not *sastra*. Juxtaposition is not comparison.

And writing literary history is a matter of differentiation, inclusion and interaction rather than of othering, exclusion, and silence.

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**PART I.**

**SHARDS OF MEMORY:  
REPRESENTATIONS OF 1965 AND THEIR  
CONSEQUENCES**





CHAPTER TWO

IMAGINING EXILE  
IN LEILA CHUDORI'S NOVEL *PULANG*  
AND LAKSMI PAMUNTJAK'S NOVEL *AMBA*

PAM ALLEN

**Background**

Ever since the “beginning” of modern Indonesian literature in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Indonesian writers have engaged with the project of creating and defining Indonesian identity, an endeavour that developed out of the nationalist movement. Literature has come to be understood as being not merely a product for consumption and entertainment, but as being a significant part of the project of nation building. Most serious fiction writers have engaged both with the mission of creating a new literature and with questioning issues of national identity.

This chapter will investigate representations in two works of recent Indonesian literature of events that stemmed from the purges, killings and imprisonments in 1965–1966 of hundreds of thousands of Communist Party members and sympathisers, following the attempted coup of 30 September 1965. In Indonesia, for more than thirty years it was not possible to speak openly of these events, which changed the course of modern Indonesian history. The militarist regime of President Soeharto imposed its own version of the events and silenced alternative discourses, characterising 1965 as Indonesia's rescue from the threatening power of Communism. As Connerton asserts (1989, 14), such historical reconstruction can “give significant shape to the memory of social groups”, using the method of “organized forgetting”. Sontag (2003, 76) describes such a kind of collective memory as “not a remembering but a stipulating: that *this* is important, and this is the story about how it happened ...”

A key tool in the historical reconstruction undertaken by the Soeharto regime was the 1984 film *Pengkhianatan G30S* (The Treachery of the 30 September 1965 Movement) by director Arifin Noer, which depicted with graphic violence the murders of six generals by supposed Communist forces, the incident that sparked the events of 1965. During the Soeharto regime, school students learned about the evils of Communism through compulsorily watching this film each year on the anniversary of the events depicted, as well as in their history classes.<sup>1</sup> Laksmi Pamuntjak, whose novel *Amba* I discuss in this chapter, recalls of her schooling:

We were taught categorically - with no room for other interpretations - that communists were atheists and the enemy of the Indonesian state, that the Indonesian Communist Party was responsible for the killings of the generals on Oct. 1, 1965, and that all communists were evil ... Not only did whole generations become so schooled in silence or forgetting, thanks to the dominance of New Order's official history and training in the regime's version of Pancasila ideology, but also ... there is now a generation that is wholly ignorant of that period of history. (Prathivi 2012)

The end of the New Order, with the deposition of Soeharto in 1998, ushered in an era of much freer speech, but arguably also of historical amnesia. The obligatory silence about the violence and the preceding political struggles and debates had resulted in a cultural veil concerning the past and critical tools for assessing it. (McGregor 2013)

2012 was a significant year for the process of recollection of and reflection on the events of 1965. A report presented on the conduct of the killings by the government-appointed Human Rights Commission (KOMNASHAM) explicitly identified the role of the military in endorsing and facilitating citizen violence against Communists, the first ever public recognition of this fact. Among other evidence, the report is based on 349 eyewitness statements. In September 2012 a special issue of the influential news magazine *Tempo* appeared, comprising detailed, often first-hand accounts by participants in killings of Communists in different regions of Indonesia in late 1965. And a film, *Jagal*, or *The Act of Killing*, was released by a US director, Joshua Oppenheimer. In this film a group of perpetrators of the 1965 violence and killings re-enact their activities for the camera. What was happening was a generational shift in understanding and interpreting the past, as a new generation of Indonesians attempts to make sense of the violence and trauma that shaped their nation. In doing so, they were reacting to what Connerton (1989, 15) describes as “the fear that there might remain nobody who could ever again properly bear

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<sup>1</sup> See Jan van der Putten's chapter in this Volume.

witness to the past". This is the struggle of a younger generation of Indonesians against "forced forgetting".

Associated with this generational shift is a phenomenon in recent works of literature by younger writers, in which the events of 1965 are imagined without direct experience. Such fiction was formerly the domain of authors who had personally lived through these events, writing in the Soeharto era as observers, like Umar Kayam (1975) and Ahmad Tohari (1982), or in the post-1998 period as victims and survivors, like Putu Oka Sukanta (1999, 2004). Now, however, stories on this topic are recollections of an imagined past. It is a phenomenon described by Henri Raczymow (1994, 103) in reference to his own writing on the Holocaust:

Writing was and still is the only way I could deal with the past, the whole past, the only way I could tell myself about the past - even if it is, by definition, a recreated past. It is a question of filling in gaps, of putting scraps together.

Leila Chudori, whose novel *Pulang* I discuss in this chapter, expresses a similar sentiment: "There are holes in our history that need to be questioned, and I asked my questions through my stories" (Siregar 2012).

In this chapter I demonstrate how recent novels by two contemporary writers—Leila Chudori and Laksmi Pamuntjak—contribute to the experience of recalling and imagining that time of violence and to integrating it into modern conceptions of Indonesian society and nation. Regarding her motivation for writing *Amba*, Laksmi says:

All the novel can do is find new ways to tell the story. I was conscious of writing through the memory of others. I knew I could never reach the depth of feeling of the people who were there in Suharto's prison ... The best I could do was to try to tell the stories of people whose stories were not told through history with a big H. (Cohen 2013)

As Raczymow puts it (1994, 103), "What I name the "pre-past" or prehistory ... was handed down to me precisely as something *not* handed down to me."

Leila Chudori writes of the challenges she encountered when writing *Pulang*, in establishing the accuracy and the recreation of historical events in her mind. Her research revealed that around 1,500 people were exiled overseas after 1965 and could not reunite with their families, and she comments that although she did not experience what they went through, "I do understand them" (Siregar 2013).

## Violence and memory

Violent conflict is a part of the history and the contemporary landscape of many parts of the world. Many countries that have been through the trauma of mass violence, including Indonesia, still exist in a transitional state between the experience of violence and an understanding of why it happened and what it might mean. It is a phenomenon that has gelled in the nascent emergence, in the context of the history of violence, of memory studies: “a shift from concern with historical knowledge of events to that of memory, from ‘what we know’ to ‘how we remember it’, changes in generational memory ... and the development of trauma narratives in reshaping the past.”<sup>2</sup>

In my discussion of the two novels I incorporate Marianne Hirsch’s notion of “post-memory”: “the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can be neither fully understood nor re-created”. Specifically, I draw on Hirsch’s idea of *affiliative* post-memory. In her later writing Hirsch distinguishes between familial post-memory—the “familial transfer of embodied experience to the next generation” (Hirsch 2008, 110)—and affiliative post-memory, which results from contemporaneity and generational connection with the literal second generation. (Hirsch 2008, 115) It might be argued that where familial post-memory involves the transfer of experience to the next generation, affiliative post-memory is the adoption (or even appropriation) of that experience.

Hirsch maintains that the power of post-memory resides in the fact that it is connected to its object or source not through recollection but “through an imaginative investment and creation” (Hirsch 1996, 659). Post-memory “creates where it cannot recover. It imagines where it cannot recall. It mourns a loss that cannot be repaired” (Hirsch 1996, 664).

## The novels

### *Amba*

Hailing from the small town of Kadipura in Central Java, the eponymous protagonist Amba is the daughter of a school principal, who is a committed nationalist. Amba leaves Kadipura to study English literature at

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<sup>2</sup> Palgrave MacMillan Memory Studies <http://alturl.com/5apk3>. Accessed 19 August 2014.

Gajah Mada University in Yogyakarta. She also leaves behind a devoted suitor, the upright and honourable Salwa Munir. Her life takes a different direction when she meets Bhisma Rashad when they are both working in a hospital (Bhisma as a doctor, *Amba* as a translator) in Kediri, a hotbed of political unrest. Bhisma, a somewhat troubled young man, comes from an elite Jakarta family and was educated in Europe, an experience that has given him left-leaning tendencies. He is part of the literary and social movement Lekra (Institute of People's Culture), the cultural wing of the PKI (the Indonesian Communist Party). Whether he is a Communist is open to speculation, but he is committed to the eradication of poverty and to equality for all. Erstwhile apolitical *Amba* subsequently joins him in the movement.

In 1965 Bhisma is arrested in Yogyakarta after a protest rally at Res Publica University, on suspicion of being a Communist Party sympathiser, and is later taken to the political prison on Buru Island, where he remains for over a decade without trial. *Amba* never sees Bhisma again, but soon after his disappearance she discovers she is pregnant with his child. She moves to Jakarta where she marries an American academic who becomes father to *Amba* and Bhisma's daughter Srikandi.

When the penal colony on Buru is closed down in 1979, Bhisma, like many other former prisoners, does not return to Java. He remains, instead, in Buru as a healer for the local people, and his life as a prisoner in Buru is revealed in the letters he writes to *Amba*, which are buried under a tree and later entrusted to an elder named Manalisa.

When, in her sixties, *Amba* receives an anonymous e-mail telling her that Bhisma has died in Buru, she travels to the island to confirm his death. She is accompanied by Zulfikar, a former Buru prisoner, and Samuel, an Ambonese ex-journalist. The three of them discover that Buru still bears the burdens of its past.

The journalist and poet Amarzan Loebis, who was himself a political prisoner on Buru and who accompanied Laksmi Pamuntjak on her visit to the island, sums up the achievement of this novel in two short sentences: "This novel merges the imaginative and the real in a way that is at once beautiful and astute. *Amba* is an essential part of the struggle against forgetting."<sup>3</sup>

### *Pulang*

Notwithstanding several flashbacks to the 1950s, and although the novel opens in Paris in May 1968, the real action of *Pulang* begins in 1965 and ends in 1998. It is thus sandwiched between two cataclysmic events of

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<sup>3</sup> <http://laksmipamuntjak.com/books/the-question-of-red>

modern Indonesian history and is based on the real life stories of four Indonesian expatriates in Paris—Oemar Said, Budiman Sudharsono, Sobron Aidit and Kusni Sulang.

In the novel Dimas Suryo and his colleagues are attending a conference of journalists in Santiago, Chile, at the time of the attempted coup. As suspected communist sympathisers, their passports are revoked and they cannot return home. Moving from Chile to Cuba to China over the ensuing years, they eventually end up in Paris where they open their restaurant. As Dimas's daughter comments, "Father and his three friends would be forever fenced in by the bars known as G30S, or 30 September Movement"<sup>4</sup> (Chudori 2012, 155<sup>5</sup>). Despite that enforced distance from their homeland, their yearning for and connection with Indonesia is the key thread of the novel.

Despite having a girlfriend back in Indonesia, Dimas marries a French girl, Vivienne, during the 1968 revolution in Paris. They give their daughter an Indonesian name—Lintang Utara—that signals Dimas's connections with his home country. Much later, as a young undergraduate student, Lintang finally has the opportunity to visit the country of her father's birth, only to arrive in Jakarta on the eve of the chaotic 1998 demonstrations that eventually lead to the downfall of President Soeharto.

Lintang needs and wants to go to Indonesia to seek and swim in "the blood relationship which I do not know called Indonesia"<sup>6</sup> (*Pulang*, 137). All her life Lintang has been immersed in, but geographically removed from, the chaotic politics and history of Indonesia. She knows why her father was in Paris: not for education, not for a holiday and not for work. She watches how the restaurant, where her father and his friends make their living, is vilified by Soeharto supporters who see the restaurant as a place that fosters dangerous ideas. As a young filmmaker, Lintang makes it her mission to make a documentary film that will represent the testimony of the exiles. She also understands that the glimpses she has had of the traumatic effects of the 1965 violence are a far cry from the experiences of the families of prisoners back in Indonesia.

In Indonesia Lintang meets with the children of her father's friends: Segara Alam and Bimo Nugroho. Lintang feels an affinity with the mission of these two activists, as they search for a new definition of Indonesia. Lintang realises that she must now define herself vis-à-vis the New Order establishment, something she rarely thought about while in

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<sup>4</sup> "Ayah dan ketiga sahabatnya akan selalu dipagari oleh teralis yang dinamakan G30S."

<sup>5</sup> Hereafter *Pulang*

<sup>6</sup> "... sebersit darah yang tak kukenal, bernama Indonesia"

Paris. She visits the Lubang Buaya Museum, a potent symbol of New Order power.<sup>7</sup> She meets Bimo's stepfather, an army general. In a dinner scene, Lintang must choose whether to reveal herself and her background to the Priasmoro family who make derogatory remarks about "that Commie restaurant".<sup>8</sup> (*Pulang*, 357)

At the end of the novel, having died in Paris, Dimas is taken home to Indonesia and, as was his wish, buried in Karet cemetery. Home at last.

### Post-memory and exile

Glossing Hirsch (1996, 64), who asks "What are the aesthetic shapes of the post-memory?", I ask "What is the shape of exile in the post-memory?" I argue that in *Amba* and *Pulang* the authors give shape to their imaginings of exile through explorations of the meaning of home, love and betrayal. In writing their novels, both authors adopt what Michael Cronin (2014) calls the "non-exilic" position, in other words that of a writer who, having never personally experienced exile, endeavours to "produce a representation of exile drawing on the resources of the imagination and the fantasmatic".

The contribution of these novels to post-memory lies in their literary imaginings of what the experience of exile may have been for those affected by the violence of 1965 and its aftermath. Speaking of her experience of talking with Oemar Said and Sobron Aidit in their Paris exile, Chudori (2013) comments:

What I have taken from their stories are the feelings and psyche of a political exile. Through Dimas Suryo's character, I hoped to convey a sense of how Indonesia remained in the hearts and souls of these exiles during their time in Paris. How they demonstrated their deep concern for Indonesia in a manner which was so sincere ...

As Monteiro (2102) puts it, "Exile is one of the cruelest prisons." Although Bhisma has voluntarily spent much of his life outside Indonesia, the impact of being forcefully removed from home is described poignantly in this line from a letter he writes to *Amba*, a letter that remains unopened until after his death: "... it is unthinkable not to be able to laugh in this

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<sup>7</sup> Located on the outskirts of Jakarta, Lubang Buaya is the site of the murder of the six army officers during the 30 September 1965 attempted coup. It is now a memorial park and museum.

<sup>8</sup> "... restorannya PKI-PKI itu"



place, simply because there is so much sadness and so much injustice ... We have to be able to laugh, or we will perish”<sup>9</sup> (Pamuntjak 2012, 489<sup>10</sup>).

In her focus in *Pulang* on the daily lived experience of those in exile, Chudori captures the poignancy of Dimas not being able to marry his Indonesian girlfriend, of not being able to go home to Indonesia for his mother’s funeral.

Exile also brings out, or gives finer definition to, particular personal characteristics and qualities. Of his own exile on Buru, Pramoedyana Ananta Toer, for example, commented (1992, 9), “as a writer it enriches the material I have to file away. At the very least, it makes the story of a writer’s life that much longer.”<sup>11</sup> Dimas Suryo’s wife Vivienne observes “perhaps that’s something that all political exiles have in common, no matter where they’re from: the mental fortitude to just keep going. And then that produces in them an obsessiveness to make their mark”<sup>12</sup> (*Pulang*, 203).

## The places of exile

### Restaurant Indonesia

In order to achieve the rich wealth of historical detail she conveys in *Pulang*, Leila Chudori spent six years researching, reading and conducting interviews with Indonesian political exiles living in Paris. For Dimas Suryo and his friends, their place of exile is Restaurant Indonesia in Rue de Vaugirard, Paris, fictionalised in *Pulang* but drawing heavily on the trials and tribulations of the four exiles, who established it.

Set up in December 1982 as a cooperative enterprise (and still operating, attracting favourable reviews on Trip Advisor), running a restaurant was almost a last resort for those Indonesian exiles, none of whom could actually cook, but all of whom did not want to be dependent on the French government. The exiles pursued several objectives when

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<sup>9</sup> “... aku tidak bisa bayangkan, bagaimana orang bisa bertahan hidup tanpa tertawa di tempat ini. Orang harus bisa tertawa karena di sini begitu banyak kesedihan dan ketidakadilan yang terjadi ... Kita harus bisa tertawa, kalau tetap mau hidup.”

<sup>10</sup> Hereafter *Amba*

<sup>11</sup> “... sebagai pengarang tentu saja memperkaya materi yang harus diendapkan. Setidak-tidaknya, membuat sejarah hidup pengarang menjadi semakin panjang.”

<sup>12</sup> “Mungkin para eksil politik dari negara mana pun mempunyai persamaan itu: jiwa untuk bertahan yang kemudian membuat mereka obsesif untuk menunjukkan sesuatu.”

establishing the restaurant. It was not only (or even) about food; it was about the inclusion and integration of Indonesian refugees, about promoting Indonesian culture through regular events such as exhibitions and dances, and it was especially about providing a forum for open political debate. The story of the restaurant, its trials and tribulations, is told in Sobron Aidit and Budi Kurniawan's evocative 2007 book *Melawan dengan Restoran (Resisting through a Restaurant)*. As Rieke Dian Pitaloka succinctly sums up, the venture was about "the cuisine and struggle of exile".<sup>13</sup>

In *Pulang*, Dimas likens Restaurant Indonesia to the famous *Café de Flore*, one of the oldest and most prestigious coffeehouses in Paris, celebrated for its famous clientele and a meeting place of French intellectuals. Dimas reflects, "maybe this was a kind of "*Le Flore*" for us political exiles, who filled our lives with cooking for our customers and writing poetry, reminiscing about our pre-1965 homeland"<sup>14</sup> (Chudori 2012, 50).

## Buru Island

Bhisma's place of exile is Buru Island in the Moluccas, commonly known as the Spice Islands. Buru is rich in teak, sago, clove and melaleuca oil, with a population divided between practitioners of Sunni Islam, Christianity and traditional forms of worship. During the Soeharto administration the island was the site of a large penal colony, where more than 12,000 alleged Communists and Communist Party sympathisers were detained for more than a decade without being formally charged or tried in court. Hundreds of prisoners died or were killed there. Although the prisoners were officially liberated between 1978 and 1979, many chose to remain in Buru. (Pamuntjak 2013, xx) Since then the island has remained a symbol of President Soeharto's New Order oppression.

Brian May provided one of the earliest outsider descriptions of Buru Island and its prison in his 1978 book *The Indonesian Tragedy*. One of only a handful of Westerners allowed to visit the island during the early Soeharto years, this is how he begins his book:

At first sight the political prisoners' settlement on Buru Island, looming up

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<sup>13</sup> "... masakan dan perjuangan di tanah pelarian" (from back cover of *Melawan dengan Restoran*)

<sup>14</sup> "... mungkin ini semacam "*Le Flore*" buat kami para eksil politik Indonesia, yang mengisi hidup dengan memasak makanan untuk para pelanggan dan berpuisi pada malam hari, mengenang tanah air yang kami kenal sebelum tahun 1965."

beyond the distant swamp, looked like a Nazi concentration camp in a tropical setting. A barbed-wire fence dwarfed the shoulder-high *alang* grass; and watch-towers, spaced along it, blotched the sickly blue of the sky (May 1978, 27)

Pramoedya Ananta Toer, perhaps Buru's most famous prisoner, provides an evocative and harrowing account of life on Buru in his 1995 memoir *Nyanyi Sunyi Seorang Bisu*,<sup>15</sup> a book that has probably been read by very few Indonesians, given that Pramoedya's works are still technically banned in Indonesia. As well as the physical descriptions of the island's rugged mountains, intense humidity, poor soil and malarial swamps, he describes the treatment meted out to himself and his fellow prisoners, who were forced to make the island habitable: "opening thousands of acres of land for fields, building hundreds of miles of roads and waterways, constructing from the trees they themselves felled the barracks they were to call their homes" (Samuels 1999, xxi). And yet, as Bhisma recounts in *Amba* (Pamuntjak 2013, 530), "in the cruellest conditions, it is the most fragile beings that survive."<sup>16</sup>

Laksmi Pamuntjak writes of feeling "compelled to recall the collective memory, to try to understand a dark history where relatives and neighbours killed each other".<sup>17</sup> But she was also drawn to the fact that among the suffering, fear, despair and pain there was still humour, there was gratitude for goodness and beauty that defied resentment and hatred. It was the back-story to this complex mix of experiences and emotions that she wanted to explore in *Amba*. (Budiman 2013) It was her surprise at finding, on her visit to Buru in 2006, a fertile landscape with flourishing rice fields that prompted Laksmi to provide a nuanced picture of the island, one that in many ways tells the story of the island as much as it tells the story of the novel's main characters. That things are never "black and white" on Buru, and probably never have been, is summed up in Bhisma's letter to *Amba*, where he writes, "There's a dullness about the place for sure, but it's a better place than the Buru that people imagine from the outside, and it's better than the other prisons I've been

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<sup>15</sup> The English translation by Willem Samuels was published in 1999 as *The Mute's Soliloquy* (New York: Hyperion)

<sup>16</sup> "... dalam malapetaka alam yang paling ganas, yang bertahan hidup adalah justru yang paling lembut."

<sup>17</sup> "... terpanggil untuk memanggil ulang ingatan kolektif, bagaimana memahami sejarah kelam di mana saudara dan tetangga saling membunuh."

incarcerated in"<sup>18</sup> (Pamuntjak 2013, 484). Bhisma also conveys admiration for the resilience of the little island that has become his home: "Don't you think it's extraordinary: so vulnerable, so small, but refusing to be beaten by anything—not even by the vast blueness and the unpredictable waves"<sup>19</sup> (Pamuntjak 2013, 509). The impact the island has on his psyche is summed up in his observation:

But this is a hinterland like no other. Here I have encountered a different kind of peace. It's like the pitch black from which only the purest of light can emanate—a light that can only be harnessed through pure longing.<sup>20</sup>  
(Pamuntjak 2013, 490-1)

## Home

The idea of home resonates through both novels. For Dimas Suryo, home is unequivocally Indonesia, a place he suspects rightly that he will never see again, yet one that remains in his heart and soul throughout his long exile in Paris. Vivienne, reflecting on the motivations and outlooks of Dimas and his friends, observes that Dimas is the only one who says that he wants to spend his old age in Indonesia. (*Pulang*, 204) Dimas's dogged belief that he will one day return to Indonesia is a source of tension in their marriage. While not the sole cause of its breakdown, Vivienne does pinpoint a moment when she has clearly gone too far in questioning his idealised quest to return:

I saw the hurt in his eyes ... he stood up and went out onto the terrace and lit up a cigarette ... I knew I'd said the wrong thing. But I knew I was not actually wrong. 'Home is the place where your family is,' I said, following Dimas to the terrace ... 'Home is the place where I can go home to,' he replied coldly.<sup>21</sup> (*Pulang*, 206)

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<sup>18</sup> "Kusam, tentu, tapi lebih baik dari Buru yang umumnya dibayangkan orang yang hanya mendengarnya dari luar, dan lebih baik daripada tempat-tempat lain yang pernah menyekapku."

<sup>19</sup> "Tidakkah luar biasa: pulau seringkih, sekecil ini, tapi yang menolak untuk ditumbangkan oleh apa pun - bahkan oleh biru yang mengempas dan riak-riak tak menentu."

<sup>20</sup> "Tapi akhirnya tempat ini adalah pedalaman yang lebih dalam daripada pedalaman mana pun. Di tempat ini, kutemukan kedamaian yang begitu berbeda. Seperti gelap purba dari mana hanya cahaya paling sejati yang dapat menyingsing - cahaya yang terangnya cuma bisa diamini oleh hasrat yang paling murni."

<sup>21</sup> "Betapa aku melihat luka di matanya. ... Dia hanya berdiri dan keluar ke teras, merokok ... Aku tahu aku telah mengucapkan sesuatu yang salah. Tapi aku tidak

Leila herself points out the irony of Dimas, exiled in one of the most beautiful cities in the world, yearning for the smells of Jakarta—sewage, brewed coffee in the morning and clove cigarettes. Dimas fills the void that accompanies longing by keeping huge glass jars full of cloves and ground turmeric—the smells of home. The other irony, of course, lies in Dimas’s longing to return to the very country that has denied him citizenship, to the country where an authoritarian ruler consistently refuses to acknowledge him as an Indonesian.

Eventually reconciling himself to the fact that he may never return alive, his keenest wish is to be buried in Karet cemetery in Jakarta. For him, Karet is not just a place to be buried; it is resonant with literary allusions, which he shares with Lintang. Glossing a line from the Chairil Anwar poem “Yang terampas dan yang putus” (The captured and the freed), Dimas refers to Karet as “my future home”<sup>22</sup> (*Pulang*, 274), “a place that knows me through and through—my shape, my smell, my soul”<sup>23</sup> (*Pulang*, 279-80). He adds wryly:

It’s true that cemeteries in Paris are pretty amazing; they’re not just built to establish some kind of ongoing connection with those who have ‘passed over’ to an unknown world, but they’re designed to preserve a sense of melancholy. But despite all that I’d prefer to be buried in Karet cemetery, sharing my final resting place with Chairil Anwar.<sup>24</sup> (*Pulang* 274-5)

The other character in *Pulang* who grapples with the idea of “home” is Lintang. As the Paris-born daughter of a French woman and an Indonesian father, she begins her real quest to discover her roots when she undertakes her research project at the Sorbonne. In a conversation with her boyfriend Nara (son of a Javanese mother and a French father), Lintang describes the place of Indonesia in her life as “a space inside me that I

salah.”

“‘Rumah adalah tempat keluargamu menetap.’ Aku menyusul Dimas ke teras ...”

“‘Rumah adalah tempat di mana aku merasa bisa pulang.’ jawab Dimas. Dingin. Datar.”

<sup>22</sup> “... rumahku yang akan datang.”

The line from the Chairil Anwar poem is “Di Karet, di Karet (daerahku y.a.d) sampai juga deru dingin”, translated by Burton Raffel as “At Karet, at Karet (where I go next), the cold wind blows just as noisily”. (Raffel 1967: 109)

<sup>23</sup> “... sebuah tempat yang paham bau, bangun tubuh, dan jiwaku.”

<sup>24</sup> “Makam di Paris memang luar biasa. Dibangun bukan sekadar untuk rasa ingin melanjutkan hubungan dengan mereka yang sudah ‘menyeberang’ ke alam yang tak kita ketahui, tetapi sekaligus untuk memelihara melankoli. Tetapi, ayah rasa, ayah akan lebih bahagia jika bisa dikubur di Karet, satu rumah dengan Chairil Anwar.”

can't reach, something so foreign, so strange, and it's called Indonesia"<sup>25</sup> (*Pulang*, 155).

Evidence that the impact of exile extends far beyond those who are actually exiled, Lintang is then driven by an urgent need to discover the place that has held her father's heart captive for all his years in Paris. As Hirsch observes (2008, 112):

Loss of family, of home, of a feeling of belonging and safety in the world "bleed" from one generation to the next. As Art Spiegelman so aptly put it in his subtitle to *Maus I*, "My father bleeds history."

After arriving in Jakarta on 13 May 1998, just before the fall of Soeharto, many things fall into place for Lintang, and she feels a strong connection with her father's friends and family whom she meets there, and with the student activists whose campaigns she joins and films. She declares:

I had begun to love this place called Jakarta. I probably couldn't yet say that I loved Indonesia, because I only knew a part of it. But as the days passed, I began to feel a connection to the place that is hard to describe.<sup>26</sup> (*Pulang*, 427)

Nonetheless, when her filming work is done, she reflects:

For the first time I really wanted to go home to Paris, to edit everything and get the project finished, and to submit it to Monsieur Dupont. Above all I wanted to go home and see mum and dad. Hang on. I just called Paris 'home.'  
Is Paris really my home?<sup>27</sup> (*Pulang*, 437)

Eventually, like her father, Lintang's understanding of home is reached and expressed through poetry—in her case, the poetry of Rendra. Listening to the singing of the demonstrating students, she realises that she recognises the words: "... I hear the sound / the screams of the wounded/

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<sup>25</sup> "... sebuah ruang di dalam diriku yang tak kukenal, begitu asing, begitu ganjil yang bernama Indonesia."

<sup>26</sup> "Aku sudah mulai mencintai tempat ini, tempat yang bernama Jakarta ini. Mungkin aku belum bisa mengatakan aku mencintai Indonesia, karena aku belum mengenal seluruhnya. Tapi dari hari ke hari, entah bagaimana aku merasa ada keterikatan yang sukar kulukiskan."

<sup>27</sup> "Untuk pertama kali, aku ingin sekali pulang ke Paris untuk menyunting dan menyelesaikan tugas ini, lalu menyerahkannya kepada Monsieur Dupont. Lebih penting lagi, aku ingin pulang menemui ayah dan Maman. sebentar. Barusan aku menyebut Paris sebagai tempat aku 'pulang'. Benarkah Paris rumahku?"

... someone is shooting the moon”.<sup>28</sup> (*Pulang*, 440) When Alam tells her that they are the lyrics of Rendra, sung by Iwan Fals, Lintang describes the impact on her as being more profound than hearing a piece by Ravel. “At that moment”, she says, “I knew where my home was”<sup>29</sup> (*Pulang*, 441).

In *Amba*, Bhisma has always had an ambivalent relationship with “home”, which adds poignancy to the way he describes the departure from Buru of many of his released fellow prisoners: “My heart pounds every time I watch a ship sail off towards that elusive line in the farthest distance, a line that for years has seemed to me to embody your face.”<sup>30</sup> The poignancy lies in his decision not to go home, a decision that prompts him to wonder “what would it mean for you, for us, if I were one of them, waving farewell, free, going home”<sup>31</sup> (Pamuntjak 2013, 530). Unlike Dimas in Paris, who yearns for the physical shape of home, the exiled Bhisma lives by the adage “home is where the heart is”, evidenced in his words to Amba: “Seven years ago I entrusted my heart to you for safekeeping. If it is still beating, it is beating with love for you, because I know my heart is safe, my heart is home”<sup>32</sup> (Pamuntjak 2013, 486).

## Love

Also at the heart of both novels are deeply flawed love affairs, relationships that on occasion in both novels teeter towards sentimentality but that are also shaped by betrayal. For Leila Chudori (2013), giving her characters important relationships beyond politics, relationships that encompass “romance and partings; joy and sadness”, transforms those characters from shadows, from non-entities, into “complete human beings”. This is an important part of the resurrection of those people from the erased memory of the past, of incorporating them into the post-memory.

Vivienne seems to sense from the start that her relationship with Dimas may not last, built as it is on love at first sight, on a desire to venture into something “new” and “exotic”. “As much as I loved Dimas and was

<sup>28</sup> “... aku mendengar suara/jerit makhluk terluka/ ... orang memanah rembulan.”

<sup>29</sup> “Kini, aku rasa aku tahu di mana rumahku.”

<sup>30</sup> “Sesuatu mengguruh di dadaku setiap kali aku memandang punggung layar yang melaju ke garis agung di kejauhan itu—sebuah kejauhan yang, bagiku, selama bertahun-tahun, adalah kamu, wajahmu.”

<sup>31</sup> “Apa kira-kira artinya bagi kamu, bagi kita, seandainya aku salah seorang dari mereka, melambai, bebas, pulang.”

<sup>32</sup> “Tujuh tahun yang lalu aku serahkan hatiku untuk kamu simpan. Jika sekarang masih ada getarnya, getar cinta kepadamu, itu karena aku tahu hatiku aman di sana, di rumahnya.”

prepared to surrender myself completely to him”, she comments, “to this day I have never known whether he loved me as much as I loved him”<sup>33</sup> (Chudori 2013, 202). The yearning for home that constantly occupies Dimas's mind presents a gulf between him and Vivienne that even the purest love cannot fill.

Also constantly on Dimas's mind is Surti Anandarti, the girl he left behind in Indonesia. While too young to offer Surti the commitment she seeks when they are living in Jakarta before his exile, the love he still feels for Surti is yet another pull to home that Vivienne is powerless to do anything about.

The other significant love affair in *Pulang* is that between Lintang and Segara Alam, who ostensibly fall in love at first sight when they meet in Jakarta, and whose relationship is perhaps intended to symbolise Lintang finding her place in Indonesia. While arguably an unnecessary addition to the plot—and with Lintang's betrayal of Nara treated somewhat arbitrarily—we can understand the relationship as another consequence of exile, an indication that the yearning for home that is felt so keenly by Dimas has become a generational phenomenon.

The love story between Amba and Bhisma that is the central narrative of *Amba* is couched—not always successfully, and some might argue unnecessarily—in the story from the Mahabharata of the love triangle between Princess Amba, her betrothed King Salwa and the great warrior Bhisma. Despite the sometimes clumsiness in attempting to work a Javanese myth into a modern story of political exile and intrigue, Laksmi hints at her reason for doing so in her reminder about the power of myths (2013, 14): “they have a way of sneaking up on you to foretell your own fate.” In other words, drawing on myths that are familiar to her readers is a way of bringing her characters out of the shadows, of making them real.

Ironically, it is Bhisma's love for Amba that keeps him in his place of exile when he could have returned home to Java. He tells Amba in a letter that seeking her out would only destroy her life over again; he must remain on Buru. He concludes this heart-wrenching letter with the words, “Know this: my beginning and my ending is in my love for you”<sup>34</sup> (Pamuntjak 2013, 543).

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<sup>33</sup> “Betapapun aku mencintai Dimas dan rela memberikan apa pun yang ada di dalam diriku, hingga kini aku tak pernah tahu apakah Dimas pernah mencintainya sebesar cintaku padanya.”

<sup>34</sup> “Ketahuilah: aku bermula dan berakhir dengan cinta itu.”



## Betrayal

For both Bhisma in *Amba* and Dimas in *Pulang*, the journey into exile begins with the ultimate act of betrayal—denial of their rights as citizens of Indonesia. Bhisma, arrested on suspicion of being a Communist, is deprived of his freedom and sent to Buru Island without trial, a betrayal he accommodates through using his prowess as a doctor to help the local people. Dimas describes the moment that his passport is revoked as being like a bomb falling (*Pulang*, 72). Subsequently, after being granted asylum by the French government, his requests for a visa to enter Indonesia are invariably rejected, as Vivienne relates: “Every year Dimas did the same thing and every year he was destined for disappointment; my heart ached every time he applied for a visa to enter Indonesia, which was invariably rejected”<sup>35</sup> (Chudori 2012, 206). The sense of betrayal is made more acute because a number of other exiles are successful in their applications.

Amba lives her adult life with the confronting knowledge that she has left in her wake a number of betrayals. Not only did she betray her first fiancé Salwa, abandoning him for Bhisma, but also, by marrying Adalhard, she later betrays Bhisma. Furthermore, because she marries Adalhard while still being in love with Bhisma, she has also betrayed Adalhard. Amba attributes Bhisma’s decision not to come home to her betrayal, believing that he chose continued exile over heartbreak.

## Conclusion

As Hirsch observes (1996, 661),

... the motor of the fictional imagination is fueled in great part by the desire to know the world as it looked and felt before our birth ... the need not just to feel and to know, but also to remember, to rebuild, to reincarnate, to replace and to repair.

In these novels those processes of remembering, rebuilding, reincarnating, replacing and repairing are enacted through a blend of the imaginative and the real. Both novels deal with real historical events, and there are characters in both novels who are based on actual historical characters. The places of exile—Paris and Buru Island—were indeed places of exile for Indonesian political prisoners. The novels are thus both internally and

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<sup>35</sup> “... setiap tahun Dimas melakukan hal yang sama dan terlempar pada kekecewaan yang sama; hatiku runtuh. Setiap tahun Dimas mencoba mengajukan visa ke Indonesia, yang entah kenapa selalu ditolak.”

externally referential. The reader is drawn into the events and storylines of the novels themselves but is also constantly drawn out to the real sociopolitical settings that underpin the stories. As such, to gloss Tickell (1986, 30), these novels can ask “what if?” in a more provocative way than can standard fiction—or indeed standard history. Standard fiction is largely self-referential, with protagonists who function as “inwardly complex agents out of whose human complexity evolve the event and the destiny” (Van Ghent 1953, 124). Historical fiction can put real characters together in imaginary settings, or populate real historical events with imaginary characters. The result is a tantalising blurring of “truth” and “fiction”.

Of course the contextualising of these stories within the events of 1965 is not done simply to add local colour. As we have seen, both authors wrote their novels with a view to remedying the ignorance among young Indonesians of that period of Indonesian history. These novels are intended as antidotes to the “forced forgetting” that remains a legacy of the official New Order discourse surrounding 1965 and its aftermath. That the novels have gone some way to achieving this is suggested in readers’ comments such as the following response to *Pulang*:

This novel lifted grey shadows from the history of our country, not in terms of political and ideological understandings, but more from the point of view of those who were lost, who were separated from their families, figures who longed for a home they couldn't return to. (Downes 2014)

On the *Goodreads* website, which contains around 870 reviews of *Amba*, we can read reactions such as:

For me, of the generation that knew the PKI as nothing but evil and treacherous, the theme of G30s is really compelling ... I am grateful for the publication of *Amba* because reading it casts some light onto what happened in Indonesia at the end of the 1960s.<sup>36</sup>

It is largely because of the overtly stated authorial intention of both authors to question “the one-sided version of history” they had been fed at school and beyond (Prathivi 2012), to “find out about that black hole which had been covered up for 32 years by the New Order, the story of the

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<sup>36</sup> “Untuk saya, si generasi yang hanya tahu PKI itu jahat, tukang makar, tema G30S sungguh sangat menarik ... saya berterima kasih atas terbitnya *Amba* karena dengan membaca *Amba* ada sedikit pencerahan tentang apa yang terjadi akhir tahun 1960an di Indonesia.”

[http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/15995172-amba#other\\_reviews](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/15995172-amba#other_reviews)

suffering of those whose “voices may not be heard”, and “whose bodies may not be seen”, who are not recorded in history” (Chudori 2013) that it is impossible to remove the authors from these novels. The evidence of their years of research, their visits to the places of exile, their interviews with former political prisoners, is present on every page.

Both Leila Chudori and Laksmi Pamuntjak, seeking a “hook” on which to hang their stories of 1965, chose exile. In this chapter I have explored the “shape” of exile in the post-memory of these two writers, as expressed through their novels. Both authors declared their intention to move beyond ideology and to imagine the effect of exile on the daily lived lives of individual people and their families. The key themes that emerge from those imaginings—ideas of home, the complexities of love, the ramifications of betrayal—are in many ways at the heart of the human condition. But in the “cruel prison” of exile, home, love and betrayal acquire added dimensions that move these novels beyond simple existentialist explorations. Perhaps their most important achievement is to make visible the impact of political oppression and silencing on ordinary people.

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CHAPTER THREE

PKI STROGANOFF:  
LEILA CHUDORI'S NOVEL *PULANG*  
(REVISITED)

HENRI CHAMBERT-LOIR

Jakarta, June 2015. Indonesia prepares her appearance on stage as the Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair in October that year. The literary world is feverish, Facebook is in commotion. The rumour has it that one of the major themes that will decide the works and authors chosen to participate in the prestigious event is the putsch of 1965. G30S is suddenly trendy. The causes for this decision are probably complex; perhaps the initiative came from Frankfurt as much as Jakarta. It happens that two fairly recent novels, both published in 2012, have 1965 at the core of their plots and are therefore in the eye of the cyclone: *Amba* by Laksmi Pamuntjak and *Pulang* by Leila S. Chudori. Has the country come to terms with 1965? An article in the German press asserts it is women authors who “force Indonesia to face its history”.<sup>1</sup> The statement is erroneous and raises passionate reactions. It is true, however, that the publication of the two novels underlines the prominent role of women in today's literary production in Indonesia.

A book's success is a mysterious matter that depends as much on social processes and marketing as on literary value. Media hype, rumour, Internet buzz, literary prizes, and foreign translations create and feed a fashion, and often end up following it. The success of the novel *Pulang* is a social fact that surely depends on its subject as much or perhaps more than its quality as a novel. Its success is for a great part the result of a discourse on the book. Then, in turn, this generates another discourse

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I wish to express my hearty thanks to my colleague Ernest Thrimbe for commenting on this article and offering editorial suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dw.com/id/tamu-kehormatan-dihadapkan-pada-sejarah-kelamnya-pembantaian-1965/a-18530811>.

intended to explain the success, notably by asserting that the book has a high literary quality.<sup>2</sup> This article aims at investigating what image of the Indonesian exiles post 1965 is to be found in Leila Chudori's novel (Chudori 2013a).

A book is purchased for various reasons; it is read for various reasons too, some of which may be different. In both cases one embarks on the reading of a book with a number of preconceived ideas and prejudices that are the product of two types of factors: on the one hand, all the elements in the book outside the text; on the other hand, the social discourse around the text—what has been coined the *paratext*.

The appearance of the book (fourth edition, December 2013) is very professional. However, the paper and binding are of inferior quality, perhaps due to the publisher's wish to procure this big volume (460 pages) at a price affordable enough for an audience of young readers.



Fig. 1. The front cover of *Pulang* (4<sup>th</sup> printing, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> This is what happened with the author of Harry Potter, J.K. Rowling, who is currently compared to Shakespeare on the Net.

The paratext is complex, powerful and efficient (see fig. 1). The **cover**<sup>3</sup> looks crammed and provocative: against an ochre background, the two main elements are an illustration and the title. The illustration is a black drawing that evokes the communist lithographies of the 1960s, figuring a raised fist; an inscription in capital letters, handwritten on the arm in a graffiti style, reads: “la lutte continue” (a sentence unintelligible to the general Indonesian reader and which evokes the French language or French culture in general rather than any political message; the source is a poster seen by the main protagonist in Paris, p. 13). Above this drawing, in red, in big characters that seem stencil-printed, the title evokes graffiti, demonstrations, struggle. The name of the author, at the bottom, and the generic indication “a novel”, at the top, are in a typewriter font, suggesting the idea of a feature story. A small round vignette, which gives the impression of having been pasted on by hand, on the left side, proclaims that the novel has been awarded the Khatulistiwa Literary Award 2013.

The **spine** reproduces the three major inscriptions (title, author's name, generic indication) in their respective types and proportions. The **back cover** reproduces, at the top, the title in its specific type and, at the bottom, two small text-blocks containing the address of the publisher, the barcode and ISBN number, as well as the indication “novel”, the remainder of the page being occupied by a synopsis of the novel divided into two parts: “Paris, May 1968” and “Jakarta, May 1998”, and ending with this sentence: “*Pulang* is a drama about family, friendship, love, and betrayal, against the background of three historical incidents: Indonesia September, 30, 1965, France May 1968, and Indonesia May 1998”. (I must say that up to now I don't know what “betrayal” (*pengkhianatan*) refers to.)

The **first four pages** (before the half-title page) contain fourteen endorsements from Indonesian intellectuals (with the exception of one American) praising the literary, political and historical qualities of the book. The **dedication** is addressed to the author's parents and daughter. The **table of contents**, printed with characters imitating a typewriter font (thus suggesting, as above, the idea of a feature story) reproduces the titles of the chapters that contain five dates, the names of two cities, and three French phrases or words (*Terre d'asile*, *L'irréparable*, *Flâneur*), emphasising the idea of international current issues.

At the end of the book one finds short **notes by the author** (*beberapa catatan akhir*) about some of the events and references in the novel, four pages of **acknowledgements**, as well as two **biographical sketches** of the

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<sup>3</sup> Since this article was written, *Pulang* has been through its 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> editions. For the latter, a new cover has been designed, very different from the one described here.



author and the illustrator respectively. The book indeed contains twenty full-page **illustrations**, three in colour at the heads of the parts and seventeen in black and white at the heads of the chapters, each being an interpretation of one of the characters of the relevant chapter, but in a way that evokes no specific genre or atmosphere. These illustrations, the subject of which is not always clear, do not suggest a way to read the book; it is rather the reading of the novel that suggests a way to interpret the drawings. The book is delivered with a **book-mark** that reproduces the cover illustration as well as a short quotation (from p. 120) and the publisher's address.

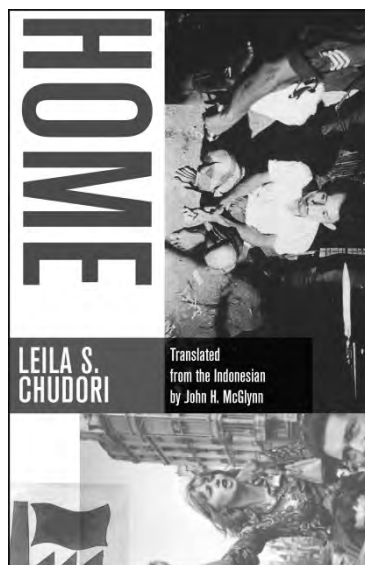


Fig. 2. Cover of the English edition, Deep Vellum Publishing, Texas, 2015.

This paratext is extremely dense, compact, almost aggressive. It conveys the idea of an urgency, a certain violence. We seem to be in the world of action rather than aesthetics or sentimentality. The most immediate paratext (the front and back covers) suggests a text of some political dimension, perhaps militancy (the raised fist), with some sympathy for a rebellion or a leftist revolution. The book is definitely a “novel”, but an historical one centred upon two major social upheavals in Indonesian modern history (September 1965 and May 1998, the dates marking the

beginning and the end of Soeharto's New Order regime) associated with the mythic May 1968 upheaval in France.<sup>4</sup>

The prospective reader, who also has read through the four pages of endorsement at the front of the novel, already knows that she is dealing with a novel the literary and political quality of which has been recognised by respected personalities like Ignas Kleden, Goenawan Mohamad and Seno Gumira Ajidarma. Moreover, whoever has purchased the fourth printing (and probably the second or the third one as well) has most likely heard of the book via the media: articles (including a column by Goenawan Mohamad<sup>5</sup>), launching, literary award, interviews, etc. The message is threefold: the novel is a work of a high literary standard; it is a book of solid historical significance; it is a new and bold initiative. The book was conceived by its author and accepted by commentators as belonging to that "alternative history" that has been flourishing since the end of the New Order, that is, the mass of documents, testimonies, and analyses that endeavour to deconstruct the official version of history produced by the New Order and to present a more complete, more authentic and more impartial discourse on the contemporary history of the country, particularly the post-1965 period.

The author of *Pulang*, Leila S. Chudori, has related several times how she devised the project of the book: 1965 is an obscure moment in Indonesian history, a "black hole":

Our generation<sup>6</sup> only knew the official history, which for 32 years was promulgated in Indonesian history books, school curricula, statues, museums, film and in government "white" books (official statements) to the media to be reported on. [...] The idea of writing the novel *Pulang* did not come on its own. It came little by little, as answers to parts of my questions about that black hole (Chudori 2013b).

Thanks to her father, a well-known journalist, and to her own profession as a journalist at *Tempo* magazine, she was conscious of the stakes involved

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<sup>4</sup> The English version has been published, with different cover designs, by both The Lontar Foundation in Jakarta and Deep Vellum Publishing in Texas. The cover of the latter (see fig. 2) has capitalised on the image of May 1968. Moreover, it multiplies the political message: the illustration comprises two photographs which evoke immediate actuality; the two pictures refer clearly to September 1965 and May 1968; the four elements of the cover (two pictures, title, names of author and translator) are inscribed in various directions, suggesting chaos, turbulence, violence.

<sup>5</sup> "Catatan Pinggir: 1965".

<sup>6</sup> She was born in 1962.

in writing about current issues and contemporary history, and she also had the opportunity to meet various victims of the New Order, particularly *ex-tapol*<sup>7</sup> and exiles. She decided to tell the story of political exiles in France, taking as a model the group of exiles who opened an Indonesian restaurant in Paris' Latin Quarter at the beginning of the 1980s. The book she had in mind, however, would not be a feature story or a pamphlet, but a novel:

It is important to remember that *Pulang* is fiction, not a history book, memoir, or a biography. [...] From the outset I had decided that *Pulang* was not going to be a passionate novel about ideology. I did not want to put on any pretence of wanting to join the political discussion. For me, that is not a novelist's job. A novelist is a storyteller, not a historian or a politician who unleashes propaganda (Ibid.).

This of course does not mean that the book has no political or ideological contents. The articles, reviews, interviews and readers' comments that I have come across, and more especially the comments by readers born after 1965, all refer to the historical side of the novel, which they treat as a document. A young mother born in the 1990s declares:

I think I will recommend this novel to my child later, when she learns about the Movement of September 30, the Trisakti tragedy, and the riots of May 1998 in school. Because I feel that reading this novel is much more enjoyable than reading formal and biased school books (Hartiningtias 2014).<sup>8</sup>

No community of Indonesian exiles in Europe ever had the privilege of being elected as the subject of a novel. The exiles were—and still are – virtually unknown. Leila Chudori's project was indeed a novelty.

In order to assess the ideological contents of a novel and the view it gives of history, it is necessary to know the narrative context they are placed in. However, knowing how tiresome the summary of a novel can be, I will keep this one as short as possible.

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<sup>7</sup> As the acronym of *tahanan politik*, political prisoners, the word *tapol* has come to specifically designate all people jailed by the New Order regime, most of them without any kind of legal procedure, for being suspected of having been involved in the putsch of September 1965. Most of them were detained in gaols throughout the country; 12.000 were banished to the island of Buru, in the Maluku archipelago.

<sup>8</sup> The Trisakti tragedy is one episode that led to the downfall of President Soeharto, and the May 1998 riots are one consequence of that event.

The novel is divided into three parts preceded by a prologue and followed by an epilogue. The three parts are named after three characters (Dimas Suryo, Lintang Utara, Segara Alam) who are the main narrators in each of them, and they are divided into chapters (five, seven, and five respectively).

In the prologue, Hananto Prawiro narrates his own arrest, in Jakarta, in April 1968, by the military. Then starts the novel proper, in Paris, the following month, May 1968. The narrative goes back to 1952 and then extends to 1998. The timeline is extremely intricate. Events from various periods of time are related in a calculated disorder across the three parts of the book, following the stream of consciousness and remembrance of each narrator.

When a student at Universitas Indonesia (UI), in the early 1950s, Dimas Suryo had an affair with Surti Anandari. They were supposed to be married, they even had chosen the names of their future children, but for a futile reason (from a literary point of view) Surti left Dimas for Hananto, the character featuring the prologue. However,—the novel repeatedly refers to this—Dimas and Surti will be in love with each other as long as they live, and Surti (albeit mainly in absentia) is one of the main characters of the book.

Later on, the three UI friends: Dimas Suryo, Tjai and Risjaf, together with Hananto and his friend Nugroho, become colleagues as employees of the Nusantara news agency. Dimas and Hananto are friends, even though Dimas cannot tolerate the fact that Hananto cheats on Surti.

In September 1965, Hananto and Nugroho are due to attend a conference for journalists in Santiago, Chile. At the last minute, Dimas takes Hananto's place (for some reason related to Surti). When they learn of the 30 September putsch in Jakarta, Nugroho and Dimas first go to Havana where they meet Risjaf, then to Beijing. For one year the three of them work at the *Peking Review*, from where they are sent to a communal village in the suburbs of Beijing. They are very soon disappointed with Chinese socialism and the Cultural Revolution and they decide to move to France, "terre d'asile".<sup>9</sup> Like in a fairy tale, they are instantly taken there. Tjai arrives from Singapore; the four friends are reunited.

After a few months in Paris, Dimas meets a French student, Vivienne. They marry in early 1970 and have a daughter, Lintang Utara, five years later. Dimas earns money by doing odd jobs, the last one at the Ministry of Agriculture, but he is mostly busy writing and publishing the *Tahanan Politik* (Political Prisoner) bulletin. His neglect of material necessities will

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<sup>9</sup> They spend about two years and three months, from November 1965 to January 1968, in China, not "three years" as it is said on p. 76.

be a cause of dissension with Vivienne. In August 1982 the four friends decide to open an Indonesian restaurant. They borrow the necessary funds to buy an existing restaurant in the Rue de Vaugirard and establish themselves as a cooperative. Various anecdotes are told about the managing of the restaurant (more about this later).

Lintang (Dimas' and Vivienne's daughter) has a Franco-Indonesian boyfriend, Nara. Worried about her own identity, she questions her father, then discovers letters from Surti to him and shows them to her mother—who instantly decides to separate from him. Dimas leaves their home and settles in a posh neighbourhood of Paris. He has never felt at home in France. Among the four friends, he is the only one who still wants to go back and resettle in Indonesia, whereas the others have accepted the idea of integrating into French society. But year after year the visa to enter Indonesia is refused to him, as it is also to Nugroho and Tjai.

At the beginning of 1998 Dimas faints in the subway. This leads to medical examinations and the discovery that he suffers from cirrhosis of the liver and that his life expectancy is extremely limited. He then states his wish to be buried in Karet (a literary allusion).<sup>10</sup> Lintang is studying for a Bachelor degree in Cinematography at the Sorbonne. Her supervisor persuades her to make a documentary film about her faraway country; she decides to deal with the victims of 1965, and therefore to make the film in Indonesia.

In Jakarta she is greeted by Alam, Surti's son, and is struck by a *coup de foudre* (love at first sight) for him. Thanks to Alam and other friends, she meets several ex-tapols, makes interviews, also with Surti, and shoots her documentary. She has accomplished the homecoming (*pulang*) that her father never had, she has witnessed the fall of the Soeharto regime, which was responsible for the exile of her father, she starts a liaison with Surti's son, and she is going to make the choice that her father was never able to do: all plots have reached a conclusion. In the epilogue, Dimas is buried in Karet, with his family and friends attending.

In a novel, prologue and epilogue are sections separated from the chapters. They provide information that the reader is supposed to know outside the narrative. Hananto's arrest is told in the prologue: it is not the start of the narrative (which will go back much further in time); it is its seal, the

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<sup>10</sup> The Karet Bivak cemetery is the largest common burial ground of Jakarta, where the poet Chairil Anwar and the novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer are buried. In his poem *Yang Terampas dan Yang Terputus* Chairil Anwar alluded to be buried at Karet.

indication that the following story, the body of the novel, is placed under the sign of the terror that followed the events of 1965.

Indeed, *Pulang* is believed to be a novel about 1965 and its aftermath, but in fact the 1965 events and their bloody consequences are not related to or even evoked. They are supposed to be known (which is clearly not the case, viewing the readers' statements). The massacres that followed are not described first hand, as an event told by an omniscient narrator or a character who would have witnessed them, but alluded to in very short passages scattered throughout the book (e.g. pp. 72, 79, 144, 233, 240-1, 334). Their bearing on the plot is secondary. These allusions refer to atrocities, but infinitely minimised compared to the actual tortures, assassinations, and mass executions, or the descriptions found in other literary works (such as Putu Oka Sukanta's novel *Merajut Harkat*) and in a plethora of testimonies by victims. In the same way, the evocation of threats and humiliations suffered by Surti, as painful and unacceptable as they are, are a very pale reflection of the tortures actually endured by thousands of women in Soeharto's prisons. In short, the novel offers a considerably mitigated picture of that reality.

*Pulang* garnered the Khatulistiwa Literary Award (the most prestigious literary award in Indonesia today) in December 2013 for a work of outstanding literature. The novel has been translated into French, Dutch, German, English, and Italian. It has been proclaimed as being of high literary quality in the media. I will not go into that question here, but it is useful to ask to which qualities or features the book owes such a success.

The reception of books (the way the audience receives and interprets them) has always been an obscure domain in the study of Indonesian literature. Publishers as well as critics and scholars used to know virtually nothing about the public and its taste. It happens that now we have some precious material in the form of the multiple blogs and other websites relating to literature, notably the website *Goodreads*, entirely devoted to comments upon books. Regarding *Pulang*, almost 2,600 subscribers took the trouble to rate the book (by simply giving it a number of stars) and 321 of them (as in June 2015) have posted a comment (between a few words and one page or more).<sup>11</sup>

These readers are very young: most were children in 1998; their parents were young in 1965. Some state that they have learned everything about 1965 and 1998 from the book. On the whole, their comments are hyperbolic. Several readers make a comparison with the aforementioned *Amba* as well as with Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Bumi Manusia* (the

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<sup>11</sup> See [www.goodreads.com/book/show/16174176-pulang](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/16174176-pulang).

highest literary comparison by today's standards). Many female readers have cried. The most frequent comment is the appraisal of the combination of history and romance.

The author, it is true, has a real talent as a storyteller. The book reads very easily; it is interesting, engaging, a real page-turner. The novel, particularly the second and third parts, reminds to TV series (*sinetron*)—and perhaps it will be the source of an excellent *sinetron*—: many vivid dialogues, much movement, many emotions, sentiments as solid as concrete, five love stories, two *coups de foudre*, three separations, four main characters (Dimas, Vivienne, Lintang, Alam) who are absolutely gorgeous.<sup>12</sup>

The characters are attractive, the background is for a large part exotic or unusual (France, the milieus of exiles and *tapol*'s, riots in Jakarta), the allusions to the atrocities in Indonesia add a political tinge, whereas the discontinuous temporal structure (the narrative incessantly jumps forwards and backwards) and the multiplicity of voices (one omniscient narrator, plus Hananto, Dimas, Vivienne, Lintang, Alam, and Bimo) and media (narratives, letters, telephone conversations, tales) maintain a constant variation; gliding from one protagonist to another (Dimas, Vivienne, Lintang, Alam) is also a factor of variation. There is very little stylistic difference in the diction of the narrators<sup>13</sup>, but they do not say the same things: they see the situation from different angles. All have their gaze fixed on Indonesia, and the picture of the situation becomes increasingly vivid when the narrative switches successively from Dimas to Vivienne, to Lintang, and to Alam.

*Goodreads* contributors have admired the author's talent: praises of the style are numerous. However, they make a difference with a more difficult kind of literature: "Once again by comparison with *Amba*, it is more accessible to anyone. Not only to the literary maniacs"<sup>14</sup>. "The diction

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<sup>12</sup> "Is there in Pulang a protagonist with an ugly face and a brain lacking a few grams? There is none." (Dea Anugerah, *Goodreads*). "Another reason why I enjoyed reading is because there are many love stories. As a fan of romance and light books of the chick lit category that of course appealed a lot to me. Even more so Leila also describes her characters like romance writers do: everyone in the book is pretty or handsome. Tell me who would not like it!" (Nilam Puri, *Goodreads*). (Original comments in Indonesian.)

<sup>13</sup> They should not speak the same way; several *Goodreads* contributors have noticed it, e.g. Dea Anugerah: "As if it were Leila herself who was speaking in the novel, not the narrators she has invented." See also the comments by Pecandudongeng and Frida.

<sup>14</sup> Stebby, *Goodreads*, "maniak sastra" in the original.

used in the novel is ornate enough, but not exceedingly literary. I would lie if I said that the diction is second rate" (Kartika).

In short, *Pulang* is a solid novel, skilfully structured, full of romance and fury (many a reader have wept), but we may keep this in mind: *Pulang* is compared to chick lit, it is not "exceedingly literary", nor is it intended for the "literary maniacs". The average Indonesian reader transpires to be pretty articulate.

The subject of the novel is actually larger than the paratext says: it is not only about the generation of the exiles but also, if not more, about the following one. The author has faith in that generation, which is more or less her own (she is three years older than Alam) and which is represented here by Lintang, Alam, his friends, as well as three young diplomats in Paris who help Lintang to obtain her visa to Indonesia. They are conscious of addressing history in a new way. Alam is the main spokesman of this attitude. He wonders: "... who owns history? Who decides who is a hero and who a traitor? Who is it who determines the accuracy of events?" (288). And he answers himself: it is the government, of course, people in power, but with the complicity of the middle class:

It is probably easier for the middle class to choose to be part of the New Order system or to admire it than to criticize it. If necessary they pretend to be deaf or stupid while burying all the rotting corpses and perching on their graves like vultures. Just imagine the middle class, which is actually educated, being brave enough to speak up, surely they would end up like the signatories of the Petition of Fifty. (289)<sup>15</sup>

The supposed (stated) subject of the novel is the "homecoming" (*pulang*) of Dimas and his friends. This coming home turns out to be impossible for Dimas himself, but it is performed by Lintang: not only does she go to Indonesia, somewhat in a hurry, at the time her father reaches the end of his life and therefore the end of his hope to go home, but she discovers a second motherland, whereas he has lost his own. His homecoming has not

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<sup>15</sup> All translations from the novel are mine. This necessitates a clarification: The English version of *Pulang* (Chudori 2015) is an extremely free rendering of the text with numerous additions to it, as the translator has inserted into the body of the novel explanations usually found in footnotes, which tend to increase the political significance of the novel. As I needed more literal renderings of the passages quoted here, I used my own translations throughout. The Petition of Fifty was a statement of concern about the use of the Pancasila state ideology as a means to counter political adversaries by the Soeharto regime. The Petition was issued in 1980 and signed by 50 prominent Indonesian figures.



taken place, but another, unexpected, one has happened. This homecoming by Lintang takes historical proportions because she witnesses, in May 1998, the fall of Soeharto, the beginning of whose reign, after the putsch of 1965, had caused the exile of Dimas. By the continuity–biological, sentimental, intellectual–between the two main protagonists, the father and the daughter, the novel suggests that history is not a linear and inescapable process: it amends itself, it mends its wounds, it constructs itself. Leila Chudori herself has declared:

The use of the word '*pulang*' (going home) in this novel does not only represent Dimas Suryo or Lintang Utara, or even all of those who are not a part of the historical record. It represents all of us who want to take a step, however small, for Indonesia. (Chudori 2013b)

Lintang realises, symbolically, another dream of her father: she starts an affair with the son of Surti, the woman her father had desperately loved and lost. The two couples (Dimas-Surti and Lintang-Alam) are thus symmetrical (man-woman, woman-man). Lintang is not the duplicate or the prolongation of her father, she is his opposite or his complement, his mirror image, and it was therefore necessary that she would be a woman. She has two lovers (Nara and Alam), as her father had had two loves (Surti and Vivienne).<sup>16</sup>

In Dimas' love life there has been one Indonesian and then one French woman. Lintang logically follows the reverse course: her first lover is mixed French-Indonesian, the second one fully Indonesian. Lintang is struck by a *coup de foudre* for Alam, like her mother had experienced for her father. Lintang has to make the choice her father was not able to do. She knows it and she is about to do it, but the author decided not to say what this choice would be: the novel concludes with an open, enigmatic, ending (a few readers have complained about that indecision), which indicates that the act of choosing is more important than its result. That threefold realisation by Lintang of her father's dreams (the return home as a mark of identity, the end of the New Order, the achievement of love) builds a very efficient structure.

Beyond the two implications (political and sentimental) of the theme of going home that constitute the major plot, the novel brings together various themes that represent its philosophy, its morality. It is a modern bourgeois morality, which belongs to the young generation (Lintang, Alam, Bimo, and a few others) and which must appeal to the young public

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<sup>16</sup> There is another feature about Dimas which is almost unnoticeable (no reader alluded to it) and difficult to interpret: he is fifteen years older than Vivienne. This, too, is more or less reflected in Lintang: she is ten years younger than Alam.

that identifies with them; its main elements are: a sense of the nation and a will to better it; a participation in political life without ideological commitment; a taste for exoticism; the irrelevance of religion; independence vis-à-vis any authority (state, family, institutions); an attachment to family; a simple life style and modest wishes; moral virtues like courage, perseverance, generosity, compassion, and respect; an appreciation for arts and literature; sex without prohibition; and an idealising of gastronomy.

Four of these themes necessitate some comments: religion, gastronomy, exoticism, and sex. *Religion* is spectacularly absent. The only two characters about whom any kind of spirituality is mentioned are Vivienne and Dimas. Vivienne is simply from an atheist family and never raises any question at all. As regards Dimas, he feels a vague spiritual anxiety, which he formulates in the terms of one of his colleagues at the Antara Agency, Amir, a member of the Masjumi: there may be inside him a vacant spiritual space, outside any religion, a “bubble of emptiness” (*gelembung kekosongan*, 34), a secret place reserved for the encounter of one's self and God. This may be a genuine creation of the author, but it happens that it echoes a disquiet about God felt by Sobron Aidit (one of the Parisian exiles) that led him to convert to Protestantism (see Aidit 2005). This silence about religion has nothing to do, in the novel, with the question of communism; it is an element of the morality of the book, which may have contributed to its success.

*Gastronomy* is ubiquitous: everybody cooks, everybody savours. From the beginning to the end of the book, the menus, lists of dishes, ingredients and spices, culinary comments follow each other. A contributor to *Goodreads* posted a two-word comment on the book: “Makes hungry”.<sup>17</sup> Dimas has no political discourse whatsoever, but he cannot refrain from talking about cuisine, and he talks about it in poetic terms: “I treat my spices and cooking products as a painter treats his colours on the canvas. I treat my ingredients as a poet treats words in the body of his poems” (96); “For me, cooking a dish is as serious as composing a poem” (114). The restaurant has a vocation of representation, in which cooking plays a prominent role (“we must introduce ourselves not only through politics and literature, but more efficiently through gastronomy”, 97) and the restaurant's kitchen is Dimas' kingdom (“The kitchen of the Tanah Air is my kingdom, which nobody can meddle in”, 95).

The novel exemplifies the fashion of gastronomy (*seni kuliner*) that seized Indonesia a dozen years ago or so. It is a spectacular phenomenon that has produced vast quantities of publications (innumerable books of recipes, magazines, guides, including a remarkable guide of Jakarta

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<sup>17</sup> “*Bikin laper*”, Mada, *Goodreads*.

restaurants by none other than Laksmi Pamuntjak), TV shows, the establishing of restaurants, and all sorts of manifestations (courses, degustations, wine tasting, culinary tourism alias *wisata kuliner* or *wiskul*). A typically bourgeois phenomenon (peculiar to a well-off urban middle class) with a national, or even nationalist, connotation. Cooking goes beyond the family milieu to become eminently social, sentimental, and patriotic, a site of sharing, joy, and pride.

The cuisine is exclusively Indonesian. The unique occasion when the characters go to a French restaurant is a ludicrous episode, where Dimas has a beefsteak and drinks wine in an atmosphere so constraining and insufferable that he and Lintang will not talk to each other during six months afterwards. In other words, Dimas has French cuisine only once, and it is a catastrophe.<sup>18</sup> In a novel so much open to the exotic and the stereotypical as *Pulang* (see below), one cannot but wonder at the absence of French cuisine. Why miss that ultimate cliché? The reason is that nothing should come in the way of Indonesian cuisine. Everybody everywhere cooks, eats and delights in Indonesian food. There is something patriotic in the novel.

*Exoticism.* France is the country where the action of the first part takes place, but it is nearly absent. The word *Prancis* (France, French) is often repeated, but there is no description of Paris (and none of provincial towns or the country): no monuments, no architecture, no park or square, no subway, no street, no shop, no café, no place at all, no atmosphere (not even the Tanah Air Restaurant is described!); we could almost be in any big Western city.

Paris is reduced to a few symbolic names: the Père Lachaise cemetery and the Shakespeare and Company book shop (the only two that are concisely depicted), Beaubourg (systematically spelled *Beauborg*), the Sorbonne (it is one of the most important places: Dimas and Vivienne meet there, Vivienne teaches there, Lintang studies there; where is it? What does it look like? There is not one line of description), the Marais, Ile Saint-Louis, Café de Flore, that is, Paris seen from a tourist guide.<sup>19</sup> This has nothing to do with the everyday life of the Parisians or the exiles. Towards the end of the novel, in Jakarta, during a caricatural dinner at the home of a rich and snobbish Indonesian family (the Priasmoros), the

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<sup>18</sup> There is another non-Indonesian meal when a French woman (Vivienne) prepares lunch for her daughter (Lintang): she cooks *spaghetti alle vongole* (p. 209).

<sup>19</sup> And a bad one at that: the bookstore Shakespeare and Company, where Dimas shows where Hemingway, James Joyce and Ezra Pound used to sit (p. 192-3), had ceased to exist twenty-eight years before Dimas settled in Paris.

narrator easily pokes fun at wealthy, vain and pretentious Indonesians who buy fashion items in Paris. However, Leila Chudori herself falls into another form of fashion: her Paris is arty and trendy, but no less artificial.

The various narrators, especially Lintang, use a certain amount of French phrases, half of which are incorrect.<sup>20</sup> What does this indifference towards exactitude mean? The same thing as the fake Paris: the France the author wants to introduce to her readers is that of postcards and tourist guides, nothing else. What matters for the used French words and phrases is not accuracy (learning, knowing, understanding) but only signs of exoticism.

Displaying such an ignorance of French reality and replacing it with cheap clichés about the natural-born dandies French people are (“Whatever the season, we won’t be able to make a difference, because Parisians look so fashion-minded and incredibly attentive to their appearance”, 49), or on the cleanliness of Paris compared to the squalor of Jakarta (Dimas looking out of a window: “Comparing Paris and Jakarta is like comparing coconut milk with black gutter water”, 44), means using France as a fictitious, enchanting place, some *Negeri Antah Berantah* (“Never-Never Land”, the country of fairy tales), in opposition to the unique, tangible reality that is Indonesia.

There is not a single character either, in Paris, except the four friends, Vivienne, Lintang and Nara. A few names are quoted (Vivienne’s cousins or Lintang’s supervisor, for instance), but none of them has a real, individual character or plays a real role in the plot; it is France without the French.

It is not due to some sort of congenial incapability that French phrases are pidginised, the city of Paris is Tussaudised, and France is depopulated; it is deliberate. Did anyone ever investigate the exotic in Indonesian literature?

May 68 (which has such an important place in the advertising and the presentation of the book, and such a tiny place in the narrative) is utilised like a Brussels’ restaurant, like Saint-Emilion, like Shakespeare and Company, that is, as a cliché. May 68 is chic. May 68 is festive. The “students’ revolution” is supposed to be a moment without danger and without problem. Students gather at the Sorbonne on page 9, then May 68 is over on page 15; May 68 never happens in the novel: it is merely the backdrop of a love story and the topic of two silly remarks by Dimas and Alam (10, 304).

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<sup>20</sup> Examples are: “Une Activiste Indonésienne qui a été Kidnappé Prend sa Parole”, p. 134, or “Tu veux s’évader de l’histoire?”, p. 136.

It is noteworthy that the paratext may sometimes have authority over the text. The blurb, the cover illustration and the author's "Final remarks" in *Pulang* state that May 68 has a part in the book, and readers believe it does (*Goodreads* contributors comment on it); none of the articles and reviews I came across has noticed the artificiality of May 68.

May 68, however, is more than a fashionable landmark. It serves a specific purpose in the narrative. Apart from the fact that it seems to underscore the political dimension of the novel, it serves for obliterating the fifteen years the authentic exiles spent in Asia (see below).

As the last theme of this bourgeois morality, *sexual morality* is extremely free: young bachelors have affairs—in the case of Alam numerous, short, and without love commitment—with the blessing of their parents. There is no exception. *Goodreads* contributors are split: several female readers were shocked and protested against what they regard as excessive liberty and vulgarity ("The political story, already too tenuous, is hidden under love stories that are described in quite a vulgar way, as if ignoring existing norms and habits", Kurnia Aprilia), but others, on the contrary, wrote positive comments, e.g.:

A celebration of the liberty of the body. Seeing intercourse not as something sacred, but a mechanical, plastic and hormonal movement of the creature named human being. This is not wrong. Not entirely wrong. That's the way the times are. And literature is basically a reflection of the time the writer is living in. (Stebby)

There is, however, one moral limit to that liberty: one has to be honest; cheating is bad. Lintang, for instance, has a bad conscience when she starts an affair with Alam without being able to clear matters with her former lover Nara; her father writes to her and says she has to make a choice (466). But there are two characters, and two only, who are described as immoral and guilty in this regard: they are Hananto and Nugroho, that is, the only two characters who are suspected to be communists in the book. Moreover, Hananto's excuse for cheating on his wife (twice expressed, 39, 68) muddles lust and political concepts; he tells Dimas: "Surti is my wife and my companion in life. With Marni, I feel the burning lust of the proletarian class" (39). The remark is so insulting for Surti (and for the novel's morality) that Dimas knocks him down with a punch to the jaw. Hananto's remark reflects his incapacity to respect and even understand the nobility of somebody like Surti; according to Dimas:

There was something about Surti, perhaps her nobility and her beauty, that felt so 'elevated' in Hananto's eyes that he would never be able to reach it. Something so sublime, which he identified as 'bourgeois', that made him

uneasy and defensive, and then play around with other women in Triveli. (68-9)

Hananto is radically condemned in a moral (literary, symbolical) way: he has stolen his friend's fiancée (Surti was engaged with Dimas), he shamelessly cheats on his wife, and he translates the opposition "bourgeoisie vs. proletariat" as "family vs. sex". Nugroho represents a half-tone of that condemnation: he also has stolen a friend's loved one, but he is not guilty because that friend had not declared himself (Risjaf had not proposed to Rukmini); he also cheats on his wife ("like Hananto he liked to hop from one bed to another", 88), but this is not elaborated upon.

*Pulang* tells the story of the Indonesia Restaurant opened by Indonesian exiles in Paris in December 1982. Everything in the novel is slightly, very slightly, different from reality, but everything is transparent. The name of the restaurant in the novel is Tanah Air (Homeland) instead of Indonesia, the address 90 rue de Vaugirard instead of 12, the date of its opening is the 12<sup>th</sup> (instead of 14<sup>th</sup>) December 1982.<sup>21</sup> Both restaurants (the actual one and the fictitious one) consist of two storeys; both have cultural activities; both are financed through loans from friends; both are managed as cooperatives; both have French people involved in the management; both are victims of an attempt at extortion; both owners receive death threats via telephone; both are visited by the French police following a false accusation by the Indonesian Embassy; both are visited by a former "comrade" who has become an army informer; both are the subject of a long article in the Jakarta press (by one Armantono Bayuaji in the novel, by Arief Budiman in reality) that provokes a scandal; both are forbidden places for the employees of the Indonesian Embassy.

Thus, the authentic facts utilised by the author are numerous, and the changes she has made are minor. One of these changes, however, is not innocent: in reality, the exiles received phone calls<sup>22</sup> from a so-called Komando Jihad, which uttered death threats. This, in the novel, has been replaced by calls from a man breathing heavily in the phone (which, in France, at that time, was exclusively the fact of sexually obsessed men harassing women), so that the Muslim connotation has been eliminated.

Leila Chudori has never denied that the restaurant whose story she tells is the authentic "Indonesia" restaurant, nor that the said restaurant had

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<sup>21</sup> The 12<sup>th</sup> is the date of Leila Chudori's birthday.

<sup>22</sup> These phone calls are referred to by both Sobron Aidit (*Kisah Intel dan Sebuah Warung*) and JJ Kusni (*Membela Martabat*), each of them saying that they received them personally.

been established by known people whose names she quotes, but she decided to replace these authentic figures by four fictitious characters of her own creation. It seems she never found it necessary to justify that decision, and no one ever found it necessary to question it. This, however, does not go without saying. The book is not the romanced story of something that happened, as there are romanced biographies; it is a mere and simple invention; it is the attribution of a creation (the restaurant) to somebody else, and this reflects a surprising flippancy. Had Leila Chudori been telling the story of the Shakespeare and Company bookstore she mentions repeatedly, would she have dared to fictionalise it as being created by someone other than Sylvia Beach? Most probably not. What is it that allows the exiles of the restaurant to be discarded without a word of excuse? What makes them so easily disposable? Or is it undesirable?

At first sight, this adaptation seems the fruit of a surprising lack of respect: the authentic figures are not worthy of literature; their experience, culture, temperament, ideas, and tastes are not interesting enough; it is necessary to replace them by the author's fantasies. But there is more to it. To ignore facts and individuals in such a way, there must be some imperative necessity. The distortion of reality is no coincidence, it answers some purpose or need.

The Indonesia Restaurant was opened by a group of friends, four of whom played a prominent role: Umar Said, Sobron Aidit, Budiman Sudharsono, and Kusni Sulang. The author replaced them by four fictitious characters: Dimas Suryo, Nugroho Dewantoro, Tjai Sin Soe, and Mohammad Risjaf. There is no univocal equivalence between one and the other. Dimas Suryo is not Umar Said or Sobron Aidit. He draws partly from Umar Said (he attends the International Organisation of Journalists in Santiago de Chili in September 1965; he publishes the bulletin *Tahanan Politik*; he works at the Ministry of Agriculture) as well as from Sobron Aidit (he is the cook; he is appealing to women), but he also has features that belong neither to Umar nor to Sobron (he marries a French woman; he never gets back to Indonesia alive). As for Nugroho, he draws from Sobron the fact that he practices acupuncture, while his affair with a patient, the wife of a Swiss policeman, recalls the fact that Sobron once treated the wife of a police chief in Mulhouse.<sup>23</sup>

In order to describe the milieu of exiles with veracity, Leila Chudori claims to have researched that topic over a period of six years and examined the personality of the four figures very thoroughly: she has read some of the autobiographical writings by Sobron Aidit, JJ Kusni, Ibrahim Isa, and Ibarruri Putri Alam, and she has met and talked with those four

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<sup>23</sup> See "Madame Eliane Albert" in Sobron Aidit, *Cerita dari Tanah Pengasingan*.

authors plus Umar Said and Djoko Sri Moeljono. "What I have taken from their stories are the feelings and psyche of a political exile" (Chudori 2013b).<sup>24</sup>

As the author wanted to erase the personality of the actual founders of the restaurant and replace them by fictitious characters, one would suppose she should indeed analyse what in their biographies and personalities was essential and could not be eliminated.

The Four Pillars<sup>25</sup> and more generally the exiles are particularly well known because many of them have published books, more specifically autobiographical ones. These are of various kinds: autobiographies like that of Ibarruri Putri Alam, memoirs like those of Umar Said, partial memories like those of JJ Kusni, autobiographical short stories like those of Sobron Aidit (he published hundreds of them), autobiographical novels like those of Asahan Alham, that is, all in all, a considerable amount of documentary material. The exiles in Europe were not many, perhaps about 500, but in their majority (at the start, in 1965) they were students and intellectuals prone to write: during the years 1988 to 2015, they published about 120 books, 42 of which are autobiographical in nature. Those who have published memoirs, memories or autobiographies are the following: Sobron Aidit, Ibarruri Putri Alam, Asahan Alham, Ali Chanafiah, Francisca Fanggidaej, A.M. Hanafi, Ibrahim Isa, Mawie Ananta Jonie, JJ Kusni, Tatiana Lukman, Waruno Mahdi, Syarkawi Manap, Basuki Resobowo, Umar Said, Waloejo Sedjati, Utuy Tatang Sontani, and Soeprijadi Tomodihardjo.

These people share the destiny of exiles, but they have known different routes and they have (or had), of course, various personalities. From the exceptional amount of documents they have left, particularly those written by the Four Pillars, it is possible to extract what Leila Chudori calls "the feelings and psyche of a political exile". It seems to me that they share five main characteristics: a) communism, b) a sojourn of about fifteen years in Asia, c) the obsession of going back to Indonesia, d) the final decision, after all, not to go back, e) a certain way of life. What did the author of *Pulang* make of all of this? Let us consider these points one by one.

a) Communism. Broadly speaking, it is because they were communists that they found themselves in foreign countries in September 1965; it is

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<sup>24</sup> Apart from the persons already mentioned above, Ibrahim Isa is an exile in the Netherlands, Ibarruri Putri Alam is an exile in Paris, and Djoko Sri Moeljono is an ex-tapol from Buru.

<sup>25</sup> In the novel, the four men who open the Tanah Air restaurant are called its "four pillars" (*empat pilar Tanah Air*). I will use the same phrase below to designate the authentic founders of the Indonesia Restaurant.



because they were communists that they stayed abroad and became exiles; and they remained communists afterwards. This is fundamental. Certain exiles have remained very much committed to politics, others have called into question their ancient convictions, some have even formulated a condemnation of communism; many regard themselves as left-wing nationalists or Soekarnoists rather than communists. In general, however, it remains that the lives and commitment of the exiles have constantly been linked with communism. Whereas there is not one single communist in the novel.

Among the exile community in France and the Netherlands there were four members of the family of D.N. Aidit, the secretary general of the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party): his two younger brothers, Sobron Aidit and Asahan Aidit (alias Asahan Alham), and his two daughters, Ibarruri Putri Alam (a.k.a. Ibarruri Sudharsono, after the name of her husband) and Ilya. In the novel, the real actors being replaced by fictitious characters resulted in the magic omission of the name Aidit. Probably by chance, nothing premeditated, but a very convenient one.<sup>26</sup>

There is one character in the book, and one only, who is associated with communism: Hananto. (Nugroho, in every point of view, is a pale replica of Hananto, a kind of substitute; his proximity with the managing group of the Antara news agency makes one think that he belongs to the left, but nothing is said of his adhesion to any ideology, party or organisation; his moustache (“his Clark Gable moustache”) is mentioned a dozen times, but his political ideas not once). Hananto is arrested by the military in the prologue of the novel; nothing is said of the circumstances of his detention, and he is executed two years later, in mid-May 1970. We know nothing either of his past activities or his possible adhesion to the PKI. He probably was not a member of the Party but may have been a member of LEKRA.<sup>27</sup> His wife (Surti) herself never knew anything of his political activities: she starts her testimony in front of Lintang’s camera with these words:

I decided to marry Hananto Prawiro in Jakarta in 1953 because of love and conviction. I knew Hananto as a responsible man who would love his

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<sup>26</sup> The name Aidit was also suppressed from the bibliography at the end of the book, by consequence of a misquotation, deliberate or not, of Ibarruri Putri Alam’s title: the book, published six years before *Pulang*, is entitled *Roman Biografis Ibarruri Putri Alam Anak Sulung D.N. Aidit*, but it is quoted in the appendix of *Pulang* as *Kumpulan Catatan Ibarruri* (p. 454). The name Aidit no less magically reappears in the English version of the novel, as the result of an invention by the translator (see Chudori 2015, 66).

<sup>27</sup> He once takes Dimas to the headquarters of LEKRA, p. 36.

family. Of course, I never knew anything of his political aspirations, even less about his activities. (379-80)

Here is thus a “left-wing” man who hides his political opinions and affiliation from his wife (who, we are told, is an educated and intelligent woman).

Hananto, as said before, is morally condemned for his sexual behaviour: he is (literarily speaking) punished by death. Nugroho undergoes a half-measure of this condemnation and punishment: his behaviour is also sexually immoral, but in a minor way; his wife asks for a divorce and marries a very bad person (the man abuses her son); Nugroho's “punishment” is exile instead of death.

As for the other pillars of the restaurant, nothing is told about Risjaf, while Tjai has always been uninterested in politics (“Tjai was the most apolitical among us”, 7). Dimas never wanted to commit himself. Hananto once told him: “You refuse to become a member of any mass organisation, even less a party. You refuse to take sides. You criticise Lekra and the signatories of the Cultural Manifesto as well” (42). Dimas is regarded as a leftist simply because of his relations. To his daughter (Lintang) he says: “... People regarded me as guilty of ‘political fornication’ with the Communist Party, Lekra or I don’t know what group...” (234), whereas he always refused to choose. About the period preceding his departure to Santiago he states: “I never felt like really belonging to the leftist spectrum like them [i.e. Hananto and Nugroho]. I was a free cell” (68). Finally, in the written message he addresses to Lintang (she is in Jakarta) a short time before dying, which is a kind of intellectual and sentimental will, he declares again:

Father doesn't want you to be somebody unable to choose, like me. Father was fascinated by a lot of things and wandered among many kinds of thought, without any final conviction. The only one I trusted was myself, my desire to keep sailing continuously. Or to use Maman's vocabulary, I was flying like the tern that doesn't want to alight. As a result, fate chose for me. I didn't decide of my lot. (446)

Not only is there not a single communist among the exiles in the novel, but communism as an ideology and a system of government is summarily condemned by three characters. The first one is Dimas: after spending some time (one year or a little more) with Nugroho and Risjaf in Desa Merah (Red Village), a commune in the suburbs of Beijing, Dimas remarks:

Besides observing collective work, we came to understand the communal system they were implementing, that is, a highly structured agricultural system by which farmers had to deliver part of their production to the state. Seeing that way of life, I became all the more convinced that Marxist theory, which was so enchanting originally, was in fact only interesting in theory. (73)

And again:

After three years in Peking<sup>28</sup>, which required that we perpetually raised our fists and praised Chairman Mao—‘Long live Chairman Mao! Long live Chairman Mao!’—while studying agricultural production in several villages, I got fed up with the absolutism of the Cultural Revolution that was forced upon the masses. I knew that the ever merry Mas Nug and the ever obedient Risjaf actually felt the same concerns. (76)

The second is a young Indonesian diplomat who has studied in Canada. According to him:

Anybody studying politics seriously has to read all kinds of books about politics and economy, including the works of Marx, Engels, and the much more modern leftist writers after them. But we also had to read other kinds of political thought, of course. And precisely because we read, we understood why communism failed in many countries. (265)

And the third one is Alam (Surti’s son), who tells Lintang:

Communism is only a convenient word to be made into a common enemy. Except for those who did it secretly, Indonesian students didn’t read Karl Marx’s works or their commentaries because of the governments’ interdiction. That paranoia actually drove the youth to look for those books (...). Even if they knew about it, it is a theory that failed everywhere. Nobody would be interested. I am not. Neither is Bimo. And not because of what befell our families, but precisely because we read them as students and we used our brains. (369)

Reducing the political reflexion of the exiles, and particularly that of people like Umar Said, Sobron Aidit, Budiman Sudharsono and Kusni Sulang, to twenty lines condemning Marxism and Maoism is a very bold move and a very efficient one: communism is entirely disposed of in the novel. But readers make no comment about this because they accept it as reality (see, however, the article by Alwi A. Ardhana).

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<sup>28</sup> See above note 8.

b) In the lives of the exiles in Europe, the sojourn in Asia is an essential stage. First, because it lasted very long, about an average of fifteen years, and it comprises extraordinary experiences; second, because it marked a new stage in their political commitment towards their country; and third, because it modified their ideological position. The Four Pillars are somewhat representative in that matter: Umar Said spent seven years in China, Sobron Aidit eighteen years in China, Budiman Sudharsono thirteen years in China, one year in Cambodia, and one year in Macau, Kusni Sulang twelve years in China and seven years in Vietnam. Other exiles spent similar periods in the USSR, North Korea, Cuba, Albania, and other socialist countries: for instance, Kuslan Budiman spent five years in China and twenty years in the USSR, Utuy Tatang Sontani six years in China and eight years in the USSR, Chalik Hamid twenty five years in Albania, I.G.A. Asrama Manuaba forty years in Hungary, Waloejo Sedjati five years in North Korea and eleven years in the USSR.

Those in the USSR and some other countries were “only” involved in propaganda against the New Order, but those in China, Vietnam, Burma, and Cambodia, that is the majority, were not only submitted to endless sessions of auto-criticism and rehabilitation in the countryside, they were also following a military and ideological training intended to prepare them to return clandestinely to Indonesia and make a revolution. How are we to imagine Umar Said or Sobron Aidit (for instance) in such a role? It is such an extraordinary experience that it is difficult to conceive its theoretical and historical dimensions as well as its material conditions. The adventures of those people in actual life are infinitely more fantastic than all of Leila Chudori's fantasies.

Once again, of the historical experiences nothing is left in the novel: Tjai spends that period with his family in Singapore, while the three others (Dimas, Nugroho, Risjaf) spend two years and three months, from the end of 1965 to the beginning of 1968, in China. They work about a year at the *Peking Review*, then one more year or so in village communes where nothing is said about what they are doing—nothing else: there is no mentioning of any training or revolution, and as we have seen, from that experience they draw a summary condemnation of communism.

The novel gives an enigmatic precision about their activity: “A few groups of Indonesians residing in Peking were also practicing *Dong Bei Fang*, which means something like “facing the Southeast”” (73). Is this a clue about what they are doing, some kind of ideological training perhaps? No, this is a misinterpretation of information found in Ibarruri Putri Alam's memoirs, who explains very plainly that, after visiting parts of China, she joined the Desa Merah, whose original name was “Dong Bei

Wang (read: tung pei wang, that is, 'Facing the North East')" (Alam 2006, 151).

Let us ignore the fact that moving from China to France is child's play (77), which is far from reality, the four friends arrive in France at the very beginning of 1968 (Tjai has come from Singapore). This allows not only for brushing away the sojourn in China, but also the integration, or pretence to integrate, the "May 1968 revolution" into the narrative, but from an historical point of view this is nonsense. The exile community came to France much later. At the beginning of 1968, it seems, there were only two exiles in Paris: Bismar Marzaini (alias Puar) and Jusfiq Hadjar, who have never mixed with the Restaurant exiles.

c) The obsession of going back to Indonesia. When staying in China and other Asian communist countries, the exiles had one idea in mind: going home. The slogan of the time in China was: "Ready to fight, straight home!"<sup>29</sup> When finally staying in Western Europe, they still had exactly the same idea in mind: to go home, but without belligerence anymore; they were older, the political situation had changed, their own position was totally different. Their aim was to reside and survive in the host countries (The Netherlands, France, Sweden, West Germany, and others) until they would be allowed to go and settle back home. None of them at the time desired to really settle in Europe and adapt. All of them (with the exceptions that accompany every rule) were anticipating the moment they would be able to go back. The entire literature they have produced is a very clear indication of this: they wanted to be recognised as Indonesian citizens and accepted back into the country. When they refused (or were prevented) to go back to Indonesia in late 1965 or early 1966, their passports were confiscated and their citizenship *de facto* cancelled. They lost their formal identity and became stateless. Their main concern during the following more or less forty years was to regain that identity.

Once again, nothing of this is left in the novel. Among the four friends, Dimas is the only one who does not feel at home in France and wishes to go back to Indonesia. The three others have accepted the idea of settling in France for good (204-5).

d) The final decision, after all, is not to go back but to end their days in Europe and visit Indonesia with the status of foreign tourists. In the novel, only one character among the Four Pillars (Risjaf) obtains a visa to Indonesia, where he goes on a visit (about which nothing is said). The others, without any reason, are never granted visa. This again is contrary to reality. As far as I know, not a single exile was repeatedly refused a

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<sup>29</sup> "*Siap tempur, segera pulang!*" Thanks to Kusni Sulang for this information, pers. comm., 24 June 2015.

visa. All of them (or the vast majority) returned to Indonesia as foreign visitors under the protection of foreign consulates. The confrontation took place, and on the whole it was very painful. Several exiles have written moving pages about the visits they paid to the graves of their parents and the family reunions, but many of those reunions were a cause for disappointment and new suffering. Sobron Aidit has told many times of his several visits to Indonesia,<sup>30</sup> for instance the fact that the first time, in 1993, his brother persuaded him not to visit his parents' graves on his home island (Belitung), as it was too dangerous, and how, the second time, he did visit Belitung, but not one of his family and friends dared to invite him to their homes, and then during the following visits he was constantly watched by informers, and how, in 1996, he was denounced in the press as a member of a forbidden leftist party.

And then there happened what, from a literary point of view, is an unacceptable anti-climax: the exiles decided not to go home for good. With regards to the Four Pillars, such was the case of Umar Said and Sobron Aidit. Budiman Sudharsono died too soon (in an accident) to have to choose. Kusni Sulang is the only one who went home. And this does not mean that one exile out of four returned home, as the general proportion is much smaller.

Thus, in reality, the dream of going home transpired to be an illusion: the exiles had no place left in their own country; they chose to stay in their host countries rather than to accept an extremely uncomfortable situation in their country of origin. This ending is unacceptable in the logic of the novel, which remains oriented towards a homecoming until the end. The author therefore has chosen to keep the dream intact (the exiles do not visit Indonesia, the confrontation does not take place; behind the closed border of the country they still have, intact, an ideal place) and to make the going home to be performed by the second generation.<sup>31</sup>

e) A certain way of life, a few elements of which are: chauvinism and an attachment to Indonesian culture, simplicity in everyday life, a spirit of mutual aid, and a constant concern for Indonesia. These require a few comments.

*Chauvinism.* The exiles lived mainly among themselves and did not try to integrate into the European societies where they had found refuge. Most did not speak the local language properly and never read books in that

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<sup>30</sup> Notably in *Kisah Intel dan Sebuah Warung* (Aidit 2000).

<sup>31</sup> Incidentally, the scene of the burying of Dimas in Jakarta is illogical because it supposes that, suddenly and almost instantly, a visa could be obtained for Dimas' body and for his three friends, while that was impossible during all the preceding chapters.

language. The entire literature they produced (literary works, autobiographical writings, essays, journals) was in Indonesian, intended for an Indonesian audience. They never addressed the societies they were living in or the international public. They were not laureates of Western universities; they rarely used English and had no taste for English poetry; making them quote Shakespeare, Keats, and Lord Byron by heart (e.g. 53, 175) is inappropriate. Sobron Aidit may never have set foot in the oft-quoted Shakespeare and Company bookstore; he believed it owed its name to the fact that Shakespeare once visited it (see Aidit and Kurniawan 2007, 42). The Four Pillars (of course) did not drink wine, except on exceptional occasions. In the novel, Dimas and his friends do not stop drinking spirits (e.g. 51, 71), wine (e.g. 69, c.88, 102, 117, 171) and beer (e.g. 26, 97, 100, 120, 121); they used to drink alcohol even before coming to France: when in Chile they learn the news of the September 30 putsch, they stop sleeping and eating, and gulp down large quantities of wine (69), then they join Risjaf in Havana and drown their sorrows in rum (71). Today, in 2015, a number of Indonesians of a certain class are accustomed to drinking wine, but how many were in 1965? It is difficult to imagine for what reason Leila Chudori invented this: is it chic for an Indonesian exile to drink wine? Is it a mark of a loss of identity? Is it a mere cliché without significance?

*Simplicity.* The episode of the restaurant in Brussels (Dimas accepting an invitation to dinner—from his daughter’s lover—in Brussels, some three hundred kilometres from Paris, in a posh restaurant where he has to wear a jacket and a tie to have a beefsteak and drink wine) is shocking by its lack of verisimilitude (nobody would have invited Umar Said or Sobron Aidit to such a pretentious, far away, and expensive place, and they would never have accepted the invitation either), and the same is true about Dimas living in an apartment in the (chic and expensive) Marais. By choice as much as by necessity, these people had the utmost simple way of life. But simplicity is not destitution either. The author introduced the—so romantic—idea that the exiles, at the beginning, could hardly survive: saying that they stayed in “dirty and rotten” (*kumuh, busuk*) flats and could not live on the allocation given them by the French government is nonsense: during that period the French state devoted considerable efforts to admit and accommodate hundreds of thousands of refugees from the whole world. Saying that they were ill-treated, just for the sake of using another cheap cliché, means to have no interest and no respect for historical truth. One of the exiles in Paris, Waloejo Sedjati, has dwelt upon his gratefulness towards France: “How is it possible that refugees who smuggle themselves in without visa are received with such luxury? [...] This is much more

luxurious than the students' lodgings at the Lumumba Friendship University [in Moscow], where people were invited as friends". (Sedjati 2013, 287)

*Mutual aid.* The exiles used to help each other across Europe, paying frequent visits from one country to the other. All together, they made up a dense network, thanks to which the Restaurant could be financed. They also helped the families of the ex-tapols back in Indonesia in various ways. They were very much preoccupied by the fate of the tapols: the way they had been treated in gaol, the tortures, the exactions, the endless humiliations. A few exiles have explicitly compared their own situation with that of the tapol: could they honestly complain when they were "only" exiles, while their comrades had been subject to the most unspeakable treatment?

*A constant concern for Indonesia.* They collected political information about Indonesia and disseminated it among themselves (Dimas does so in the novel, like Umar Said used to do in real life; Budiman Sudharsono and Ibarruri Putri Alam were also publishing a news bulletin). They constantly talked about Indonesia and politics. During the 1980s-1990s the exiles published more than ten cultural journals, some devoted to opinions and literature, others to opinions only (e.g. *Kreasi*, *Mimbar*, *Arena*, *Arah*, *Kancah*, *Pembaruan*). These journals, all in Indonesian and entirely devoted to Indonesia, reflect clearly their concern for Indonesia, particularly from a political point of view. In the novel, during thirty years in France the exiles do not have a single conversation about politics. If we consider the major preoccupation of the Four Pillars and that of their fictitious equivalents, it is clear that the author has substituted gastronomy for politics. She has distorted the identity and the way of life of the Four Pillars to such an extent as to transform them into nice, attractive and inoffensive stateless petit bourgeois.

Too many inventions, inaccuracies, distortions and clichés end-up with building a forgery. Leila Chudori wrote this novel with the intention to evoke the fate of the exiles in Paris. The readers have read the book as reflecting an historical reality, be they sophisticated readers like Goenawan Mohamad and Pam Allen<sup>32</sup> or less informed to literary analysis ones like the *Goodreads* contributors. The point of view of the latter group is interesting: many praise the historical value of the novel; they embarked on it as it was supposedly loaded with history, stating they were totally ignorant of the relevant episodes and most open to the idea of discarding

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<sup>32</sup> Goenawan Mohamad, "Catatan Pinggir: 1965"; Pam Allen, "Leila S. Chudori's novel *Pulang*".



altogether their New Order education and to accept a new image of the communists without any prejudice:

I am history crippled, so I read this without any distortion from right or left and actually with a fear as high as the National Monument that I would not be able to finish the book. Frankly, I only borrowed it to show off, to look clever, you know. (Zulfy, *Goodreads*)

All in all, they feel they have learned a lot, without questioning the author's point of view, that is, her knowledge of the facts and her integrity as an intellectual.<sup>33</sup>

The novel is thus almost unanimously received as a serious historical document, whereas I hope it has become clear by now that, as regards the personalities and the lives of the exiles in Europe, it is a complete masquerade. The reason for this distortion is simple: the exiles still have no place in Indonesia.

During the days of the New Order, that is to say until 1998, there was virtually no counter-discourse on history and the interpretation of 1965. There was a political opposition, but the military regime had no consideration for law and human rights, and there was no space for debating. There were people who, defying any rational calculation, chose to challenge the forces in power, many of them ending in gaols and some in body bags, but the spirit of the time is rather better reflected by the participation of intellectuals like Arifin C. Noer, Umar Kayam, and Arswendo Atmowiloto in the filming and writing (in that order) of "Pengkianatan G30S/PKI", one of the main tools of the government's anti-communist propaganda.<sup>34</sup>

Immediately after the fall of Soeharto, initiatives started to flow from all directions in favour of a reassessment of historical facts and of measures being taken to rehabilitate the victims of the New Order. Numerous debates, both formal and informal (part of it on the Internet) were instituted; a great number of books were published; associations were created; a search for mass graves was initiated; and recently the two films by Joshua Oppenheimer (*The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence*) created a stir inside as well as outside Indonesia.

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<sup>33</sup> With two interesting exceptions, however: Titus estimates that the novel is unfair towards the New Order, and Kurnia Aprilia thinks that the author shows a bias in favour of the communists, while the historical contents of the novel is much too thin to justify such an opinion. I have already mentioned the criticism of Dea Anugerah and Alwi A. Ardhana.

<sup>34</sup> See Moriyama and van der Putten, this volume.

A few initiatives came from the government, notably under the presidency of Abdurrahman Wahid: he announced his wish to apologise to the victims and to abrogate Decree No. 25 of 1966 of the People's Consultative Assembly (Tap MPRS no. 25/1966), which had dissolved the Communist Party and forbidden the dissemination of Marxist and communist theories, but Wahid's declaration provoked such a violent reaction within the government itself and in society at large that he had to renounce both intentions. Among others, the opposition took the form of an Anti-Communist Front (Front Anti-Komunis Indonesia, FAKI) created at the initiative of the National Assembly Speaker, the powerful Amien Rais.

The Nahdatul Ulama, a huge Islamic mass organisation that Abdurrahman Wahid once headed, and that had played a prominent role in some of the massacres of 1965-1966, took specific measures towards atonement and reconciliation. Other Muslim organisations, however, came to the front of a renewed anti-communist action.

As soon as 1998, various associations asked for the constitution of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Komisi Kebenaran dan Rekonsiliasi), but the opposition in political circles was such that its creation was ordered by a decree of the Parliament in 2004 only and with such distortions (the rehabilitation of the victims was associated with amnesty of the torturers) that the said associations had to protest; then the Supreme Court simply abrogated the law in 2006. The whole project was abandoned.

The current President of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, in turn formulated his intention to apologise to the victims of 1965, but renounced it as recently as September 2015. The two latest authoritative books about the history of Indonesia, both produced by leading historians under the auspices of the government, ten and fourteen years respectively after the fall of the New Order (*viz.* Poesponegoro et al. 2008, and Abdullah and Lopian 2012), have had to deal with the difficult question of the 1965 putsch, the massacres that followed it, and the responsibility of various factions for these events. They simply chose not to mention the massacres altogether (see Suwignyo 2014).

2015 is the 50th anniversary of the putsch that marked the beginning of a dark period in the history of Indonesia. Many celebrations are being performed, most of them in favour of an effort for "truth and reconciliation", including an International People's Tribunal 1965 held in The Hague in November 2015.

The situation is thus improving, as it seems that more and more people are taking more and more initiatives in order to revise history—even though

there is no quantitative indicator to confirm such an assessment—but the situation is also, in a way, more and more worrying, as fifty years have passed since the events of 1965 and almost eighteen years since the end of the New Order, but it seems that the people in power still have no intention to reopen the file.

The participation of the PKI in the 1965 putsch, or even the whole master-minding of the putsch by the PKI, is indeed what the New Order elaborated upon and inscribed as an historical truth, but it is something that, in 1965, everybody was ready to believe and that has been dominating the collective subconscious until today. For a great number of people, probably the majority of the population, the Communist Party of Indonesia has always been one of the most dangerous enemies of the Republic. In 2015 the accusation of being a communist is still a powerful weapon and the evocation of the “communist threat” can be heard every day.

The success of *Pulang* is that of a subterfuge: the exiles seem to be rehabilitated; they are respectable people, sympathetic ones even, who have committed no crimes and no misdeeds; they are simply victims of a political situation that is today fortunately solved. But in fact, they are only acceptable if transformed into kind and inoffensive novel characters, stripped of every single one of the traits that shaped their lives and personalities.

The substitution of real people by fictitious characters results in total annihilation, thanks to which communism and so many other features of the exiles are disposed of. In writing “the novel of the exiles”, Leila Chudori has performed the suppression of all that characterises them, which in Indonesia is unacceptable still today.

This is not to say that Leila Chudori has deliberately manipulated her subject; she simply incarnates the spirit of the time. Whatever her personal opinions and her understanding of the situation, she documented herself on the exiles, then she eliminated what she believed to be improper, kept what she found interesting, and incorporated that into a *sinetron* plot (love, sex, family, cooking, and poetry). The novel shows that one can talk about the exiles, that they are no pariahs, that they are nice people. They can be reintegrated into the history of the nation, provided one erases their ideological and political dimensions (their affiliation to the PKI, their will to make a revolution, their fifteen-year stays in communist countries), underscore (and invent if necessary) their family-familiar dimension (love and cuisine) and, in short, transfigure them as harmless poets that the wind of history has carried to the adorable city of Paris, the upcoming

generation is ready to incorporate them into national history. Provided, in short, that they cook and make love, but stay away from politics.

Leila Chudori's discourse is a typically post-New Order discourse that has integrated the idea, spread out worldwide, that Marxism has not survived the fall of the communist bloc. Since 1998 an alternative discourse on 1965 has developed, the purpose of which is to deconstruct and replace the New Order's writing of history that has dominated the scene for thirty years. This new discourse, made of original documents together with historical and social studies, has already produced a great number of publications. In the literary domain, too, including fiction and autobiographical writings, publications are numerous. Besides the 42 autobiographical writings by exiles mentioned earlier, there are about twenty autobiographies by ex-tapols, the best known of whom are Pramodya Ananta Toer and Hersri Setiawan. Regarding the communities of exiles in Europe, a small bibliography is slowly growing, including notably the studies by David T. Hill (2010; 2014).

This all means that, in spite of all the above-mentioned fierce resistance, important work is being done in view of revising history and allowing society to cope with its past. In this context, Leila Chudori's novel marks a surprising regression, even more so because it comes from a section of society that displays ideals of tolerance, pluralism and progressivism. The novel is a good example of the ambiguous atmosphere prevailing today: there is an urge to know and assimilate history, but at the same time an impossibility to face it.

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CHAPTER FOUR

A NATION IN A STATE  
OF SUSPENDED DISBELIEF:  
THE CONSTRUCTION AND UNRAVELLING  
OF THE INDONESIAN MASSACRES  
OF 1965-66 AS A SITE OF MEMORY<sup>1</sup>

JAN VAN DER PUTTEN

**Introduction**

The dramatic and horrific events surrounding the transfer of power in Indonesia in the mid-1960s can be considered constituting a *lieu de mémoire*, a dynamic site of memory that was dominated by the official narrative of the New Order regime. Although the construction of the site was contested from the very start, it was only after another change of power in May 1998 that alternative versions were published and spread in Indonesia, albeit in limited numbers. The majority of these other accounts of what had happened in the mid-1960s were the stories told by those who were vanquished and/or composed by mediators sympathetic to their cause. In this volume a number of literary representations of these alternative narratives about this time are discussed. Pam Allen and Henri Chambert-Loir analyse the recent novels by Leila Chudori and Laksmi Pamuntjak, while Monika Arnez discusses Ahmad Tohari's well-known trilogy from the mid-1980s. In this chapter I focus on Indonesia's most popular film ever, which was produced by the New Order regime that, in close connection and cooperation with institutions of formal education, convinced millions of Indonesians of its verisimilitude and instilled them with a lingering sense of suspended disbelief. The film Treachery of the 30<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Henk Maier and Martina Heinschke for their thoughtful comments. Any mistakes contained in this chapter are of course my responsibility.

of September Movement/The Indonesian Communist Party (*Pengkhianatan Gerakan 30 S/PKI* (1984, henceforth *Treachery*) may be considered the apex of the regime-directed construction of a site where “memory crystallises and secretes itself”, which was fabricated at a time when the encompassing *milieu de mémoire* was violently and irreversibly erased (Nora 1989, 7).

Although there is little hope that the details will ever be unearthed, the tragic events surrounding the attempted overthrow of the Indonesian government on the eve of October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1965, are common knowledge and have been the topic of a number of academic studies.<sup>2</sup> Many of these studies have tried to disprove the official version of the events as propagated by the New Order regime in order to provide a firm political and moral foundation for the 32 years of its dominance. Despite a number of alternative narratives emphasising the fate of the victims rather than prolonging the victors’ narrative published after 1998, the New Order’s propaganda proves to have been extremely effective. As a result, these alternative stories are met with much resistance and disbelief, and insistently also with suspicion about the motives of the people who dare to come forward.<sup>3</sup>

The New Order narrative surrounding the transfer of power has thus become extremely well moored into the cultural memory of the Indonesian nation. However, unsurprisingly, sites of memory are not stable or fixed but need to be continually confirmed, enhanced and renewed by reiterating the narrative on different platforms, such as has been done during the New Order regime in annual commemoration rituals, dramatised re-enactments in schools, Pancasila upgrading courses, et cetera. In the introduction to their book on cultural memory, Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (2009, 2) contend that sites of memory are formed by dynamic processes of remembrance and forgetting in which people reconfigure their ideas about and position to the past, as well as their relation with the memory sites, which comprise collections of mediated narratives about the past in a

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<sup>2</sup> Some of the most thorough are Cribb 1991, Roosa 2006, and Kammen and McGregor 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Islamic groups held protests and blocked the main entrance of a venue where the Goethe Institute organised a series of talks and performances on the topic of “Indonesia and the World in 1965” in January 2011. The one-dimensional identification of communist with atheist and the involvement of Islamic organisations in the killings after the coup are still very sensitive topics and easy prey for groups who want to stir up a commotion (see Inside Story 28 April 2011 at <http://insidestory.org.au/indonesias-dangerous-silence>; see also McGregor 2007, 213).

continual process of renewal and change. The different media used for constituting these sites of memory or acts of remembering are interrelated and combined in different configurations, and show dynamics of their own. These dynamics not only pertain to technological innovations or social and economic frameworks, but also relate to the ways in which previous acts of remembering were represented in that particular medium (cf. Jones 2014, 31-33). For the film *Treachery*, for instance, it is germane to analyse its filmic representations in comparison with its direct predecessors in the Indonesian film scene (*Janur Kuning* 1979 and *Serangan Fajar* 1981), while also Joshua Oppenheimer's recent film *The Act of Killing* (2012, henceforth *TAOK*) inevitably is in direct conversation with *Treachery* as the most influential representation in the construction and perpetuation of this site of memory.

Erll and Rigney (2009, 3) also emphasise that the dynamics of cultural memory can only be fully understood if studied at the intersection of social and medial processes. Memories can only become part of a collective, cultural memory if they are mediated and distributed to others. Film is a particularly powerful medium in this process of remembering, but it has a particular problem with establishing the authenticity of the representation because of the predominance of the dramatised and romanticised fictional representations in films rather than more truthful narratives. A particular mechanism to enhance authenticity frequently used in film narratives is the authenticity of affect, by way of which the mediator seeks emotional response to involve the recipient not only cognitively but also affectively with the historical narrative. This can affect the viewer, so that s/he feels more connected to the narrative, but simultaneously also it may contain the danger of creating a "closed history" that does not elicit nor even allows for further reflection (Jones 2014, 41-42). In more general terms, like any other medium, film oscillates between *immediacy*, giving the recipient a sense of reality, of "how it really was" (cf. Welzer 2002, 189), and *hypermediacy*, reminding the viewer that it is all just a film (see Erll and Rigney 2009, 4). In this chapter I will explore some mechanisms of authenticity and also the interplay of remediation and premediation of memories in the film *Treachery*. The chapter first concisely discusses the social-historical context of the film, before analysing a few intriguing points in the film language and structure as deployed by the director in order to explain the reasons behind its success as a building block of Indonesian cultural memory. The chapter is concluded by a concise discussion of *TAOK* that is meant by its director as an intervention into the historical myth-making achieved by the film *Treachery*. The general argument here is that, by propagating the official version of the events, the



New Order regime kept the Indonesian nation in a stranglehold to perpetuate the nation's state of suspended disbelief surrounding the events of the mid-1960s.

### **Historical time frame**

In the 1970s the Soeharto regime ostensibly felt pressure mounting on his New Order regime. Student protests against the government had become more vigorous, imprisoned and exiled suspects of having communist sympathies were released at the end of the decade, and economic development was picking up, due to the booming oil revenues that increased the need for a stable society to attract foreign investments. The regime's anxieties were further exacerbated by severe criticism of a number of retired senior officers and statesmen who indicated their concern about the content of recent speeches of the president by issuing the *Petisi 50* in 1980. In this petition, 50 leading figures of the society urged Soeharto to reconsider his steps to regard Pancasila as a means to curb criticism of and opposition to his regime (see Jenkins 1984). The direct provocation of the president's ire was a walkout staged by a part of the Islamic PPP faction in parliament when the legislation for new Pancasila courses was discussed (McGregor 2007, 180).

After the parliament officially recognised the Manual for the Internalisation and Execution of the Pancasila (*Pedoman Penghayatan dan Pengamalan Pancasila*, henceforth P4) as part of the General Outline of the State's Course (Garis-Garis Besar Haluan Negara, GBHN) in 1978, the regime's policy to have the Indonesian people live their lives in accordance with the Pancasila state ideology could be further developed. A year later the Institute for the Development, Training and Implementation of P4 (Badan Pembinaan Pendidikan dan Pelaksanaan P4, abbreviated as BP7) was established, and the campaign to turn the Indonesian population into a community of loyal followers of Pancasila could take off. With immediate effect, all state officials were required to follow upgrading courses (the infamous and ubiquitous *penataran*), and soon afterwards P4 entered the curriculum of the educational system from the primary to the tertiary levels in the form of Moral Education of Pancasila (*Pendidikan Moral Pancasila*) and more *penataran*. Of course, other subjects taught at the schools, such as national history (in which the History of the National Struggle—*Pelajaran Sejarah Perjuangan Bangsa*—formed the most prominent part), were ensured to be all in accordance with and in support of the P4 principles.

One of the main ideologues of the New Order regime and designer of the national history textbooks was the head of the army history centre and professor of history at the Universitas Indonesia, Nugroho Notosusanto, whose role in the New Order propaganda machine has been thoroughly described and analysed by Katherine McGregor (2004, 2007). Two months after the attempted coup Nugroho already launched the first draft of the official Indonesian version of the events, pointing at the PKI and its chairman, D.N. Aidit, as masterminds of the coup and accusing certain quarters in the armed forces, particularly the air force, as the main assistants in its execution. A slightly revised version of this narrative was used for the initial design of the monument and a museum that were erected at the main “crime scene”, Crocodile Hole (*Lubang Buaya*). The later added dioramas in the museum and reliefs adorning the pedestal depicting the killings of the seven Heroes of the Revolution provide graphic details of the alleged torture members of the Pemuda Rakyat (communist youth groups) and Gerwani (Indonesian women organisation) were supposed to have inflicted on the army officers. Most infamously is the graphic representation of a frantic “fragrant flower dance” (*tarian harum bunga*) performed by sex-hungry, scantily-dressed women, a representation that was created during the campaign in the wake of the killings.<sup>4</sup> The emotional effects on visitors to the dioramas were further augmented by adding sound effects “geared towards creating an atmosphere of fear and trepidation” (McGregor 2007, 93).

After about a decade of constructing the site of memory by having built the monument and commemorating the events in several other ways, in the early 1980s the regime felt the need to reinvigorate its efforts to justify the massacres (cf. McGregor 2007, 91). Consequently, Notosusanto and his team transformed the official version of the events into the film script, using the same notions about the guilty party and limiting the narrative to a concise overview of the build up to the coup, the abduction and killing of the seven officers and the direct aftermath up to the state funeral of the heroes. In the same period a restructuring of the government took place that put the Ministry of Information under the aegis of the Coordinating Minister of Politics and Security (MenKoPolKam), thereby emphasising ideological interests and propagandistic functions with the national cinema, while the new Minister of Information (1978-82), General Ali Murtopo, further tightened censorship rules (Sen and Hill

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed description of the monument and museum at Lubang Buaya, see McGregor 2007, 68-104; see Wieringa 1998 and McGregor and Hearman 2007, for details about how women were coerced to issue witness statements about how they had danced naked and tortured the officers.

2000, 139-40). Moreover, Soeharto appointed one of his personal staff members, Brigadier-General Gufran Dwipayana, as the director of the National Film Production Company (PPFN) in 1978, and in close connection with funding organisations such as Metro77, new productions could take off that included a new propaganda campaign around the person of President Soeharto.

The first result of this campaign was the movie *Janur Kuning* (Yellow Young Coconut Leaves, 1979)<sup>5</sup>, directed by Alam Surawidjaja, which tells the story of how the Indonesian revolutionary army launched an attack on Yogyakarta and occupied the city for six hours on 1 March 1949. This feat, generally referred to as *Serangan Umum 1 Maret* (General Attack of 1 March), provides another example of a site of memory constructed and maintained by the New Order regime. *Janur Kuning* can be considered a “remake” of Usmar Ismail’s *Enam Djam di Jogja* (Six Hours in Jogja, 1951). The latter was intentionally fictionalised “to avoid that people involved would feel wronged or any misunderstanding would emerge”. The reason given for such caution was that the historical events were too recent and the historiography had not been concluded.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to its remake, *Enam Djam* focuses on Sultan Hamengkubuwono’s role, while Soeharto’s name as the leader of the attack was not even mentioned (Heider 1991, 101). The film was still being screened on the national television channel in the 1980s, which motivated the production of *Janur Kuning*, glorifying Soeharto’s role.<sup>7</sup> The latter movie was launched in

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<sup>5</sup> Young coconut leaves are commonly used in all kinds of plaited configurations in offerings and as marker for a wedding celebration. The movie depicts how a young Soeharto needs to decide on a secret code for his men to wear during the pending operation to distinguish the freedom fighters from disguised Dutch spies. While he is pondering on his decision the film cuts to a woman plaiting a yellow coconut ribbon into a container and gamelan music softly plays. Soeharto has decided to use coconut ribbons and the visual and audial elements emphasise the symbolic meaning of this choice (cf. Sen 2009, 175).

<sup>6</sup> See the very cautious introduction to the movie: “Untuk menghindarkan timbulnja sentimen2 dan salah faham dari mereka jang merasa berdjung dan sudah berdjasa sedang namanja tidak disebut-sebut atau dari padanja diberikan gambar jang salah maka “Enam djam di Jogja” ini ditulis setjara fiktif, sedang nama2 pelaku dan laku tidak ada hubungannja dengan jang ada atau jang pernah ada.”

<sup>7</sup> See Heider 1991, 102, for the reference about the screening on the television channel. Here he makes the erroneous observation that *Serangan Fajar*, a film made by Arifin C. Noer in 1982, was the remake of Usman Ismail’s film. The following passage about *Janur Kuning* is largely based on Sen (2009) and Irawanto (1999).

early 1980 and distributed through the National Sports Committee's network to rural areas where it became compulsory viewing for civil servants (Irawanto 1999, 140). The narrative is a blatantly one-sided version of Soeharto's participation in the attack, which totally eclipses the roles of some of the other leaders, such as the Sultan, which sparked deep controversy in 1998 around the question of who had taken the initiative for the attack. In the film we also find a clear derision of General Nasution's decision to order the Siliwangi division back to West Java, putatively leaving behind the Diponegoro Division with its hero Soeharto to launch the attack all on its own. *Janur Kuning* also presents General Soedirman as a rather weak, bed-ridden commander who is completely dependent of Soeharto. After the first conversation between Soeharto and his commander en route to Yogyakarta, and an inspection of the troops in town while the opening credits of the film are running, the narrative starts with a first scene featuring General Soedirman who, for health reasons, is forced to perform his dawn prayers in bed and later is treated by his personal doctor.<sup>8</sup> We find a similar opening scene in *Treachery*, where Soekarno is presented as being bedridden and treated by Chinese doctors. These beginnings set the stage for the depiction of a weakened and quite troubled leader whose illness metaphorically indicates his disturbed relationship with the nation. This use of illness as topos referring to a looming change of political regime in the realm is well established in Southeast Asian myths of origin (see Jordaan and de Josselin de Jong 1986). Here it may serve as an example of one of the schemata that premediates the narrative of a later turn of power and that converges with other to construct the site of memory (cf. Erll 2009). In both films the hero Soeharto solves all the problems and restores a peaceful equilibrium. In the 1980s the General Attack of 1 March 1949 was transformed into a site of memory by organising annual commemorations at a newly built monument, arranging film screenings, providing educational material and other forms, such as staging a re-enactment of the attack by students' regiments in 1987. Tellingly, the president himself often took a major part in the remembrance rituals, by always repeating the same stories of his heroism during the recapture of Yogyakarta from the Dutch occupiers (see Ahimsa Putra 2001). The comic book *Merebut Kota Perjuangan* (Capturing the City of the Revolution, 1985) was produced as part of the memory site, explicitly meant as material to be used in history classes at school (PSPB). The drawings were made by the accomplished artist Widodo Noor Slamet (a.k.a. Wid NS) and coloured in by some of his

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<sup>8</sup> For an elaborate discussion about *Janur Kuning*, see Sen 2009, 156-68.



Fig. 1: Visualised ponderings on her husband's heroic role during the Revolution by Soeharto's wife in the comic book *Merebut Kota Perjuangan*

colleagues, while the story was created by Hasmi and Marsoedi. In comparison with *Janur Kuning*, the comic book gives a more extensive and possibly balanced version of the events by positioning it in a bigger historical context, while the inclusion of maps and introductions by the president, the Sultan and a former mayor of Yogyakarta add to the authority of the story (*Merebut* 1985). Most confusing is the role of Soeharto's main assistant in the attack, first-lieutenant Marsoedi, as he seems to have switched loyalties several times. In 1968 he was incarcerated for active involvement with the PKI (classified as a "category B prisoner") and released ten years later when he started the company PT Daya Karya that co-financed the film *Janur Kuning*. His name is not only mentioned as the supervisor of the movie but also as that of the script writer for the comic book. During the controversy that ensued after the president had stepped down in 1998, his name was mentioned as the remaining eye-witness of the attack, and he criticised Soeharto for not giving the Sultan a more prominent role in the movie, which he ordered to be cut by more than an hour. Marsoedi even acted as head of the

committee responsible for the construction of a new monument in Yogyakarta, close to the one built in the 1980s, tellingly named Tetenger Pelurusan Sejarah SO 1 Maret (Monument Rectifying the History of the General Attack 1 March).<sup>9</sup>

Krishna Sen (2009, 168) contends that before *Janur Kuning* was distributed, Dwipayana was already plotting to make a second narrative that would aggrandise Soeharto's heroic past. During the previous years he had become well acquainted with film makers and artists and managed to convince the theatre and film director Arifin C. Noer of the necessity to make an educational film to instil the Indonesian people with love for their nation, ostensibly in exchange for a promise to fund the production of *Matahari-Matahari* (Suns, 1985), whose earlier funding company had gone bankrupt. PPFN never financed this movie by Arifin about a petty farmer's infatuation with a *dangdut* star, but hired him to direct three films to teach the nation about its history, much to his (later) remorse.<sup>10</sup> *Serangan Fajar* (Attack at Dawn, 1981), the first movie in cooperation with Dwipayana, only rather cursorily relates to Soeharto's heroism during the Revolution as a backdrop for depicting how two families are affected by the armed struggle, thereby referring to a social revolution and the budding nation. Craftily, Arifin builds the narrative by using the symbolism of the Javanese shadow play and staging characters such as Bagong and his friend Petruk (names of clown servants in Javanese shadow play) who, of course, crack some jokes and build a symbolic relationship between the fighting spirit (*semangat*)—in the film personified as little boy looking for his father, Temon—of the common people (*rakyat*) and the ultimate hero of the national struggle and father of the nation, Soeharto (see Sen 2009, 168-76). It will not come as a big surprise that this combination of *wayang* symbolism, giving a voice to the ordinary people and turning the ultimately refined hero (*ksatria*) into a father of the nation, also serve as a pattern for the construction of *Treachery* that will be discussed in the following section. The third movie Arifin made in close

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<sup>9</sup> See Sen 2009, 156, Ahimsa Putra 2001, and contemporary newspaper articles posted by Ismail Fahmi Lubish in his blog ([indonesiancinematheque.blogspot.de/2011/01/janur-kuning-1979.html](http://indonesiancinematheque.blogspot.de/2011/01/janur-kuning-1979.html)). For information about the construction of the monument, see the article "Bangsawan yang Demokratis" by Tian Son Lang about Sultan Hamengku Buwono IX ([www.tokohindonesia.com/biografi/article/285-ensiklopedi/276-bangsawan-yang-demokratis](http://www.tokohindonesia.com/biografi/article/285-ensiklopedi/276-bangsawan-yang-demokratis)).

<sup>10</sup> See references to Goenawan Mohamad's article in Media Indonesia about Arifin's remorse in Herlambang 2013, 169 and *Jurnal Sunardian* 2011. In an interview with the director published in *Variasi* (1985), Arifin doesn't voice any remorse yet but defends himself against "cynical" critique about his close ties with the government.

cooperation with Dwipayana at PPFN was *Djakarta 66* (1982). It tells about the students' activism and the official actual handing over of power by Soekarno by issuing the rather mysterious and highly controversial "Supersemar" (Order of 11 March 1966).

### ***Treachery (1984)***

About two decades after the coup and the ensuing massacres a new generation that had no personal experience with communism was coming of age, and the regime felt the need to instruct this new generation about the threat this ideology posed to the nation. The most conspicuous result, the film *Treachery*, had its first public screening on 1 October 1984, in connection with the Hari Peringatan Kesaktian Pancasila (HAPSAK, Remembrance Day of the Sacred Pancasila), a celebration specifically geared to commemorate the "Seven Heroes of the Revolution" and the failure of the coup d'état envisioned to have been executed by the PKI. The film was an instant, exceptionally successful blockbuster—Indonesian-language reports use the special term *super-infra box-office* for this movie—that was screened in the big cities of the country and broke all existing records for Indonesian film viewings. For instance, it was reported for Jakarta that in the last three months of 1984 almost 700,000 paying visitors had watched the movie, a figure that is almost 10 per cent of the total number of viewers watching the annual production of 46 films in 1984 (*Kompas*, 31 December 1984).<sup>11</sup> Also reports for other cities talk about the enormous turnouts attending the screenings. The regional head of the Surabaya distribution office stated that besides students, military personnel and office employees, also street vendors and peddlers watched the movie. Prostitutes even had booked 500 seats in a cinema in the vicinity of the red-light district, he was reported as stating (unquestionably gloatingly; *PosFilm*, 2 December 1984). A general guideline prescribing civil servants and school children to watch the movie started later, but early compulsory viewing sessions in a number of regions were also reported (see Heeren 2012, 93, *Waspada*, 4 February 1985).

A number of studies has made clear that the film was an important cogwheel in the propaganda machinery of the New Order regime to normalise the Indonesian population to become citizens convinced of Pancasila's sanctity, thereby demonising the communists and people sympathetic with left-wing politics. The annual screenings on the national

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<sup>11</sup> These newspaper articles can be found in the clippings of the Sinamatek Indonesia. These reports clearly contradict the information that the film was not released through the normal commercial channels (Sen and Hill 2000, 148).

television channel and, since 1993, also commercial channels, the compulsory communal viewing by school children, civil servants and military personnel, combined with excursions to the Sacred Pancasila Monument with its annual commemoration rituals and graphic dioramas all had an indelible impact on the approximately 50-60 million Indonesian citizens subjected to the propaganda system in many aspects of their intellectual training (cf. Heryanto 2012, 224-5). The film was at the heart of what Wijaya Herlambang aptly views as cultural violence the New Order regime inflicted upon the Indonesian population for 32 years (see Herlambang 2013, McGregor 2007, Heeren 2012).

*Treachery* is a three-and-a-half hours long dramatised documentary (*dokudrama*) based on Nugroho's official version and directed by Arifin C. Noer, who was responsible for the artistic script. The film was produced by PPFN under Dwipayana, the total production costs being around 800 million Rupiah, and involved 120 actors and 10,000 extras. In the opening credits, accompanied by the sound of a typewriter rattling the words out on the screen, a rather modestly formulated message<sup>12</sup> appears, stating that

As an effort to search for the truth this film, evidently, cannot not be perfect or free from a variety of flaws, but as an effort to educate, and even more as a prayer and contemplation for the Indonesian nation, hopefully it is of use and will become valuable material for the future. (*Treachery*, 1:13-1:19)<sup>13</sup>

The film continues with detailed shots of the monument at Lubang Buaya while an authoritative voice-over explains that it was erected to commemorate the seven heroes of the revolution, victims of the PKI's barbarism and their perfidy towards the Pancasila. The camera then focuses on the preserved well and a plaque behind it, whose text is read out loud by

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<sup>12</sup> Even if one considers the message in a Muslim-Indonesian tradition where initial self-deprecatory statements are appreciated, the modesty of the statement is in absolute contrast with the overall purpose and character of the movie.

<sup>13</sup> The original text runs: "Sebagai suatu upaya dalam mencari kebenaran sudah tentu film ini tidak sempurna dan tidak luput dari berbagai kekurangan, namun sebagai upaya pendidikan dan lebih2 sebagai doa serta renungan bangsa Indonesia, semoga bermanfaat dan menjadi bahan berharga demi masadepan". References to specific scenes in the movies are given as time reference when they appeared in the movie. The total length of the available version released by Virgo Home Entertainment which was approved by the Indonesian film censor board in 2001 and also posted on youtube is 3:37:15. In the reviews it is reported that the duration of the film was four-and-a-half hour, but it seems unlikely that the copy available to me was cut by almost one hour.



multiple voices, as if the seven heroes were speaking from their graves: “It is impossible that the ideals of our struggle to uphold the purity of Pancasila will be destroyed merely by burying us in this well.”<sup>14</sup>

The close-up shot focusing on the built up stone ring of the well then dissolves into a hammer and sickle symbol on a bamboo plaited wall on which we see other communist symbols appearing as well as hands that draw knives and a sickle out of the plaited bamboo, while the sinister soundtrack preludes an imminent communist attack. For the next two minutes the viewers are presented with staged impressions of the attack of a Pemuda Rakyat group (youth wing of the PKI) on an Islamic training centre in the village of Kanigoro on 13 January 1965. The dawn prayers were disturbed, holy Qurans violated and the kyai assaulted, runs the text of the voice-over explaining the filmic images we see. This scene sets off one of the main threads explored by the film and also by other parts of the New Order campaign against the PKI: communists are atheists with no respect for any religion or its believers. This ascribed characteristic repeated several times in the film, is in clear violation of the first principle of the Pancasila—the belief in one God—and has proven to be extremely powerful and effective to galvanise popular hate against the members of the PKI and its supporters (Heryanto 2012).

The next four minutes on the screen are filled with a concise overview of the incidents leading up to the coup, singling out the PKI as the sole instigator of the attempted coup that was backed with arms supplies by the Chinese government, as it is explained by the voice-over and illustrated by numerous newspaper clippings and photographs. The Chinese Prime Minister Chou En Lai and President Soekarno had negotiated an arms deal intended to equip peasants and labourers to become a “fifth force” in the country next to the regular armed forces, which had sparked off a controversy between their commanders. The PKI had plans for a takeover like the one they had attempted in 1948 in Madiun, and the alleged coup by a council of generals was based on false rumours spread by communists and backed by forged documents, so the voice-over explains the selection of clippings showed.

This is the prelude to the movie that tries to raise the authenticity of the narrative, by showing “real” newspaper reports and the reality of the seven army commanders buried at Lubang Buaya. A similar objective and strategy is apparent at the very end of the movie, when the original recording of an interview with Soeharto at Lubang Buaya is used to verify the re-enacted recovery of the bodies from the well, which we see on the screen. After a few minutes the camera focuses on a cameraman supposed

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<sup>14</sup> See McGregor 2007, 71, for an image and the translation.

to have been filming the exhumation (3:25:32), who subsequently changes his position to film Amoroso Katamsi—the actor who plays Soeharto in all three movies by Arifin—while the text of the original interview is continued by Katamsi. Black and white images of the corpses are shown and the film continues in black and white with the original footage of the state funeral of the seven army officers, where Arifin cunningly cuts in a shot of a poor woman with a child also shown earlier in the film as extras (3:32:26), suggesting that they were part of the crowd watching the funeral parade on its way to the Kalibata burial grounds. During this original footing we hear the voice of General Nasution reading his funeral speech. The genuine newspaper clippings, original footages and sound recordings are used as a framing device for the mainstay of the movie comprising re-enactments of the preparations, the abductions and the immediate aftermath. This frame enhances the verisimilitude of the dramatised re-enactment and is backed by the other elements of the New Order's propaganda machine, it left the Indonesian audience little choice but to believe in the historical truth of the spectacle they watched.<sup>15</sup>

This is a clear example of how such use or remediation of older reports adds to the authenticity of the presented New Order version, despite the fact that these reports were selected and framed in order to construct a site of memory out of this version of the course of events (cf. Erl 2009, 111). Besides remediation in Arifin's dramatised documentary, we also find examples of premediation—the use of available schemata and topoi to represent new experiences—in his contribution to the construction of the site of memory. The diegesis of the drama is divided into three, approximately equal, sections of more than one hour showing the build-up to the coup, the abductions and subsequent sadistic treatment of the officers, and finally the restoration of law and order by Sarwo Edhie and Soeharto. This structure and plot development copy a shadow play performance with its initial segment at a palace, a dramatic turn of events and the ensuing war between good and evil forces, and eventually the victory of the good and the restoration of a cosmic equilibrium. Arifin's use of *wayang* symbolism has been noted with regard to his earlier *Attack at Dawn*, which started with an iconic shot of a mountain top referring to the *gunungan* prop used in *wayang* to visually structure the performance and emphasise certain dramatic events. In the same movie he also provides a few characters with the names of the magic clown servants of the good

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<sup>15</sup> This may have changed a little in the 1990s, as Hill and Sen (2000, 149-50) noted voices of dissent of teenage schoolchildren who were required to watch the movie each year.

forces, who symbolically bridge the gap between the refined hero and the commoners (cf. Sen 2009, 174-5).

The basic pattern of a dichotomy between agents or forces of order versus those of disorder, as noted to be prevalent in Indonesian cinema (Heider 1991, Sen 2009), is universal in structuring narratives. Because of this universal character and the Javanese colouring Arifin applied, I would argue that these patterns, where the abduction of the generals form a severe disruption of the state order (*gara-gara*)—which is subsequently restored by the hero Soeharto—may be considered a mechanism of authentication of the narrative, since the audience was very familiar with this structure and would subscribe to the significance of the restoration of order.

In this respect, it is telling that the diegesis starts with the camera slowly panning down from the sky to settle on a long shot of the presidential palace in Bogor. In a rapid sequence we then see a part of a man's body in which two hands insert a needle, a flagpole, the boots of a soldier standing guard while the camera slowly pans upwards, Brigadier General Sabur walking past a long table inside the palace, back to an extreme close-up of the man's belly where another needle is inserted into, cutting to deer outside the palace, back to the belly, and so forth. The whole palace scene takes 5'19 with a total of 28 cuts between shots, while a sinister soundtrack adds to the ominous atmosphere in this thread of the narrative. Through this quick succession of very short shots the viewer is slowly and discontinuously informed that a team of Chinese doctors (they perform acupuncture and speak Chinese) in grey suit and tie is treating a seriously ill person. Only after about three minutes we hear spoken text by someone informing D.N. Aidit that there is a telephone call for him; after he has walked away the film cuts to a long shot of a man in pyjamas looking out of the window. A text in white at the bottom tells us that this is "Presiden Soekarno". The next shot is a medium side shot of him from a low angle, followed by a close-up of his face from a slightly different angle, which both emphasise the worried look on the president's face. Umar Kayam played Soekarno, who rather resembles Chairman Mao Tse-tung.<sup>16</sup> This becomes even more apparent in the conclusion of the first palace sequence, when close-ups of a sleeping Soekarno from different angles are superimposed and dissolve in one another for about 40 seconds (*Treachery*, 13:03-13:43), suggesting death is imminent. These shots emphasise and dramatise the information of the previous shots, where

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<sup>16</sup> Arifin cast his main actors with clear resemblance to the real persons, which he used as a mechanism to authenticate the diegesis when he filmed the actors standing next to original family photographs, filmed in the generals' homes.

Aidit is informed about the results of the examination by the Chinese doctors, namely that his condition is serious and he could die.

Later in this first part the movie twice revisits the president in his palace, where he is shown thoughtfully reading J. W. Wheeler-Bennet's "The Nemesis of Power" (*Treachery*, 16:27-16:58), and after a scene presenting full military training of Pemuda Rakyat again the president is shown worriedly looking into the void of his room, while the camera scans his bookshelves. Then follows a long shot of his room where he sits behind his desk and, after cutting to a small Balinese Hanuman statue, his hands put down another symbolic title, "Politics have no Morals" by Norman Beasley (*Treachery*, 19:28-20:36). The mise-en-scènes in the palace indicate that the president is surrounded by objects of art, most of which are paintings and statues of women, often nude. This first palace sequence displays the trope of a sick and apprehensive ruler who has a tad perverse inclination of collecting erotic art. The latter peculiarity of the president is well known but accompanied with sinister music, and featuring a worried-looking, not-speaking Umar Kayam suggests a representation of Soekarno as a leader who has lost control over his nation. This line of "filmic reasoning" is continued in the third part of the movie, where the president is symbolically defeated by the saviour Soeharto and gradually relinquishes his power to the future president. The strategy is part of what McGregor has described as the "de-Soekarnoisation" of Indonesia's political scene in the aftermath of the transfer of power (McGregor 2007).

The remainder of this first section of the movie can be further divided into the following four strands of the diegesis: 1. Scenes displaying the conspiracy by the PKI at the houses of the main perpetrators and the PKI headquarters; 2. Training sessions and the build-up of the preparations for the abductions at Lubang Buaya; 3. Introduction into the happy family lives of the army officers immediately prior to their abduction; 4. Fragments of the lives of the common people (*rakyat*) suffering from the destitute economic and political situation, with a particular focus on one middleclass family. By and large, these strands are discontinued in the second and third parts of the movie, rendering these parts into a simple dichotomy between the evil abduction and killings and a heroic restoration of order.

In terms of film art, the most interesting strand in the diegesis is the one where the evil communists are displayed as plotting against the army forces in a plan to pre-empt a possible takeover by a council of generals. Most typically, this strand starts with an extreme close-up of a talking mouth speaking about the plans, a jump cut after the palace scene

mentioned above (*Treachery* 20:36). The setting is D.N. Aidit's house covered in darkness, where the conspirators are seen chain smoking and are filmed in an ingenious manipulation of the lighting that makes use of strong contrasts between light and darkness (*charuscuro*), emphasising the presumably sinister personality of the characters who cast dark shadows on the wall, while the eerie tune of the previous scene is silenced and conspiring voices provide the soundscape. In a way reminiscent of the film noir genre and Hitchcock movies, the viewers are presented with a shot from outside Aidit's home, with a light beam emanating from the house when the door opens to let in another member of the conspirators, shots of smoking silhouettes of three men projected on the curtains, the conversations between the conspirators, and a concluding extreme close-up of Aidit's eyes, which all add to the intended suspense and secretiveness of the first scene in this strand (*Treachery*, 20:36-23:30). Unsurprisingly, these shots are in absolute contrast to the brightly lit houses of the generals and Soeharto's residence in the movie.<sup>17</sup> These iconic shots of chain-smoking perpetrators, the recurrence of paper burned in ashtrays, extreme close-ups, and shots from above showing men around a table, indicate the evil nature of their plans and contrast with scenes depicting the innocent victims.



Fig. 2: Two stills from the conspiracy thread of the movie: filmed behind the curtain and through blinds

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<sup>17</sup> There is one scene presenting a smoking Soeharto pondering upon his plan of advance on Halim airport in a simple room in Senayan where his headquarters had moved to because of an alleged threat of an air force strike (*Treachery*, 2:51:22-2:51:45).

In the latter series of scenes, the most disturbing and emotionally affecting strand is the one introducing General Nasution's family life, which is continued to the very end of the movie with the death of his daughter Ade. Clearly and most emphatically this strand of the narrative is meant to provoke an emotional response from the audience as a mechanism to add authenticity to the film (cf. Jones 2014, 41). The viewers are familiar with the fact that Nasution's daughter died from a bullet wound inflicted during the failed abduction of her father, but selecting this thread of the narrative and following it to the very end adds an emotional coup de grace to the conviction of the suspected perpetrators and instigators of the coup. A similar objective is apparent in the way Arifin used the dramatic outburst of one of General Pandjaitan's daughters, Catherine who, standing on the balcony of the house, witnesses her father being shot after saying his last prayers. She runs down the stairs and out of the house to kneel in front of the pool of blood left behind by her father's dead body that was dragged away by the rebellious soldiers. She then sinks her hands into the blood and rubs her father's blood in her face and hair, while screaming continuously (*Treachery*, 1:49:34-1:51:10). In a contemporary, thoughtful review of the film, this scene was considered as an instance of "vulgar sadism", which the film also unnecessarily displayed in the torture scenes of the army officers at Lubang Buaya. The reviewer regretted that Arifin had not continued the cinematographic idiom he had successfully developed for his *Attack at Dawn* and that he had focused too much on a polarised picture of communists versus the Indonesian people (Bambang Adi Pitaja 1984). This criticism, however, did not prevent the image of Catherine Pandjaitan covered in blood from being displayed in brochures and posters advertising the film (see fig. 3).<sup>18</sup>

The more or less graphic torture scenes of the officers in an attempt to force them to sign confessions of their complicity with the council of generals up to the killings and disposal of their bodies inside the dry well takes approximately 12 minutes in total, including a few minor shots of other scenes. One thread in the display of torture is carefully constructed by the director to evoke maximum suspense and horror. The scene is part of the depiction of how communist youths are enjoying themselves while dancing and singing "Genjer-Genjer" and only takes 29 seconds (*Treachery*, 1:58:58-1:59:27). It starts with a woman wearing a red jacket

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<sup>18</sup> Being so iconic of *Treachery*, the scene is also repeated in *TAOK* in a section where Congo watches and comments on the film, expressing his pride that they have repaid the evil communists in kind. Although the scene was reduced, it is telling that Oppenheimer used this scene as a reference to *Treachery* (*TAOK*, 38:47-39:38).

who appears in the doorway of the barracks at Lubang Buaya. The lighting source is a single key light on the lower left corner, brightly illuminating her face but leaving the doorway behind her in the dark. She is looking into



Fig. 3: Catherine Panjaitan covered in her father's blood

the room and the camera cuts to a razor blade stuck in the centre of a bamboo plaited wall. We see a red cloth passing the camera and the woman's hand pulling out the razor blade. The camera cuts to a policeman tied up in another room and then cuts to the woman leaving the room. She passes the policeman, who wriggles to stand up, and enters the room where one of the generals is being interrogated. A medium shot focuses on the tied-up general sitting in a chair, while the red jacket passes the general twice before stopping on his left-hand side. She then raises the razor blade and slashes the general's left eye with the blade, while scolding him in a high-pitched voice that his suffering is nothing compared to what the commoners are experiencing every day. This sequence, precluded by the "Genjer-Genjer" tune and dancing that evoke an atmosphere of a lustful and cruel orgy (cf. Arps 2011), clearly refer to the fabricated reports of Gerwani women torturing the generals by cutting their genitals with razor blades and gouging out their eyeballs with a spoon. However, in contrast to the depiction in the reliefs of the Sacred Pancasila Monument, *Treachery* does not contain a representation of highly erotic dances performed by the women present at Lubang Buaya. There are several shots of more or less frantic crowds of youngsters, among whom we see some

women who occasionally participate in the dancing, but they are all uniformed and do not seem to display any particularly sadistic behaviour. Even though the reported graphicness of the torture scenes seems rather exaggerated, this does not mean that they cannot evoke strong emotional reactions with the spectators, because they are indeed designed to invoke strong emotions of abhorrence and hatred.

Another narrative strand shows common folks suffering from destitute circumstances, which exemplifies a well-established characteristic in Indonesian performing arts to provide space for the common voice to comment upon the everyday life of the people during the period the narrative is set. In *Attack at Dawn* Arifin gave ample space to the depiction of the lives of two families affected by the war against the Japanese and the ensuing revolution. In *Treachery* the director deploys a similar pattern, by showing fragments of the lives of two families, one poor and the other upper middleclass, who experience the destitute economic and tense political situation of the period. The head of the middleclass family is most adamant in criticising the PKI, although in his first appearance he also comments upon the materialist lifestyle of the elite in general. The civil servant initially voices criticism of Islamic organisations, but in his later appearances there is no continuation of this line and he only blames the communists for the problems he hears about on his radio. In contrast, the poor family is shown as consisting of silent, quite apathetic old folks who are doing their daily routines: listening to the radio, washing clothes, going to the mosque for prayers, playing chess and smoking. The last appearance of the silent (silenced?) voice of the *rakyat* is quite significant.<sup>19</sup> It is the early morning of October 1<sup>st</sup>, Sarwo Edhie has retaken the national radio studios (RRI) on Merdeka Barat, and Soeharto's message is broadcast. After Colonel Untung, one of the ringleaders of the complot, is seen listening nervously to the message, the film cuts to the white radio in a ramshackle kampong house, while the broadcast continues. Three men are visible inside, huddling around the radio, while others are preparing for prayers or are gathering outside. When the film cuts to the people outside, they are looking into the house in a listless manner, while the camera pans from left to right, showing every face through chicken wire and finally cuts to a chessboard outside. In an earlier appearance of the kampong house with the chessboard, the

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<sup>19</sup> With reference to Arifin's suggestions that there is a certain subtext in the film where he shows the truth of the people's sufferings and their role as victim of the country's political and military elite, one may interpret the *rakyat* scenes as a certain subtext although the mainstay of the film is taken up by the series of events shown which by far outshines such an interpretation (cf. interview *Variasi* 1985).



black bishop was shown to be attacking the white defence, here in this last shot of the *rakyat* scenes the white queen checkmates the black king and the game is lost. The *rakyat* thread opens up the obvious interpretation of silenced masses who became the innocent toy of the elites playing their game on the political stage, but it hardly seems to reveal a critical subtext of the film, as suggested by Arifin in the interview. The film therefore fitted perfectly in the blatant propaganda campaign to demonise the left-wing organisations and morally legitimised the mass killings that took place in wake of the attempted coup of 1965.

### *The Act of Killing*

In 2012 Joshua Oppenheimer's documentary project, that had taken seven years of research and preparations, producing hundreds of hours of footage, materialised in the form of the release of *TAOK* that, in the words of The Guardian film editor, "has had seismic effect from the moment it was premiered at the Toronto film festival in September 2012" (Pulver 2014), and received an Oscar nomination in 2014.<sup>20</sup> In the same year a second documentary was released, *The Look of Silence* (2014), which supplements *TAOK* in certain ways as it brings together a family member of one of the victims and his brother's killers. In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss how *TAOK* sets out to unravel the medial representations of the site of memory as constructed by the New Order regime, by giving only space to alleged perpetrators to perform their stories in a venture fraught with dangers and moral traps. The director is not only interested in recording or documenting the perpetrators' performances but seeks active intervention in the construction of the site, in order to dissolve the spectral power these aged villains still seem to hold and allow victims to achieve a certain form of retribution (Oppenheimer and Uwemedimo 2012, 304).

A concise text projected on the screen at the beginning of the film presents the basic idea of the project: surprised and shocked to learn that perpetrators of the killings were boasting about their involvement in the Indonesian massacres, Joshua Oppenheimer and his crew asked them to "create scenes about the killings in whatever way they wished. This film follows that process and documents its consequences" (*TAOK*, 3:30).

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<sup>20</sup> The "seismic effect" was also felt in the field of Indonesian Studies, triggering many reviews of the film and motivating the editors of *Critical Asian Studies* to organise a round-table discussion about the film with the participation of renowned Indonesianists, such as Robert Cribb, Laurie Sears, Sylvia Tiwon, Adam Tyson, and others, whose papers were published in 2014 (*Critical Asian Studies*, 2014).

However, it becomes clear in the documentary that the “volunteering actors” were not only asked to “create scenes”, but that Oppenheimer and his crew were involved in the production of a full movie with a script and ample directions and assistance. The main “actors” were also paid a certain fee to compensate for the time spent on the project. The result is a documentary that records “the making of” a bizarre, surrealist film entitled *Arsan dan Aminah*, in which the villains appear to relive the past and give full reign to their fantasies about the killings they ostensibly committed in the mid-1960s.<sup>21</sup> The documentary follows a few leading characters in the movie being made, who at the beginning meet several public figures responsible for safeguarding their social position, most of whom are connected to the paramilitary organisation Pemuda Pancasila (PP).

The documentary’s diegesis starts off with one of the leading characters, Herman Koto, whom we see on a tour around a neighbourhood in the city of Medan to recruit extras for the movie project which, as he discusses with the main character of the movie, Anwar Congo, is difficult because many people are afraid of being accused of PKI connections or sympathies (TAOK, 04:30-05:05). The spectators are further introduced to Congo as he has meetings with a few public figures, such as the (ex-) governor of North Sumatra, Syamsul Arifin, local newspaper editor Ibrahim Sinik, and Japto Soerjosoemarno, the national leader of the PP who visits Medan for a big meeting of the local branch of the organisation, also attended by Vice President Jusuf Kala. Then, 39 minutes into the film, one of Congo’s friends and fellow executioners, Adi Zulkadry, arrives in Medan, and the shooting of scenes for the movie *Arsan dan Aminah* is shown. The following two hours of the diegesis comprises scenes of the movie under construction, interspersed with scenes where the characters reflect upon their horrendous actions in the mid-1960s by commenting on the scenes they shot and reviewed on screen. It also shows how Congo is increasingly troubled by nightmares in which the ghosts of his victims haunt him. The movie was completed, it seems, and the documentary starts (and ends) with shots of a huge rusty iron fish on poles placed against the backdrop of Lake Toba, while from its mouth dancing ladies issue onto a catwalk. In a next shot the ladies stand around two gesticulating main characters in front

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<sup>21</sup> Some people have expressed their doubts about how historically accurate the roles of Anwar Congo and Adi Zulkadry have been represented in the documentary and to what extent they were involved in the massacres. See for instance the open letter Yan Paruhum Lubis sent in October 2012 to the Indonesian Press Council in which he denounces reports in *Tempo* and some of the statements made in TAOK, and Alfian Nur Syafitri’s comments made in different blogs (e.g. [jurnalfootage.net/v4/artikel/kekerasan-massal-dan-manusia-bebas-dalam-the-act-of-killing](http://jurnalfootage.net/v4/artikel/kekerasan-massal-dan-manusia-bebas-dalam-the-act-of-killing)).

of a waterfall that makes all of them wet, while a director is giving orders. In the course of the film, viewers find out that the two central characters are Herman Koto as drag-queen in his role of Aminah, a member of Gerwani, and Anwar Congo playing Arsan, Aminah's lover and executioner. Eventually, Arsan's evil crime catches up with him when his throat was cut by Aminah ('s ghost?). However, in a serene scene at the end of the movie and documentary his sins are redeemed, when one of his victims thanks Arsan profusely for the execution that brought them all to heaven. This scene, shot against the background of the Sipiso-piso Waterfall on the north side of Lake Toba, shows eight, supposedly, heavenly nymphs clad in white dresses with red tops, while the reverberating song "Born Free" prevents any possibility to a non-ironic interpretation of Oppenheimer's intentions (*TAOK*, 2:23:11-2:25:00, see fig. 4).



Fig. 4: shot against the background of the Sipiso-piso Waterfall (Photograph courtesy of Final Cut for real)

*Arsan dan Aminah* is a surrealist amalgam of the perpetrators' fantasies, which they ostensibly made to record their heroic role in the history of the Indonesian nation, but as mentioned in the opening titles and apparent from several scenes, Oppenheimer and his crew assisted them in this fabrication of their roles. How much the scenes are the result of Congo and comrades and to what extent the documentary director and his crew intervened in this process never becomes clear, which also may cast doubt on the genuineness of the shown emotions and the way the characters express them.

Two threads of exploration may be discerned in the documentary; the first one is perhaps best considered as an "institutional" thread probing

into the reasons why the criminals have been left untouched for fifty years. The issue of impunity is quite obviously developed by first connecting the criminals with the PP and subsequently depicting its members and their patrons in high political positions as most vulgar, ignorant and depraved men who have their own interests to leave the killers unpunished. Anderson referred to the assassins as local Medan gangsters who never formed a real threat to the New Order regime in distant Jakarta, and therefore escaped the extrajudicial cleansing of the Petrus murders executed by the New Order regime in the early 1980s. They all seem to have joined the PP, an organisation that firmly supported Soeharto and his regime from the very start and was frequently used to perform the regime's dirty work (Anderson 2012, 279-81).

In a most dramatic and revealing way, this thread shows the involvement of respected members of the political elite in illegal practices and their support of the obviously criminal PP organisation. For instance, the film presents a scene where a local member of parliament openly admits to illegal practices (*TAOK*, 1:19:15-1:20:55), and another where a high official of the central government participates in the shooting of a horrendous re-enactment of the burning down of a PKI village and the killing of its population. After giving a lecture to Oppenheimer about the "true story" and the vehemence of the PP if being really threatened, he leaves apologising before the most horrific scenes are shown (*TAOK*, 1:51:34-1:58:08).



Fig. 5: re-enactment of the burning of a PKI village and the massacre of the population (Photograph © Final Cut for real)

Perhaps the most mind-boggling scene in this institutional thread is the recording of a special feature (*Dialog Khusus, TAOK, 1:43:48-1:48:48*) dedicated to the *Arsan dan Aminah* film project by the local station of the national television company (TVRI) that celebrates the movie and its actors as heroic historical agents (*pelaku sejarah*). In an absolutely ignorant and ignoble way the young female presenter talks freely with the main characters in front of a small, all-PP audience, overtly appreciative of the services these people performed in dealing with the communists while exclaiming as some sort of undeniable truth that “God hates the PKI” (*Ternyata Tuhan benci PKI*). In a kind of general conclusion about the film she vents that “it really shows that Anwar Congo and his friends have developed a new, more efficient system to exterminate communists, a humane system that is not too brutal and does not use excessive violence.”<sup>22</sup> Of course, this presenter cannot be considered representative of the whole Indonesian nation, and by all means regional TVRI broadcasts are very low in popularity, but the fact that such a celebrative interview with “exterminators” was broadcast at all may give a certain indication of the memory-erasing powers of the New Order regime’s propaganda machine lingering on decades after its demise.

The second, “individual” thread explores how the perpetrators deal with questions of guilt and penitence. It contrasts the two characters of Congo and Zulkardy. The latter is shown as ardently holding on to a conviction that the killing of communists was justified to save Indonesia from being turned into a communist stronghold. He is more outspoken and even challenges the documentary maker to report his name to the international court of justice in The Hague so that the international world would be informed about the good services he rendered to his nation and the world, and he would become famous (*TAOK, 1:06:55-1:09:24*). In another scene, in which Suryono, a Chinese victim whose stepfather was killed, is interrogated and becomes genuinely upset by the re-enactment, Zulkardy warns his colleagues that the people’s image of them may change because of the movie’s success. He lectures that the general public could consider them meaner (*kejam*) than the PKI whose savage image was perpetuated through Arifin’s movie. Such a change would not have any legal consequences for them, as the crimes they committed are time-barred and they will not be convicted, so he explains to his comrades, but the people’s image of them might change (*TAOK, 1:04:27-1:06:18*).

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<sup>22</sup> The actual phrasing is as follows: *Berarti benar-benar film ini juga mengungkap kalau Anwar Congo bersama teman-temannya mengembangkan suatu sistem baru yang lebih efisien dalam menumpas komunis, yaitu sebuah sistem yang manusiawi, kurang sadis dan juga tidak menggunakan kekerasan berlebihan.*

Congo is less eloquent and is presented as being much more troubled by penitence in the form of the ghosts of some of his victims who haunt him in his dreams. If it were not for the gory atrocities he admitted, Congo might just be playing the role of a quite likeable grandfather who apparently has found a new hobby in staging re-enactments of the atrocities he committed in the past. In the re-enactments he plays the leading role of Arsan, the ghosts of whose victims are represented as carnivalesque figures with, at its bizarre climax, drag-queen Herman Koto playing Aminah, whom we see cutting off Arsan's head in one scene and in another devouring the liver she has just cut out of Arsan's body remains (*TAOK*, 1:38:38-1:40:04). Outside of the re-enactments he is represented as a kind and friendly man who teaches his grandsons about important values in one scene, while waking them up in another so that they watch grandpa being tortured in one of the re-enactments he is watching with the director. There is an issue here with the mechanisms of authentication: how does a spectator construe the sincerity of Congo's remorse and other feelings, as in many instances these are enmeshed with staged re-enactments and other scenes? Actually, it is in agreement with one of Oppenheimer's objectives, namely to dissolve the perpetrators' spectral power by showing the obscenity of their practices and by critically reframing them (Oppenheimer and Uwemedimo 2012). However, it may be questioned whether presenting the one pointed out figure of the main executioner as a person with sweet grandfatherly feelings who cries and gags on the memory of his own actions, is the critical frame that deconstructs such obscenity. It shows the human face of the Butcher Congo (*Jagal*, the Indonesian title of *TAOK*), but that seems to defeat rather than support the director's objectives because of the empathy for him created among part of the audience.

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*Treachery* is the artistic expression that has had the widest and deepest impact on the Indonesian population during the past 70 years of cultural production, as it has been an integral part of the New Order propaganda machinery ever since its release in 1984. It therefore may be considered as the most important building block of the site of memory of the 1965 attempted coup and the ensuing mass murders instigated by the regime that were deliberately left "out of the picture". The dramatised documentary was produced and distributed almost two decades after the events, to instil new generations of Indonesians with a sense of terror towards and ignorance of communism. Unsurprisingly, a most powerful

“antidote” to the horrific memory-erasing power of *Treachery* comes from outside Indonesia, through films made by Joshua Oppenheimer. His documentaries are controversial as they purport not only to document historical events but actively intervene in the construction and maintenance of the site of memory. This daring project inevitably meets much opposition but may also prove to be a means to shake Indonesians out of their apathetic stupor of suspended disbelief of the wrongs and atrocities committed by the New Order regime.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### DANCING THE PAST: *RONGGENG DUKUH PARUK AND SANG PENARI*<sup>1</sup>

MONIKA ARNEZ

*Ronggeng*, professional dancer-singers performing for money, look back to a long history in Java. Although it remains unclear when and how that history started, there is much reason to believe that at least in the 19<sup>th</sup> century *ronggeng* dancers were a familiar sight and that they were part of local culture (Putten 2014, 117). Despite the different terms used to refer to various *ronggeng* dance forms,<sup>2</sup> they show remarkable parallels. One characteristic feature is that after the performance of a professional woman dancer there followed an “erotic social dance”, the male spectators being invited to join (Hanan 1993, 95). This spectacle includes the interplay between the dancer, members of the male audience who try to touch her, and the crowd that responds to their attempts. The dancers’ erotic movements and also the fact that *ronggeng* sometimes offered sexual services have fostered the image of *ronggeng* as prostitutes.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the Republic of Indonesia banned *ronggeng* dance in 1948, but after some of the dance movements had been altered, authorities lifted the ban again in 1950 (Kuswandini 2010). After *ronggeng* had regained its popularity in the early 1960s, the New Order regime strongly impacted on performance

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Edwin Wieringa and Jan van der Putten for comments on an earlier version of this paper. However, the responsibility for this article is my own.

<sup>2</sup> In the trilogy of novels *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* and the movie *Sang Penari*, the terms *tayub* and *joged* are also used.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Spiller (2010, 88-89) and Alexeyeff (2011, 586) points out to the fact that the *ronggeng* is often associated with prostitution. Arjo (1989, 169) states that the dancer’s alleged immorality made it difficult for women to dance in public. Roberts, when addressing *tayuban* in East Java, remarks that the attitudes towards *ronggeng* are ambivalent and that they are sometimes regarded as “little better than prostitutes.” (Roberts 2001, 9-10).

practice. Hence, *ronggeng* was conformed to New Order ideology, so “nothing happens” (Lysloff 2001, 2). However, even today the term *ronggeng* is believed to represent lewdness, and thus it is hardly surprising that professional female dancer-singers rarely use the term *ronggeng* to define their profession (Alexeyeff 2011, 586).

Ahmad Tohari’s story of the rise and fall of the erotic *ronggeng* dancer Srintil addresses the disputed position of *ronggeng* dancers. The trilogy of novels *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* (The Dancer, 2004),<sup>4</sup> set in the 1950s and 1960s, revolves around the twists of fate in a small village community in Banyumas regency, Central Java. The daily newspaper *Kompas* first released *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* as a serial in the early 1980s,<sup>5</sup> and the Gramedia publishing house followed suit, publishing the novel in three parts between 1982 and 1986. However, the censorship board prevented sensitive parts of the novels from being released. These passages<sup>6</sup> describe how Srintil shared the fate of thousands of alleged communists who were hunted down and imprisoned in the aftermath of an attempted coup d’état in the early morning of 1 October 1965. In the course of this attempted coup, also known as the “30 September Movement” (Gerakan 30 September), six generals were kidnaped and later killed. According to the version promoted by the government, the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) was solely responsible for the killings of the generals. However, scholars have shown that the communists were not the key players in this coup that paved the way for Soeharto’s military regime.<sup>7</sup> As Roosa argues, the military orchestrated the killing of “hundreds of thousands of people and imprisoned hundreds of thousands more” in the name of suppressing the 30 September Movement (Roosa 2010). The army and anti-communist groups attacked members of the political left and alleged communists

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<sup>4</sup> This is the version of the trilogy of novels published by Gramedia in 2003. I use the second edition of this text, published in 2004, as the basis of analysis in this article. This edition published the three parts of the novel released in the 1980s as one book but added some of the formerly censored passages, whereas others were still omitted. In the 1980s, Gramedia had released a censored version in three parts, *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* (1982), *Lintang Kemukus Dini Hari* (1985) and *Jantera Bianglala* (1986), after the daily newspaper *Kompas* had published it as a serial. In the version of 2012, the Lontar Foundation published an English version of the trilogy, *The dancer: A trilogy of novels*, which contains translations of uncensored parts the Gramedia version did not include.

<sup>5</sup> The narrative appeared in *Kompas* from 1981-1986.

<sup>6</sup> Gramedia published some of these passages in a new edition of the trilogy, published in 2003 (1<sup>st</sup> edition of this version) and 2004 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition).

<sup>7</sup> Compare: Roosa 2006.

since October 1965.<sup>8</sup> There were several groups that assisted the army in the massacre, for example Ansor, the male youth wing of the Muslim mass organisation Nahdlatul Ulama.

Given the sensitivity of this issue in Indonesia, even today, it is not surprising that the first movie inspired by the trilogy, *Darah dan Mahkota Ronggeng* (The Dancer's Blood and Crown) did not refer to the events of 1965 at all. This film, directed by Yazman Yazid, was launched in 1983, when the repression of the New Order regime strongly affected cultural productions. In this movie, the plot of the original trilogy was fundamentally changed, and vital parts of the narrative were omitted. It focuses on the "opening of the mosquito net" ritual (*bukak klambu*), an initiation rite that was practiced in the remote hamlet Dukuh Paruk in Banyumas regency, Central Java. This ritual marred the love between the *ronggeng* dancer Srintil and her friend Rasmus. It thrusts Rasmus, who prevents the ritual from commencing, into the role of a savior because it includes the *ronggeng* dancer's loss of virginity to the highest bidder. The movie places particular emphasis on Rasmus' struggle with the young man Sulam and his friends who try to deflower Srintil, and on his violent acts of retribution. Ultimately, Rasmus manages to rescue Srintil, and the lovers leave Dukuh Paruk forever, thus escaping the "strange" and "immoral" customs practiced there.

There is no information available as to how cinemagoers received this movie in Indonesia in the 1980s. However, it is well established that Ahmad Tohari, who knew the plot of the film, disapproved of it. He said in an interview:

I do not want to see my works to be filmed because there are different interpretations. *Sang Penari*, which was adapted from my work, is a different case.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, he stated that he had never watched *Darah dan Mahkota Ronggeng*. It can be assumed that the author was uneasy with this production because it failed to give a voice to the victims of the 1965 events. It did not capture the fact that the army held captive alleged communist supporters in detention camps for years, without trial. In contrast, the trilogy promises the reader to give a reliable and "true"

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<sup>8</sup> This was also particularly the case in places where communists had a strong base, including villages in Central Java. See also: Cribb 1990.

<sup>9</sup> See: "Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk Menginspirasi Sang Penari," *Harian Banyumas*, 13-01-14, p.13. [http://issuu.com/harmas./docs/harian\\_banyumas\\_13\\_januari\\_2014](http://issuu.com/harmas./docs/harian_banyumas_13_januari_2014). Accessed 14 March 2015.

account of the sufferings.<sup>10</sup> Of course, a fictional text does not represent reality, but it can refer to individual recollections of certain events. Although Ahmad Tohari addressed these memories in the trilogy, he was careful not to be outspoken about violence against alleged communist sympathisers because he feared that he still might be attacked as a consequence. For example, the narrative does not explicitly state that the military killed communist leaders. This is not surprising because authors writing during the New Order were aware that criticising the state apparatus might result in repression and persecution.

The film *Sang Penari*, a movie inspired by the *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* trilogy, was launched in 2011, more than a decade after the Soeharto regime had fallen. This highly praised movie won four Citra Awards at the Indonesian Film in the categories Best Film, Best Director (Ifa Isfansyah), Best Leading Actress (Prisia Nasution) and Best Supporting Actress (Dewi Irawan). Ahmad Tohari welcomed *Sang Penari*, arguing that the film grasped the spirit of the novel, and he even praised the film director, Ifa Isfansyah, for having been braver than him:

(...) this film was more courageous because it narrated how the military finished off citizens who did not know anything.<sup>11</sup>

In particular, he appreciated the young film producer's courage to counter the official version of the mass killings in the aftermath of the failed coup d'état.

From Ifa Isfansyah's statements about *Sang Penari* we gather that his main idea was to launch a film for his generation. He designed it for young people like himself, most of whom do not have much knowledge of the events of 1965. As someone who has not lived through these troubled times, he relied on third-party information, for example on eyewitness accounts, written sources, and his imagination, to construct ideas about this period. When he designed the film, he certainly thought of the young generation:

I understand politics from the perspective of 98. I belong to the generation of 98, not 65. That is why I feel that elements of our generation must be

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<sup>10</sup> See for instance: Suryomenggolo 2011, 222. This is also true for other fictional texts written by Indonesian authors such as Putu Oka Sukanta and Umar Kayam, who personally experienced the traumatic mid-1960s.

<sup>11</sup> See "Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk Menginspirasi Sang Penari", *Harian Banyumas*, 13-01-14, p. 13.  
[http://issuu.com/harmas/docs/harian\\_banyumas\\_13\\_januari\\_2014](http://issuu.com/harmas/docs/harian_banyumas_13_januari_2014). Accessed 14 March 2015.

included into the film. Also, for this reason, *Sang Penari* does not take sides. Not with the PKI, also not with TNI. This is a story about human beings. We are not siding with anything; we are siding with the people. The citizens of Dukuh Paruk are human beings; only their role is influenced by the costumes they are wearing. [...] They are people who cannot write and read, who are coincidentally connected to many political interests. (Pasaribu 2011)

Ifa Isfanyah also said in the same interview that, similar to many other young people in Indonesia, he does not know much about politics. But he also mentioned that the book *The Year That Never Ends: Understanding the Experiences of the Victims of 65* (2004),<sup>12</sup> edited by John Roosa, Ayu Ratih and Hilmar Farid, had been his companion when he was writing the script for *Sang Penari*, together with Salman Aristo and Shanty Harmayn.<sup>13</sup> This book is a collection of oral history essays about the detainment and killings of alleged members of the PKI after the events of 1965. Based on interviews conducted in 2001 and 2002 by the Volunteers Team for Humanity (*Tim Relawan untuk Kemanusiaan*) with victims of the massacre, it depicts how these people suffered from the cruel acts committed by the army and their allies. Therefore, it suggests itself that *Sang Penari* pays particular attention to the victims' perspective on the 1965 events.

Assuming that *Sang Penari* places emphasis on representing the victims' emotions, I employ studies of film analysis (Weber 2013; Uhrig 2015) to show how these emotions are portrayed against the backdrop of the 1965 events. One reason for the central position emotions have in the movie is that *Sang Penari* belongs to the melodrama genre in which the characters' world of emotions plays a significant role. Moreover, melodramas provoke strong emotions among audiences, from tears to broad laughter (Mercer, Shingler 2004, 1). In *Sang Penari* emotions are used as a vital tool to narrate a personal, moving story of a *ronggeng* dancer's life in rural Central Java and her traumatic experiences during the 1965 events.

Furthermore, I illustrate the different ways in which the two cultural productions use dance as a tool to describe tradition. For the analysis of the novels, a helpful approach is Spiller's notion of the female performer

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<sup>12</sup> The original title is: *Tahun yang tak Pernah Berakhir: Memahami Pengalaman Korban 65 esai-esai sejarah lisan*. This book was published by ELSAM in Jakarta.

<sup>13</sup> Ifa Isfanyah said that in the process of writing each of the three people played different roles: he paid attention to the content and culture-specific elements, Salman Aristo looked after the structure, and Shanty Harmayn made sure that they did not overstep the mark. See: Pasaribu 2011.

as moving between the spheres of the sacred and the profane, the rice goddess and the prostitute (Spiller 2010). *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* uses this dichotomy and shows how disorder gradually substitutes the existing social fabric, as the hamlet's symbolic centre is enmeshed in political affairs. As the sacred decreases, tradition loses its spirit, and only an empty shell is left. This, ultimately, leads to the hamlet's loss of its symbolic centre, which means disaster for the village.

### ***Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk and Sang Penari: Synopsis***

Ahmad Tohari's trilogy of novels, *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* features Srintil, a young and beautiful girl. She is only eleven years old when she is chosen to revive the *ronggeng* tradition in the remote hamlet Dukuh Paruk in Central Java. Since the time when many inhabitants, including the former *ronggeng*, had died from food poisoning after eating fermented soybean cake<sup>14</sup> there has not been another *ronggeng*. Thus, the villagers are delighted when they hear that, finally, a gifted young dancer will entertain them again. Some assume that Srintil's dance moves are so compelling because a dancing spirit, the *indang*, has entered her body and makes her dance irresistible for the male audience. However, Srintil is not only expected to perform erotic dance and invite men to join in but also to offer sexual services to male inhabitants. This is in line with the village customs, but it throws Srintil into conflict. She is torn between her role as the hamlet's dancer and her desire to marry Rasus, a local teenager who admires Srintil. When Rasus realises that he cannot have Srintil for himself, he turns his back on the village and enters military service. As a result, Srintil becomes lovesick, does not dance anymore and tries to divert herself by adopting a baby boy, Goder, although he is another woman's child. Subsequently, prior to the events of 1965, Bakar, an official in PKI, enters her life and persuades her to perform publicly as a dancer of the people (*ronggeng rakyat*). As a consequence, the military arrests and detains her in a detention camp for two years, and Srintil, as the final part of the trilogy suggests, does not recover from this horrible experience. After another blow of fate, when a man she had placed her hopes on tries to "sell" her to his superior, she loses her mind and ends up in a mental hospital.

In the film *Sang Penari*, which is inspired by the book, Srintil starts dancing as a *ronggeng* only after she has become an adult woman. The movie focuses on the love story of Rasus and Srintil. They fall in love with

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<sup>14</sup> *Tempe bongkrek*, soybean cake made from peanut residue.

each other as young adults, but Rasus is troubled by jealousy because Srintil does not only belong to him but is the property of all villagers. Central episodes of the novel, food poisoning, the *bukak klambu* ritual, and the events of 1965 are also part of the film. The last sequence of the movie strikingly differs from the trilogy of novels. It does not elaborate on what happened after the mid-1960s but thrusts the spectator into the early 1970s, when bulldozers and big yellow trucks made new earth tracks in neighbouring Dawuan and the people built irrigation canals. The last scenes of the film show Srintil as a dancing beggar, and only the blind musician Sakum is left of her *ronggeng* group. Then there is a short moment when Rasus and Srintil meet. In a symbolic gesture, Rasus places a magic dagger (*keris*) into Srintil's hand that was lost during the events of the coup d'état.



Fig. 1, Rasus gives the *keris* back to Srintil (*Sang Penari* 2011, Salto Films, DVD 2, 48:48)

Throughout the movie, the *keris* is used to express Rasus' love for Srintil. When he first gives it to her, she responds by putting the *keris* into her dress. Here, the *keris* also symbolises the perfection of the *ronggeng*, the strengthening of her position by this magic object. Vice versa, the decreasing power and influence symbolised by the *keris* becomes apparent when the *keris* is shown lying on the bedroom floor, after Srintil has got out of her bed in which one of her customers is sleeping. It is suggested that the love between Srintil and Rasus is marred by Srintil's sexual



services. Moreover, the element of the sacred, symbolised by the *keris*, is tainted by prostitution.

Although Srintil accepts the *keris* at the end of the film, a future for Rasmus and Srintil as a couple is unlikely. The final shot shows Srintil dancing with Sakum on a farm road, slowly disappearing out of sight. Thus, the film's end has a subtle gloomy undertone, which is characteristic of many melodramas. In contrast, the end of the book prompts the conclusion that Rasmus will be responsible for helping Srintil, combating backwardness and bringing reforms to the whole village. These reforms are also supposed to help Dukuh Paruk to find harmony with God (Tohari 2004, 404). Moreover, the last pages of the trilogy suggest that superstition has to be replaced by common sense and reasoning, which echoes ideas of Islamic reformism. The end of *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* sends the clear message to the reader that ignorance, backwardness, dirtiness and prostitution are "diseases" that have to be cured. This should be kept in mind when looking at how the trilogy of novels connects tradition with dance.

### **Dance, desire, and tradition**

In the first part of the book the text directs the reader's attention to local, traditional culture in the fictional hamlet of Dukuh Paruk. This culture, as we learn, is marked by an ambivalent concurrence of sacredness and dirtiness:

Dukuh Paruk is only complete if there is Ki Secamenggala's sanctity, if there are obscene jokes, curses and a *ronggeng* dancer with her musical equipment.<sup>15</sup> The picture of Dukuh Paruk is complemented by remarks by outsiders, such as: "Don't stay in misery as the people in Dukuh Paruk." Or, "Hey, children, go and bathe. If you do not, pus will flow from your ears, scabies are going to infest your legs as happens with the Dukuh Paruk children!" (Tohari 2004, 15-6)

Dirt, physical and non-physical, is an important aspect of everyday life in the fictional hamlet. The children are dirty in the actual sense of the word, and the types of diseases mentioned indicate that there is a lack of hygiene. Scabies, for example, although they also occur in "clean" environments, are typically associated with a lack of hygiene. The narrator's comment shows that other people distinguish themselves from the local people of Dukuh Paruk because the latter are associated with remoteness, backwardness,

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<sup>15</sup> The original term here is *calung*, a musical instrument consisting of pieces of bamboo, hung and beaten by help of two pieces of wood.

and a lack of “civilization”. Obviously, paying attention to cleanliness is a way how people demonstrate their superior economic status, nationalism, ethnic belonging, or religion (van Dijk / Taylor 2011, vii).

In contrast, the erotic dance of the female *ronggeng* is “dirty” in a figurative sense. There is no concrete physical dirt but the *ronggeng*’s erotic dance movements and her appearance of immorality, easy virtue, and sexual availability is considered “dirty”. Due to this connotation, people tend to view the dancer as being defiled in a moral sense, and, hence, associate the *ronggeng* with prostitution. Ki Secamenggala, the villager’s founding father, is also “dirty” in a metaphorical sense because his behaviour is impure. During his lifetime he was a bandit, and the narrator explains that he deliberately sought a remote place to end his roguery (Tohari 2004, 10). Nevertheless, the inhabitants venerate him as a saint. Ki Secamenggala is their spiritual centre, and it is his tomb where they worship and seek his blessing and guidance. Thus, from the beginning of the narrative sacredness and dirtiness are not constructed as opposites, but they are regarded as elements complementing each other in the microcosm of Dukuh Paruk. In a similar way, the *ronggeng* dancer is a divine and profane object of desire, as she is connected with the rice goddess, but as a prostitute she is also bound to the profane. As common themes of *ronggeng* Spiller identifies the dancer’s representation of femininity, which is believed to complement masculine energy, their quality as catalysts for power by men and their function as objects rather than individuals. He concludes that the dancers are seen in a similar way as agricultural resources, as a property to be shared among men (Spiller 2010, 82-83). The narrative employs this idea because the erotic dancer becomes a shared resource as well as the embodiment of fertility and prosperity of the hamlet. It alludes to the fact that, in the past, *ronggeng* dance was part of local customs related to the spiritual world.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, it is evident that Tohari does not believe in the balance between the divine and the profane that is characteristic of the microcosm of Dukuh Paruk. Rather, as he promotes a Reformist Islamic stance, he considers the villagers’ “animist” practices such as the worship of their founding father and the practice of prostitution impure and unholy.

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<sup>16</sup> Nowadays, *lènggèr*, as *ronggeng* dance is also called in Banyumas, is sanitised, and several of the customs described in Tohari’s trilogy of novels have disappeared. See: Lysloff 2001.



Fig. 2 Cover of *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, 2004, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition

There is no agreement among scholars over whether *ronggeng* can be considered prostitutes or not. Following Spiller, who highlighted two contradicting connotations of female performers—the rice goddess and the prostitute—Bader (2011, 339) draws our attention to the dichotomy between the divine and the profane: how can a prostitute be sacred at the same time? To answer this question, a closer look at the relationship between *ronggeng*, villagers and spirits is needed, especially in the context of mystical practices (*kejawen*). In those areas where such practices are still alive, the notion prevails that an inner mystical power (*kesakten*) holds the world together. People can achieve this power by meditation, for instance at the graves of their ancestors, and by way of other forms of sacrifice, austerity, and ascetic exercise. Hence, in some villages in Java it is common to visit the village founder at his holy grave or shrine at which the ancestor may be invoked (*kramatan*). Keeping up a good relationship with him is important for the community because the local people believe that the hamlet's founder can impart blessing (*berkah*) (Woodward 1989, 170). This blessing is only bestowed on the condition that the inhabitants venerate him and offer sacrifices to him. If they fail to do so, the local people presume that the village founder or saint will punish them, for

instance by making the crops infertile. One sacrifice offered could be the *ronggeng*'s dancing which, according to Hughes-Freeland (2006, 66), is a "gift to the village's protective spirit in exchange for well-being". This observation stems from the belief that through establishing contact with tutelary spirits and giving sacrifices to the village patron the *ronggeng* can promote the welfare of the community and ensure the fertility of the harvest. Thus, the association of the *ronggeng* with ritual and spiritual elements is related to the central position of fertility in agrarian communities. As Wessing (1999, 645) points out, dance, through re-establishing the connections between the ancestors, nature spirits, and the community, makes the crops fertile. The productivity of the plants is essential for peasant societies, and, hence, several ritual practices connect the fertility of the crops with a fertile relationship between men and women. The latter symbolically lays the soil to make the crops grow (Cahyono 2006, 23). It is a sexual relationship between men and women that is alluded to: by insemination, the man fulfils the role of preparing the earth, the feminine source of life.

In the trilogy, the relationship between men and women is also used to symbolise fertility. Similar to Wessing's description of dance in Banyuwangi (1999, 663), the hamlet's ancestor once established a relationship with the tutelary spirit, in this case the *indang*, which exemplifies productivity. This relationship has been transmitted to the descendants of the village. The extent to which the *indang* possesses Srintil determines her dancing skills. This becomes obvious when the narrator points out that Srintil's sudden ability to dance as a *ronggeng* is intricately linked to the *indang*:

In the hamlet, there is a firm belief that a real *ronggeng* is not the product of instruction. Regardless of teaching, a virgin can only become a *ronggeng* if the soul of the *indang* takes possession of her body. The *indang* is a spirit exalted in the *ronggeng* world. [...] So, this afternoon Srintil dances with her eyes half-closed. The three boys who accompany her witness that Srintil can already sing many *ronggeng* songs. (Tohari 2004, 13)

However, the fact that the *indang* has entered Srintil's body does not result in physical fertility, as one might assume. According to the customs of Dukuh Paruk, a *ronggeng* can only be a dancer as long as she is not pregnant. Therefore Nyai Kartareja, the old woman who supervises Srintil and trains her to follow the customs as a *ronggeng*, massages her stomach to make her infertile. It is Rasus who informs the reader about this practice, adding that he assumes Srintil to be haunted by the idea of not having any offspring (Tohari 2004, 90). The seeming contradiction between

the fertility symbolised by the *indang* and the *ronggeng*'s personal infertility can be explained by the relevance of "supernatural" fertility in this case. Rather than being individually fertile, the dancer provides a temporary lodging for the nature spirit and becomes an auxiliary body, as Wessing (1999, 666) showed. The female body serves as a loan for the spirit of fertility; thus, when the *indang* possesses Srintil, it is the *indang*'s energy and potency that are passed on through the dancer. The body becomes a channel through which a descent line's spiritual essence and fertility are passed on (Wessing 1999, 667). Thus, the dancer's role is precisely determined: through her dancing she channels the *indang*'s fertility to the community and contributes to the villagers' wellbeing. Hence, ideally, the *ronggeng* needs to put aside her own desires to serve others. It is appropriate to draw on Bertrand (2009, 78) here. He postulates that cosmic harmony can only be reached by abandoning one's own subjectivity and intimate desires, and a state of emptiness and feeling of submission is the result. In Bertrand's sense, Srintil has to leave her subjectivity behind and help higher-ranking beings, the ancestor's spirit and the *indang*, to ensure cosmic harmony.

According to the local customs, Srintil's virginity is awarded to the best-paying man in the initiation ritual of *bukak klambu*. However, Srintil breaks the rules because she performs the sexual act with Rasmus, whom she loves, before submitting to another young man for money. She wants Rasmus to marry her, but he does not see any shared future for them because he feels that Srintil will never exclusively belong to him but is "common property". The traditional role of a woman as a wife and mother is presented as what Srintil desires. It becomes apparent that as a dancer offering sexual services she is in conflict with a harmonious life according to Islamic norms.

The film *Sang Penari* also contains this ethical component, but *Sang Penari* does not explore the details of tradition. Events relating to the local culture, including ancestor cult and interpretation of signs in nature, are either described shortly or left out altogether in the film. This deliberate decision was taken because, as Ifa Isfanyah said in an interview, he wanted to produce a film suitable for any audience. It was important for him to make Banyumas the site of the film to catch the local atmosphere, but he also suggested that confining the film to tradition was contrary to this aim.<sup>17</sup> However, the film follows the traditional pattern of the

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Ifa Isfanyah in: "Sebuah Proses Mahakarya: Behind The Scene Sang Penari," uploaded on 3 November 2011, Salto Films. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KjmgxZiflQ&list=PL7gNjV3-exPBOvdAIOWfdgfhAvjb2dRal&index=4>. Accessed 6 March 2015.

melodrama to subordinate one's individual desire and hopes to a conventional order (Weber 2013, 101). Srintil sets aside her needs because dance is everything for her, and she is ready to sacrifice her private life for being a *ronggeng*. In contrast to the trilogy of novels, the *indang* does not signify the relation between the dancer, symbolising fertility, and the village. Rather, Srintil's increasing physical attractiveness, in particular her attractive voice and body odour, indicate the *indang*'s presence. It is Sakum, the blind musician of the *ronggeng* troupe, who has acquired knowledge (*ilmu*) during his life, who notices Srintil's change:

I have known *ronggeng* for decades [he...he...he]. Your voice has already become a *ronggeng*'s voice [he...he...he]—ah, your body odour is a *ronggeng*'s body odour—ah, if later the *indang* leaves, I will also know. (*Sang Penari* 2011, Salto Films, DVD 1, 12:29-12:46)

Srintil's physical attractiveness and her erotic aura are constructed as elements that make the *indang* alive for the audience. They underline Srintil's contradictory role as a dancer and a prostitute. In contrast to the book, Srintil's dancing is strongly ambivalent from the beginning of the film. When she performs for the first time, Kartareja, the spiritual counsellor (*dukun*) who will take care of her training in the future, refuses to come, and the audience leaves. After a moment of tension and retardation, Srintil dances without an audience. Only Sakum accompanies her and also consoles her when she starts weeping over her misery. This moment of tears is juxtaposed with moments of happiness after Kartareja has announced that Srintil is the new village *ronggeng*. For example, in one of the dance scenes Srintil is first shown close up and then amidst the excited villagers who try to touch her. The audience is exulted when she finally throws her yellow scarf around a man's neck, thus deciding with whom she will dance and spend the night. However, not only the male inhabitants do support the revival of the *ronggeng* tradition in Dukuh Paruk, as one might expect, but also the women do so. For them, the sexual act of their husbands with Srintil is proof of virility. Hence, the female villagers frequently speculate as to whose husband might be most desirable for Srintil.

Although the common villagers accept Srintil's dancing, the most important person in Srintil's life does not: Rasmus. When Srintil tells him that the *bukak klambu* is approaching, hoping for his sympathy, he flies into a fury. He shuts the door in her face, saying she knew that a *ronggeng* had to perform the *bukak klambu* ritual. In another scene, when Srintil dances in front of Ki Secamenggala's grave to become a real *ronggeng*, Rasmus does is not able to bear watching her dancing and walks away.

Nevertheless, his behaviour conforms to the traditional notion that men play a more active physical role in a relationship. Contrary to the novel, he seeks Srintil's affection until he realises that the *ronggeng* will not belong to him. In one scene he approaches her from behind, draws her close and places his hand over her mouth. In contrast, in the trilogy of novels Rasmus is sexually immature, and he views sexuality sceptically and even disapproves of Srintil's passion. This has also to do with the fact that Rasmus associates Srintil with his mother who mysteriously disappeared from Dukuh Paruk. As Rasmus does not know whether his mother escaped from Dukuh Paruk or died, his thoughts often revolve around her. He develops an Oedipus complex he projects onto Srintil (Cooper 2004, 537). For him, Srintil is an idealised mother figure he does not want to be "tainted" by feelings of passion.

### **Disorder and disaster**

The village falls into a state of disorder after Rasmus has turned his back on Dukuh Paruk. Srintil is plunged into a deep crisis; she refuses to dance and retreats to her room. In her attacks of melancholy she is obsessed with having a family. Thus, to enforce her ideas of life against the will of the others, she tries to take away another woman's child. The movie captures the dramatic moment of this decision, when Srintil, while screaming, struggles with other women who try to take the child back from her. This scene shows her despair about being denied her desired role as a wife and mother. It suggests that since Srintil has lost Rasmus, she is also deprived of her position as the symbolic centre of Dukuh Paruk. Hence, she is more susceptible to Bakar's hypocritical interests in her. According to her, this communist leader is a father figure because he shows understanding for her achievements as a dancer but does not harass her (Tohari 2004, 228). All villagers, except Srintil's grandfather Sakarya, think that he protects and advances the rights of the local people. One reason for their high opinion of Bakar is the fact that they fail to understand his desire to use the villagers for his political agenda. As the government did not provide education to people living in rural areas, as we may read Tohari's criticism, the local population was incapable of recognising the signs of the times. Thus, in the novels they are described as being unable to assess situations correctly because they are illiterates:

In front of Kartareja's home a banner had also been put up. Nobody in Dukuh Paruk was able to read the writing on this banner. However, at least they knew that the writing there was related to *ronggeng* art. (Tohari 2004, 229)

The only critical person among the villagers is Sakarya, who is often described as interpreting the signs of nature. Both in the novel and in the movie he points out to the fact that Dukuh Paruk did not need banners in the past. He also thinks that Bakar is wrong when he prohibits customary (*adat*)-practices such as the burning of incense. However, the other villagers, including the *dukun* Kartareja, do not share his concerns, and Srintil becomes the dancer of the people.

Hence, it is not surprising that red is the dominating colour. When Srintil dances at the folk festival (*pesta rakyat*) in August 1964, her dress, her scarf, the bamboo hats of the spectators and the banners are red. Red, of course, is and was the signature colour of the communists, and its dominance during the celebrations reveals that the PKI used Srintil for the purpose of propaganda. Whereas this symbolism of red is unambiguous in both cultural productions, this is not the case with green. In the context of 1965, green tended to be associated with Ansor, the organisation of young males related to the Muslim mass organisation Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Several scholars have pointed out to the active role of Banser, Ansor's paramilitary group, in harassing and finally killing communists.<sup>18</sup> Banser had clashed with members of the Indonesian Peasants' Front (Barisan Tani Indonesia, BTI) over actions of land reform prior to the coup d'état. As a response to the land reform, which was on the 1959 Crop Sharing Law and the 1960 Basic Agrarian Law, the PKI saw the need for peasants to implement their land reforms. They felt that the distribution of land was unjust, and they viewed the religious leaders (*kiai*) as one of the "seven devils" because of their land property. In the months after the coup attempt Banser "rounded up and killed members of leftist organizations" (McGregor 2009, 199). As Fealy points out, NU units worked closely with the army and drew up lists of PKI members and supporters, and afterwards they detained or killed them (Fealy 2010). They thought that killing communists was justified because they were "warlike infidels" threatening Islam (Ibid.)

The book suggests a connection between Nahdlatul Ulama circles and those who destroyed the tomb of the villagers' forefather, Ki Secamenggala. When the villagers discover the destruction of the tomb, Darkim, a young man of Dukuh Paruk, proclaims that he has found a bamboo hat in the shrubs. He says that he suspects the villains who desecrated the grave to be the perpetrators. Subsequently, the narrator comments as follows:

All eyes were on the green bamboo hat. Moreover, although they could not read, they understood something. A green bamboo hat. Bakar's people had

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<sup>18</sup> See for example: Hughes 1967, Hefner 1990, Fealy 2010.



never used a hat like this. (...) In 1965 everyone knew which group of farmers held processions and held meetings with such a headwear. (Tohari 2004, 233-4)

On the one hand, this attack on Nahdlatul Ulama is interesting because Ahmad Tohari, who promotes a Reformist Islamic stance, suggests that Islamic traditionalists defiled the tombs. However, the practice of desecrating graves is rather associated with promoters of Islamic Reformism, who strongly criticise “impure” Islamic practices such as the veneration of saints. Thus, the author might have tried to divert attention from Islamic Reformist actors here. On the other hand, it is well known that Ansor was involved in the agitation against communists. In the film the case is a different one, although a bamboo hat also plays a role. Here it is Bakar who finds it close to Ki Secamenggala’s defiled tomb and holds it up. He uses the villagers’ shock over the destruction of the tomb to further his goal of making them not only avenge the crime but claim their land rights. However, it is hardly possible for the audience to judge from the colour of the bamboo hat, as it is briefly shown in the dark, and the only light stems from torches.



Fig. 3, Bakar holds up a bamboo hat, calling the villagers to claim their rights (*Sang Penari* 2011, Salto Films, DVD 2, 24:09)

Similar to a Rorschach test, where patients are asked to interpret a blot of ink, the audience also makes sense of those scenes that might create gaps

in meaning (Uhrig 2015, 86). The audience relies on elements such as dramaturgy, the characters' postures, camera shot, film music, and colour to create meaning. In this particular scene, the dramaturgy suggests that the bamboo hat is one item used to demonstrate how communist agitation has affected the village community. This scene is marked by fast cuts between perspectives, in ways that imply rapidly evolving events. In the beginning Bakar is shown in a medium close-up shot, and the camera focuses on the hat for two seconds. In a gesture of victory he shouts: "It is clear who the perpetrators are." Then he appears in the background, facing a crowd of male villagers, some of whom hold torches in their hands. Raising the bamboo hat, he calls out questions to the group such as "Who owns the land?" and "Who owns you?", and each time they enthusiastically shout "the people" with one voice. Here, passion and sadness are juxtaposed because we see women kneeling at Ki Secamenggala's tomb in the foreground. We also witness how Sakarya, who talks to Kartareja, bemoans that he and the villagers have failed to guard the ancestors. In the subsequent shot some men of the crowd are portrayed close up. Next, in a point-of-view shot, they turn around, and the audience sees another communist, holding a stick in his hand, from their position. With a gesture to follow him, the latter leads the shouting crowd away in the direction of the fields. Afterwards, the audience witnesses how Srintil and Nyai Kartareja, who cannot make sense of the events, are almost overrun by the crowd that starts setting fields on fire. It captures the crowd's exuberant emotions after the fields are burning; they wildly dance around, start singing, and their faces radiate with glory. This moment of happiness is again followed by a moment of despair, when Srintil kneels in the dark, crying and praying to the villagers' forefather. The musical composition supports the ambivalent moods because a melancholic violin tune is opposed to the loud shouting and wailing. The impression created by the film music and the characters' emotions, going from low to high, is that the village has fallen into a state of disorder. The scene focuses on how agitation creates group cohesion between the villagers and the communists, an unhealthy alliance.

It should be pointed out here that the communists are held responsible for inciting the villagers to set the fields ablaze. The telling name Bakar underlines their prominent role as agitators because the Indonesian term *bakar* means "to burn" or "to set on fire". It is obvious that Bakar, as a representative of the communist leaders, is considered guilty of manipulating the villagers and leading them astray. Thus, on the one hand the movie evokes emotional reactions among the audience, in particular compassion for the innocent villagers who fail to understand Bakar's

motives because of their lack of education. They are shown as easily misled but guiltless victims of political developments. However, there is no sympathy evoked for the communists who, as the movie suggests, should be held responsible for the subsequent events. Hence, in this regard *Sang Penari* is in line with official accounts of the 1965 events, according to which the communists had to be stopped, if necessary by use of violence, to prevent them from further threatening the social order.

In the book, the dramatised scenes of communist agitation are absent. After the narrator has described the desecration of the tomb, Srintil decides to go to the police, accompanied by Kartareja. She intends to ask the police to find those people, who have previously threatened their village. She is convinced not to have inflicted any harm upon others and asks the policeman to protect Dukuh Paruk. When the latter tells her that she and Kartareja, on the command of his superior, are imprisoned, she is stunned. The narrator comments that she walks around like a person without a soul after this incident (Tohari 2004, 241). Accordingly, disaster hits the village as Dukuh Paruk is burnt down two days after Srintil's imprisonment. There are different explanatory approaches for this attack. One is that some peasants have taken revenge on Bakar and his people because they had repeatedly stolen rice from their fields during the past years. Another is that religious sentiments might have played a role, a reference that might be directed to Islamic groups (Ibid.)

However, although there is no preference given for any of these interpretations, it is important to note here that speechlessness remains an essential motive used to address the traumatic experiences of the victims. When Rasmus, who has embarked on the difficult search for Srintil, finally finds her in a detention camp, he manages to meet her for ten minutes. However, neither Srintil nor Rasmus do talk during their meeting. Srintil is plagued by self-doubt, and she hides her face behind her hands, so that Rasmus cannot see her tears. Her silence continues after she has been released from the camp. The horror she has experienced in the camp has impacted so strongly on her mind that her self-esteem is destroyed. As a result, she lapses into silence. Rasmus remains silent because he is embarrassed, and hence he does not know what to say to Srintil (Tohari 2004, 272). Thus, when the time is over, he tells the corporal that he is unable to tell him what they have been talking about because nothing has been said.<sup>19</sup>

It is Srintil's trauma that prevents her from speaking. Her silence and speechlessness that result from her traumatic experiences can also be

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<sup>19</sup> The only strong emotions represented are those of the corporal who, in a fit of rage, beats Rasmus because he does not believe him.

found in narratives dealing with mass killings in other parts of the world, most prominently the Holocaust. For instance, Ernestine Schlant (2001, 13) has convincingly shown that silence is an important feature of Holocaust literature. Several of these fictional texts addressed the fact that inmates of concentration camps had difficulty putting into words what they had seen and experienced. Producers of cultural productions that appeared many years after the killings, however, have used emotionality as a means to overcome speechlessness, to express resistance and to allow for cathartic relief. It is in this light that Srintil's strong emotional reactions to the events should be seen. When the allies of the army come to the village, read the villagers' names from a list<sup>20</sup> and force them into the back of a truck, Srintil defends herself amidst loud screams. The other villagers also cry as they are compelled to get into the van. They are all shocked because none of them has anticipated their imprisonment. They did not know anything about the recent developments. This is clearly shown in a previous scene, when the killings of the army generals "by a group referring to themselves as 30 September Movement" (*Sang Penari* 2011, 28:20) are announced on the radio. Nobody takes notice because the only villager who could have listened to the news is asleep beside the radio.

However, not only the victims of violence and persecution show intense emotionality, but also Rasmus does, when he has found Srintil in an old, isolated building. He fears for her life because he sees that a soldier calls her name and makes her sit down in a different place. He falsely assumes that she is among those prisoners who are heading towards death in an empty freight car. In a dramatic action, he tries to push all soldiers aside and to get through to the woman, crying out Srintil's name, but other soldiers seize him, beat him and force him back.

Afterwards, the audience witnesses how an empty freight car transports prisoners on a siding. Soldiers guard them, and it is suggested that these prisoners will be executed. The film stresses Rasmus' despair and powerlessness, his inability to help Srintil. Although he is part of the army, he is unable to do anything for her. Another aspect the movie emphasises is the inhumane conditions of the prisoners, who are crammed together in dark and confined rooms. The film shows the prisoners in a vulnerable state, with their backs bent and arms held close to their heads, thus creating an atmosphere of fear and tension. Moreover, it juxtaposes light and darkness and uses the sound of squeaking iron doors when military personnel enters the room, so that the audience gets an impression of the fear the prisoners endure.

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<sup>20</sup> It is suggested that they employ Bakar's list of participants at the folk festival.



Fig. 4, Rasmus tries to get through to Srintil in the detention camp (*Sang Penari* 2011, Salto Films, DVD 2, 46:55)

The film clearly shows that the army shot communists in the aftermath of 1965. First, the audience sees Bakar with his hands held up, and then it is shown how someone is executed as he is thrown into the water. Following this, the next scene switches to Rasmus, who has his weapon at the ready. This scene suggests that he was involved in the killings of communists. However, the film censorship board censored an additional sequence that illustrated how a severed head was thrown into the water. Hence, it does not appear in the officially released version. A likely reason is that members of the commission did not want Ifa Isfanyah to visualise the military carrying out beheadings of communists and alleged communists in the aftermath of the 1965 events. Furthermore, intimate moments of Srintil's and Rasmus' love were shortened or cut. According to Ifa Isfanyah, around five minutes of the original film were censored.<sup>21</sup>

### Concluding remarks

*Sang Penari* captures the emotions of detainees who were alleged communists, the victims of the events of 1965. The film demonstrates the human rights violations by the military and thus picturises what has been silenced for many years. The film is marked by sharp contrasts, caused by

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<sup>21</sup> See: Pasaribu 2011.

the use of contradictory emotions going from low to high and back again. In the context of the 1965 events, the outbursts of emotion substitute the silence that people associate with the victims of the mass killings. The movie transforms the silence, caused by trauma, into emotionality and action. Thus, the victims are given the opportunity to express their despair over the events of the past. It is interesting to note here that not only women are ascribed emotionality. Rather, also the male protagonist, who switches roles between “victim” and “perpetrator”, is shaken by emotions over the atrocities committed. His sensation of despair is clearly transmitted to the audience. By choosing emotions as a central element the film keeps the memory of 1965 alive.

It is apparent that in *Sang Penari* emotions serve as a tool to demonstrate the threat external forces posed to the villagers in the mid-1960s. “Outsiders”, in particular communists, turned moments of delight into misery. Thus, the image of the communists as evil people who abused their power and took advantage of the ignorant villagers is perpetuated. Their intrusion threatened the village community because they wanted to exploit the villagers for their purposes. The ease with which they achieved their goals was due to the local inhabitants’ lack of education and naivety. Tradition, which according to the book includes both sacred and profane elements, did not provide the local inhabitants with an adequate tool to face their threats. Tradition, thus the message, should not be at odds with social and religious mores. Thus, it would have been the duty of the government to promote decency and to provide the local people with the knowledge necessary to make them understand social and political contexts. In the novels, the answer to these challenges is rooted in Reformist Islam, whereas the movie rather seems to point to the people’s right to humanity in a more general manner. Furthermore, it does not delve deeply into matters of tradition. It uses the local culture as an atmospheric background to the love story between Srintil and Rasus which, after all, is what makes people go to the cinema.

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## CHAPTER SIX

# TEXTUAL PRODUCTION IN THE MIDST OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN INDONESIA: READINGS OF AJIP ROSIDI'S *ANAK TANAHAIR*<sup>1</sup>

MIKIHIRO MORIYAMA

### Introduction

The horrendous killings triggered by the events of the night of 30 September 1965 still cause haunting memories with many Indonesian citizens. Ajip Rosidi, born 1938 in Jatiwangi in the Province of West Java, some twenty years after the dramatic events decided to write his second novel *Anak Tanahair* (A child of the homeland, 1985), foregrounding his personal views of the cultural-political situation in the mid-1960s.<sup>2</sup> This novel relates to the difficulties and conflicts experienced by a young Muslim who lived in Jakarta during that time. Understandably, these traumatic events have also induced writings by many other Indonesian authors, including Ashadi Siregar, Yudhistira A.M. Massardi, Ahmad Tohari, Umar Kayam, and more recently Ayu Utami and Gitanyali.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on my presentation at the International Conference “70 Years of Textual Production in Indonesia: Cultural Traditions Informing Modern Productions” held in Frankfurt on 12-13 October 2015. I thank the participants of the conference for their input and, in particular, Henk Maier and Jan van der Putten for their comments and suggestions on this draft. This research was supported in part by Nanzan University Pache Research Subsidy I-A-2 for the 2016 academic year.

<sup>2</sup> Before being published as a book in 1985, the novel was serialised in the Bandung-based newspaper *Pikiran Rakyat* under the title of *Secercah Kisah* (A Glimmer of a Tale) (see Rosidi 2008b, 827).

<sup>3</sup> Ashadi Siregar, *Jentera Lepas*, 1994 (first published in 1979); Yudhistira ANM Massardi, *Mencoba Tidak Menyerah*, 1996; Ahmad Tohari, *Kubah*, 1980;

Critics such as Keith Foulcher (1991; 1993) and Nilson Hoadley (2005) have mainly interpreted the novel *Anak Tanahair* as a reflection of the turbulent period the novel takes as its historical context.<sup>4</sup> For instance, Foulcher (1991, 106) asserts: “It is a realistic historical novel, in part a historical documentary, full of autobiographical elements and peopled by actual historical figures, either under their own names or thinly disguised behind pseudonyms.” In this chapter I will venture an alternative reading to their interpretations, by exploring themes of this novel and messages the author has encoded into his writing. Questions that will be addressed are, *inter alia*, possible personal motives for the author to have written the novel in the specific way he did and for him to include particular episodes. This essay does not seek to reconstruct the history of those times through the novel. I am aware of “the extent to which the discourse of the historian and that of the imaginative writer overlap, resemble, or correspond with each other” – as Hayden White (1978, 121) calls it, “the fictions of factual representation”. In this sense it is not possible to read this novel without taking factual representation into account. However, I will try to show an alternative reading based on, but separate from, the readings by the scholars mentioned above.

### **Ajip Rosidi and the writing of *Anak Tanahair***

Ajip Rosidi produced an extensive number of literary works both in Indonesian and Sundanese, including poems, short stories, novels, drama scripts, essays, translations, and adaptations of old Sundanese tales (Rosidi 2008b). He started writing poems in his youth in the 1950s, after he had moved to Jakarta for his secondary school studies, and together with W.S. Rendra he was regarded as “a new avant-garde” in Indonesian literature (Aveling 2001, 9-11). His contribution to Indonesian literature consists not

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*Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, 1982; *Lintang kemukus Dini Hari*, 1985; Umar Kayam, *Sri Sumarah*, 1975; *Para Priyayi*, 1992; Ayu Utami, *Bilangan Fu*, 2008; *Manjali dan Cakrabirawa*, 2010; *Cerita Cinta Enrico*, 2012; *Lalita*, 2012, Gitanyali (Bre Redana), *Blues Merbabu*, 2011; 65, *Lanjutan Blues Merbabu*, 2012. The short stories include GM Sudarta, “Candik Ala”, 2008; Puthut EA, “Koh Su”, 2008, and Adek Alwi, “Mata Sultani”, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Surprisingly, not many have discussed this novel. Chambert-Loir (2008) mentioned it in passing. In Indonesia, Yoseph Yapi Taum discussed this novel in his dissertation *Representasi Tragedi 1965* (2013); Basuki Resobowo (2005) and Eka Budianta (2005) referred to it in their books. I am grateful to Atep Kurnia, a researcher on Sundanese and Indonesian literature in Bandung, for sharing this information. A Japanese scholar, Kaoru Kochi, mentioned this novel in comparison with Ahmad Tohari’s trilogy in his presentation (2010).

only of the creative writing he produced but also of a great number of works he published through his self-managed/owned publishing company. His literary career is outstanding, and his contribution to Indonesian literature is immense.

After an initial, abortive attempt in the 1960s, his tireless zeal for promoting the Sundanese language and culture was revived in the late 1980s during his stay in Japan, where he taught at a number of universities. In 1989 he founded a literary award for regional literature called *Rancagé* (creativity), officially named Hadiah Sastra Rancagé (Rancagé Literary Award).<sup>5</sup> The value of the Rancagé prize, which far exceeds that of any other award for regional language literature, has had a significant impact on the publishing world of West Java.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the publication of literature in Sundanese has increased significantly in the 15 years since it was established.<sup>7</sup> It is now recognised nationally, and its annual awards are featured in the mass media. It draws attention to creative writing in regional languages and raises the profile of regionally based authors, all part of the “chain reaction” envisaged by Ajip. Another initiative taken by Ajip Rosidi to encourage the development of writing and reading in Sundanese and research on Sundanese culture was the first International Conference on Sundanese Culture (Konperensi Internasional Budaya Sunda, KIBS), held in 2001. As much a political as an academic event, this conference drew 634 participants from Indonesia and overseas. It ran for over four days, and a total of 75 papers were presented.<sup>8</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> While criticising the Indonesian government’s failure to promote regional languages and literatures for many years, Ajip described the aims of this prize for literature as follows: “A well-publicised annual prize for literature can be expected to produce a chain reaction. With the assistance of the press, the community will become aware of new books and interested readers will go in search for them. This in turn will encourage publishers to be more active in book publishing” (Rosidi 2004, 27).

<sup>6</sup> When the prize was instituted in 1989, it was worth IDR 1 million, an extraordinary amount for a literary award at the time. As a result, the prize gained widespread community attention. See more in Moriyama (2012, 93-5).

<sup>7</sup> In the 1980s, the number of works of Sundanese literature was no more than five, but gradually it increased in the 1990s. At its height in 2002, a total of 27 works of Sundanese literature were published within a single year (Moriyama 2012, 94). This Rancagé Prize for Literature has also been extended to other regions of Indonesia. In 1994 it was offered for the first time for literature in Javanese, and in 1998 for literature in Balinese.

<sup>8</sup> 10 years later a second International Conference on Sundanese Culture was held at the same place, the Asia Africa Conference building in Bandung, which attracted much attention from the Sundanese community.

most recent activity of his promotion of Sundanese culture was establishing the Ajip Rosidi Library in Bandung in 2015. This library includes the collection of the Institute of Sundanology, which was established soon after the above mentioned conference, as a research centre for Sundanese culture.

Ajip wrote poems and essays not only in Indonesian to reach a wider audience but also continued to write in his mother tongue, Sundanese. This is an indication of his insistence on using a regional language and his sense of anxiety of losing it as part of one's cultural identity, as he points out in his essay *Masadepan Budaya Daerah: Kasus Budaya dan Sejarah Sunda* (The Future of Regional Culture: The Case of Sundanese Culture and History 2004, 74-5). He is known as a literary critic through his *Ikhtisar Sejarah Sastra Indonesia* (A Short History of Indonesian Literature) and dozens of essays in various magazines, literary journals and newspapers. His publications, that have been appearing from the late 1950s on, by now are more than 300, which exceeds the output of most other prolific writers in Indonesia.<sup>9</sup>

In September 1965 Ajip published a Sundanese magazine, *Mingguan Sunda*, later renamed *Madjalah Sunda*, which he apparently intended as a means to promote a reading culture in the Sundanese-speaking community and to preserve the Sundanese language next to the national language as the most important identity tool (Rosidi 2008b, 337-8). The magazine was not only meant for propagating Sundanese language and literature but also contained critical writings about social affairs, in which Ajip vented criticism on the PKI, for instance.

Perhaps ironically, despite having some ideological differences, Ajip was on good terms with left-wing Sundanese writers and also associated with Utuy Sontani, Toto S. Bachtiar, Mh. Rustandi Kartakusuma, Dodong Djiwapradja and Rivai Apin, most of whom were members of Lekra (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat: Institute of People's Culture), a cultural organisation affiliated with the Communist Party (Rosidi 2008b, 310-26 and 385-8). Right-wing and nationalist authors and artists viewed his close relationship with these Lekra members with much suspicion and considered Ajip a member of the organisation. Their conviction was even enhanced when Ajip and his Sundanese fellow writers did not express their full support for the All-Indonesia Writers Conference (KKPI: Konferensi Karyawan Pengarang se-Indonesia), held by a group backed by the national army, which in 1964 obviously was engaged in a fierce dispute with Indonesia's Communist Party in Jakarta. In one of his letters to Benedict Anderson, written during his time in Osaka in 1986, he stated

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<sup>9</sup> For his career and a large number of publications see Rosidi (2008b, 1240-58).

that he enclosed an essay entitled *Manifes Kebudayaan dan KKPI* (Cultural Manifesto and the All-Indonesia Writers Conference), which he had submitted to the literary magazine *Horison* (Horizon) to deny the accusations. In the letter he also included clippings about this heated dispute from the newspaper *Pikiran Rakyat*, published in 1964 to justify his position (Rosidi 2008a, 325-6).<sup>10</sup>

In 1986 this belligerent controversy between cultural producers being divided into different organisations would come back to Ajip's mind when he responded to several passages in a biographical novel about the literary critic H.B. Jassin, written by Darsjaf Rahman (Rosidi 2008a, 322). In the novel Darsjaf contended "that Ajip and a group of young West Java writers, somehow in league with Lekra, had sought to sabotage the anti-communist "All-Indonesia Writers' Conference" of March 1964" (Foulcher 1991, 110-11). Ajip's response essay explaining his attitude of 1964, which he had sent to Anderson earlier because he was afraid it would not be published, was released in two consecutive issues of *Horison* and triggered a polemic with a few writers in 1987, some twenty years after the conference. Ajip wrote again to Benedict Anderson in November 1986 about the reason why he felt that he was forced to write this even after 20 years had passed since the Indonesian Communist Party was dissolved: "as an Indonesian such self-protection that I carried out was necessary. If not, you could become victim of slander" (Rosidi 2008a, 322). Ajip's attitude shows his distrust of his peer writers and critics in Jakarta and how deep the trauma around Lekra in the 1960s is rooted in his mind.

Ajip does, however, seem to have tried to remain unaligned with any political group, including the anti-communist *Manifes Kebudayaan* (Cultural Manifesto in 1963),<sup>11</sup> as may be concluded from the content of a series of letters he sent to a number of people including Yahaya Ismail, Arief Budiman, Satyagraha Hoerip, Z. Afiff and Sitor Situmorang between 1985 and 1987 (Rosidi 2008b, 303-49). These letters also show that Ajip protected those involved in Lekra from the long-lasting condemnation they were subjected to after the mid-1960s. These letters constitute important documents to draw on the cultural and political situation of the time of writing and provide insights into the period they refer to.

Ajip wrote the novel *Anak Tanahair* before the start of the above-mentioned promotion campaign for the Sundanese culture and after he had left Jakarta. Ajip moved to Kyoto in 1980 and stayed for about one year,

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<sup>10</sup> Ajip Rosidi sent at least three letters to Benedict Anderson in 1986 (Rosidi 2008a, 322-6).

<sup>11</sup> A detailed documented account of the Cultural Manifesto can be found in Goenawan Mohamad's book (1993, 11-54).

before returning to Jakarta and then moving back to Osaka in 1981, to stay there for more than 20 years. Before his departure to Japan he devoted much of his energy to establishing and managing a publishing business and other organisations in Jakarta. He led the publishing house *Pustaka Jaya*, with a focus on domestic and international literature, particularly the *belles lettres*, as president-director. At the same time he became the head of IKAPI (Ikatan Penerbit Indonesia, Indonesian Publishers' Association) and later was appointed a member of the Jakarta Arts Council (Dewan Kesenian Jakarta) by the well-known mayor of Jakarta, Ali Sadikin, an ethnic Sundanese. It seems that in his 30s and 40s, after the turmoil of September 1965, he devoted most of his time to managing the business and leading the organisations.

The first draft of *Anak Tanahair* was written in 1980 and completed in 1983, according to what he published in his memoirs (Rosidi 2008a, 323). He stated to have written this 300-page novel in about one week while being in Kyoto but was not satisfied with the first draft (Rosidi 2008b, 826). During his 1981 summer break of his university teaching job he revised the first draft and completed the novel (2008b, 901). In the above-mentioned first letter to Benedict Anderson of November 1986 he wrote that he would have liked to write the novel earlier, but could not find the time (Rosidi 2008a, 323). One might ask whether a lack of time is the main reason why he did not write the novel in the 1970s or even sooner after the events surrounding the attempted coup of 30 September 1965. It is plausible to think that he “bought time” to reflect on his position towards the unprecedented events in Indonesian history, in order to carefully choose words that would not induce criticism against him. He himself noted that he could finally write his *roman yang sudah bertahun-tahun mengganggu kepalaku* (novel that for years had upset my head) only after having left Indonesia (Rosidi 2008b, 826). Ajip Rosidi seemingly felt the need to write *Anak Tanahair* to narrate the cultural political struggle that led to the cataclysm of 1965 and to clarify his position, as rumours surfaced in 1979 and 1980 that he had been a member of Lekra.<sup>12</sup> Tellingly, this is the last and longest novel in his extensive literary oeuvre.

### **The content of *Anak Tanahair***

The novel tells the story of a young Sundanese man who gets involved in politics before the attempted coup of 30 September 1965 in Indonesia. The

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<sup>12</sup> For instance, in a book published in 1973 Ajip mentions that Yahaya Ismail indirectly regards him as a member of Lekra (Rosidi 2008a, 322).

protagonist, Ardi, comes to Jakarta in the early 1950s for his studies and wants to become a painter but is unable to escape from taking sides in the highly polarised political situation of the early 1960s. The storyline of the novel is divided into three parts in which three narrative voices develop the plot respectively. The first voice is the omniscient narrator, the second one is the protagonist Ardi, and the third one is Ardi's painter friend Hasan, who narrates in the form of letters to an anonymous friend.

The first part tells about the time Ardi leaves his village somewhere in West Java to go to Jakarta and attend the Taman Siswa school, a private nationalistic institution. In general, the Sundanese people are regarded as pious Muslims. Ardi's childhood is described in such a Muslim society. His life in an idyllic Sundanese village is told in retrospect—attending primary school in the morning and studying the basic tenets of Islam in the afternoon, playing with friends, and enjoying Sundanese performing arts such as *wayang golek* and traditional music. He spends his teenage days at the Taman Siswa school while staying at his uncle's humble house in Jakarta. Ardi takes up an interest in drawing and trains himself to be a painter. His tranquil life is disrupted when, on a visit to the home of one of his friends in a small village in West Java, he witnesses the killing of his friend's family and the burning of their house by a group of Darul Islam, the Islamic State, followers. This part of the novel concludes with the termination of his days at school and another fire burning down his uncle's house, which had become his home. Rumours spread that the slum settlements in Jakarta are set on fire by housing developers. Times are difficult; it is the period of political turmoil and economic destitution of the last phase of President Soekarno's reign.

The second part tells of Ardi's career as a painter and how he becomes involved with a group of communist artists. Ardi meets Hermin, a beautiful female university student, at his painter friend Hasan's first exhibition. He falls in love with her and their relationship deepens, but their love does not last long, as a consequence of Ardi's involvement in left-wing politics. In the parts where their relationship is described, differences in social class between Ardi and Hermin are elaborated and emphasised. At one point there is a meeting between Ardi's old friend Asep and Ardi at Hermin's house; Asep was Hermin's ex-lover whose father was known as a traitor in his village, selling out nationalists, including Ardi's father, to Dutch colonialists during the struggle for independence. In Jakarta Ardi's life becomes difficult and destitute because his paintings do not sell and he is unable to make a living through other means. In this desperate condition, without being able to provide for his basic physical needs of food and shelter, Ardi inevitably accepts the



support offered by Lekra, and as a condition he signs a political petition that seeks to secure the creativity of artists and to contribute to maintaining Indonesian unity guided by President Soekarno. In this part also President Soekarno's support of the left and repression of the group *Manifes Kebudayaan* are mentioned. Ardi becomes increasingly involved in the political agenda of Lekra, through a meeting with a well-known painter of the left, Hendra Gunawan. Finally, when a solo exhibition of Ardi's paintings is held thanks to the support of Lekra, his friend Hasan, who is not aligned with any political group, visits Ardi and advises him to be independent and keep distance from politics.

The last part of the narrative is told from Hasan's perspective, expounding the political situation before the events of 30 September 1965 in his letters to an anonymous friend. The letters are dated between early 1963 and December 1965. According to Hasan, the catastrophic condition of society and economy are a result of President Soekarno's policies. Hasan accuses Soekarno of misleading the country and supporting communism. He defends his stance of non-involvement during this pre-1965 period of extreme ideological tension. One day in 1963 Hasan runs into Ardi, who is now deeply involved in Lekra activities, and tells him of the greatness of Islam. Having witnessed mass killings in the wake of the attempted coup of 30 September, in his last letter, dated 8 December 1965, Hasan asserts that only *Pancasila*, the five principles of state ideology, will be able to rescue the people and this country. To protect people's interests they should abandon Soekarno's policies. Hasan expresses his fear for the safety of his friend Ardi after the killings that have cost the lives of so many people.

### Previous interpretations

Anna-Greta Nilsson Hoadley reads this novel as a literary work that provides an alternative version to the official history of the events of 1965-1966 by the New Order regime. In her reading of one of Hasan's letters, Nilsson Hoadley (2005, 117) particularly hints at the involvement of the army in the massacres, as they backed "local vigilantes" to execute the killings. She argues that the novel shows an alternative pre- and post-history of the events. Another point discussed by her is the presumed Javanese political stances in Ardi's attitude. She points out that blind obeisance of authority, accepting one's fate, and a strong attraction to power are characteristic features of Javanese culture that also feature in other novels, such as Umar Kayam's *Sri Sumarah* and Ahmad Tohari's *Kubah* (2005, 119-20). She argues that Ardi signed the Lekra petition in

accordance with this blind following of authority and a high dependence on the central power, namely President Soekarno (2005, 120). Such a statement is problematic, as it cannot be assumed that the protagonist's actions resulted from such an alleged characteristic feature of Javanese culture. Ardi's sympathy for President Soekarno seems to be simply because Soekarno supported Lekra and Ardi was a member of it. Moreover, Ardi is not Javanese but Sundanese, which has a distinct different culture. In the early 1960s, Soekarno introduced a new political slogan, NASAKOM, based on three political streams: *Nasionalisme* (nationalism), *Agama* (religion), and *Komunisme* (communism). Soekarno tried to save his country during the economically difficult times by drawing closer to the communist party. In his novel *Ajip* apparently criticises Soekarno's politics because these favoured the communist party too much.

With regard to this active involvement with communism, Nilsson Hoadley argues that authors who wrote novels dealing with the traumatic events of the mid-1960s, such as Ahmad Tohari, Ashadi Siregar and Ajip Rosidi, "write about individuals who cannot by any measure be considered Communists.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, they show how easy it was to belong to an organisation or group which retroactively would be classified as Communist" (2005, 122).

Foulcher undertook a different reading of this novel. As mentioned above, Ardi's friend Hasan's letters to an anonymous friend continue the narration in the third section of the novel, and Foulcher regards Hasan as Ajip's persona: "Ajip's major purpose in the final section of *Anak Tanahair* is to establish the legitimacy of the stance of non-involvement which he took in the Manifes Kebudayaan period, and to indicate his ultimate rejection of any hint of sympathy with those artists who aligned with the left" (1991, 117). Things seem a bit different when we read Ajip's letters and autobiography, even though we know that these publications give us one-sided information and may be considered to self-justify the author's position. Ajip had kept his stance of non-involvement but at the same time tried to understand his friends and people without prejudice to their ideology, as long as they tried to be on good terms with him (Rosidi 2008a; 2008b). This stance can be read in the depiction of friendship between Ardi and Hasan in this novel. Hasan repeatedly advises Ardi to keep his distance from the political activities of Lekra and concentrate on

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<sup>13</sup> Henri Chambert-Loir points out that Ajip Rosidi kept his stance of non-alignment with cultural and political groups in the 1960s. He also contends that the cultural displacement and the events of the mid-1960s are the main themes of the novel *Anak Tanahair*. According to him, Ajip Rosidi hopes to be considered a writer who is engaged with the problems of society (Chambert-Loir 2008, xv).

painting. In a chance meeting they had shortly before the mass killings started in October or November 1965, he cautions Ardi that involvement in any political movement will bring disaster to everyone in the end.

Another point made by Foulcher is that this novel “is an example of how uneasily the exigencies of the political present and the need to re-examine the past co-exist in contemporary Indonesian literature” (1991, 119). This remark is important when reading the novel, especially when considering how significant the events of 30 September and their aftermath were for Indonesian society; the people are still suffering from this trauma.

The reading I will present here is intended not so much to explore the events of the mid-1960s and the cultural and political situation preceding them, but rather focus on a few other themes that Ajip broached in his novel, such as his proposed stance on Sundanese views on cultural tradition, other ethnic groups, social class in society, criticism of Soekarno’s regime and praise of Islam.

### **Supposed cultural inferiority of the Sundanese**

The first topic to be discussed concerns the author’s views on Sundanese conventions and other ethnic groups. The protagonist, Ardi, was 14 years old when he left his birthplace somewhere in the province of West Java. On his way to Jakarta he visited for the first time the city of Bandung, the capital of the province and the centre of Sundanese culture, and was excited to see a new world. The geographical space he travels is mostly within the area of the Sundanese people living outside Jakarta. In some passages, instances of Sundanese culture are mentioned—for example, a performance of an itinerant music group, *longser*, from Sumedang and the singing of a traditional poem, *pupuh*, a rhymed verse (Rosidi 1985, 45). He learned the latter by heart at school in his birthplace, and after having moved to Jakarta it conjures nostalgic feelings in him (Rosidi 1985, 86). This also applies to Sundanese tales such as traditional *wawacan* (narrative poetry) and books he borrowed from the library in his village. These cultural representations are inserted to display Ardi’s cultural identity, his connection with an ethnic group by birth, and how he is subject to its conventions in a positive as well as a negative sense. The majority of the population of Jakarta consists of people whose cultural identity is linked to their birthplace. Arguably, this strong attachment to the place of origin may be considered to have been strongly felt in the 1950s, when many of them became first-generation Jakarta residents. These sentiments are represented by the protagonist Ardi, and the author describes the close ties

of these people with their cultural and social background. Their lives were partly determined by traditional values and conventions of the ethnic-regional culture, which became a support to hold on to as well as a psychological burden for them. The author shows ambivalence when representing cultural elements of people living in urban centres, particularly when it comes to matters of ethnic identity, traditional values and conventions.

The author's depiction of such Sundanese conventions also contains examples of the system to differentiate high and low registers in Sundanese, *undak usuk Basa Sunda*. This system was imported from the Central Javanese cultural tradition during the period in which the Sundanese-speaking region was under the control of the Mataram kingdom in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Sundanese developed in its own way, with different and simpler speech forms compared to the more elaborate Javanese system. The author describes the main character as a country boy born in a lower social class, by indicating that Ardi's speech is not up to the "proper" level used in the Priangan region, the core region of the Sundanese culture, consisting of Bandung and the surrounding regencies (Rosidi 1985, 19). For instance, Asep laughs at Ardi's mistakes at an assembly of friends and members of the older generation somewhere outside the Priangan area. Here we can see the author's criticism of a normative and feudalistic Sundanese speech system at a time of egalitarian developments, endorsing the idea that it is not the origins but the education and ability of an individual that should be respected. In other words, it may be argued that here the author criticises authority and power-centeredness, as well as Priangan's sense of superiority over peripheral areas and the notion of elite classes versus commonality. An analogy of this criticism can be seen in the depiction of Javanese culture as being superior to the Sundanese one.

A number of cultural activists have opined that Sundanese people have complex feelings towards the Javanese culture, since for centuries their territory was under strong political and cultural influence of the central Javanese kingdom. Initially, Dutch colonial officials found it difficult to distinguish between the two neighbouring cultures. The Sundanese language was regarded as a dialect of Javanese that was used by mountain people (so-called *Berg-Javaans*; see Moriyama 2005, 8-20). Due to centuries-long influence on the culture of the Sundanese elite, the official register of the Sundanese language was thoroughly Javanised, while there was no court functioning as a cultural centre that could promote a local culture in the Sundanese-speaking region (Rosidi 1984, 2-10). The relatively small size of the Sundanese population in comparison to a large majority of ethnic Javanese on the island of Java also matters. It seems that

these elements have helped to generate a complex of unwarranted cultural competition and ill feelings, bordering on an inferiority complex, among a cultural minority towards an overwhelming majority.

At the dormitory where young Ardi lived during his education in Jakarta he noticed discriminatory allocations of rooms: the part of the dormitory near the teachers was allocated to Javanese students, non-Javanese ethnic students occupied quarters further away. Confronted with this situation, Ardi poses the question: “Was this done intentionally? Or does it happen by chance only?” (*Apakah hal itu disengaja? Ataukah hanya kebetulan saja?*) (Rosidi 1985, 60). This can be interpreted as the ethnic Javanese being treated differently and enjoying a privileged position among ethnic groups in a united Indonesian nation. The author suggests that Javanese-centrism already prevailed at the time of President Soekarno. This cultural and political dominance certainly did not change after President Soeharto had consolidated the New Order regime. It is common understanding that during the Soeharto regime most of the high positions at government offices not only in the capital but also in the region were occupied by Javanese bureaucrats and military personnel. They were appointed by the central government and sent to the regional government offices, where the majority of the population comprised local ethnic groups. This policy was thought necessary to keep peace and order and reduce political tensions, especially after the mass killings of 1965-66. The political and military control by the central government covered the whole nation by way of this network of Javanese personnel. As a result of this policy, strong antagonistic feelings towards the Javanese emerged among local ethnic groups everywhere in the nation.

### **Social class and egalitarianism**

The next theme concerns social class in society. We see how social class is maintained in regional society when in Jakarta Ardi comes across his old friend Asep, the son of a local official in his birthplace. Asep calls him “Jang Ardi”, a form of address that designates commonality, whereas Ardi calls his friend “Dang Asep”, indicating a higher social class and the aristocracy of the addressed person; this is common usage in the Priangan region (Rosidi 1985, 214). This depiction suggests that feudalism and cultural conventions rooted in Sundanese culture were maintained in the state capital at a time of rapid modernisation and changes towards egalitarianism. The author deems feudalism unnecessary and unwelcome. At the same time it may be argued that the author criticises cultural conventions and the long-standing expansion of Priangan centrism to its

periphery in Sundanese-speaking areas. The Priangan region had its cultural and economic centre in Bandung and its surrounding regencies, which obviously put forward a socially and culturally superior position in the history of the Sundanese, especially since the Dutch colonial administration was introduced. Its peripheral region, such as the north coast region including the author's birthplace of Jatiwangi and the Banten region, have been regarded as less developed and sophisticated. The author suggests that discrimination of differences by birth is unwelcome and does not have a place in the modern-city society of Jakarta.

The depiction of feudal tendencies does not only concern Sundanese conventions but also social class. Criticism against the upper class can be read from a depiction of Ardi coming to his girlfriend Hermin's house. One day Hasan and Ardi visit Hermin's house in an upper-class residential area of Jakarta. The house is huge and equipped with luxurious furniture, while a painting by famous Affandi decorates one of the walls. As Hermin has not yet returned from university, her cousin Rini engages in a conversation with them. Seeing a female servant's extremely deferential behaviour while serving tea, Ardi becomes angry because he thinks of the independence the people had fought hard for to reach equality with the other nations (*di zaman kemerdekaan yang diperjuangkan untuk mendudukan bangsa kita sederajat dengan bangsa-bangsa lain*) (Rosidi 1985, 136). Ardi asks himself:

Doesn't Rini's family think that the obligation to squatt and humbly stoop down is a humiliating custom for a human being? Don't they regard their servants as human beings too? Or is this the way it should be? I do not know how the people of the elite live.<sup>14</sup>

This obvious criticism of class divisions in his last, ironic, sentence about how members of the elite live is arguably one of the most obvious themes of this novel, which is depicted as common and should be abolished by implementing certain political programmes. The author's hope can be read as the realisation of an egalitarian society, which ironically resonates with the aim of communism in a sense. This scene also provides a background of Ardi's propensity to left-wing politics.

However, it is telling to see that the author's egalitarianism possibly does not apply to the whole of society. Apparently, the Chinese minority

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<sup>14</sup> "Tidakkah keluarga Rini menganggap keharusan berjongkok dan beringsut seperti itu merendahkan martabat manusia? Tidakkah mereka menganggap pelayan pun sebagai manusia? Atau memang begitukah seharusnya? Aku tak tahu bagaimana kehidupan kalangan atasan" (Rosidi 1985, 136).

was not included into this depiction of an equal society of the modern city. The discriminatory views of the Chinese is read clearly here:

I shook hands with the slit-eyed guy. From his narrow eyes I felt I saw his sly character. It seems there was a danger. Or is it my prejudice only?<sup>15</sup>

This passage is surprisingly contradictory, given the egalitarian views found in other parts of the novel. Does this possibly subconscious slippage derive from anti-communism, because being Chinese was identified with being a communist, and a communist does not believe in God? The Chinese in Indonesia form a small and relatively wealthy minority that has been engaged in trade since the Dutch East Indies period. They have been trapped in an odd and totally paradoxical accusation of being communists who have become wealthy in society although their goal is to abolish capitalism. Their loyalty to Indonesia has been doubted because of their opportunism since the emergence of the nationalist movement and throughout the Indonesian struggle for Independence. Their wealth and exclusive attitude have evoked anti-Chinese sentiments within the Indonesian society (Copple 1983, 171-2). In the 1980s the Chinese businesses penetrated deeper into Indonesian society because of Soeharto's close relationship with them. The above depiction reflects such prejudice against the Chinese in the society of the time the novel was published.

### **Critique of President Soekarno's politics**

One of the most important themes of *Anak Tanahair* is freedom of expression, particularly in the letters written by Ardi's friend Hasan. It was difficult to express one's own opinion during President Soekarno's regime, in particular in the early 1960s when he verged towards communism to overcome economic and political difficulties. Freedom of speech was very much curtailed, so that artists, writers and intellectuals were forced to apply self-censorship during his regime. The letter dated 8 March 1963 begins with a sharp criticism of the politics of Soekarno:

Life in my beloved homeland has been compartmentalised. First of all President Soekarno divided the nation into three blocks: nationalists,

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<sup>15</sup> "Aku bersalaman dengan orang yang bermata sipit itu. Dari matanya yang sipit itu, rasanya aku melihat tipu muslihatnya yang lihai. Seakan-akan ada bahaya dari sana. Ataukah hanya semata prasangka saja?" (Rosidi 1985, 160).

religionists, and communists. He designated this with the abbreviation Nasakom—one of those terms that he coined and popularized.<sup>16</sup>

In the 1960s, President Soekarno created a number of slogans that became part of the official jargon in order to try to keep the nation together, but this sloganism rather had the opposite effect and polarised society even further. In the above quoted letter from 1963 Hasan, as the persona of the author, says that he will not join any group, not even if they would ask him to join Lesbumi, (Lembaga Seniman Budayawan Muslimin Indonesia), an Islamic cultural organisation affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama—one of the most influential Islamic organisations (Chisaan 2008, 117-58). He wants to be independent as an artist (*aku bertahan supaya sebagai seniman aku tetap bebas*) because freedom of expression is essential for artists (*yang paling penting bagi seorang seniman ialah kebebasannya untuk mencipta*) (Rosidi 1985, 274). This is a key statement the author Ajip Rosidi made in the 1980s when open accusations were thrown at him concerning his political alignment with left-wing organisations in the 1960s. It is telling that we can find almost identical phrases in a letter Ajip Rosidi sent from Osaka to a close friend on 28th April 1985, soon after he had completed his novel. In the letter he wrote that *saya katakan saya akan tetap menjadi orang bebas* (I state that I always will be an independent person) when he was asked to join Lesbumi or one of the other groups in the 1960s (Rosidi 2008a, 302).

In another letter, Hasan writes to an anonymous friend about the importance of freedom and the production of art:

I reached the conclusion that what's most important in art is the freedom to nurture our character as artists. [...] But nowadays in my beloved homeland that has been liberated from colonialism my conviction has melted down, facing the terrors that threaten me at every step. What is appreciated in this beautiful homeland now is not the development of individuals but one's ability to adapt to the demands of a power-holder. Everyone is forced to express things that are not according to their own heart, because otherwise their lives will be threatened. Personal

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<sup>16</sup> “Hidup di tanahairku yang kucintai ini dibagi dalam kotak-kotak. Pertama-tama Presiden Soekarno membagi bangsanya menjadi tiga kotak: golongan nasionalis, golongan agama, dan golongan komunis. Dia menyebutnya dengan singkatan Nasakom – salah satu istilah yang dia ciptakan dan dia populerkan” (Rosidi 1985, 271).



consciousness as the source of truth has been repressed, because it is thought that the truth can be voiced only by power and force.<sup>17</sup>

Especially the last sentence “the truth can be voiced only by power and force” (*kebenaran dianggap hanya yang disuarakan oleh kekuasaan dan kekuatan saja*) holds true for any regime if it does not guarantee freedom of speech. For instance, the regime during which this novel was written implemented even stricter policies to curtail the freedom of speech than ever before. Under President Soeharto’s dictatorship any kind of opposition group, including ethnic separatist and liberal Islam groups, were suppressed for the sake of national stability.<sup>18</sup>

The narrator in the last part of the novel criticised Soekarno’s politics not only in terms of ideology and freedom of speech but also in terms of injustice and inequality when it comes to the distribution of wealth. This can be read in Hasan’s letters accusing President Soekarno many times. For instance, the very last letter of 8 December 1965, which also forms the final part of this novel, reads as follows:

Till now Soekarno is still stubborn and won’t acknowledge failure. Also he doesn’t want to see changes that have happened in society. He does not want to recognise the reality that is developing in front of his eyes. He stubbornly does not accept the demands of the people who are asking for justice.<sup>19</sup>

This criticism of Soekarno’s poor and failed politics, especially in not recognising “the reality that is developing in front of his eyes”, also

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<sup>17</sup> “Maka aku sampai pada kesimpulan bahwa yang terpenting dalam kesenian ialah kebebasan untuk menumbuhkan pribadi kita sebagai seniman. [...] Tetapi sekarang, di tanahair yang kucintai yang telah bebas dari penjajahan ini, keyakinananku seperti cair di depan teror yang mengancam setiap langkah. Sekarang yang dipentingkan di tanahairku yang indah ini bukanlah pertumbuhan pribadi, melainkan kemampuan seseorang menyesuaikan diri dengan keinginan orang lain yang sedang berkuasa. Setiap orang dipaksa untuk mengatakan apa yang tak sesuai dengan suara hatinya, karena kalau tidak maka hidupnya akan terancam. Hati nurani sebagai sumber kebenaran telah ditekan, karena kebenaran dianggap hanya yang disuarakan oleh kekuasaan dan kekuatan saja” (Rosidi 1985, 269).

<sup>18</sup> For instance, the campaign slogan SARA (*Suku, Agama, Ras dan Antar golongan*) of the Soeharto regime put a ban on the discourse on ethnic, religious, racial, and class issues (Aspinall 2005, 73-74).

<sup>19</sup> “Hingga sekarang Soekarno masih juga tetap ngotot dan tidak mau melihat kegagalan itu. Dia pun tidak mau melihat perubahan yang terjadi dalam masyarakat. Dia tak mau mengakui kenyataan yang berkembang di depan matanya. Dia tetap tak mau menerima tuntutan masyarakat yang meminta keadilan” (Rosidi 1985, 313).

suggests poor policies of the government in power in 1985, when the novel was published. Soeharto's regime had been established through military force, by putting down the attempted coup of 30 September 1965 and "straightening out" its consequences, which led to constant repression in every corner of the country. The oppression was felt in the daily lives of the people, and a feeling of apathy towards politics prevailed in society, at least on the surface (Aspinall 2005, 5-11). Injustice and inequality of the distribution of wealth prevailed, and the government did not pay much attention to the development of the nation and its society.

### **Propagation of Islam**

The narrator suggests that the only solution to save people in any situation under whichever regime would be Islam and Allah. A letter written by Hasan on 29th of June 1963 refers to how Hasan ran into Ardi after a long absence and they had a conversation in a cafeteria. Ardi had become a member of Lekra and was preparing a national exhibition of his paintings to celebrate Independence Day, while Hasan had started creating abstract paintings that President Soekarno denounced. As Soekarno had turned to communism, he appreciated art containing a simple and concrete message and expressions of Socialist realism (Bodden 2011, 455-8). Arts and literature should be media to realise a just society where arts for the sake of arts, including abstract paintings, would have no place in the bigger scheme of his nation-building programme. Their conversation is initially about art, but finally Hasan tells Ardi about the importance of Islam for artistic creation. He claims that:

Islam is not only to provide a place for ideas developing in the modern world, but also to provide challenges and motivations for the development of new ideas. It will be a source of extraordinary power for creative humans.<sup>20</sup>

At a time of ongoing politicisation of everyday life, Hasan deepens his religious conviction and his ideas surrounding the true nature of Islamic art. Meanwhile, Ardi tries to persuade Hasan to join an organisation, for instance the Islamic Lesbumi group, if Hasan does not want to join Lekra. In the early 1960s a number of groups and factions were trying to

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<sup>20</sup> "Agama Islam bukan saja memberikan tempat kepada gagasan-gagasan yang tumbuh di dunia modern, melainkan memberikan tantangan dan dorongan untuk tumbuhnya gagasan-gagasan baru. Dia memberikan sumber kekuatan yang luar biasa bagi manusia kreatif" (Rosidi 1985, 293).

accomplish their political goals in accordance with their own ideologies (Lindsay 2011, 2-19). Everyone was supposed to belong to one of these groups. However, Hasan insists on remaining unaligned, as we have read above.

Hasan's suggestion does not stop with the arts, and he tells Ardi about the greatness of Islam and God:

Humans were created by God as His representatives in this transient world. Humans are given the chance to do anything—everything. But Allah admonishes that those who gratify their passion will cause destruction and go to hell on the Day of Judgement. Because of this, God orders humans to have faith, to believe in Him and his prophets, His angels, and the sacred books, so that they will follow the blessed way. As long as you follow the straight and blessed path, you will be safe and will always feel peaceful, even though you are alone. Pious humans and their fate must depend only on God, not on anything else. In this way, man will not be afraid of being considered going against the tide.<sup>21</sup>

The last sentence shows again Hasan's stance of non-involvement in any group. Ardi continues to ask whether Hasan does not feel fear, and Hasan replies that he has become calm and peaceful after deepening his Islamic belief. This passage reads as a strong message of *da'wa*, propagation of Islam. The author does, however, warn against blind obedience to Islam, by showing an episode in a village when Ardi was small. Little Ardi did not understand the Haji's preaching and was reprimanded when he asked Haji questions (Rosidi 1985, 53). Ardi also tells an anecdote about another negative encounter with an old Haji in his village to Hasan. This Haji was believed to cure illnesses of the people, although most of the patients were not cured and he misappropriated Islamic tithe on the last day of *Ramadan* for his own good. Hasan cautions Ardi to be aware of wrong Islamic practices and to learn Islam by studying the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*.

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<sup>21</sup> The original text states: "Manusia itu oleh Tuhan diangkat menjadi wakil-Nya di bumi yang fana ini. Manusia diberi kesempatan untuk berbuat apa saja—semuanya. Tetapi Allah pun telah memberi peringatan bahwa orang yang mengikuti hawa nafsunya akan menyebabkan kehancuran dan akan memperoleh neraka di hari akhir. Maka diseru-Nya agar manusia beriman, percaya akan Dia, akan nabi-Nya, akan malaikat-Nya, akan Kitab-nya, dan agar menempuh jalan yang diridoi-Nya. Selama kau berjalan pada jalan yang lurus yang diridoi-Nya, kau akan selamat, akan selalu merasa tenang walaupun kau sendiri saja. Manusia yang beriman harus menggantungkan diri dan nasibnya hanya kepada Allah saja, tidak kepada yang lain. Dengan begitu dia tidak akan merasa takut karena dianggap melawan arus" (Rosidi 1985, 294).

The narrator not only condemns irrationality represented by corrupt Islamic teachers and *haji*, but also denounces the violence committed by Darul Islam, the Islamic State, by recounting an episode in which the parents of one of Ardi's friends were killed in their home in a village in West Java set on fire by Islamic militants as mentioned above (Rosidi 1985, 96-102). The leader Kartosuwiryo declared the establishment of Darul Islam in 1949 and rebelled against the Republic of Indonesia to gain recognition of his Islamic state in the area around Garut in West Java. He was finally captured and executed in 1962 (Dijk 1981, 69-126). This movement had a considerable impact on the Sundanese society of pious Muslims for a long time (Formichi 2012, 171-6).<sup>22</sup>

Islam is praised and thought of as the rescuer from the *mimpi buruk* (nightmare), to realise *masyarakat yang adil dan makmur* (the just and prosperous society) only in the right way of Islam, not by forms of irrationality (Rosidi 1985, 314).

### Concluding remarks

I explored some of the themes of the novel *Anak Tanahair* in this chapter by not reading it as an historical record—although this novel can be regarded as fiction in a realistic setting of political sensitivity, as other scholars have indicated. The novel can be read as a literary work that is trying to understand people who were involved in the political turmoil surrounding the events around 30 September 1965, with a particular focus on those involved with Lekra through the main protagonist Ardi. By depicting the challenging economic and political circumstances, the author explained why artists joined Lekra in an apparent attempt to protect them from the long-lasting condemnation they were subjected to after the mid-1960s. The difficult living conditions at times of political power struggle prevented them from creating art of their own volition and made it extremely hard to keep their artistic freedom while not getting involved with politics.

The author does not justify the stance of Lekra, which was trying to accomplish its purposes in close connection with the communist party, or of Lesbumi propagating Islam, nor of the group behind the Manifesto Kebudayaan (Cultural Manifesto) protesting against their suppression

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<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the massacres triggered by the attempted coup of 30 September made proportionally less victims in West Java compared to other regions of Java (Cribb 1991, 26). One of the reasons was the strong hold of military force of the Siliwangi Division which had attempted to crush the Darul Islam movement for more than 10 years.

exerted by Lekra with President Soekarno's support. This novel indicates that the author's strong inclination to defend the stance of non-involvement, "I try to be always independent as an artist" (*aku bertahan supaya sebagai seniman aku tetap bebas*) through Hasan, Ajip's persona. This novel can be read as an autobiographical novel. The name of the protagonist Ardi is easily recognised as an acronym of the author's name, Ajip Rosidi. The author's childhood and youth days are described in the first part of the novel. However, the author casts off the persona Ardi of his childhood to become Hasan in the second part, in which the narrative voice is Ardi. In the second part Ardi falls in love with a student and is gradually getting involved in Lekra activities. By detaching from Ardi and drawing more to the pious Muslim Hasan, the author avows his independent position of the 1960s in this novel. He expressed his anxiety about being accused of not supporting the Cultural Manifesto in a letter to his close friend just before the publication of the novel.<sup>23</sup> Clearly then the polarisation of the Indonesian society in the early 1960s was still very much alive at the time of the publication of this novel in the mid-1980s, and the author felt compelled to describe the tensions and motivations of artists who did not align themselves with the different groups back then.

In a sense, Ajip Rosidi suffers from the trauma of the events of 30 September throughout all his life.<sup>24</sup> He seemingly lost his energy and willingness after the turmoil and accusations against him, then left Indonesia for Japan in 1980 and completed his *Anak Tanahair* there in voluntary exile. The events of 30 September still haunt people's minds, and the trauma is still part of society (Kurasawa 2014, 219-34). This can be seen in recent discussions among people, including ex-political

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<sup>23</sup> In his letter dated 28 April 1985 to Sugiarta Sriwibawa, a journalist of *Antara* and an editor of Pustaka Jaya in the 1980s, he wrote "Sementara itu terbitnya Anak Tanahair dalam waktu dekat ini, niscaya akan menempatkan saya dalam posisi non-Manikebu dan tak mustahil akan menjadi sasaran kritik dan fitnah juga" (Meanwhile the publication of *Anak Tanahair* in the near future certainly shall put me in the non-Cultural Manifesto camp and no doubt will make me a target of criticism and slander) (Rosidi 2008a, 302).

<sup>24</sup> Very recently Ajip published a compilation of essays titled *Lekra Bagian dari PKI* (Lekra as a Part of PKI). There he refutes statements made by ex-political prisoner Joebaar Ajoeb, ex-secretary general of Lekra, that Lekra was not affiliated with Indonesia's Communist Party (Rosidi 2015, 9-16). In the same book he responds to Martin Aleida's (pen name of Nursan) letter which he perceived as humiliating (Rosidi 2015, 51-56). These essays show that a group of people continuously consider Ajip's attitude and stance in the 1960s questionable, and at the same time it shows his sensitivity of the events.

prisoners released after the end of Soeharto's regime.<sup>25</sup> *Anak Tanahair* is an important novel because it shows a different view of the cultural-political situation before and after the events of 1965 and suggests the importance of fair and just politics for the Indonesian homeland.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> For instance, a lively discussion was held at the International Conference "70 Years of Textual Production in Indonesia: Cultural Traditions Informing Modern Productions" held in Frankfurt, 12-13 October 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Additional importance is pointed out by Foucher: "it is a major contribution to the tendency of 1980s Indonesian literature to begin recording and reflecting the experience of its readers as participants in processes of social and historical change." (Foulcher 1991, 118)

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## **PART II.**

### **INSTANCES OF GLOBALISATION: MANAGING THE HERITAGE IN LOCAL AND GLOBAL TRAJECTORIES**



## CHAPTER SEVEN

# SEEING THE GLOBAL THROUGH THE LOCAL: INDONESIAN FICTION'S WORLD TRAVELS

MICHAEL H. BODDEN

In Ayu Utami's novel *Bilangan Fu* (The Fu Numeral, 2008), one of the novel's key protagonists, Parang Jati, explains his idea of a new kind of spiritualism to the novel's narrator, Yuda, as they attempt to climb a difficult rock face. It is an idea that is based on Javanese spirituality:

Still, this was not the old Javan spirituality, but a new kind of Javanism...Neo-Javanism. The main difference lays in its critical capacities. The old Javanese spirituality did not formulate a critical capacity. The old spirituality was siphoned off into feeling and creative forces, but neglected logic. It stressed inspiration but ignored analysis completely. The new spirituality is for those who are rational, but critical of rationality. For those who have imbibed of modernism, but have not been swallowed by modernism. It is for postmodernists. The new spirituality believes that *sangkan paraning dumadi*,<sup>1</sup> if it exists, is always deferred. (*Bilangan Fu*, 384)<sup>2</sup>

Here, we see Ayu's characters trying to formulate a complex fusion of traditional Javanese mystical spirituality with notions of western rationalism

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<sup>1</sup> The idea in Javanese mystical spirituality is that knowing one's origin and end point is crucial for one's decisions in life. It suggests that there is a truth to our life which can be determined.

<sup>2</sup> The original Indonesian from which I have translated is as follows: "Tapi ini bukan kejawaan lama, melainkan kejawaan baru. [...] Neo-Javanism. Perbedaan utamanya terletak pada daya kritisnya. Spiritualitas Jawa lama tidak merumuskan daya kritis. Spiritualitas tersedot pada rasa dan cipta tapi mengabaikan logika. Menekankan pada inspirasi tapi tidak analisa sama sekali. Spiritualitas baru ini milik orang-orang yang rasional namun kritis pada rasionya. Milik orang-orang yang telah mengenal modernisme tapi tidak tertelan dalam modernisme. Milik orang-orang postmodernis. Spiritualitas baru ini percaya bahwa sangkan paraning dumadi jika pun ada, selalu tertunda."

and post-modernism, in order to find a new way for contemporary Indonesians to move more confidently and tolerantly forwards into the increasingly globalised and polarised world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I have quoted at some length because Ayu's novel, by attempting to take up issues of how Javanese and, more broadly, Indonesian spiritual beliefs and philosophies might contribute to global culture, engages with the problematic I wish to investigate here: how Indonesian writers—all Javanese in this case—imagine themselves as cosmopolitan global citizens. That is, how their works, in both form and content, situate them physically, intellectually and/or spiritually on a global stage in relation to foreign others with whom Indonesia has historically had an ambivalent and sometimes antagonistic relationship. My main thesis is that Pramoedya Ananta Toer's "Buru" tetralogy (1981-88), Y.B. Mangunwijaya's 1992 novel, *Burung-Burung Rantau* (Migratory Birds), and Ayu Utami's *Bilangan Fu* (2008) have used various Indonesian and Asian traditions and ideologies—ranging from the *wayang* (shadow theatre), ideas of being a *ksatria* (knight) or *brahmana* (priestly caste), familial bonds and Indian-derived spiritual concepts, to belief in ancient Javanese pre-Hindu and Hindu concepts of spirituality and their potential ties to environmental movements—to mediate, in differing ways, relations between Indonesia and its global others, especially the so-called "Western" nations of Europe and North America. In so doing, they represent cosmopolitan identities that are increasingly assertive of the value of local traditions and ideas on a global stage and at the same time are supportive of a universal notion of humanity. This dual positioning, which appears ambiguous if not contradictory, is richly suggestive of the ways in which originary cultures frame the experience of such "universal" cosmopolitanism. It is, in fact, a way in which the "empire" continues to "write back" to former and current imperial powers.

### **Cosmopolitanism**

Over the past two decades there has been a renewed interest among academics and critical theorists in the idea of cosmopolitanism, spurred on, perhaps, by a variety of "globalisations" in the economic, political, technological, cultural, and social spheres. As Kymlicka and Walker have argued, past conceptions of cosmopolitanism endorsed an amalgamation of moral, political, and cultural ideas. Morally, they held that all human beings are subject to a common moral code; politically, they asserted the need for institutions of global governance; culturally, they emphasised the idea of a common global culture or the ability for individuals to move

freely between different cultures. Yet given the potential for such universalising ideas to suppress cultural and linguistic diversity and pave the way for imperialism and colonialism, as they were sometimes used in the past, a number of critics and theorists have recently contended that any conception of cosmopolitanism for the present world must be a postcolonial cosmopolitanism separated from ideas of cultural homogenisation or political unification. This has shifted the terrain of debates about cosmopolitanism in the direction of discussing the possibility of a “rooted cosmopolitanism”, one that is firmly grounded in the local or the national, but which does not see the nation as possessing “unqualified sovereignty, exclusive loyalty, or blind patriotism”. In what follows, I am going to argue that various forms of cosmopolitanism to be found in several Indonesian novels are indeed examples of “rooted cosmopolitanism”. That is, they demonstrate the ways in which local cultural images and experiences form the lens through which cosmopolitan identities are framed in each of the novels. Still, in contrast to the discourse of rooted cosmopolitanism discussed above, I will argue precisely that for the Indonesian writers whose works I will be examining there is in fact a desire to imagine themselves as part of a “universal” human culture. Nonetheless, this imaginative act necessitates a process of translation and an attempt at harmonisation of seemingly disparate cultural elements that may in the end lead to a productive new kind of hybridity—one in which spokespeople for the developing countries assert the equal value and similarity of local concepts to those they see as “cutting edge” epistemologies of the once dominant “West”.

### **Pramoedya’s “Buru” novels: Rooted cosmopolitanism, learning from the “West”, critical distance, and nationalism as an international project**

As far back as in the 1930s commentators argued over the basis for a future Indonesian national culture. Some argued that local tradition was dead, necessitating a culture drawn entirely from the West, while others maintained that Indonesian culture must be a fusion of “East” and “West”, Arjuna and Faust. In these latter views, East and West were seen as separate but combinable. In early 1950, a number of writers and cultural figures published the *Surat Kepercayaan Gelanggang*, which stated that its authors saw themselves as “heirs to world culture” who nevertheless would develop in their own individual ways. This suggested the possibility of a cosmopolitanism rooted in local or national cultures, though the emphasis of the *Surat*’s authors was more on individual creativity. Yet

Indonesia's relations to that world culture have at times shown ambivalence given a history of colonialism, nationalist pride in struggling for and gaining independence, suspicions of Western neo-imperialism and perceived materialism and, more recently, Islamic tensions with the "West".

Pramoedya Ananta Toer came into prominence as a writer of fiction at about the same time as the *Surat Kepercayaan Gelanggang* was formulated and published. His best-known novels were, however, written during his long imprisonment from 1965-1979 by the New Order regime headed by General Soeharto. Here, I will discuss briefly the novels of his "Buru" tetralogy, looking at both the novels' vision of a then barely nascent Indonesia as a participant in global culture, as well as at the ways in which Javanese cultural traditions, especially the ideas of the *dalang* (puppeteer), *ksatria* (Javanese knight), or *brahmana/sudra* (Hindu priestly caste/menial workers caste) condition or modify that vision through the narrator and primary focal character of the novels, Minke.

The main thrust of the first three "Buru" novels, in which Minke serves as the narrator and chief focal character, is to dramatise the way in which a national, anti-colonial consciousness began to grow that would eventually find its culmination in Sarekat Islam (Islamic Association), the PKI, and the Nationalist Party from the 1910s to the 1920s and beyond. One of the key points the novels make is that the colonised must seek to absorb and practice "modern" concepts of organisation and argument, most often equated with "the West"<sup>3</sup>, in order to fight colonial exploitation. For example:

People say only the modern man gets ahead in these times. In his hands lies the fate of humankind. You reject modernity? You will be the plaything of all those forces of the world operating outside and around you. I am a modern person. (*Footsteps*, 15-6)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This becomes more explicit when Minke discusses the Philippines with Ter Haar and thinks to himself: "Such progress. The Filipino natives were closer to European science and learning, closer to understanding the power that rested with the European peoples, to knowing how to use that power..." (*Child of All Nations*, 263). In Indonesian the passage reads: "Kemajuan menyebabkan Pribumi Filipina makin dekat pada ilmu-pengetahuan Eropa, memahami kekuatan yang ada pada bangsa Eropa, tahu menggunakannya..." (*Anak Semua Bangsa*, 264-5).

<sup>4</sup> In the original Indonesian: "Orang bilang: hanya orang modern yang maju di jaman ini, pada tangannya nasib umat manusia tergantung. Tidak mau jadi modern? Orang akan jadi taklukan semua kekuatan yang bekerja di luar dirinya di dunia ini. Aku manusia modern." (*Jejak Langkah*, 1)

Minke repeats this statement on page seven of the same novel, and in a conversation with Dutch Governor General Van Heutz, Van Heutz argues to Minke that modern newspapers and organisations are more powerful than past methods, and that these would not have been possible without modern science and knowledge (*Footsteps*, 224-5). In fact, Minke's rise to prominence and leadership in founding a national movement of Indies natives throughout the first three books of the tetralogy has been driven by a desire to master Dutch language and learning, to use newspapers to defend himself and his family, then to learn and write in Malay so as to reach a wider audience, and finally to found his own newspaper and organisations, one of which propagandises "boycott" tactics to achieve some of its goals. This would seem to align Pramoedya's leading character with the pro-West advocates of the 1930s cultural polemics.

Minke is well aware, however, that though the Dutch, and the "Western" nations in general, preach one set of political ideals, they tend to ignore or abandon them in governing their colonial possessions. The first novel in the series, *Bumi Manusia* (This Earth of Mankind; henceforth TEoM) contains many passages in which Nyai Ontosoroh, and later Minke himself, fume against European hypocrisy, greed, and double standards in dealing with natives (TEoM 146, 277-84, 287-8, 323, 329, 333-6, 358). This greed and hypocrisy is made most emotionally manifest in the court case in which custody of Annelies, Minke's wife, is awarded to her Dutch father's family rather than to Minke, her husband under Islamic law and native custom, and her native mother, Nyai Ontosoroh (TEoM). It is also quite painfully clear in the succeeding volumes when Maurits Mellema, Annelies' half-brother, seizes the business built by his father and his father's concubine, Nyai Ontosoroh; in the circumstances of Trunodongso and the peasant rebels (*Anak Semua Bangsa*/Child of All Nations; henceforth CoAN); in the extra-legal harassment and eventual arrest and exile of Minke (*Footsteps*); and in the disgust and self-loathing triggered in the government agent, Pangemanann, who has been charged with destroying Minke and the movement he has helped found through extra-legal means (*Rumah Kaca*/House of Glass; henceforth HoG).

Given the fact that the tetralogy lays bare the hypocrisy and self-serving motives of the Dutch, which do not match their ideals, we might suspect that the works would in the end advocate a kind of nativism. In fact, they refrain completely from such a position. Minke is highly critical of Javanese elites and their traditional values. He feels humiliation at being forced to walk on his knees as a sign of obeisance to his father and in his mind mocks this "little king" who knows nothing of the science and



learning of the new era. (*TEoM*, 124). This leads to his conclusion that the Indies is “a country that can do nothing but wait upon the products of Europe!” (*TEoM*, 180).<sup>5</sup> Minke’s image of the local rulers is of a group that is *gila kebesaran* (mad with their lust for power) and which makes everyone crawl before them (*CoAN*, 265). Furthermore, Minke reasons that “Without the power of the whites the kings of Java would soon be mobilising every single inhabitant in the effort to annihilate each other, each trying to emerge the sole triumphant ruler. Wasn’t that our history for centuries?” (*CoAN*, 265).<sup>6</sup>

What is crucial here in both his assessment of the Dutch and native rulers is that Minke is represented as an individual who has developed a critical consciousness and an ability to be self-critical—to take a distance from himself and those around him in order to assess all actions and motives critically. Minke learns to do this through Dr. Martinet, who appears conversant with Freudian psychological theories and who guides Minke to view himself as “a third person”, as a “you as somebody else, a problem” (*TEoM* 255-6); but also through Nyai Ontosoroh and Magda Peters, Minke’s favorite teacher, who disabuse Minke of his overly naïve admiration of Europeans (*TEoM* 277-84; *CoAN* 76-7); through Minke’s French friend, Jean Marais (*TEoM* 242), who urges Minke as an educated person to act justly in his thoughts and deeds (*TEoM*, 55-6); and many others, both European and Asian, who hold critical dialogues with Minke. Minke’s frequent internal thought processes reflect his ability to critically evaluate even his own behaviour (e.g. *TEoM* 242; *Footsteps*, 218-9). However, perhaps the largest part in the development of this critical consciousness is played by the Dutch education, along with Minke’s resentment of his father’s lack of love and attention (*TEoM* 276-7). As Minke opens the first novel, he remarks:

This science and learning, which I had been taught at school and which I saw manifested in life all around me, meant that I was rather different from the general run of my countrymen. *Whether it contradicted my being as a Javanese*, I don’t know.<sup>7</sup> (*TEoM*, 16-17)

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<sup>5</sup> “Uh, Hindia, negeri yang hanya dapat menunggu-nunggu hasil kerja Eropa!” (*Bumi Manusia*, 175)

<sup>6</sup> “Tanpa kekuasaan kulit putih raja-raja Pribumi akan kerahkan setiap orang untuk saling memusnahkan buat berebut unggul. Kan itu yang terjadi abad demi abad?” (*Anak Semua Bangsa*, 266)

<sup>7</sup> I have added a phrase that is missing in the Max Lane translation, marking it in bold italics above. The Lane translation occurs on pages 16-17 of the 1991 U.S. edition, The Indonesian is as follows: “Ilmu dan pengetahuan, yang didapatkan

Minke's mother and family members repeatedly wonder if Minke remembers Javanese customs any longer (*TEoM*, 126-30, 309, 311), and Minke himself reflects that the rhythms of his life would not fit into the metres of Javanese poetry (*TEoM*, 297). Dutch colonials, too, recognise Minke as being startlingly different from most of his compatriots (*TEoM* 190; *Footsteps*, 39-40). This distance from his culture of origin enables Minke to understand both European culture as well as seeing Javanese culture in a more critical light. Many of Minke's critical interlocutors are Dutch, allowing the novels to present a complex picture of varied Dutch attitudes towards colonialism. In other words, Minke learns that not all Dutch have racist attitudes or crudely exploitative intentions towards the Indies. This enables him to accept the support and help of some Dutch, as in the case of Miriam de la Croix or the journalist, Ter Haar, just as he realises that some Indies natives will not support a truly democratic, independent Indonesia. As he notes, good and evil come from all peoples and ages (*CoAN*, 169). Such a position captures two of the traits that Amanda Anderson describes as being common to cosmopolitanism: a reflective distance from one's own culture and a broad understanding of other cultures and customs (Anderson 1998).

Furthermore, the novels show that Minke's path towards becoming an Indonesian nationalist incorporates a process of imagining the nation by comparing it to what he learns of other Asian nations. In this process, Minke learns from and draws on many sources in constructing his nascent nationalist movement, the Sarekat Dagang Islam (Islamic Business Association). Henk Maier has argued that one of the most intriguing aspects of Pramoedy's tetralogy is its multiplicity of contending voices (Maier 2004, 478-80). Along similar lines, Razif Bahari (2006, 71) points to a passage in *Child of All Nations* where Minke admits that

It was not only from Europe that so much could be learned! This modern age had provided me with many breasts to suckle me—from among the Natives themselves, from Japan, China, America, India, Arabia, from all the peoples on the face of the earth. They were the mother wolves that gave me life to become a builder of Rome! [...] In humility, I realized I am a child of all nations, of all ages, past and present. Place and time of birth, parents, all are coincidence: such things are not sacred. (*CoAN*, 169)<sup>8</sup>

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dari sekolah dan kusaksikan sendiri pernyataannya dalam hidup, telah membikin pribadiku menjadi agak berbeda dari sebangsaku pada umumnya. Menyalahi wujudku sebagai orang Jawa atau tidak aku pun tidak tahu.” (*Bumi Mansuia*, 2)

<sup>8</sup> “Bukan hanya dari Eropa! Jaman modern ini telah menyampaikan padaku buahdada untuk menyusui aku, dari Pribumi sendiri, dari Jepang, Tiongkok,

Indeed, Minke learns to become a nationalist pioneer through meetings and conversations with Dutch colonial liberals and radicals, Chinese nationalists, and local natives as well as gathering additional knowledge from reading and hearing about Japan, China, the nationalist uprising in the Philippines, and European concepts and principles. In this sense, nationalism is very much an international project and Minke a clear cosmopolitan who learns to understand Europeans and other Asians quite well, and who refuses to essentialise cultures, as Bahari points out (2006, 71).

And yet, for all the cosmopolitanism the books represent Minke as growing into, and given Minke's estrangement from and, often, rejection of aspects of Javanese culture, there is also a strong tendency in the novels—and especially the first three in which Minke is the narrator—to frame important parts of the narrative, and of Minke's awareness of himself, in specifically Javanese terms. Each of the first three novels begins with a reference to Javanese myths and legends. In the first one, Minke's awe for the fruits of European science and technology pushes him to compare trains and plans for airplanes to the gods and heroes of the *wayang*, such as Gatotkaca. In *Child of All Nations*, Minke's attempts to come to terms with the loss of Annelies, his wife, through Javanese beliefs about Batara Kala as the God who pushes all beings along towards their unknowable final destinations. In the third volume, *Footsteps*, Minke begins his narrative with a reference to Bandung Bondowoso who built Prambanan in a single night—an image he relates both to Robert Suurhof's failures and to what he suggests by association are his liberal friend's pipe dreams of turning the Indies into paradise overnight (*Footsteps*, 1, 20).<sup>9</sup>

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Amerika, India, Arab, dari semua bangsa di muka bumi ini. Mereka adalah induk-induk serigala yang menghidupi aku untuk menjadi pembangun Roma! [...] Dengan rendah hati aku mengakui: aku adalah bayi semua bangsa dari segala jaman yang telah lewat dan yang sekarang. Tempat dan kelahiran, orangtua, memang hanya satu kebetulan, sama sekali bukan sesuatu yang keramat.” (*Anak Semua Bangsa*, 165)

<sup>9</sup> There are a number of other key images drawn from Javanese culture that emerge from the pages of the novels as well: Herbert de la Croix's assertion that the Javanese are like a gamelan awaiting its gong (and Miriam's question about whether Minke will be that gong, *TEoM*, 193); a comparison of Annelies to the angel in the Jaka Tarub legend (*TEoM*, 44); he reads the Japanese emperor's call for Japanese to be more self-reliant as akin to a *wayang kulit* call from the heavens (*CoAN*, 49-50); and Ter Haar's reference to the kancil mousedeer stories when he argues that Governor-General Rooseboom has “the deceit of a Mousedeer” (*CoAN*, 256).

Similarly, Minke's cultural background appears in a variety of other ways. He sees himself at times as a *satria* or Javanese knight (*TEoM*, 134, 154-5), an image his mother uses to refer to him again as he is about to be married to Annelies (*TEoM*, 310-13). This image puts Minke in a rather elitist position in relation to his compatriots—as a defender or benefactor. On other occasions he refers to himself as both a *brahman* and a *sudra*, teacher and student (*Footsteps*, 293-5, 355, 408), a change that signals a much more critical attitude towards his own role and a more egalitarian stance towards his fellow Indies natives. In one of the same passages Minke admits to his mother that the ogres always win in real life, unlike in the *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet) plays, and that he wants to become a *dalang* (puppeteer) *yang tidak salah* (who does not tell the stories in the wrong way) so that the ogres will no longer win in real life either. This idea of being a *dalang yang tidak salah* becomes a repeated motif in Minke's self-narrative (*Footsteps*, 54, 355, 408, 418), even though he and others are critical of the shadow theatre's lack of representation of peasants, its stories being out of touch with contemporary life and its audience's need for the sensational (*Footsteps*, 373, 378, 408). Here, the novels' analysis of *wayang* shows the same sort of detached, distanced critical ability as their political analysis of colonial relations. Yet they also foreground the way in which Minke's frame of reference retains roots in his cultural background as a Javanese, even as he rejects much of the tradition of Javanese elites.

Minke's Javanese roots are also underscored powerfully in two key scenes in the first novel of the tetralogy: first, when having had his private affairs publicly exposed in the court case involving the murder of Herman Mellema and, as a result, being expelled from school, he describes his feelings with the Javanese term, *nelangsa* (feeling completely alone, still living among one's fellows, but no longer the same, *TEoM*, 289); second, the emotionally charged scene in which Minke's mother explains his necessary attributes as a Javanese knight just before his wedding ceremony, leaving Minke in tears as he embraces his mother's knees (*TEoM*, 307-13).

Thus, though the tetralogy presents a strong picture of the need to imitate the "West" and shows Minke to possess a cosmopolitan detachment from his own culture as well as a familiarity with cultures other than that of his origin, the first three novels in particular show Minke's cosmopolitan identity as being still strongly rooted in Javanese culture. Thus, Pramoedya's novels support arguments for the importance of notions of "rooted cosmopolitanism" that at the same time aspires to a notion of a "universal" humanity.

## **Mangunwijaya: Merging the family with the world and Indian concepts of maya hybridised with Western nuclear physics**

The next two novels I will discuss both look to the West as a model for Indonesians to emulate, but they end by drawing different conclusions about the nature of a possible Indonesian cosmopolitanism than Pramoedya's novels. If Pram's works could be said to put forward a kind of rooted cosmopolitanism centred on learning from the West on the road to a universalised global citizenship that is nonetheless strongly coloured by local culture, Mangunwijaya's and Ayu's novels begin to assert that, while Western knowledge and culture are indeed powerful forces in the world, local and Asian ideas both preserve a sense of rootedness as well as paralleling contemporary Western intellectual knowledge, thereby creating the possibility of a more equal sense of hybridity.

*Burung-Burung Rantau* is a novel of ideas. As such, its plot is secondary to the delineation of characters and the discussions and internal debates in which they are involved. What plot there is can be briefly summarised as follows. *Burung-Burung Rantau* represents a Javanese Catholic family, the parents, Wiranto and Yuniati, having lived through the end of colonialism, the revolutionary independence struggle, and the Soekarno and Soeharto eras. Their five children constitute a cross section of the 1990s Indonesian middle-class. The oldest daughter, Anggi, is a high-rolling businesswoman; Bowo, the eldest son, is a nuclear physicist; Candra, the next son, is an air force pilot; Neti, the youngest daughter, a social worker and master's degree candidate; and Edi, the youngest son, a drug addict who dies before the action of the novel begins. The story revolves around the marriage of Bowo to Agatha Anaxopolous, a Greek academic historian, and the growing feelings of Neti for an Indian non-government organisation worker and microbiologist, Gandhi Krishnahatma. Given that Bowo works at the CERN (European Organisation for Nuclear Research) centre near Geneva, Switzerland; that Bowo's wedding to Agatha takes place in the Greek archipelago; that Candra writes of his experiences accompanying a U.S. team attempting to stop drug smugglers in Latin America; that Neti, Krishna and Candra travel through Greece; that Neti attends a conference of non-government organisations concerned with helping the world's poor in India; and that Wiranto and family lived for several years in London during his posting as ambassador, this book offers a more geographical sense of cosmopolitan mobility than Pram's tetralogy. In addition, the marriage of Bowo and the abortive courtship of Krish and Neti suggests an additional layer to the Wiranto family's

cosmopolitanism—that this family, symbolic of the Indonesian middle class as a whole, also cements deep ties of understanding and personal intimacy with the wider world. Given the significance of representing Indonesia as one big family under Soeharto’s corporatist New Order society, this may suggest the novel’s first form of mediation with global society—casting it as a (post-) Indonesian family affair in which Greeks and South Asians (almost) might become equal members.

Several critics have pointed out that *Burung-Burung Rantau* strongly supports Indonesians adopting perceived “Western” values in its attempt to delineate a preferred shape for the emerging possibility of a “post-Indonesian” (*pasca-Indonesia*) generation (Abdullah, Mulder, Allen, all 1999). Pamela Allen has even argued that “‘post-nationalism’ in this novel is equated with ‘modern’, which is equated with being ‘westernized.’” Allen goes on to accuse the characters in the novel of simply being “no more than whites who seem alienated from their culture of origin” (Allen 1999, 194).<sup>10</sup> Clearly, Manguwijaya’s novel valorises aspects of Western culture—particularly its science and methods, what it sees as the “West’s” dynamism, its driving desire to learn and know more (150-1). Wiranto, the father, believes that, like it or not, loose (relaxed?) western morals will infiltrate Indonesia (34), and Neti and her father feel that the “West” is well-rounded, highly attractive, and has great abilities and achievements in science, technology, the arts, theology, and all things, including evil (95). Allen has pointed out that Neti wears jeans and t-shirts and would prefer to go bra-less as examples of her westernisation, while her brother, Bowo, lives in Geneva and considers himself a post-Indonesian who contributes, with his scientific research, to global human knowledge as his form of “patriotism” (159-60). Older sister Anggi seems to have become a globe-hopping, predatory, neo-liberal business magnate (270, 297), while even Candra, the air force pilot, admires Western equipment, interrogation methods, and other aspects of Western military capabilities (41-6).

Still, I believe there is a more complex relationship than Allen and others have noticed between Indonesians and the so-called “West” that is charted out in *Burung-Burung Rantau*. It is true that at times Manguwijaya’s book seems to fall back on stereotypical, polarised images such as were articulated in the Cultural Debates of the 1930s when the “West” was cast as the restless, materialistic and scientific Faust and the “East” was represented as the spiritual warrior, Arjuna. When examining her growing

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<sup>10</sup> In the Indonesian version of this article, to which I have access, Allen’s quotes are as follows: “...‘pasca-nasionalisme’ dalam roman ini searti dengan ‘modern’, yang dipersamakan dengan ‘kebarat-baratan’.” The second quote goes: “tidak lain adalah bule yang seolah-olah diasingkan dari budayanya yang asli.”

fondness for Gandhi (Krish), Neti sees her intellectual resources as Indian intuition or Greek rationality (205), while Krish characterises “East” and “West” in much the same terms (237). Yet elsewhere, Neti opposes the idea of essentialising entire cultures arguing, much like Pram’s novels, that good and bad are in all people (240), while Krish contends that a nation’s greatest enemies can come from among that very nation’s own citizens (228).

Much like in Pram’s novels, as well, the sense of learning from different countries—in this case from first-hand travels and discussions—imbues the characters of *Burung-Burung Rantau* with a critical comparative consciousness that results in critiques of both the characters’ countries of origin and the “West”. Neti thinks of the “East” as having pretenses to being spiritually rich, while permitting women to be brutalised and sacrificed for venal patriarchal reasons, and children to be disfigured so that others may earn easy money (270, 328). She criticises Indonesia for creating a culture in which “goodness” equals pretense and dissimulation and whose ministries often put an “out-of-place pride” before accomplishing good for the nation’s people (211, 324). In debates between Neti, Krish, and Neti’s brother, Candra, Neti lovingly ridicules Candra’s military-bureaucratic rigidity of thought (240-1). Even Neti’s father, Wiranto, reflects that many children’s minds have been cannibalised by their parents or by the country’s attempt at accelerated modernisation (8-10), and Neti’s M.A. supervisor suggests that the poverty of a part of the Indonesian population indicates a failing in the practice of Indonesia’s political and social organisation (139). Bowo sees Indonesia as still being trapped in a herd mentality full of superstition and barriers to individual liberation (158). Still, Indonesia, and Asia in general, are not alone in being criticised. As mentioned above, Wiranto and Neti recognise that the power of the “West” allows it to be good at everything, including doing evil. Bowo’s discussion of CERN’s role in the world also includes critiques of both the ill-gotten gains of third world corruptors and the “global-level bandits of the advanced industrial countries” (294). Finally, Wiranto tells Neti logic does not help in most cases when we must use our feelings or intuition: the case he gives as an example is that of their maid/housekeeper who is now too old and sickly to work as she once did; should she be fired or let go? Here, Wiranto criticises the utility of what he terms *logika manajemen*, a kind of cold economic calculus that seems in sync with “Western” derived neo-liberalism (26).

What this critical awareness calls forth is the need for a post-nationalist or post-Indonesian positioning of young Indonesians (and others) that are able to serve all of humanity (159-61, 345-6). This issue is raised as early

as page 59 of the novel, when Neti tells her father that Bowo has become a post-Indonesian and Wiranto asks Neti if Bowo, who is now living in Switzerland, is still Indonesian at all. Neti replies:

No, that's not it. "Post" means still the same, but at the same time you've become different. Papi, on your identity card and in real life you state that you're an Indonesian, but you're still a Javanese who loves *wayang*, alias an Indonesian who's post-Javanese. Isn't a post-bachelor's degree student someone who still did their bachelor's degree work but has now graduated?<sup>11</sup>

This theme is repeated several times (111, 156-62, 297, 345-50), and indeed, given Bowo's emblematic statement that his "patriotism" is no longer held by narrow national bonds but makes an individual contribution to the greater humanity, it does appear to favour young Indonesians adopting the kind of dynamic individualism the novel portrays the "West" as representing (158-9, 358).

However, just as in Pramoedya's novels, *Burung-Burung Rantau's* characters are immersed in a world of local frames of reference. Wiranto and Neti debate whether people are manipulated by a *dalang* (other people or larger social forces) in the course of their lives (54) and discuss the world in terms of *wayang kulit* (94-5), while Neti, the modern, post-national woman, wonders which of the five Pandawa warriors she and her siblings take after (94-7) and sees her M.A. thesis supervisor as a *wayang*-like figure (133-47). While attending Bowo's and Agatha's wedding in the Greek archipelago, Neti asks Agatha if Greek and Indonesian mythologies and geographies are not comparable to each other, comparing Arjuna to Apollo and the sacred mountain of Mahameru to Mount Olympus (161-2). Certainly, Neti experiences India in part through a shared sense of mythologies (318-19, 322). Bowo even explains the field of nuclear-physics and the many aspects of reality by referring to the *wayang* figure from the *Ramayana*, Dasamuka (338).

All this is not so different from presenting Minke as a rooted cosmopolitan in Pramoedya's novels. But there is something more going on here, as signalled by the comparison the novel is at pains to make between Indonesia and Greece (148, 151, 161-2, 165, 184-5). The two countries are seen as similar in many ways—geographically, in their myths, and in many of their social networks, the Greeks being represented as

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<sup>11</sup> "Bukan begitu, pasca artinya masih tetap sama, tetapi sekaligus menjadi lain. Papi di KTP dan nyatanya menyatakan diri berbangsa Indonesia, tetapi kan tetap orang Jawa yang suka wayang, alias manusia Indonesia yang pasca-Jawa. Pascasarjana kan tetap sarjana juga, tetapi meningkat."



having the superior quality of being more frank and open. Here, the essentialised differences between “East” and “West” begin to disappear in a symbolic comparison suggesting convergence. Even more interesting, given the novel’s concern to highlight and valorise the importance of spiritual values, is the sub-plot in which Neti and Krish begin to become emotionally attached. Through this plot device, Manguanwijaya’s novel also begins to compare and merge Indonesia and India, via elements of their shared cultural background. This allows the novel to begin to discuss Indian spiritual values and the ways in which the Hindu concept of *maya*, as a synecdochic representative of the “East” (and thus Indonesia) is in fact very similar to modern nuclear physics. When questioned by Neti about how he can be both immersed in the traditional beliefs and mythologies of India while at the same time working for his doctorate in biotechnology, Krish replies that it was a relatively simple matter to harmonise the ancient views with sub-nuclear physics (230). He goes on to explain that the ancient Hindu concept of “*maya*” holds that the transient world of our senses is false, an illusion. This is similar to modern subatomic physics, which finds that the material, since it is in fact composed of energy in continual motion, is also profoundly full of empty space, an idea that confounds our sense of sight and touch (231-2). Later, Plato’s notion that the idea of something, not its various different forms (as in the idea of a horse versus the various kinds of horses that actually exist), is what is true is also compared to the concept of “*maya*” and the illusory nature of the material world (246). Similarly, when explaining the mysteries of the sub-atomic universe he explores, Bowo confirms the statements of Indonesian traditional mystics (*paranormal*) by explaining that since there is a vast distance between atomic nuclei and the particles that orbit them to make up their atomic structure, much of the material world is made up of empty space (298). Finally, Krish states at several points that since the material world is “*maya*”, an illusion, though we can grasp aspects of reality, of the truth, we can never know the entire truth (231, 322). Later Bowo remarks that modern science no longer tries to explain the precise nature of reality but rather how humans understand reality (337-8).

All of this comparative work of *Burung-Burung Rantau* points towards a belief in the convergence of ancient “Eastern” knowledge with modern experimental science. And as if confirming the Indonesian/Indian frame for representing this, at a number of points in the novel the characters discuss or think of science as the new religion, with scientists as the new *brahmana* or priestly caste (285, 304). Neti, who wants to be a source of spiritual value in life, imagines herself as the pious Pandawa priest-king,

Yudhistira (96). Thus, *Burung-Burung Rantau* suggests a rather different model of rooted cosmopolitanism than Pram's novels—one in which Indonesian, or at least Indian philosophy, which for Javanese Indonesians is a part of their cultural heritage, can be viewed as parallel to Western modernity and thereby as a contributor to global culture. One caveat remains, however. When talking with Neti about her thesis, her M.A. supervisor, Professor Baridjo, claims that while the world is becoming more Western, “Nevertheless on the other hand there are a few signs that the West is becoming East. Too few, of course, but significant enough. It's just unfortunate that the development and convergence are still too asymmetrical...”<sup>12</sup> (283).

### ***Bilangan Fu: Javanese mystical spirituality and postmodernism***

Over 15 years later, one of Indonesia's leading novelists of the new century produced *Bilangan Fu*, which made very similar arguments about parallel developments and convergence, but uses Western postmodern or poststructuralist philosophy, as noted at the beginning of this article, as the key comparative value, rather than nuclear physics. In addition, Indian spiritual ideas are certainly present but much more in tandem with Javanese mystical spirituality.

*Bilangan Fu* is a rich novel whose plot revolves around Yuda, a rock climber, Parang Jati, a student and believer in Javanese mystical spirituality, and Marya, who will become a lover to both men. Yuda and Parang Jati become acquainted through a chance meeting at a friend's house, but form a close bond soon thereafter and scheme to pioneer a new, less equipment-oriented form of rock climbing (sacred climbing or *pemanjatan suci*) while climbing a rock face near the South Javanese coastal area where Parang Jati grew up. Parang Jati's origins are narrated like a mysterious legend, and he is adopted by a leading *paranormal* who trains him to appreciate older, pre-Islamic and even pre-Hindu aspects of Javanese culture, as well as putting him through several difficult tests and forcing him to perform with a carnival side-show group of people with unusual physical conditions. Later Yuda, Parang Jati, and Marya discover that the hills in which the two men love to climb are being mined for rock and mineral resources, and Parang Jati leads them in planning a campaign

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<sup>12</sup> “Namun sebaliknya sudah ada tanda-tanda sedikit: Barat menjadi Timur. Terlalu sedikit memang tetapi cukup signifikan. Hanya sayang, perkembangannya dan konvergensinya masih terlalu asimetris...”

to preserve the mountains. However, Jati's local rival, a young man named Kupu-Kupu (Farisi), who has become the leader of a group of young, militant, and very dogmatic religious fundamentalists, aligns himself with the business interests attempting to exploit the hills for their rock resources, and a tragic confrontation ensues after Kupu-Kupu's group accuses Jati of engaging in devilish pagan rituals.

Similar to Pram's "Buru" tetralogy, *Bilangan Fu*'s characters are not shown travelling to foreign lands, although Kupu-Kupu does spend some time studying abroad, an experience only briefly described. Much of the novel's cosmopolitan thrust lies with its long discussions of evolutionary theory, religious history, and geology, as well as the fact that Yuda, its narrator, and other characters make frequent references to aspects of foreign cultures, from Karl May's Winnetou to Native Americans being dispossessed of their ancestral lands; from Hollywood movies to Japanese manga; from Freudian theory to ideas of trauma; from the influence of US popular music to various forms of popular international cuisine. Characters at times interject bits of English or German, as well, into their conversations.

All of this, however, is enwrapped in a narrative densely packed with references to local culture, history, and geography. The same critical distance that existed in Pram's and Manguwijaya's novels can be found here, including a variety of criticisms of Indonesian society. Most notably, Parang Jati is suspicious and critical of the Indonesian military (and militarism, in general [58, 81, 230], although his friend, Yuda, thinks some Indonesian soldiers are not violent but rather noble ksatria, 399-400). Yuda remarks that justice in Indonesia is a matter of money, relations, and connections (128). Elsewhere Yuda criticises some Indonesian bureaucrats for believing in the supernatural power of symbols and refers to Indonesia as "the rule of modern Majapahit-Mataram" (235). Though more muted than in Pram's and Manguwijaya's novels, implied criticism of "Western" culture and nations is also evident. For instance, in Yuda's brief reference to the fate of the Native Americans (18). In other passages, the novel is at its most cosmopolitan in asserting that global problems, most attributable to "Western" ideas, technology, and business rapacity, are common concerns for the entire planet, including Indonesia. Parang Jati is critical of "utility and results" as measures of success (344), suggesting modernist, rationalised ways of viewing the world, and his call for a new contract with nature is prefaced by a discussion of the power of technology and rationality in conquering superstition but also, less fortunately, nature (385, 531).

The novel also grounds itself squarely in recent Indonesian history by noting events such as the sometimes violent rivalry between the military

and the police over control of off-budget business dealings (395-401), attacks against the Ahmadiyya sect of Islam (298-9, 320) and the killing of so-called “sorcerers” in East Java (355-6). References to local cultural images, myths, and history saturate much of the book as well. Yuda compares his rock-climbing group to ascetic hermits (*pertapa*) who used to seek isolated spots to meditate and gain spiritual power (11-12). A sense of animism and pre-Hindu beliefs is suggested early on, when Yuda remarks that a stone he possesses should be regarded as having a spirit (*ruh*), or when he has a frightening dream that the rock face he is climbing is occupied by a Jackal spirit that bites him (65). Later Yuda shows that he is still influenced by older spiritual beliefs when he licks the blood from Parang Jati’s hand at a place where animist spirit offerings are left (61), and the village near which the rock climbers climb still holds animist ritual ceremonies (131-2) and clings to a belief in Nyi Roro Kidul. This mythic figure, imagined as Queen of the South Seas, is a major presence in the story, having great consequences for Parang Jati’s rivalry with Kupu-Kupu. As in the other works discussed above, the Javanese *wayang* is also prominently mentioned with the local village head being characterised as Semar (the father of the *wayang* clowns, 96-7, 140) and another village character, Pak Pontiman, as Bilung (a servant of the less noble enemies of the Pandawa, 391). In a symptomatic fashion, the heroes of *wayang* are compared in stature and behaviour to Ramboesque Hollywood action heroes (86-9). Even the story of Parang Jati’s origin is presented in mysterious, fairy tale-like (*dongeng*) terms connected to Javanese mystical, pre-Hindu spirit beliefs (215-20).

There are also other elements of the text that signal its deep engagement with local culture and Javanese culture in general. Parang Jati tells a series of stories that tie local geologic formations to Javanese myths and history (41-59), and he teaches Yuda that there are layers to history, and that these are part of an ongoing process of change. This is most evident in his discourse on the history of the Nyi Roro Kidul legend (255-62). It is also apparent in Yuda’s narration of the abortive ceremony to ward off evil after a recently deceased villager is thought to have risen from the dead (140), or in Parang Jati’s tongue-in-cheek remark that there was no Indonesian Environmental Protection organisation such as WALHI in the time of Sang Kuriang, when Dayang Sumbi set a forest on fire to create a false sunrise in order to prevent Sangkuriang from completing an epic task she had set him (55).

Like *Burung-Burung Rantau*, however, *Bilangan Fu* mobilises local and Javanese culture at one level in order to suggest a possible convergence or synthesis of contemporary Western thought with elements

of traditional Asian spirituality.<sup>13</sup> In this case, the goal is a return to a more ecological “earth-centred spirituality as part of a new compact with nature in order to prevent environmental disaster” (385, 452, 463, 531). It is a kind of spirituality that draws heavily on Indian beliefs and a pre-Hindu animism still fragmentarily visible beneath the surface life of many Javanese villages and city neighbourhoods and symbolised in the novel, in part, by the Queen of the World of Javanese spirits, Nyi Roro Kidul (255-6). The reason for championing this kind of earth-centric spirituality is to combat what Parang Jati describes as the three enemies of postmodernism: modernism, militarism, and monotheism (474-80). Parang Jati sees all of these as being focused on possessing: truth, territory and wealth, and spiritual truth. To accomplish their aims, these three “isms” create polarised oppositions between “us” and “them”, oppositions which, Jati argues, are rigid, intolerant, and destructive in their insistence that they possess the one, sole truth. As Yuda interprets Parang Jati’s ideas

...what he meant by a critical attitude....An attitude that believes something but at the same time defers that thing....A deferral of the truth. Humanity wants the truth and they want it right now. Unfortunately, truth can’t be gotten this very day, even though every day we must believe it can be. The truth, if it showed up today, would be nothing more than sheer arrogance. To engage in critical practice is to restrain arrogance. It carries that heavy burden to prevent truth from reincarnating on earth today.

*Let good come from today, not the truth.* (381)

It is here in the notion of the deferral of “truth” that Ayu’s novel finds one key point of convergence with poststructuralism, expressed as well in the Javanese phrase *eling lan waspada* (be aware of your circumstances and examine your actions), though such convergence is also present in the text’s foregrounding of the subjective nature of our understanding of “reality”. A prime example is the passage where Parang Jati contends that there are various versions of events, and what is important is not the truth or falseness of any one version, but rather what the versions tell us about the social map that has generated them all (159-60). Elsewhere, the novel contains discussions of the arbitrary nature of multiple numbering systems (273-7). Along similar lines, Parang Jati reminds Yuda that older myths and stories are not “false”, but rather contain “symbolic truths” (244-5, 369-71). Finally, in another passage that hints at the novel’s attempt to be

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<sup>13</sup> And Parang Jati does, in two possibly contentious passages, suggest that Asian religions, which are not monotheistic, show less a tendency to see their duty as waging a war of God against the Devil, but rather as balancing the power of earthly authorities (321, 480).

cognisant of class differences in the realm of culture, Parang Jati explains that villagers are not stupid, rather their language is simply different from that of educated urban Indonesians (451-2).<sup>14</sup>

Another indicator of the poststructuralist bent of the novel is the preference for elusive, metaphoric images as opposed to attempts to make language conform to precise, transparent singular meanings. The chief example of this gives the book its title. Parang Jati's adoptive father, Suhubudi, argues that rationality is too dominant in the world (331), the world Parang Jati critiques as being too oriented to ideas of "utility and results" (*guna dan hasil*, 344). Suhubudi thus takes on the mission of restoring the symbolic dimension of "zero", (*noI*) which he claims once used to hold great metaphoric value in the form of the Indian term, *shunya* (that which is without limits but also full and whole, 303), but was reduced to a mere mathematical numeral representing multiples of ten. This he calls the numeral *hu* or *fu* (302-4, 320-32). This image of "Hu" or "Fu", with its metaphoric rather than exact character, corresponds to the idea of the deferral of truth mentioned above, a theme that is repeated multiple times (378, 381, 407, 452) and as such represents another point where Hindu Javanese concepts run parallel to contemporary Western philosophy.

All of this, connecting poststructuralist ideas to Hindu and pre-Hindu spiritual beliefs, is part of the novel's attempt both to legitimise these ways of understanding and practicing spirituality in the face of hostile monotheistic religions and to modernise—through "critical practice"—these beliefs as a contribution to Indonesian and, possibly, global culture. It certainly suggests that ancient Javanese spirituality is in tune with contemporary thought and therefore has much to offer. The novel's dramatisation of this effort makes Nyi Manyar, the woman who originally found the abandoned baby, Parang Jati, and who is a spiritual medium in the local village, recognise that times have changed and that her power can no longer solve the problems the village faces (225-7). Thus, the student

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<sup>14</sup> Here I acknowledge the very insightful reading of *Bilangan Fu* provided by Laurie J. Sears in her book, *Situated Testimonies* (2013). While I agree with much of Sears' reading, I would argue that Sears is not completely correct in saying that in *Bilangan Fu* "Ayu has, in certain ways, abandoned reason and turned to the spirit world of Java where she puts forward ideas of melancholic bonding and critical spirituality" (206). In contrast, I would contend that in fact, though some critics see poststructuralist methods as glorifying the irrational, in *Bilangan Fu* Ayu's work strives to construct, through the concept of critical practice, a practice which tries to blend ancient spiritual beliefs with a critical rationality. Its goal, as announced in the passage that opened this paper, is to bring critical reasoning to older Javanese spirituality. What is abandoned is not so much reason itself, but a particular kind of modernist, instrumental rationality.

and activist Parang Jati and his friends endeavour to combine poststructuralist critical thinking with revived local beliefs, such as making offerings to the jungle and the rocky cliffs, in hopes that this will reignite a respectful relationship with nature and end destructive practices such as the destruction of the nearby mountains by mining. Yet the monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Islam condemn such animistic practices (309). Parang Jati explains that this is because monotheistic religions cannot tolerate difference (320-1). Jati thereby chooses not only to defend older Javanese spiritual beliefs, but to do so together with those marginalised and oppressed by the monotheistic religions (463). As such, Parang Jati's, and the novel's, attempts to defend pre-Islamic Javanese spirituality and its adherents represent a kind of cosmopolitanism that also stands in solidarity with those, in Kymlicka and Walker's analysis, who are "left outside state-and-nation-based projects". According to this variety of cosmopolitan thought, "a successful rooted cosmopolitanism will therefore be a "minoritarian" or "indigenous cosmopolitanism—a cosmopolitan community envisaged in marginality..." (Kymlicka and Walker 2012, 9-10). It is no coincidence, either, that Ayu's novel, advocating on behalf of pre-Islamic spiritual beliefs, should come at a time when a conservative political Islam in Indonesia has enacted so-called sharia bylaws in many localities (Bush 2008; Crouch 2009a), seen the passing of a national anti-pornography law, and when aggressive Islamic vigilante groups have violently attacked and persecuted a number of Islamic sects and religious minorities (Crouch 2009b).

## Conclusion

Prominent Indonesian novelists have continued to pursue the ideal of seeing Indonesia and Indonesian literature as standing equal on the world stage and as heir to world culture. The three novels discussed here have shown cosmopolitan ambitions and identities realised in representations of characters who can achieve critical perspectives through taking a reflective distance from Indonesian culture. All of these works see "Western" culture as the dominant model that needs to be emulated in some way or another, but all are also sceptical or critical of some aspects of the "West". Similarly, all three view the process of Indonesia becoming more cosmopolitan through a lens that is heavily coloured with local context: history, mythology, and cultural images. Finally, there is a movement from Pramoedya's tetralogy, in which a universal cosmopolitanism is achieved by the colonised turning the colonisers' own technologies and weapons of struggle against them, to Mangunwijaya's and Ayu's novels in which

elements of Asian or local Javanese cultures are seen as being parallel to contemporary “Western” thought and therefore, symbolising a more equal hybrid form of global cosmopolitan identity.

There is, however, another kind of cosmopolitan identity that emerges from contemporary Indonesian literature, an Islamic cosmopolitanism that does not look to the “West”, but rather to Cairo and a global community of Muslims, as evidenced by Habiburrahman El-Shirazy’s best-selling novel of 2004, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (Verses of Love). As with its counterparts discussed above, there is a sense of a foreign centre seen as a source of universalising Islamic values (to “humanise humanity”, 83, 167) and a critical distance in recognising that pious and less pious Muslims are found in all societies. Similarly, there is criticism of the perceived failings of many Indonesians and their cultural customs, though the book is, like the novels already discussed, profoundly immersed in Indonesian culture and hinges on an Indonesian demonstrating a knowledge of Islam and its teachings that is superior to that of many other nominal Muslims, Indonesian or Egyptian, that he meets in the course of El-Shirazy’s narrative. In this sense, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* depicts a religious community in which Indonesians can stand equal to others on a global stage, a fact further reinforced by the hero’s, Fahri’s, almost irresistible qualities in the eyes of women from a variety of cultures. Still, for all its similarities, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* is also quite different from the novels previously discussed. As noted above, the centre to which the novel looks is Egypt and Al-Azhar University, and the values espoused as being superior are a particular version of Islam. In its unrelenting focus on the nobility and truth of Islam, it is quite far from *Bilangan Fu*’s deferral of truth and concerns about the repressive nature of monotheism, or from Mangunwijaya’s vision of nuclear physics and “maya” as indicators of the difficulty of humans achieving absolute truth. Similarly, the political vision presented in the book seems more naïve, less critical, than that presented in Pram’s tetralogy or in Mangunwijaya’s and Ayu Utami’s novels. Still, a more detailed analysis of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*’s cosmopolitanism is beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, its existence stands as yet another bit of evidence that despite the desire of Indonesian novelists of various strands to find universal cosmopolitan values, what currently exists is probably a striving for a cosmopolitan universality by several contending cosmopolitanisms rooted in local contexts and conveying different frames of reference.



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# CHAPTER EIGHT

## CONTEMPORARY INDONESIAN THEATRE AND JAVANESE TRADITION

BARBARA HATLEY

### **Contemporary Indonesian theatre and Javanese tradition**

A woman preparing dinner in a humble village home repeatedly tells her son to bathe before he eats, as he dawdles and talks back. Finally, the boy sets out for the river but reports that the stream has dried up, transformed into a battlefield, that of the great Bharatayudha war that concludes the Mahabharata epic. A four-armed goddess appears, holding a grenade, arrow, pistol, and sword, and urges her child to fight fiercely, without mercy. At another site, in a contemporary airport lounge, passengers carrying suitcases rush past women performing traditional Javanese dance movements; huge shadows of both are projected on a screen behind them, along with images of jet planes traversing the sky.

In these startling images, two Indonesian theatre groups evoke Javanese “tradition” in the midst of the everyday, exploring connections between history, cultural tradition and contemporary life. The work of these groups contributes to a process in which modern Indonesian theatre, theatre in the national language, Indonesian, based on the model of a Western play, which developed as part of Indonesia’s transformation from a European colony to modern nation, has drawn on local, regional theatre forms and cultural traditions. Response to changing social and political conditions has shaped the nature of this engagement, “traditional” reference in modern Indonesian theatre taking different forms, with varying motivations, through the decades. Exploring how modern theatre draws on Javanese traditions today, amidst the complexities and challenges of post-New Order, regional autonomy era Indonesia, with what suggestions and questions about current life, is the focus of this chapter. After briefly reviewing the interaction of modern theatre with traditional, regional

theatrical and cultural tradition over time, and outlining some general features of such processes at work today, I examine several examples of works that explicitly take up the question of the meaning of Javanese “tradition” for Indonesia in contemporary times. The focus on Javanese traditions and Java-based theatre groups reflects my own research experience as well as the volume and variety of such performance activities. Exploring comparable developments in contemporary theatre in other regions would constitute a very interesting and revealing parallel project.<sup>1</sup>

### **Modern theatre takes on “tradition”**

In the early decades after Indonesia achieved Independence in 1945, modern theatre maintained a distinct identity from traditional, regional performance genres. Associated with the Western-educated elite, it was seen by its practitioners as embodying qualities of individuality, originality and freedom of expression, in contrast to the fixed theatrical conventions and restrictive world of thought of traditional performance.<sup>2</sup> In the strongly nationalistic political environment of the 1950s, modern theatre, like other modern Indonesian cultural forms, attempted to create a new, progressive culture for the new nation by combining nationalist commitment with contemporary international aesthetic expression. The left-right political polarisation of early-mid 1960, which aligned theatre practitioners espousing liberal, Western-influenced values against their populist, communist-connected counterparts, produced some differences of approach. Some leftist groups embraced traditional stories and performance styles in order to connect more closely with rural and lower-class audiences.<sup>3</sup> Yet overall, dialogue-based, realistic narrative plays remained the dominant mode of Indonesian modern theatrical expression until the late 1960s.

It was during the 1970s, following the dramatic changes in Indonesian politics and society that occurred with the decimation of the left in 1965-

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<sup>1</sup> The edited volume cited below, *Performing Contemporary Indonesia* (Hatley with Hough 2015), makes some reference to this issue, but in the context of “snapshots” of performance activities in different regions and genres rather than a systematic comparative analysis.

<sup>2</sup> No less a figure than Rendra, who a few years later spearheaded modern theatre’s engagement with traditional performance and cultural symbols, describes modern theatre this way in an essay first published in 1967 (Rendra 1983).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Bodden (2010) describes activities of this kind carried out by theatre groups associated with the Communist-linked cultural organisation LEKRA in North Sumatra in the 1950s and early 1960s.

1966 and the installation of the authoritarian, militaristic New Order regime, that modern theatre began to engage with local performance styles and cultures. In varying and complex ways, this process expressed response to the new sociopolitical conditions. Under the New Order state, as it implemented a programme of orderly, top-down economic transformation, the cultural focus on “building the new” of the previous era was replaced by a valorisation of local “tradition”, seen as a source of values conducive to stable national “development”—solidarity, orderliness, and local pride. Regional traditions, shorn of any dangerous separatist political implications, were seen to contribute to a richly varied, yet harmoniously unified, national culture, and regional cultural forms were actively supported, inventorised and “upgraded”. Practitioners of modern theatre, perhaps encouraged by this climate to focus attention on local performance traditions, experienced new opportunities to do so.

Government-provided facilities, particularly the Taman Ismail Marzuki arts centre in Jakarta, where performances by both traditional, regional, and modern theatre groups were staged, fostered interaction between traditional and modern, and provided space for the resulting experimentation. Modern theatre actors and directors could watch performances of genres from all over the archipelago and interact with the performers. With the lifting of the constant pressure to address political concerns in their work, theatre artists were free to experiment aesthetically, including through the blending of modern Western and traditional, regional forms.

Another motivation for engagement with traditional, regional performance was that of attracting wider audiences, overcoming the gap between modern theatre as an elite, Westernised art form, and the mass of ordinary people. Theatre practitioners in the 1970s expressed a desire to tap into the colourful dramatic idioms and energy of traditional, regional performances and emulate their intimate, dynamic relations with their audiences. Sometimes such efforts were framed explicitly in post-colonial terms, in assertions of the need to move beyond Western models and to incorporate the revitalising power of local traditions in order to establish an authentic Indonesian identity.<sup>4</sup>

The incorporation of elements of regional performance genres and cultural traditions into modern theatre played a further role that grew in importance as the New Order state became more entrenched. Resonating with the cultural worlds of audience members, these elements could also

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<sup>4</sup> Such issues were debated in three major symposia on modern Indonesian theatre held in this period, the collected papers from which appear in the publications Sihombing et al. (eds) (1980), Sutarjo et al. (eds) (1983) and Malaon et al. (eds) (1986).

be used to convey commentary on contemporary social and political conditions. Adaptations of classic European dramas using the conventions of traditional, regional Indonesian theatre drew clear parallels between moral concerns raised in these texts and Indonesian social reality. Several major playwright/directors created original works combining international theatre styles with traditions from their native regions in distinctive ways to reflect on contemporary social issues. Arifin C. Noer's absurdist plays drew on images and stories from indigenous folk tradition, particularly that of his birthplace, Cirebon, on the Javanese north coast, in representing the sufferings and struggles for survival of the poor. Putu Wijaya reworked elements of the theatre of his native Bali in bizarre images and events, evoking the alienation and confusion of contemporary urban life. As government authorities extended their control, political organisation was proscribed and political expression severely restricted, modern theatre invoked "tradition" as a medium of direct political resistance. Reinterpreting cultural tradition in ways that challenged and subverted the dominant representations of the state, modern plays provided an important channel for political critique.

### **Javanese tradition and national politics**

Javanese theatrical and cultural tradition was the main site of this contestation, in keeping with its valorisation by the Java-centric New Order state, while theatre groups in Central Java were its most active proponents. Reference to political power is arguably inherent in the repertoire and stage conventions of Javanese theatre forms such as *wayang* shadow puppet theatre and dance drama, with their stories of mythic kingdoms and epic wars, and history of development within a hierarchical, court-dominated society. Characterisation and interaction within these classic forms, and more so in the popular historical melodrama *ketoprak* that draws on these models, allow for a degree of variant, critical interpretation. Modern theatre unambiguously interpreted such elements so as to critique the celebration of court-centred "tradition" by contemporary representatives of the state. Kings were portrayed as ruthlessly ambitious or troubled and ineffectual, their palaces as sites of internal conflict rather than harmony and beneficence. Like New Order officials, these plays associated past royal power with contemporary political authority. Yet here continuity between past and present was suggested not by invoking courtly grandeur but by depicting the age-old, on-going greed and corruption of today's powerholders. Under conditions of strict control of public expression of political opinion, with a constrained and muzzled

press, theatre performances, conveying contemporary reference in “traditional”, historical guise, served as a vital channel for sociopolitical critique.

The key figure in this movement was the playwright and director Rendra, working with his group Bengkel Theatre in Yogyakarta in the 1970s, at first producing adaptations of Western plays, then several original works. Most famous of Rendra’s own plays, frequently cited, translated and performed internationally, is the iconic *Kisah Perjuangan Suku Naga* (“The Struggle of the Naga Tribe”, 1975). Set in a supposedly mythical foreign kingdom immediately identifiable as contemporary Indonesia,<sup>5</sup> it adopts the format of *wayang*, Javanese shadow theatre, to tell the story of a village community struggling against rapacious foreign developers working in league with the kingdom’s ruler and chief ministers. Based on a real-life case of land appropriation by mining interests supported by the central government on one of Indonesia’s outer islands, the play had huge contemporary political resonance, powerfully conveyed through the use of a familiar, local theatrical medium to satirise the powerholders and depict their opponents, the “little people”, as heroes. Meanwhile key deviations from the model of *wayang*-depiction of the *dalang* as not simply narrating but also commenting critically on the action, and the Naga Tribe, “the people”—not as humorously flawed, clown-like subordinates of the nobility but as intelligent, well-informed citizens—suggests differences between past and present and the need for traditional models to adjust to new conditions and contexts.

Rendra’s politically critical plays and poetry and his active involvement with the oppositionist student movement eventually brought harsh, repressive response from the authorities. In 1978 he was imprisoned briefly and banned from performing, a ban that remained in force for seven years. Other groups, however, continued to perform politically-critical, traditionally-styled plays. Teater Dinasti took on the mantle of Teater Bengkel in Yogya and continued to stage historical dramas satirising powerholders. In the late 1980s the group Gandrik introduced a new theatrical style influenced by folk theatre, involving contemporary settings, straightforward dialogue, critical humour and simple musical accompaniment. Other groups such as Teater Arena developed this style into *teater rakyat*, a populist theatre approach used with villagers and

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<sup>5</sup> The actor playing the role of the *dalang*, puppeteer/narrator, in introducing the performance, states explicitly, with heavy irony, that this play does NOT take place in Indonesia, but instead in the kingdom of Astinam. Given that “Astinam” is the name of the “enemy” kingdom in *wayang*, the disclaimer further strengthens rather than dispels the perceived political critique of the play.



NGO workers in programmes of social transformation. In Solo the plays of the group Gapit, using Javanese-language dialogue, set in lower class neighbourhoods dispossessed and bypassed by New Order development, gave expression to contemporary lived experience of Javanese identity shaped by “tradition”.<sup>6</sup> And in Jakarta, Teater Koma’s spectacular satirical musicals set in mythical Javanese kingdoms attracted huge numbers of middle class, urban viewers.

In the final months of the New Order regime, as political disaffection spread and strengthened, the resistant role of theatre and its links with societal opposition strengthened further. Critical performances were staged to packed audiences of cheering students; actors joined in demonstrations, staging street theatre; Yogya performer Butet Kertarejasa gave mock speeches impersonating Soeharto on campuses, at demonstrations, and to the students occupying the parliament building in the final days before Soeharto resigned in mid-May 1998. Theatre groups then participated actively in the celebrations of the President’s demise and in the turbulent *Reformasi* politics that followed, in performances commenting critically on ongoing violence and the lack of significant change. After the euphoria of *Reformasi* abated, however, as the new political conditions and structures of the post-Soeharto era became established, theatre performers faced the challenge of engaging with a very different social world.

### **Tradition and identity in contemporary times**

In a context of democratisation of the political system and devolution of administrative authority and economic power to the regions under the regional autonomy system, no longer was there one central authoritarian state formulating a single national identity, promoted through traditional cultural forms. Instead regional autonomy produced a focus on local cultural distinctiveness, and diverse local social identities—ethnic, religious, territorial, sexual—were celebrated and contested. No single, powerful repressive force existed for critical theatre to demonise, no broad-based opposition movement for artists to work with. With the collapse of the Soeharto regime the opposition movement fragmented in the absence of a common target, while the removal of the flawed Javanese king deprived performers of a shared idiom of political reference. And in the new climate of openness of expression, with a booming, flourishing

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<sup>6</sup> Suggesting that “Gapit presents Javanese language and theatre as embodiments of lived experience”, Tony Day argues that the play *RoI* reveals “an essential connection between the theatre and dance of Central Java and male violence.” (Day 1999, 130)

free press, political critique conveyed through theatre no longer had the same force and rationale.

Commentary in the press at that time described modern theatre activity as “floundering and directionless”, unable to respond to the new climate of freedom.<sup>7</sup> Theatre practitioners expressed a sense of loss of political mission; a famous playwright and director spoke of feelings of confusion in the face of contemporary social and political reality and inability to respond creatively.<sup>8</sup> While some of the major theatre groups from the New Order years have continued to perform, conveying political critique and attracting enthusiastic audiences, the sense of “organic” connection with contemporary conditions has faded. New kinds of performance have emerged to give expression to contemporary social reality, mobilising the energies of young people and capturing media attention—locally-based yet often shaped by global cultures and widely publicised through the new electronic media.

A recent edited volume on contemporary Indonesian performance contains a discussion of developments in different regions and artistic media—Sundanese language drama festivals participating in a general revival of Sundanese language and culture, newly “liberated” in the regional autonomy era from domination by Indonesian national language and culture and that of the neighbouring ethnic Javanese; new media groups assisting young people in making their own videos, sharing technology to empower communities.<sup>9</sup> My own chapter in this volume (Hatley 2015) attempts to define some general features of performance in Java observed in recent years, particularly in the cities of Yogyakarta and Solo—a mood of celebration and display, a focus on local cultures, stories and places, and an emphasis on “community”, understood both as a performing group, bonded by their shared passion for and commitment to their art, and neighbourhood residents mobilised in participatory theatre activities. Street parades and festivals of local performance have displayed an exuberant blending of traditional genres with global influences—*jathilan* hobby horse pageants incorporating hip-hop and breakdance movements, Javanese songs interspersed with passages of rap. Performance events staged outside designated arts venues, on riverbanks, in markets and

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<sup>7</sup> Lauren Bain quotes this description of the current state of modern Indonesian theatre from an article in *The Jakarta Post* in 2000 (Bain, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Riantiarno, playwright/director of the group Teater Koma, spoke in these terms at a national theatre festival held in Yogya in 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara Hatley with Brett Hough (eds). 2015. *Performing Contemporary Indonesia: Celebrating Identity, Constructing Community*. Leiden/Boston: Brill.

kampung neighbourhoods celebrate and enrich the significance of these sites.

Such activities can be seen as responding to contemporary social conditions. Street parades and festivals express a sense of newfound freedom after the restrictions of the Soeharto years, a reclaiming of public space in which performers construct and celebrate their own identities, tell local stories. The focus on the local in performance corresponds with a general climate of attention to and pride in regional and local identity promoted by regional autonomy, and the conscious celebration of the self-encouraged by engagement with global media. Democratisation as a valued social ideal presumably encourages the increased participatory emphasis of contemporary performance.

In this context “cultural tradition”, variously interpreted and constructed, is a major focus of attention. Organisers of local performance festivals see these activities as a way of giving young people a sense of pride in and commitment to their own culture, often mentioning in their speeches the vital importance of maintaining local culture in the face of all-consuming globalisation. In performance practice, meanwhile, the interface between the local and the global is often dynamic and flexible. An eclectic blending of local traditions and global cultural styles is presumably very attractive to young people, in providing simultaneously a sense of pride in one’s own and engagement with global cool.

Modern theatre groups participate actively in this performance scene. Their plays frequently dramatise local narratives—the stories of women migrant workers who have lived and worked overseas; the case of a young boy who suddenly develops powers of healing; the experiences of a community forced out of their neighbourhood by developers. Such performances often take place outside the confines of theatre buildings, bringing audiences together in everyday public spaces, overcoming the separation between theatre and life. The incorporation of traditional theatrical elements often gives the play added local resonance—a teenage love story, for example, enacted as a fragment of *wayang* theatre on a village badminton court, the frenetic pounding of rice-stamping music suggesting an underlying potential for violence in rural social life in a narrative recalling the anti-communist massacres of 1965-1966. In some contexts, cultural “tradition” is drawn upon in celebratory display of group or community identity, in others as a critique of local practices. Instances of social injustice, for example, referenced through traditional theatre

imagery and songs, take on added poignancy, evoking enthusiastic audience response.<sup>10</sup>

Some contemporary theatre practitioners and groups, meanwhile, engage with Javanese “tradition” in a more holistic way, not simply as a source of reference but a site of sustained critical engagement, a body of ideas, myths, and historical experience to be explored for its potential meaning for the present day.

### **Teater Ruang—maintaining the rage**

Use of traditional cultural elements in contemporary theatre with direct, targeted political reference is now relatively rare. The decline in prominence of the discourse of nationhood, with the dismantling of the centrist state and dispersal of power to the regions, presumably undermines the force of invoking cultural “tradition” to contest the contemporary direction of the nation. In this context the Solo-based group Teater Ruang, founded in 1995 by Joko Bibit Santoso, stands out markedly in strongly asserting a politically critical stance over the years. At its studio on the outskirts of Solo and locations in various regions of Java and beyond, the group has staged performances and conducted community cultural activities described as *gerilya budaya* (cultural guerilla war) with the aim of exposing social injustices and undermining the hold of the global mass media. For in Joko Bibit’s view, ordinary Indonesians are being deprived of prosperity and access to their own culture as global capital and cultural influence flood in, while government officials and other social leaders take no action, pay no attention. In October 2016, still fully-engaged in such arts activism, meeting with Teater Ruang members at their new base in Wonogiri, south of Solo, expounding his views and interacting with followers on Facebook, Joko Bibit suddenly passed away. Just how Teater Ruang’s work will be continued after his death is still unclear. But the group’s distinctive performances, political stance and community activities have surely contributed memorably to contemporary theatre in Central Java.

The performance entitled *Mutilasi Purba* (Ancient Mutilation), or alternatively *Kumbokarno Gugur* (The Death of Kumbokarno), presented numerous times since its first staging in 2012, can be seen as emblematic of Teater Ruang’s work in its dramatic invocation of Javanese theatre tradition to convey a contemporary political message. It portrays the death

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Bodden (2014) describes such processes at work in *Suara dan Suara* (Voices and Voices), a performance about women workers’ rights and experiences.

on the battlefield of Kumbokarno, younger brother of King Rahwana, the abductor of Sita, wife of Prince Rama in the Ramayana legend. Kumbokarno's role has been performed by Joko Bibit speaking in monologue, his bulky, bare-torsoed frame illuminated by the light of candles and matches in a darkened theatre space, while other actors move silently about, their shadows flickering against a back wall. Kumbokarno denounces the self-seeking greed of his brother Rahwana, waging war against Rama to defend his own power and possessions, with no thought for the sufferings caused to the people of his country, Alengka. Kumbokarno himself meanwhile fights fiercely to defend his country and its citizens. The army of monkeys who have come to attack Alengka on Rama's behalf are identified as foreigners—from China, India, Arabia, America—with no compunction about destroying the livelihoods of farmers, fishermen, and workers in the lands they invade. Kumbokarno asks Rama and his allies if they are attacking Alengka in order to defend the right, eliminate the evil Rahwana, or if their aim is rather to possess the beautiful Sinta, take over the thriving, prosperous realm of Alengka and expand their own power? Having exposed the flaws of these leaders, and by implication of contemporary powerholders and their capitalist allies, Kumbokarno, icon of nationalist loyalty, is brutally attacked and mutilated. As shadow figures move towards him and flaring matches pelt his body, he describes his nose being cut and ears torn, then his hands and finally his legs cut off; he suggests that the rich and powerful will similarly mutilate the ears of ordinary people, so that they cannot hear the truth, and cut off their livelihoods and connections with their own history. Ultimately, three arrows of flame shoot through the air towards Kumbokarno's mouth, silencing and killing him. But with his last breath he declares that the spirit of his resistance will not die but live on through the ages. Then the theatre is plunged into darkness as the giant hero dies.

The performance has a powerful aesthetic and emotional impact. The profound darkness of the theatre space, the wavering shadows, and danger of fire from the flaming matches create feelings of fear and foreboding among the audience that reinforce the horror of the violent acts described. References to contemporary parallels of Kumbokarno's suffering recall for viewers victims of state violence, such as the missing poet Wiji Thukul and murdered worker Marsinah, as well as more general social experience. Some commentators have expressed the wish that Kumbokarno's bravery and commitment to protecting his fellow citizens might be taken up as a model by young people today. Here "tradition" provides both a medium to expose the evils of a distanced, vilified "other" and a positive model to be claimed and emulated. In either case, invoked in celebration or critique,

cultural tradition has an established, well-recognised form and social meaning.

For other contemporary theatre groups, however, cultural traditions have no such clearly-defined meaning in today's changed and changing world. Instead the search for such meaning, through innovative exploration of these traditions, constitutes the focus of their performances. Such performances attempt to express theatrically the experience of "Javaneseness", the significance of their historical and cultural background for Javanese today, in response to the contemporary emphasis on issues of identity, the conscious awareness of self and locality within a wider, global framework. Whereas Teater Ruang explicitly situates its work outside these developments, the performances now to be described engage actively, in contrasting yet related ways, with the contemporary scene.

### **Teater Garasi—exorcising the stains of the past**

The group Teater Garasi, founded by Yudi Tajuddin and two fellow students at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta in 1993, now has its base in a studio complex in the south of the city, with Yudi as ongoing creative director. Teater Garasi plays an important role for Yogya theatre activities, providing a space for performances by other groups, conducting actor training, and maintaining a documentation centre. Meanwhile Garasi's ambitious, sophisticated, avant-garde productions are well known and highly acclaimed.

Garasi's engagement with Javanese history and culture began at a time of more general questioning and critique of Javanese cultural identity. The demise of the Java-centric Soeharto regime, which had mobilised Javanese symbols and valued in state ideology to justify its authoritarian control, led to the suggestion of the inherent feudal, anti-democratic nature of Javanese values and to questioning of their suitability for the new era of democracy. In 1999 and 2000 group members reported feeling a sense of disorientation, a confusion about their own history, identity, and future direction. In subsequent years they immersed themselves in the research, writing, rehearsal, performance, and discussion of three separate productions of the play *Waktu Batu* (Stone Time), staged between 2003 and 2005, drawing on ancient Javanese myths and history. The texts drawn on for the production were myths embodying the concepts of *sukerta* (spiritual pollution) and *ruwat* (ritual exorcism). The project itself represents a kind of an exorcism, a *ruwatan* of the condition the Garasi actors were experiencing at the time, and of the general sense of cultural disorientation of the nation.

The group travelled to temple monuments throughout Java where these legends are depicted in statues and reliefs, seeking to locate the essence of Javanese culture. But finding Hindu elements present in even the most ancient sites, they acknowledged the false logic of seeking pure, authentic culture. Instead they focused on the distinctive sensibility of Javanese culture, its syncretism. They saw Java, because of its geographical position, as being open throughout history to influence from different directions, different cultural flows. In the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, with the almost simultaneous arrival of Islam and the Europeans, changes came too rapidly to be absorbed. The Javanese fled inland, or metaphorically retreated inwards, in escape and denial. Each new political leader destroyed the legacy of his predecessor, creating his own myths. Events of the past that conflict with the narratives of current rulers, like the anti-Communist massacres of 1965-1966 for the New Order state, are “forgotten”, untellable. People today feel disconnected, unable to interpret their past or imagine their future.

The theatrical style of the performances mirrors this sense of confusion and disconnection. Its imagery is abstract, complex, and many-layered; multiple images and actions appear on stage; dialogue is oblique and poetic. A dominant aesthetic of fragmentation and layering conveys a sense of time as fragmented and discontinuous, and of individual histories as layers of experience rather than a linear sequence of events. Meanwhile repeated fragments of dialogue and blending of images and characters serve to create links and suggest continuities between the three main narratives that form the basis of the production.

The first narrative, the Murwakala legend, tells of the birth of the monster-god Kala from the sperm of the god Siva, spilt into the sea when Siva’s wife Uma rejects his amorous advances, and is then transformed by Siva’s curse into the witch-like Durga. The second tale is that of Watu Gunung, a legendary Javanese king who unwittingly marries his mother, having run away from her as a child when she struck him angrily for demanding food while she was still busy cooking. Through the unknowing offence of this incestuous marriage, the king becomes subject to a deadly curse. The third narrative depicts the arrival on a ship from across the sea of the first Europeans, bringing a plague of physical illnesses and a dread disease of the mind, amnesia.

The savage fight between Siva and Uma that creates Durga and the monster-child Kala resonates in numerous ways with the confrontation between Watu Gunung and his mother. Words uttered by Kala while loud noise and flashing lights announce his sea birth are repeated by Watu Gunung as he escapes from his angry mother, while cries and percussive

beating signal the grave offence of her rejection and violence. Watu Gunung's grieving mother, Sinta, overwhelmed by guilt at what she has done, in turn, takes on the form of the demonic Durga. Links between these female figures and the newly-arrived Europeans are suggested as the women discuss what "they", the Europeans, are doing—using typewriters, producing goods like soap and bread—so that the women no longer need to cook. In the third production, the women are depicted in illuminated boxes, one having her hair styled, the other using a blender, enjoying the new consumption and leisure opportunities Europeanisation has provided. Distraction by foreign-derived goods and technologies seemingly follows on and compensates for rejection of one's own.

The echoing of earlier motifs in an increasingly complex, technologically sophisticated form is a key characteristic of the three productions. In *Waktu Batu 1*, a spare, simple "classic" aesthetic conveys a sense of the Indianised Javanese cultural world of the narratives, as actors dressed in plain white costumes, the men with bare torsos, adopt the postures of temple statues or Javanese dancers, and Javanese songs, *tembang*, are heard. Here the conflict between the god Siva and his consort Uma as they journey through the heavens commences with acrobatic pursuit of Uma by Siva, simply dressed in black and white, as Indian-style sitar music plays and other figures perform sensuous hip-swaying dance movements. Subsequent productions use costume styles and music, technological devices and a frenetic, complex mix of images and sound to emphasise the contemporaneity of myth and history, their existence in the here and now. So in the second production Siva wears a wig of red dreadlocks and Uma a black evening gown and long gloves; their interaction occurs simultaneously with a man lying writhing on a hospital bed, another couple dancing, and a woman singing a Javanese *tembang*. In the third production, huge images of Siva and Uma soaring through the sky, alternating with jumbo jets, are projected on to a screen, while their dialogue is conveyed in amplified voiceover. In a later scene, in an airport lounge, people sit waiting and wheeling suitcases across the stage as giant images of figures performing traditional Javanese dance movements are projected on a screen behind them, and confrontation erupts between a young traveller in contemporary clothes and the masked, dreadlocked god Kala. Ancient myth, technologically sophisticated modernity and global mobility coincide, combine, and collide.

As the aesthetic of confusion and complexity in the *Waktu Batu* productions evokes the disorientation felt by Indonesians attempting to interpret their culture and history, the constant reappearance of ancient symbols and mythical/historical figures in contemporary settings indicate a



kind of “haunting” by these elements, an ongoing, subterranean influence of Javanese myths and history in the present day. The Murwakala and Watu Gunung legends suggest the trauma of unresolved power struggles and resulting violence, separation and disrupted memory, particularly conflict between parents and children, and male and female. The arrival of the Europeans is shown bringing loss of local identity and occupation along with amazing new goods and technologies and connections to a wider world, a complex historical experience recurring today in processes of globalisation.

Overall, such reverberations with the past cast a bleak shadow; the predominant ambience of the three productions is dark, disjointed. Yet recalling the description of the *Waktu Batu* project as a *ruwatan*, a ritual of exorcism to release subjects from past curses and misfortune, perhaps the final scene of the third production takes on special significance for the three productions. Here a modern band comes on to the stage, playing mood music as figures from previous scenes rush in and out—travellers with their bags, a child with plate in hand, Siva on stilts. Soothing music plays louder and louder, and the frenetic pace of action slows. Several couples dance, Yudi, the director comes onstage and the audience applauds enthusiastically. Could there be a sense here of celebration of release from haunting by the past, a sense of the acceptance of a rich, mixed, unavoidable heritage of multiple voices and fragmented identities?

Certainly in their subsequent productions Garasi moved on from exploration of the Javanese past to direct engagement with the present-day. The group’s next big production *Je.Ja.l.an* (The Streets), staged in 2008 and 2009, is set very much in the here and now, amidst the chaotically diverse sights and often violent interactions of contemporary Indonesian streets. Buskers and itinerant sellers compete for attention; radical Islamist figures with swathed heads whizz by on skateboards; two housewives playing badminton fight over a racket. This follows an opening scene where the narrator speaks of the hectic pace of contemporary life, and poses the big question—*kita mau ke man?* (Where are we going)? Garasi members had carried out research for this production in the streets of Jakarta and Yogya, gaining from this experience a vivid awareness of Indonesia’s current condition of plural, competing identities, jostling together in “the street”. In the view of the director, Yudi Tajudin, two possible futures confront Indonesia in this situation—being swamped by globalisation or assuming a single essentialist identity that many people would find oppressive. What was needed was a new rationale for co-existence of the different ethnic and cultural groups that make up Indonesia.

In the third production of the *Waktu Batu/Je.ja.l.an* series, entitled *Tubuh Ketiga* (The Third Body), the group takes up the concept developed by post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha of a space in-between, an identity beyond essentialisms, neither Western nor indigenous, a “third space” (Bhabha 1994, 36-9). Within this framework, Indonesia’s hybrid, plural mixture of cultures and bombardment by outside influences is something to be accepted and worked with rather than lamented. The example of Indramayu—an area close to the capital, Jakarta, both urban and rural, traditional and modern—serves as an iconic embodiment of this principle. And the exuberant, hybrid local entertainment genre *tarling dangdut*, a fusion of guitar music with the popular music and dance form *dangdut*, sets the dominant atmosphere, represents cultural “tradition” as a dynamic, evolving expression of local identity.

Yudi speaks of Garasi’s work moving from *Waktu Batu* to the subsequent productions in terms of a progressive focusing of attention inwards from the epic sweep of history to contemporary society and individual identity. The shift can be seen in changing dramatic and spatial imagery—from the mythic space and filmic projections of the cosmos of *Waktu Batu* to familiar, earthy interactions on contemporary city streets in *Je.ja.l.an* and a village wedding celebration in *Tubuh Ketiga*. The focus on the local is embodied in concrete recreation of local sites, involving audience members as participants—the theatre space constructed as a street, with the audience watching on either side in *Je.ja.l.an*; viewers greeted as honoured wedding guests in *Tubuh Ketiga*, given drinks and snacks and being entertained by a provocative singer/dancer who prances into their midst inviting the men to dance with her.

Here Teater Garasi, famous for their abstract, complex avant-garde performances, embraces the local focus, celebratory idiom and emphasis on audience participation of much contemporary theatre. Yet celebration of contemporary Indonesia in its hybridity, plurality and freedom from narrow essentialism is not the end of the story. When a cacophony of voices and forces bombard the individual, when the state lacks authority and there is no outside body ordering the complexities of social reality, what happens inside each person in facing this reality alone? Such questions remain to be explored. Garasi continues to address the “big questions” facing contemporary Indonesia, seeing this as a responsibility of theatre artists in this time of political, social and cultural confusion and crisis. The group engages with the “nation” by presenting a vision of contemporary Indonesian-ness shaped, among other forces, by cultural “tradition” in its varying forms.

### ***Kintir*—engaging with space, conjuring the ancestors**

The other performance glimpsed briefly at the beginning of this chapter, *Kintir* (Swept Away) illustrates a similar seriousness of artistic and social commitment. The playwright and director, Ibed Surgana Yuga, who staged this production with the theatre group Seni Teku then established his current group, the Kalanari theatre movement, voices the aim of “not merely staging performances or creating artistic works” but “developing culture by promoting humanitarian values”.<sup>11</sup> Both Seni Teku and Kalanari employ a dramatic medium that contrasts markedly with the grand scale, visual display and technological sophistication of Garasi productions. Performances are intense, minimalist, and exploratory, staged outdoors, beyond the confines of established theatre buildings. As the director, Ibed describes a process of *mengakrabi ruang* (engaging intimately with space), “space” being understood both in a broad sense as social and cultural context and more narrowly as the physical site of performance. Presentation of a performance is necessarily shaped by its location, responding to physical features of the site, incorporating experiences arising during preparation of the production.<sup>12</sup> Outdoor stagings not only break down the formal separation between theatre and its audience but place viewers and performance on a more equal level, facilitating dialogue between them. In terms of content, performances juxtapose and interweave images and events from ancient myths with narratives of contemporary experience. Ibed reports that he regards myths as the view of the world of a culture. He finds their perspectives strange, disturbing, out of keeping with his contemporary way of thinking, but feels drawn to exploring his ancestors’ understandings of the world through these narratives. And in creating performances engaging with these myths he finds parallels between their motifs and events and present-day life, as if human experience is a cycle, changing only in external ways.<sup>13</sup>

The production *Kintir*, staged 11 times between 2009 and 2011, provides a graphic illustration of these theatrical processes and perspectives at work. It takes up the story from the Mahabharata epic of Dewi Gangga and her son Bhisma, the only surviving child after she has cast into the river seven earlier-born babies, fulfilling the terms of a curse. Episodes of this narrative are juxtaposed with other dramatic fragments—the monologue of a young woman who has had eight children, each born

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<sup>11</sup> Cited under “About” on Kalanari’s blog, <http://www.kalanari.org/p/blog-page.html>.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.kalanari.org/2014/10/sharing-diskusi-teater-yang-mengakrabi.html>

<sup>13</sup> Personal e-mail correspondence, 23.8.2014.

to a different father; fraught domestic interactions between this mother and her son; the tragic drowning of a young boy while playing in the river with his friends; images of scavenging, hustling street kids. Ibed reports that representation of the experiences of children first arose as a result of interaction with local children playing in the performance space during the preparation of the production. Actors responded by discussing their own childhood memories, and these found expression in the scene of children playing in the river. While his original intent had been to focus on the figure of Bhisma, the image of the river and the experiences of the children took on central importance in the eventual performance. Here we see illustrated both the shaping influence on performances of the site of their production, and their openness to incorporation of issues and experiences encountered during the rehearsal process.<sup>14</sup>

Everyday interactions and mythic images alternate as the performance begins. A young man dressed in shirt and sarong, beating a hand-held slit drum, a traditional way of announcing news, welcomes audience members to the outdoor space. In a humorous reversal of the announcements made at the commencement of performances in formal theatre buildings prohibiting phone and camera use, he urges audience members to use their phones freely, take photos using a flash (but not to blame the actors if the results are flawed!), and eat and drink whatever they like. In the distance, two dimly-lit figures appear. A man, bent double, with a woman lying across his back, moves slowly forward, in stylised, contorted movements. Slow, bell-like percussive music sounds as the couple converses in lofty tones in formal Indonesian. They have sighted the sacred cow Nandini, mount of Siva, a blessing, a sign of their good fortune, but argue over the woman's request that her husband catch the cow and take some of its life-giving milk. Such an act will cause disaster and bring upon them the curse of Siva. But the wife insists, and the husband finally agrees. Immediately darkness descends and after a burst of loud, discordant noise, the voice of Resi Wasista, the cow's keeper, is heard. Speaking in Old Javanese he proclaims a curse upon the couple from which they can only be released by being born as humans. "Mother, mother, who is willing to become our mother?" the husband cries.

A young woman in contemporary dress passes by, oblivious of the distraught, kneeling husband. She calls out in colloquial Indonesian to her absent lover, asking him if he doesn't miss her, as she does him. Suddenly

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<sup>14</sup> As a result of this attitude, Ibed suggests, almost all of his work *tidak punya perjalanan lurus* (doesn't proceed in a straight line). Whereas other theatre groups like Garasi commence a production with a clear concept and goal, he does not. (Personal conversation, 11.12.2014)

she exclaims with joy—her lover, Mas Marto, has appeared, and she runs to join him. The announcer reenters, energetically beating a slit-drum, telling of flooding rains, water poured out of the sky by heavenly nymphs on to the world below, creating a great river. The mythic, dream-like ambience of the earlier scene returns, as silvery percussive music plays while a man and woman, meeting by chance on the banks of the river, are performing slow sensuous Javanese dance movements. The man praises the beauty of the river and describes the woman as a river, with her long, wet, spread out hair and supple, curving body. “I am the woman river!” she agrees, leaping onto his shoulders and sliding into his embrace. Identifying himself as Sentanu, a powerful warrior (*ksatria yang punya kuasa*), the man declares his desire to become the lake into which she flows. He begs her to flow into him, drown him. The woman is willing, under certain conditions. He must not ask about her source nor where she is flowing. If he breaks this rule, the river will dry up, and she will disappear completely. In his ardent desire, his body shivering, Sentanu agrees. “Sweep me away!” he cries, and carries her off into the darkness.

Action returns to the here-and-now with the entry of a young woman in knee-length pants, slit-drum in hand, moving energetically around the space, who explains to the audience that the woman in the previous scene has been Dewi Gangga in disguise, unrecognised by King Sentanu. Now he has taken her as his wife and the marriage celebration will begin. The stage fills with young people beating their slit drums, singing, and dancing in lively, folksy style.

In subsequent action the mythic and everyday domains blur into one another. Two mothers, incarnations of Dewi Gangga and the young girl seen earlier waiting for Mas Marto, talk about their pasts. Dewi Gangga recalls the eight children born to her because of a curse, the other woman her eight children with different fathers, the first one born out of love for her sweetheart, Mas Marto, the others because she was raped or paid for sex. Dewi Gangga reports throwing seven of her babies into the river, in keeping with the terms of the curse, while one was saved by the intervention of her husband. The other mother has also lost seven children, either swept away by the river, lost in misadventures on city streets, or perhaps because they had forgotten their way home. Thus, each of them has one surviving child. As Dewi Gangga recounts how her son has been diligently training in the arts of war, the space darkens and shadowy figures are seen, holding rifles, stalking one another, as rifle shots and staccato machinegun fire are heard.

The “warriors” turn out to be children playing at war. One boy’s mother, the young woman who spoke of bearing eight children, arrives to

take him home, and, when he resists, drags him off reluctantly by the ear. Hostility continues at home. The son accuses his mother of being out all day, leaving him without food; she complains that he is constantly defying her. Asked to bathe first before eating, the boy at first refuses, then procrastinates with delaying questions; his mother loses patience and gestures at him violently with an imaginary pistol. On the way to the river he resumes playing war games with his friends; his mother shouts angrily from afar. After a time, the boy's voice is heard crying out in real pain; he shouts that there is no water in the river, it has turned into the plain of Kurukshetra, the site of the Bharatayuda, the great war at the end of the Mahabharata.

In the darkened theatre space appears the illuminated form of a four-armed goddess, resembling a statue in a Hindu temple monument. Dewi Gangga and the mother of the previous scene, their bodies entwined, arms arching above their heads, speak in unison. They advise their son to conserve bullets, to keep watch in every direction; to ignore the lofty pronouncements of the gods and employ devious tricks as needed. For this is the defining moment, the climax of the battle. There is no need to show mercy to anyone, not even family.

As the noises of war fade, the scene shifts to a city street where street children scavenge for food among the debris. A mother urges her son to go home, fearful of punishment by patrolling security guards. Perhaps his father wore boots like these guards, he asks? No, no, says the mother, then remains transfixed by the past, retelling the story of the conception of her eight children, as her son returns home alone. Back at the river, children play joyfully, bathing together in the late afternoon. An announcer enters, beating his slit drum, describing how in the past rivers functioned as roads, bringing traders from foreign lands, and civilisation along with subjugation to local people. At night hordes of spirits and demons traversed the watery thoroughfare. Darkness is falling and one of the children, Antok, is missing, having been swept away by the river. They call out his name, but there is no reply; a woman screams "My child!" and weeps uncontrollably. A crowd of prancing spirits talk of a child who has broken the rule prohibiting bathing after sunset and thus become legitimate food for them to consume. The announcer reappears, bringing news of Antok's death and announcing the time and place of his burial.

Finally, a white-clad man appears, standing erect as if driving a war chariot along the now dried-up river bed. He announces himself as Bhisma, also called Dewabrata or Ganggaputra, Antok or any of the names of your children. For where he is going is the direction in which these children are headed. He would have followed the path of the river, like his

brothers before him, however his father, wanting to protect him from its dangers, dried up the river to make a great plain. Bhisma chose the open plain of battle—Kurukhsetra, not the river—as his future. But it turned out to be haunted by its past, constructed of little stones cleared from the river bed. A shower of stones begins to pelt his body. At first, he remains erect but finally sinks to his knees, no longer able to resist the onslaught. But Bhisma does not die. Instead he repeats his many names, then states “I am your children”, as the performance ends.

Theatregoers and critics in Yogyakarta responded enthusiastically to this performance. They praised its imaginative blending of the Dewi Gangga story with the contemporary narrative of the woman with eight children born to separate fathers, the instant transitions from the world of myth and epic to the everyday, conveyed through evocative theatrical imagery (Tranggono 2009), and shifts in language from formal, poetic Indonesian to earthy exchanges in colloquial Indonesian or Javanese (Arisona 2010). The first production, performed for the 2009 Yogya Festival of Theatre, was seen to admirably fulfil the aim of the festival to bring theatre back to its community base, to *mengunjungi rumah sendiri* (visit its own home), to interact with the subcultures in its local environment rather than simply perform elite art in a theatre building. Staged in a traditional *pendapa* pavilion on the outskirts of the city and in the surrounding grounds and rice fields, it is described as creating a sense of theatre merging with its natural and social environment. Audience members, many of them village people, would not have fully understood the performance but instead wondered at its visual effects and returned home with minds full of questions. For rather than providing catharsis, the group’s performances are said to stimulate audiences to question the reality around them (Tranggono 2009).

In terms of key questions and meanings of the production, one commentator saw in the image of the river, bearing away the bodies of lost and sacrificed children, reflection of the fate of children today, absorbed into a great system controlled by business and technology. They are brought up not by the care of their families but by electronic media—games, television and the Internet—shaping even the most private aspects of their lives. And parents and other adults do nothing to protect them, instead endorse and promote the process (Halim 2010). Another analyst interprets the performance as a reflection on child abuse, describing as verbal, physical, and mental violence the harsh words, ear-pulling, and pistol waving directed at her son by the village mother, and her refusal to tell him the identity of his father. In the depiction of the street kids, he sees economic deprivation and parental neglect; Sentanu’s actions towards his

son, forbidding Bhisma to join his siblings in the river, consigning him instead to a great dry battle plain and his duty as a warrior, is seen to typify parental treatment of their children as extensions of themselves, embodiments of their own understandings of history, rather than as individuals with their own rights and desires (Setiawan 2014)

The river as the focal image of the production is surely rich with meaning, a site of multiple, contrasting suggestions. The sensuous movements and poetic dialogue of the interaction between Sentanu and Dewi Gangga create a powerful, experiential sense of the river as woman, curving and enticing, and of its rushing flow as an embodiment of the irresistible force of sexual desire. The boisterous, joyful play of the children as they bathe together in the river reflects the pleasures of childhood memories and perhaps suggests something broader about the freedom and closeness to nature of traditional village life. But right in the midst of the children's play the announcer arrives to describe rivers as conduits for expanding commerce, colonial domination, and spirit haunting. One senses strong reverberations with contemporary globalisation. Ibed speaks of two "rivers" in the performance: the Ganges and Kurukshetra. For both lead to the same place, have the same outcome—being swept away, either by the rushing current of water or the violence of war. Sentanu's drying up of the river to protect his son Bhisma from the lethal flood is of no avail: not only Bhisma but many of his descendants perish in battle on the Kurukshetra plain. It is in this sense that Bhisma can claim "I am your children", embodying the direction in which they are heading. For all children will face "war", in actual battle, in struggling to survive as street children or in confronting the tide of globalisation. Yet in contrast to the Mahabharata, where Bhisma dies in a hail of arrows, in this performance he survives an equivalent assault from an avalanche of tiny stones. For however hard the battle, however painful the suffering, the narrative suggests, we will survive.<sup>15</sup>

### Concluding thoughts, connecting threads

Ibed Surgana Yoga and the Kalanari Theatre Movement have continued to create performances engaging intimately and intensely with contemporary

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<sup>15</sup> Ibed reports that originally he planned to stage an attack with arrows, but later chose to use tiny stones, as a more familiar, more graphic imagined torture for ordinary village and *kampung* viewers. The deviation from the Mahabharata story in depicting Bhisma's survival reflects an optimism Ibed feels about the future, in spite of the dangers ahead, which often leads him to look for alternatives not present in the original myth. (Personal communication, 11.12.2014)



spaces and ancestral myths. A follow-up production to *Kintir, Panji Amabar Pasir* (Panji Scatters the Sand), explores themes of migration and diaspora, presenting the story of a Javanese family who transmigrates to Kalimantan in search of a better life. They are shadowed by a white-masked figure, Panji, the mythical 11<sup>th</sup>-century prince who roamed far from his palace seeking adventure, and whose legend has spread throughout Southeast Asia. The original location of the performance, a partly-built guest house on the outskirts of Yogyakarta, represents the half-finished house that the family leaves behind; in the surrounding rice fields and open land we see the family's struggle to make a living at home, then their backbreaking efforts to make productive the harsh, alien terrain of Kalimantan. In a particularly effective fusion of actual performance space and the imagined world of the performance, the father of the family about to migrate to Kalimantan asks for blessing and support from his neighbours; audience members feel involved and moved as neighbours to place money in a contribution box, which helps fund production of the show (Maryanto 2014).

Teater Ruang has likewise staged further productions critiquing contemporary social ills seen as ignored or even fostered by state authorities. In a performance by women from the village of Sangir, directed by Teater Ruang member Ery Aryani, several older women perform traditional rice-stamping music while other actors warmly invite passing strangers to come into their homes, act freely and make themselves comfortable—an ironic reference to the way contemporary Indonesia naively encourages takeover by foreign interests. Teater Garasi's project begun in *Waktu Batu* with exploration of myths of the past has concluded in the production *Yang Fana Itu Waktu, Kita Abadi* (Time Is Transient, We Are Eternal) with surrealistic reflections on present-day life and potential futures. Staged in June 2015 and again in July 2016, the performance fuses together explorations by individual Garasi members of the competing voices and ideologies, haunting by past violence and fractured identities characteristic of contemporary Indonesia. A bus driver in the Jakarta traffic, seeing a woman dancing, recalls his dancer grandmother, killed as a Communist in 1965; a dysfunctional family celebrates the end of the Islamic fasting month with one son headed for the war in Afghanistan, another blasting out the call to prayer through his loud-speaker head, and their migrant worker sister dreaming of Hollywood stardom.

The three contemporary theatre groups work in distinct idioms, with varying aims, within their own environments. The performances analysed above—*Mutilasi Purba*, *Kintir*, and *Waktu Batu*—illustrate these

differences of approach in engaging with Javanese “tradition”. Yet there are also intriguing similarities and reverberations. All three reflect on the menacing threat of globalisation, undermining autonomy and identity, producing “amnesia”. Arriving initially by water—by sea in *Waktu Batu*, by river in *Kintir*—and today by air (*Waktu Batu*) as well as electronic and virtual media, foreign commercial forces subsume the local. But global tides also bring attractive benefits—access to modern material goods as displayed in *Waktu Batu* and described in the text of *Kintir*; in Teater Ruang’s case illustrated in the group’s avid embrace of social media to publicise their performances and promote their views. Probing explorations of Javanese tradition in *Waktu Batu* and *Kintir*, seeking meaning for today, produce dark, disturbing references to ancient curses and a sense of the past as a haunting shadow in the present. Conflict is central to the myths invoked in both works, particularly family conflicts involving men and women, parents and children. In a context of ever more rapid social change, inter-generational friction, misunderstanding and estrangement are arguably widely-experienced and deeply-troubling issues of concern.

Resonances with past Javanese tradition provide no solutions to such problems but perhaps bring them to attention, allow them to be viewed with greater understanding, provide a sense of common ownership and responsibility. And in so doing, actors and viewers experience a sense of connectedness with their own culture, not just as vibrant artistic expression to be enjoyed and celebrated, but as a rich flow of experience throughout the decades and centuries, with all its flaws and lessons and insights. In these ways, modern theatre evoking Javanese tradition connects with its social environment, embodies experiences of “Indonesianness” today.

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## CHAPTER NINE

### VISIONS OF THE URBAN: SENO GUMIRA AJIDARMA AND AFRIZAL MALNA

ANDY FULLER

#### Introduction

I first met Afrizal Malna in the car-park of Taman Ismail Marzuki, an arts centre in relatively central Jakarta. I noticed a couple of things when shaking hands with him: the coarseness of his hands and the firmness of his grasp. He smiled casually. I immediately recalled how a friend of mine had spoken of Afrizal as some kind of legendary urban poet who would spend months on the road without any fixed address. I would also later learn of his involvement with the Urban Poor Consortium: a grass-roots activist organisation resisting top-down urban development. His very body and his worn-out (but well-made) shoes embodied an urban figure—full of corporeal experience with Jakarta's pollution, dust, violence, and, of course, pleasures.

My meeting with Seno was a touch more detached. The *Penembak Misterius* (1993) collection was what got me into his work, and as Seno's career continued, he maintained his interest in urban matters, issues, problems, while the form switched from novel to essay to short story. Seno—always busy—once told me that he could only meet me if he picked me up from Taman Ismail Marzuki—and then I could join him as he drove about Jakarta doing some of his writerly business. This was a quintessentially Jakarta moment indeed—when the car becomes a pseudo office-space. Seno's works, like Afrizal's, are vital media for accessing the urban transformations of Indonesia and particularly Jakarta. Their works continue one of the main themes and evocations of writing in Indonesian.

Indonesian literature, in its postcolonial expressions, is an urban product. Without the arrival of the modernist city, modern literature also would not be possible. Just as literature is a cultural product, so, too is the city. These two “products”—always in contention, always fragile and susceptible to sudden and dramatic change—mutually inform one another. Literature assumes urban forms, writers respond to the *sikon*—situation and conditions—they find themselves in. As Nas et al. write, “considering the constant development of living standards—infrastructure, production and consumption—the city and urbanisation should generally be regarded as something positive without thereby disguising problems of social inequality and violence” (Nas, de Groot, Schut 2007, 7). Jakarta is where major publishing houses are headquartered, where important literary communities are based, and where many of the readers are to be found. The city, however, also exists problematically as a site in which one can make one’s fortune and live successfully, but, also as a place that is morally, ethically, and financially corrupting. Jakarta is exemplary of the major tensions regarding urban change in Indonesia. Writers and film makers have engaged with the image of the city in contrasting and conflicting ways. This chapter will address how “visions of the urban” have changed throughout the history of modern Indonesian literature. Part of the purpose of this chapter is to complement the work of Bakker and Saentaweesook and their chapter on “Jakarta through Poetry” (2011, 217-40).

### Urban literature

Indonesian literature, like other forms of modern literature, has long engaged with the idea of the city. In the modern and contemporary European novel, “the city” regularly emerges as a major theme. Examples include James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), the novels of Émile Zola, such as *The Belly of Paris* (1873), the New York-based novels of American author Don DeLillo (2003, 2007), the novels of Charles Dickens, the poetry of T.S. Eliot, and the postmodernist urban folktales of Italo Calvino such as *Marcovaldo* (1983). Modern Indonesian literature, with its specific social, political, and cultural background and context, makes a significant contribution to contemporary literary discourses on urban life.

Urban life and modern literature are inseparable. For Malcolm Bradbury, cities act as both “generative environments” as well as “novel environments, carrying within themselves the complexity and tension of modern consciousness and modern writing” (Bradbury in Preston and Simpson-Housley 1994, 6). Urban geographer Terry McGee has asserted

that “in view of the dominance of the great Southeast Asian City as a centre of intellectual activity [...] much of the contemporary indigenous literature portrays the problems of their changing societies within the milieu of the city” (McGee 1967, 196). Our notions of both the city and literature are tied up in mutually overlapping discourses.

Literature has traced the trajectories of urban development. The novel has long been the pre-eminent form of modern literature (Moretti 2006). In Indonesia, however, as Derks has argued (Derks 1996), poetry and short stories have featured as the most easily consumed and most widely read and written forms of literature. Developments and changes in the social and political conditions of urban life are also reflected in changes in literary discourses.

Bakker and Saentaweesook pay further homage to Teeuw as being the primary source of scholarship on Indonesian literature, and they use his works to determine their reading of Indonesian literary history. The linear and formal reading of modern Indonesian literature by Teeuw has over time been shown to be problematic for its exclusion of popular literature and its neglect of the importance of performance in literature. The contributions of scholars such as Foulcher and Day (2002), Maier (2004), and Derks (1996), among others, show the plurality and variety of postcolonial readings of Indonesian literature. I focus on the works of Seno and Afrizal for their embodiment of cityness and how their works raise an increased awareness of urban life. I eschew the heavily interpretive approach of Bakker and Saentaweesook in order to engage with Seno and Afrizal’s works as legitimate and meaningful discourses in their own right.

### **What makes Jakarta**

Indonesian urban spaces have been framed in numerous ways. In what follows, I will present a discussion of the various ways in which academics and scholars of urban history and societies have written and framed discourses on Indonesian urban space and societies. I will draw on research regarding the dislocation of the urban poor, the manner in which a city reflects a national political culture and ideology, change in the structure of local communities, and transitions of colonial/postcolonial societies. Throughout this section I will connect writings on Indonesian urban spaces with debates, ideas, and theories that are being applied in contexts beyond Indonesia. As such, I will argue that Seno’s writings on Indonesian urban societies are not only a continuation of earlier literary



writings in Indonesian but also engage in contemporary urban studies discourses.

It is not possible to define Jakarta by a single adjective or limiting notion as, like other cities, Jakarta also is neither “homogenous, one [or] indivisible” (Preston and Simpson-Housley 1994, 11). As such, it is more practical to think of the city in terms of plurality: as Jakartas, rather than as a singular Jakarta. Wherever one looks, researches, or engages with others, one may gain an appreciation of the city’s diversity, plurality, and richness. Jakarta—in spite of its infrastructure problems, economic imbalances, and political injustices—is a rich source of exploration, investigation, and analysis. It is a city heavily ingrained in the national imagination, and exploring the city—both physically and through research—leads to further questions regarding the Indonesian nation and its other regions. Jakarta is a worthy place to start.

Jakarta is the most intense example of urbanism in Indonesia; no other city in the country is comparable to it—by size, density, wealth, and infrastructure. Symbolically, it is also greatly important and highly contested. At the airport in Jakarta, newly arrived travellers are greeted with advertisements for the more exotic “tourist” locations of Bali and Lombok. Nonetheless, tourist advertisement increasingly promotes Jakarta as a city with the necessary facilities and infrastructure for international business and trade, and as being comparable with cities such as Singapore and Hong Kong—at least in terms of shopping. It is also regarded as being the “party capital” of Asia. Jakarta, on first impression, can be a startling contrast of huge shopping complexes (such as Grand Indonesia, Plaza Senayan and countless others) and vast areas of urban slums that are bypassed by the encircling toll roads of the city. Wirth’s comments, in a different context, regarding the daily urban exposure of the contrasts between “splendor and squalor” and “riches and poverty” (Wirth 2005, 36), are an apt description of the daily lives of Jakartans. The contrast between extremes of wealth and poverty is one of the issues that forms the context for Seno’s short stories, novels, and essays.

Jakarta is different from other Indonesian cities and, at the same time, embodies much of daily Indonesian life. It is the *ibu kota* (mother city) of Indonesia, and it is bigger, denser and possibly more diverse than other cities in Indonesia. It is also particularly “Indonesian” for, as Susan Abeyasekere wrote, Jakarta is one of the few cities where people use Indonesian as “the normal means of communication” (1989, xvii). The use of elements of Hokkien and many other languages in daily Jakartan Indonesian indicates the diverse history of the city, and, as such, the Indonesian that is used in Jakarta is also representative of its history, rather

than being “true and correct” Indonesian. The use of one kind of Indonesian in public may be balanced by the use of other languages in the private sphere. Sub-cultural groups in Jakarta have also developed their own language, which further upsets the ideal of the uniform national language. Informal Indonesian links Jakartans from different regions; it is “used by the young as a *lingua franca* different from the native regional languages of their parents or the stuffiness of the standard [Indonesian] used by authorities in school, work, or in government” (Abeyasekere 1989, 236). Although Abeyasekere's work dates from the Soeharto era, her observations remain relevant.

Abeyasekere writes that “Jakarta is different from the rest of the nation, a world of its own, because it is a large urban concentration, because it is the centre of government and administration, because it is exceptionally privileged in its amenities, and because it is a melting-pot of cultures” (1989, xvii). Jakarta is both different from and similar to other Indonesian cities. For example, Medan is one city where Indonesian is used as the daily language and that is also clearly a “melting-pot” of cultures, with its large minorities of Hokkien speaking Chinese, Acehnese, Javanese, Minang, Malay, and Batak communities. Jakarta, I argue, is different by the *degree* of its size, density, and heterogeneity. It is also the city that has been most drastically shaped and reshaped in the national imagination and by Presidents Soekarno and Soeharto. Salim and Kombaitan write that Soekarno's Jakarta was one that “looked like the world's great cities, such as Paris, New York, and Moscow”, and similarly Soeharto's Jakarta was “characterized by broad avenues, highways, and electric railway lines...hundreds of high-rise buildings, golf courses, [and] luxurious housing estates” (Salim and Kombaitan 2009, 121). Jakarta, despite the way the name of the city is so often used to refer to a clichéd place of Indonesian success and national development, is also a city that offers great variety and difference over time and space—that is, Jakarta is home to many diverse communities with their own interests, and the power relations between Jakartans change over time.

Soekarno imagined Jakarta (then Djakarta) to be “an inspiration and beacon to the whole of struggling mankind and to all the emerging forces [...] Indonesia must [...] proudly present Djakarta as the portal of the country” (Soekarno in Kusno 2000, 54). Kusno argues that in Soekarno's vision, “Jakarta, like other cities throughout the world, had to convey an image of a centre with its traces of decolonisation and signs of being parallel to other world cities” (Kusno 2000, 55). Soekarno sought to place Jakarta on the “map of world cities” (Kusno 2000, 55). Landmarks such as the “National Monument” and the Masjid Istiqlal were symbols of Jakarta's

centrality to national Indonesian life and the modernity of its architectural practices. The engineering of Roosseno Soerjohadikoesoemo created Soekarno's monuments. Mrázek writes that "throughout the Sukarno era, and after it ended, Roosseno designed and dreamt out the concrete face of the metropolis, and of Indonesia, as far as it aspired to be modern" (2004, 436).

Ali Sadikin was installed as governor of Jakarta in the last year of Soekarno's presidency (1966). He would become one of the most influential figures in the shaping of contemporary Jakarta. His ideas and policies for Jakarta were a continuation of Soekarno's ideas—in terms of putting Jakarta on the "map of world cities"—and his programmes were part of the "development" (*pembangunan*) programmes of the New Order government led by President Soeharto. Sadikin's programmes were implemented at a time of major economic and population growth in Jakarta. Abeyasekere writes of the ambivalent legacy of Sadikin. He sought to declare Jakarta a "closed city" and prevent further migration from the rural areas, yet, he also "was the sponsor of culture, of urban conservation, of a more rational urban infrastructure" (1989, 221). He was popular with the middle-classes who "could afford to appreciate the better things of life" (Abeyasekere 1989, 221). Sadikin implemented a *kampung* improvement programme, yet he was also responsible for land clearances that were implemented in a "military"-like manner (Abeyasekere 1989, 227). Elsewhere, Silver asserts that Sadikin's policy of removing *becak*<sup>1</sup> from the streets of Jakarta was one of his most controversial policies (2008, 157).

Jakarta is a city of difference both within the city itself and nationally in comparison with other Indonesian cities. Dick argues that the (economic) history of Indonesia can be read as "the tale of two cities" (2002, xvii). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Surabaya had been the larger of the two cities (thanks to its harbour), while "by the 1920s Surabaya had slipped to second place in terms of population but remained the commercial centre" of Indonesia (Dick 2002, xviii). As with Jakarta, during the 1990s Surabaya's cityscape became replete with high rise buildings, "condominiums, five-star hotels, and shopping malls" (Dick 2002, xix). After Jakarta, Surabaya was Indonesia's other leading "industrial heartland and metropolis" (Dick 2002, xix). Later Dick marks differences between Jakarta and Surabaya in the following way: "Surabaya is not Jakarta. In

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<sup>1</sup> A three-wheeled bicycle which can transport passengers who sit in a small cabin at the front. Some *becaks*, such as in Medan, have the cabin next to the cyclist. Some *becaks* are propelled by a motorbike and are also used to transport goods as well as people.

Jakarta, the forces of capital were almost unimpeded and ruthlessly supported—and exploited—by the state” while in the former city “a small, like-minded group of senior officials and academics managed in Surabaya fairly successfully to deflect the worst excesses of the New Order” (Dick 2002, 474-75). Unlike in Jakarta and Solo during the time of the May 1998 riots, troops in Surabaya remained stationed at key intersections and protected possibly targeted buildings (Dick 2002, 475).

The rapid increase in Jakarta’s population has been an important element in the development of the city. The urban spread of Jakarta has led to the formation of the region known as Jabodetabek. This is a region that includes the neighbouring cities of Bogor and Depok (to the south), Tangerang (to the west) and Bekasi (to the east) (Firman 2009). According to Firman, Jakarta and Bandung “are physically integrated” and form an “urban belt” that is “characterised by a mixture of socio-economic activities, including agriculture, industries, trade [that has] created very intense rural-urban linkages” (2009, 327). Salim and Kombaitan have shown that, although Jakarta’s population is only increasing at a modest rate, it is the cities on the periphery of Jakarta—Depok, Bekasi, and Tangerang—that are showing the highest growth rates. That is, “the extended metropolitan region is expanding quite rapidly” (2009, 123). The current rapid growth in cities neighbouring Jakarta is also reflected in the rapid growth of cities in other parts of Indonesia, such as Makassar, Semarang, Bandung, and Medan. These cities are growing faster than Jakarta (Salim and Kombaitan 2009, 123).

### **Seno Gumira Ajidarma: Writing Jakarta and its people**

Seno’s essays compiled in *Kentut Kosmopolitan*<sup>2</sup> (Ajidarma 2008) present a reading of the Indonesian city informed both by cultural studies theories as well as the physical, corporeal experience of living in and being a part of the changing urban dynamics he describes. The rapid increases in urban populations and densities mentioned above, and how the newly urban citizens make sense of their new surroundings and indeed make their cities, is a part of Seno’s essayistic writings.

In these essays, Jakarta is a site of contested urban meaning and interactions. Seno, through “postmodernist” observations, explores the manner in which power relations are formalised, strengthened and challenged. In this chapter, I show how Seno’s essays in *Kentut*

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<sup>2</sup> Or, in English, “Cosmopolitan Fart.” The essay of the same name is found on pages 35-38 of *Kentut Kosmopolitan*.

*Kosmopolitan* explore the dichotomies of “formal” and “informal” public space, global and local cultures, and the borders of “public” and “private” space.

An important element of Seno’s essays relates to notions of “the *rakyat*” and the emerging middle classes. He shows how the “powerless”—often identified as the *rakyat* (ordinary people) create specific uses for space and their own meanings of the city. In these essays, the *rakyat* are not presented as powerless and oppressed. Nor are the middle classes of Jakarta represented as being a homogenised class of people. Ideas regarding the middle classes and the *rakyat* are part of the process of establishing what is “formal” and what is “informal” space.

The essays “Puisi Jalan Tol” (2008, 72-5), “Jakarta dan Ruang” (2008, 225-9), and “Jalan Tol” (2008, 63-6) in *Kentut Kosmopolitan* address the matter of “planning” and how some members of Jakartan society have their lives affected by government-sponsored urban planning. Marco Kusumawijaya, an urban activist based in Jakarta, has also written of the problems of urban planning in Jakarta and, in particular, how it has favoured the creation of spaces for motor vehicles at the expense of pedestrians and bicycle users (2004). Kusumawijaya is the leading activist for creating a greener and more environmentally friendly Jakarta.<sup>3</sup> The planning of Jakarta has increased the city’s amenity and function, while at the same time displacing urban poor and isolating sections of the city’s population. The essays of *Kentut Kosmopolitan* are part of the discourse that addresses the displacement of the urban poor as well as the ambivalent nature of “development”.

Ambivalent engagement with urban spaces and cities in Indonesia is also reflected in an observation of Pramoedya Ananta Toer regarding both Surabaya and Medan, cities that produced a sensation of “discomfort” in him. In a letter to one of his children, Pramoedya writes about Surabaya: “I lived there once, for quite some time...I can’t say I like Surabaya very much. For me, it’s a bit like Medan—I just don’t feel comfortable there” (Toer 2009, 388). Through the essays of *Kentut Kosmopolitan*, it seems that Seno is making sense of his unease in the city. Through writing, Seno formulates his “sense” of what is going on around him. Writing is an act that allays a sense of un-ease. *Kentut Kosmopolitan* is an attempt at going beyond “just feeling” a particular way about a city or environment; his essays are investigations and exploratory. Seno does not consider Jakarta a place from which to escape (even if Jakartans themselves are often looking for “escapes” and “retreats” from daily urban life), but instead explores the manner in which Jakartans address the often harsh daily realities of

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<sup>3</sup> See Kusumawijaya’s website: <http://rujak.org>.

Jakartan life. He shows how Jakartans adapt to their situation and make the most of their circumstances. And, unlike Pramoedya in his conflation of Surabaya and Medan, Seno does not accept his immediate and intuitive reaction to the city. Instead, the city—and Jakarta in particular—is a site for intellectual, theoretical and writerly investigation.

The essays in this collection were first published in *Djakarta!: The City Life Magazine* between 2004 and 2008. Seno's essays published in *Djakarta* stand in contrast to his series of essays for *Intisari*.<sup>4</sup> The former monthly magazine provides Seno with a forum for his writings on urban life. The audience of the magazine comprises young cosmopolitan Jakartan elites who are interested in "lifestyle" and who have time and money to spare. The taste of the audience is a hybrid of global and local interests; this audience consumes products that are globally available as well as those that are specifically "Indonesian". Foreign popular culture is consumed alongside local culture. The essays in *Intisari* are generally less than 1,000 words in length. They sit among chapters on where to get a good massage, where to eat the best kind of Italian or Japanese food, and where the best cafes are in Jakarta or Bandung. The magazine, a large format glossy with thick chapters, is a guide for urban living in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Jakarta. Seno provides readers with light theoretical essays with which to consider their context.

The style of the essays in *Kentut Kosmopolitan* shows Seno's skills as a journalist, academic researcher, short story writer, essayist, and popular culture critic. Seno frequently draws on theory and philosophy to expose issues in contemporary urban society. The essays are sprinkled with references to de Saussure, Barthes, Appadurai, Althusser, and Stuart Hall. Readers are introduced to the aforementioned philosophers and theorists in terms that are directly relevant for their sociocultural situation. For example, *Jakarta sebagai Teks* (Jakarta as a Text; 2008, 5-8) draws on de Saussure; *Uang Dengar* (Hearing Money; 2008, 67-71), *Udel Bodong* (Protruding Navel; 2008, 76-80), and *The Fashion System* (2008, 85-9) draw on Barthes; *Puisi Jalan Tol* (Toll Road Poetry; 2008, 72-5) draws on the cultural studies work of Stuart Hall, and *Media, + &-* refers to the work of Arjun Appadurai (2008, 81-4).

References to such theorists and academics who are known across broad areas of studies are intermingled among texts that repeatedly refer to

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<sup>4</sup> For example, in *Intisari* Seno was able to present lengthier essays on subjects of his own choice. One of his notable series of essays were those on the Wali Songo—the nine saints credited with spreading Islam throughout Java—and his visits to their graves. These essays and the photographs that Seno took were to form the basis of his book, *Sembilan Wali & Siti Jenar*.

local Jakartan and Indonesian cultural figures. These references include the comic book author Ganes Th in *Si Jampang dan Maskulinitas* (Jampang and Masculinity; 2008, 22-6), the essay *Kentut Kosmopolitan* (2008, 35-8), which refers to the Javanese clown Semar, and *Menjadi Tua di Jakarta* (Getting Old in Jakarta; 2008, 39-42), which refers to the prominent modern Indonesian short story writer and playwright Putu Wijaya. A reading of these essays requires a degree of flexibility in being able to make connections between theorists from outside Indonesia with examples of sociocultural patterns in Indonesia. The essays are both *on* Indonesia and *on* theories and ideas from outside of Indonesia. Seno's writing style is questioning and provisional rather than assertive and declamatory. The essays are introductory, rather than sustained arguments about a particular subject. Seno explains that, "I'm not exploring the art of writing in this book. But rather I'm offering the heat of an argumentative discussion in around 700 words" (Ajidarma 2008, ix).<sup>5</sup> Seno's essays are an act of creating a dialogue; they start a conversation with his unseen audience—an audience that is made up of young, cosmopolitan and educated urbanites.

The essays of *Kentut Kosmopolitan* are part of an increasing number of texts relating to the documentation and analysis of contemporary Jakartan life and urban conditions in Indonesia in general. These include *Jakarta: Metropolis Tunggang-Langgang* (Jakarta: Head over Heels Metropolis) by Indonesian architect and city-culture commentator and activist Marco Kusumawijaya, and the more sensationalist novelistic reportage of Moammar Emka in his series of books *Jakarta Undercover* (2003), which apparently purports to uncover the sexual habits of Jakartan yuppies in the late 1990s and 2000s. The cartoons featuring the two characters Benny and Mice—published weekly in *Kompas* newspaper—are also available as books and present a humorous perspective on the lives of two men who are ill at ease with Jakarta's modernity and cosmopolitanism. Books such as Erwin's *Peta 100 Tempat Makan Legendaris di Jakarta dan Sekitarnya* (2009) (Map of 100 Legendary Restaurants in Jakarta and Its Surrounds) and the Urban section in *Kompas* offer specific guides on how to live in urban Jakarta and how to enjoy the luxuries it offers. The intended readers of these books and sections of news chapters are middle-class, knowledgeable of life outside Indonesia and upwardly mobile. Such texts present their own imagining of what it means to be "cosmopolitan" and "Jakartan".

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<sup>5</sup> "Bukanlah seni penulisan yang saya tawarkan dalam buku ini, melainkan hangatnya obrolan argumentatif, yang dalam format kolom ±700 kata sebisa-bisanya saya jadikan optimal."

Seno's essays are complemented by the activist-oriented urban studies writings of Marco Kusumawijaya. Like Seno, Kusumawijaya shares an interest in the street, mall culture, *becaks*, and politics of the city and daily urban life in Jakarta. Kusumawijaya's essays, nonetheless, differ in that they focus more on the failed aspects of planning in Jakarta. Moreover, Kusumawijaya often negatively compares the daily practices of Jakartans with those of urbanites in other cities in the world. He also draws on European and Western urban theory to describe the problems of Jakartan planning and life. His vocabulary incorporates many literal translations of English language terms. Rather than finding a discourse from within Jakarta and Indonesia itself to describe contemporary urban conditions in Indonesia, Kusumawijaya imposes a foreign urban pattern upon Jakarta. His approach seems to lack something—something that I seek to find through the writings of Seno Gumira Ajidarma. That is, a hybridisation of knowledge of urban theory (whether coming from “the West”, or locally) with that of the daily practice of urban citizens. Seno's essays, unlike Kusumawijaya's, draw meanings from how urban citizens make sense of and adapt themselves to their conditions.

Jessica Champagne writes that the reality of Jakarta is in contrast to how it is imagined in nationalist representations of the city. She writes that Jakarta is generally imagined as the incarnation of nationalism and of modernity, rather than as a city where tens of thousands of people make their homes beneath toll roads (Champagne 2006, 11). Through Seno's essays in *Kentut Kosmopolitan*, a perspective on Jakarta is shown where the lives of those who live under toll roads are disrupted by development. Their lives are depicted as being of significance for the historical reality of Jakarta. Seno considers the lives of people living under toll roads as integrated and meaningful, rather than something dispensable, moveable, and subject to being ordered by a municipal or national government. The fate of urban *kampung*s that have their land turned into toll roads is discussed in the essay *Jalan Tol* (Toll Road; Ajidarma 2008, 63-6).

Seno describes the setting of a toll road under construction. He observes that the local residents of the *kampung* make use of the empty roads for themselves. The roads—which are not yet being used by vehicles—are the site for games of badminton, mothers taking their children for walks, and for teenagers who, unhappy with their lives, smoke marijuana, dye their hair, ride bicycles, and have rings on all their fingers (Ajidarma 2008, 63-4). A toll road, Seno writes, “changes everything” (Ajidarma 2008, 63 and 65). Seno asks rhetorically “why housing estates for the wealthy have not been cleared for the construction or extension of toll



roads?”<sup>6</sup> (Ajidarma 2008, 63). The poor, who live in informal communities, have their houses destroyed for an infrastructure they cannot use. The toll road under construction becomes a site for “play” for members of urban poor communities; upon its construction, it is used by those with access to cars. Seno concludes that “toll roads are born from the ideology of efficiency” (Ajidarma 2008, 66)<sup>7</sup>. Where one lives, Seno writes, is part of “identity”, and through the construction of a toll road this identity is destroyed. Identity, however, is not part of the ideology of efficiency.

The *rakyat*, according to James Siegel, are “followers of a leader”. They are the audiences of political rallies and those who associate themselves with the nationalist movement (Siegel 1998, 3). Doreen Lee, on the other hand, states that the *rakyat* are “the common people...with overtones of their being poor and uneducated, but nonetheless remaining the good and moral citizens of the nation” (Lee 2007, 1). Siegel and Lee’s observations are useful, for they show points of convergence and divergence with the manner in which Seno employs the figure of the *rakyat*. For Seno, the *rakyat* are not merely “followers of a leader” and those identified with the nationalist movement, but are in control of their own fate—that is, they are able to determine their own course in life—and this sometimes puts them at odds with the nationalist ideals of Jakarta’s city planners. In contrast to Lee’s observations, Seno’s *rakyat* rarely feature as being “good and moral”, but as citizens acting in their own best interests and often in an innovative manner. As such, they are not separate from “the nation” or a group that blindly follows national political leaders, but are rather individuals with their own ideologies and their own interests that they seek to protect. The innovation is seen in their willingness to disobey standard traffic laws (Ajidarma 2008, 62).

These essays consider the *rakyat* sympathetically and at the same time remove the *rakyat* from a romantic imagination: they show that the *rakyat* are not a general, floating mass but individuals with their own needs, agendas and abilities to negotiate their lives in their particular contexts. At the conclusion of “The Motorcycle People”, Seno writes: “for them, it is an impossibility that they put off their visit to grandma until they have enough money to buy a car or wait until the rules of road usage change” (Ajidarma 2008, 62).

The concept of *rakyat* and their presence in the essays of *Kentut Kosmopolitan* is significant, as they form part of the “crowd” in which the flâneur differentiates himself. The narrator is the flâneur; he looks and

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<sup>6</sup> “Kenapa jalan tol ini tidak pernah menggusur kompleks perumahan mewah?”

<sup>7</sup> “Jalan tol dilahirkan oleh ideologi efisiensi.”

observes the others who are acting out their lives before him as a kind of spectacle.

The flâneur also observes and comments on the actions, identity and behaviour of the crowd and masses. A flâneur is dependent on a separate and “other” *rakyat* for the feeling of being “different” from them. A flâneur, in the case of Seno’s essays in *Kentut Kosmopolitan*, also documents the activities of the *rakyat* through his writings. The crowd is a group from which the flâneur differentiates himself. They are caught up in daily life without being able to take a critical stance towards their surroundings or habits. The flâneur is a critical and detached participant in daily urban life, while the crowd, the *rakyat*, are often imagined as uncritical participants. Seno’s essays, on the other hand, point to the creativity and ingenuity of the *rakyat*.

### **Afrizal Malna and the bodily experience of the city**

Afrizal Malna sits apart from many of Indonesia’s recent poets. Not only is he a productive literary and theatre critic, Afrizal has also written novels and collections of short stories. Afrizal, now in his mid-50s, is highly productive; he writes around the clock, he travels regularly throughout Indonesia for seminars, readings and festivals, and when not working on a new collection of poems, he is revising older works, or having essays published in *Kompas*. In 2012 Afrizal had residencies in Poland at Platform Lublin and through DAAD in Berlin. His most recently published book of poems is *Museum Penghancur Dokumen* (document-destroying museum, , 2013). In 2014, he returned to Berlin for a year-long residency. During the 1980s and 1990s he was active with Teater Sae. For a period in the 1990s he was affiliated with the activist group Urban Poor Consortium in Jakarta. Despite this degree of activism as a writer and poet, Afrizal remains relatively neutral in terms of Indonesia’s often polarised literary communities.

Afrizal’s voice as a poet is also distinctive from other poets who are also well-established in the modern Indonesian literary canon. He stands in contrast to the wildness and *joie-de-vivre* of Chairil Anwar (Afrizal, though, also writes of his indebtedness to Anwar), the intellectualism of Goenawan Mohamad (to whom he dedicates a poem in *Museum Penghancur Dokumen*), the activism of the legendary late W.S. Rendra, the gentle romanticism of Sapardi Djoko Damono, the playful domestic scenes of Joko Pinurbo, and the absurdity of Sutardji Calzoum Bachri. Afrizal, if such generalisations can be applied, is concerned not so much with the romanticism of a poet’s loneliness, but with a questioning of

language and a bodily engagement with public and private space, things and their connotations and associations. It is through the appearance of everyday objects that Afrizal's poems emerge as a vital catalogue and repository of the cultural meanings of space and things in Indonesia's everyday contestable modernity. In an essay published in *Museum Penghancur Dokumen*, Afrizal writes:

in the triangle between language, body and space, the poems in this collection are like a net that leaves behind what can't be caught in the net; i.e. shadows from the aforementioned triangle: linguistic-shadows, bodily-shadows, spatial-shadows.<sup>8</sup>

Afrizal's poems employ various strategies that evoke both a familiarity and a defamiliarisation with the objects of everyday life. His phrasing and grammar is often disarmingly simple. Yet, grammatical variation and poetic effect are achieved through idiosyncratic uses of the words *tentang* (about), *di antara* (in between). Moreover, he will often remove subjects from sentences. This presents problems for translation, but also opens up a broadness of interpretation and meaning.

Afrizal's poems draw on the practice of surrealism and montage. Objects are placed in the same sentences with each other without any seeming immediate correlation. In these cases *di antara* or just *antara* (space between/among) are used. For example, in *Capung di atas pagar tinggi* (dragon fly on a high fence; Malna 2013, 12)<sup>9</sup> he writes *seperti ada bangkai yang terus dipuja dalam warna kelabu langit, kenangan di antara kacang hijau dan bunga matahari* (like there is a corpse that is continued to be praised in the colour of the grey sky, memories among mungbeans and sunflowers). And, in *Musik Lantai 16* (Level 16 Music), he writes *senda-gurau antara koper dan puisi, antara gigi dan daging tersayat, sebuah orgasme yang membuat seluruh bahasa manusia terdiam* (laughter between suitcases and poetry, between teeth and sliced meat, an orgasm that silences all of mankind's languages). In between or among is used as a device to create relationships between disparate objects and between concrete and intangible nouns. Surrealism, as Ben Highmore argues, is something more than just a formal technique epitomised by the "chance encounter on a dissecting table of a sewing-machine and an umbrella"

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<sup>8</sup> "Dalam segi tiga antara bahasa, tubuh dan ruang ini, puisi dalam kumpulan ini seperti rajutan yang menyisakan yang tak terajut antara bayangan dari segi tiga tersebut: bayangan-bahasa, bayangan-tubuh dan bayangan-ruang" (Malna 2013, 106)

<sup>9</sup> Afrizal Malna, "Capung di atas pagar tinggi" in Afrizal Malna, *Museum penghancur dokumen*, 2013, 12.

(Lautremont in Highmore 2002, 46). But it is able to “attend to the everyday” through refusing to inhabit a separate realm between art and everyday life (Highmore 2002, 46).

Afrizal’s sentences vary from being self-contained to being fragmentary and incomplete. And thus, he plays one sentence off against another. Afrizal writes in blocks of sentences, rather than flowing, linear narratives. They are repetitive and disconnected. This is a style of writing that embodies doubt in the language he uses. Afrizal argues that he feels “uncomfortable” with language. And that despite being a poet, critic, novelist, he feels more at home with the discourses and practices of the visual arts.<sup>10</sup> He claims that Indonesian is his only language, but that it is a language without a home; a language that rejects domestication. On the occasion of his book launch for *Museum Penghancur Dokumen*,<sup>11</sup> he argued that Indonesian is his “first language” (and only language), but that it is not his “mother tongue”. Afrizal’s frequent references to the soles of feet and to the palms emphasise the importance of touch in his engagement with the space he occupies. He seeks to reclaim a kind of Indonesian that is both questioning its construction and grammar as well as a language that draws on the body and physical experience as opposed to bureaucratisation and staid formality.

Afrizal’s poems often involve a fragmentary and multiple self, “saya” or “aku”. This first person presents the poetic discourse across various moments in time. “Saya” or “aku” is neither stable nor reliable, but an entity that is diverse and problematic. Using these terms is a moment of contestation and negotiation. In “Mesin Penghancur Dokumen” for example: *Ayo, minumlah. Tidak. Saya sedang es kelapa muda. [...] Saya tidak sedang nasi rames.*<sup>12</sup> (Go ahead, drink it. No. I’m being a young coconut juice. [...] I’m not being *nasi rames*). And elsewhere, in *Aku Setelah Aku*<sup>13</sup> (Myself after Myself), the “aku” that is present is persistently problematic, never just “aku”, but always “aku setelah aku” as this self (or rather, *these selves*) negotiate an encounter with a woman in an un-named city, somewhere in Europe.

The concluding essay from *Museum Penghancur Dokumen* articulates Afrizal’s position regarding the first person. He writes “the first person has

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<sup>10</sup> Discussion with Afrizal Malna, 4 July 2013, Yogyakarta.

<sup>11</sup> Cafe Lidah Ibu, Yogyakarta, 4 July 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Afrizal Malna, “Mesin Penghancur Dokumen”, in *Museum penghancur dokumen*, 2013, p.31.

<sup>13</sup> Afrizal Malna, “Aku Setelah Aku” in *Aku Setelah Aku*, unpublished collection, 2013, p.11. This is a collection based on his travelling and residencies in Europe (Poland, Germany, and France), 2012.

passed at the moment he writes. Writing is performed through changing the first person into the third person. I cannot write ‘I’ into time and space at the same time: the camera cannot photograph the camera, my eyes cannot see and gaze at myself at the same time. Writing only happens when ‘I’ has become ‘him.’”<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, “aku” and “saya” consistently appear throughout his poems. But, these are selves that are doubted and negotiated with the context of time (unlinear) and space of which “aku” is a part.

The sense of an ambivalent imagining with Indonesian language is complemented by Afrizal’s problematic relationship with Jakarta. The trajectory of modern Indonesian literature is inextricably linked to the processes of urbanisation, and Afrizal’s poems offer another variation of the ongoing exchange between urbanisation and articulating these changes through literary discourses. Afrizal’s sense of disconnect with Indonesian is reflected in his realisation of the “city” as a place that is not a site of “return” in the Indonesian literary discourse. To return never means to go home to a city. Although this statement is somewhat exaggerated and generalised, his point is that the city is most often imagined as a site of expectation, novelty, and ambition. Afrizal, however, characterises his experience of Jakarta through the riots of the Malari incident (1974) and *Reformasi* (May 1998). On the night of the Malari incident, Afrizal was woken by a member of the army, as his home was searched for looters. It was since that moment that he describes that poetry no longer became a literary matter to him, but one of a “bodily engagement with space”.<sup>15</sup>

Afrizal Malna’s work as a poet spans some thirty years. His first collections of poetry *Abad yang Berlari* (1984) (Running Century), *Yang Berdiam dalam Mikropon* (1990) (That Which Lives in the Microphone), and *Arsitektur Hujan* (1995) (Rain Architecture) were written at the height of the Soeharto-led New Order era. Until now he has maintained a consistent style—that some regard as being uniquely “afrizalian”. In my reading, this afrizalian style draws on the techniques of inscribing a fragmentary self, an engagement with language games in which various punctuation marks are absent, and subjects or objects are removed or rendered ambiguous. His diction frequently draws on the ideas of what is “stored”, “kept”, “held”, “preserved”, “retained” through the use of the word *menyimpan*. The poems are explorations of bodily engagements with his surroundings; those of domestic and urban spaces. References to the *telapak kaki* (sole) and *telapak tangan* (palm) recur frequently. Afrizal’s

<sup>14</sup> Afrizal Malna, “Catatan di bawah bayangan”, in Afrizal Malna, *Museum penghancur dokumen*, Yogyakarta: Garudhawaca, 2013, p.102.

<sup>15</sup> Afrizal Malna, “Kota di Bawah Bayangan Api.” *Kompas*, 17 March 2013, p.20.

practice of constructing poems from lists, from playing with uses of “in between” and “about” are other common traits. Afrizal’s poems, however, cannot be reduced to these qualities and techniques. Afrizal’s poetry and essays provide a sensory insight into the everyday variations of urban experience.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored the trajectory of two writers—Seno Gumira Ajidarma and Afrizal Malna vis-à-vis that of Jakarta in particular and urban change more generally. Seno and Afrizal have both been highly productive over the past 30 years and thus have established a significant body of work. Their engagement with the city through their literature shows similarities as well as significant differences. Both Afrizal and Seno have played roles in the negotiation of a plurality of identities and interests that are a part of the Indonesian nation.

The trajectory of modern Indonesian literature is inextricably linked to the processes of urbanisation, and Afrizal’s poems offer another variation on the ongoing exchange between urbanisation and the articulation of these changes through literary discourses. Afrizal’s sense of disconnect with Indonesian is reflected in his realisation of the “city” as a place that is not a site of “return” in the Indonesian literary discourse. Afrizal, apart from working as a poet, has been working as an activist defending the rights of the urban poor in Jakarta. Yet, his poetry is often less explicitly confrontational than Seno’s writings. Afrizal’s poetry explores the bodily and textural encounters with the city. Where Seno’s writings are often critical explorations of the city, Afrizal’s are evocations of cityness and the senses of being in the city.

Jakarta and the subject of “the city” have been dominant sources of inspiration and exploration in modern Indonesian literature. The city, and Jakarta in particular, has not only represented a geographical and political centre of Indonesian political life, it has also served as an important site for interpretation, analysis and narrative. Jakarta has proved to be a complex starting point for writers, critics, and intellectuals who approach the city in their own way and from their own political and ideological perspectives. The city of Jakarta is central to the imagining of the modern nation of Indonesia. It is also central to the writing practices of modern Indonesian literature. Seno’s flaneuristic readings of the small details of everyday life and how Jakartans live their lives within an intense and dense urban space opens up an awareness of Jakarta’s meanings beyond its tangible and grand symbols. Afrizal’s sense of *home* within cosmopolitan

Jakarta—or Berlin, or wherever he is—is evidence of his own identity beyond a sense of “loss” (Bakker and Saentaweesoek 2011, 237). Seno and Afrizal, long-established within the canon of Indonesian literature, help us to reimagine and reengage with our ways of applying meaning to urban spaces.

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## CHAPTER TEN

# WOMEN IN INDONESIAN POPULAR FICTION: ROMANCE, BEAUTY, AND IDENTITY POLITICS IN *METROPOP* NOVELS

DIAH ARIANI ARIMBI

### Introduction

“Every culture lives inside its own dream”, says Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957, 208). Dreams are narratives, and in real life these dreams are often turned into fictional stories. Fiction appeals to faithful readers who believe in the dreams of their nation, which become ammunition for their lives. Dreams of sincerity, of love and, of course, dreams with a happy ending are the dreams that many readers love to pursue. Is there a more pleasant desire than projecting one’s own life onto an idyllic fantasy, a wishful thinking about life’s pleasures? Popular literature may just offer the dreams so many readers are craving for.

Popular literature is an important medium for people to indulge in dreaming about their lives. Indonesia is no exception to this general rule. This genre is the mainstay of the books on sale in the biggest book retail chain, in supermarkets, and also of the pirated book market. This popularity suggests to what extent Indonesian readers like to dream away into the fantasy this genre has to offer. One type of popular literature that in recent years has been particularly popular is often referred to as chick lit: an oversimplified term to describe narratives centring on a woman’s or a girl’s life and her efforts to juggle attention between her career and love life. Chick lit rose to fame in the 1990s and is still going strong these days. The term is quite derogatory, and many criticise its use because it creates a distinction between specific female and male literature.<sup>1</sup> More neutral terms to refer to the genre have been proposed. One term, introduced by

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<sup>1</sup> Although the term “ladlit” does exist, the genre does not seem to be very well known or popular in Indonesia.

the Gramedia bookstore (the biggest retail bookstore in Indonesia), is *metropop*—an abbreviation of *metro popular*: a genre name that is gender-neutral, referring to stories exclusively set in metropolitan locations and focusing on the life of a girl or a woman in her daily activities. Career and romance are still primary themes, but certainly there is more than just this to capture the readers' attention, as this *metropop* genre manages to steal readers away from enjoying other subgenres in popular fiction. Publishers seem to target a rapidly increasing group of young, urban, middleclass Indonesians to buy the novels.

It is safe to argue that romance has been by far the dominant genre of fiction ever since the early formation of Indonesian modern literature in the 1920s (Teeuw 1967, 1). Stories such as Marah Rusli's *Sitti Noerbaya* (first published 1922), Abdoel Moeis's *Salah Asuhan* (The Wrong Upbringing, first published in 1928) and Merari Siregar's *Azab dan Sengsara* (Torment and Misery, first published in 1927) clearly can be classified as popular romances. Love stories and the search for a perfect soul mate capture the imagination of the general reader, so that such stories will never be abandoned. Why are we craving such stories? Why do love, romance, and people's life stories entrap us, so that we expect that the heroine and hero in those stories will experience a happy ending? Hoggart reasoned that these stories are created by writers who are not only authors but, more importantly, "picture-makers for what is behind the readers' daydreams" (1957, 209). In Hoggart's opinion, authors of romance stories are able to make such daydreams come true by visualising them in their stories. Such narratives turn readers into the writers of their own fantasies and dreams. This means that readers find solace and may project their daydreams onto characters similar to themselves. Here lies the power of popular fiction or, in this case, *metropop*. Identification with the readers' world is pivotal in popular fiction. Once identification is created, the reader will be sucked into a world of daydream and make-believe.

Most *metropop* stories follow a similar structure; they revolve around a female protagonist in her search for everlasting love and her attempts to balance between her private and public affairs (love, life, and career). This formula is typical for contemporary romance fiction. Ilana Tan, Ika Natassa, aliaZalea, and Lusiwulan are among the most prominent Indonesian *metropop* authors. Unlike the so-called *sastra wangi* genre,<sup>2</sup> *metropop* is meant to provide easy reading: often hilarious stories of young metropolitan women in their 20s and 30s who have to manage both their

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<sup>2</sup> This is another derogatory term widely used to refer to stories by Indonesian women authors, such as Ayu Utami, Jenar Mahesa Ayu, and others, who often display their feminist and critical views in the narratives.

job and love life. Issues such as beauty, fashion, and consumption in urban settings often take a prominent position in these narratives. In contrast, stories of the *sastra wangi* category are known to tackle controversial issues, which are avoided in the *metropop* writings. Issues such as sexual abuse, gendered discrimination, oppression, and sexual liberation are quite common in the former category but generally omitted in *metropop* writing. If *sastra wangi*'s writings often tackle political issues such as the sociopolitical turmoil of the mid-1960s or the 1998 political reformation, *metropop* writings focus only on romance, in the context of which the protagonists are searching for their ideal heterosexual relationship with their male counterparts.

Another striking characteristic of *metropop* writings is the use of language in their story titles. Unlike many other Indonesian authors, *metropop* writers often use English words in the titles of their novels. The following titles of books authored by aliaZalea provide examples of how the upcoming generation of writers distinguish their books from other Indonesian works: *Blind Date* (2010), *Crash into You* (2011), *Celebrity Wedding* (2013), *The Devil in Black Jeans* (2013), and *Dirty Little Secret* (2014). Other striking examples are found in Ilana Tan's tetralogy *Summer in Seoul* (2006), *Autumn in Paris* (2007), *Winter in Tokyo* (2008), *Spring in London* (2010), and her other works *Sunshine Becomes You* (2012) and *Autumn Once More* (2013).

*Metropop* titles make clear that the readers will be introduced to a setting of the novels that can no longer be identified as "purely" Indonesian. By using English in the titles of the novels these writers present themselves as individuals who have no difficulty in using English as the global language of modern discourse. Thus, the English titles are their entry into a multi-lingual, cosmopolitan society, not only by way of Indonesian as their local identity but also by way of English as a means of a global identification. Often, too, the *metropop* stories are situated overseas, as exemplified by the titles of Ilana Tan's tetralogy. In recent decades, many younger-generation Indonesians have become more affluent and started to travel around the world; the *metropop* writers seem to portray this entrance of Indonesian readers into a global, urbanised life style. Their stories have become part of Indonesia's new wave of cosmopolitan imagination. The English titles suggest that this generation of writers wants their stories to be more cosmopolitan than the earlier generations. By suggesting that English language skills make them cosmopolites, they want to show that Indonesian young people, too, can become citizens of the world. Globalisation takes up a more important part in the lives of the characters portrayed by *metropop* writers, compared to

those in most of the other Indonesian stories. The rapid development of the Internet contributes profoundly to the popularisation of *metropop* writings. Many *metropop* stories are distributed and discussed on the Internet. Personal blogs and other social media help create wider networks for this genre.

Even though these stories are meant to be very easy reading, this does not mean that their protagonists do not reflect on and perform any complicated issues, such as identity formation. These narratives will also disseminate a certain ideology operating in the society in which the *metropop* genre appears. Stories are never created in an historical, social, and cultural vacuum. Having this in mind, I argue that Indonesian *metropop* is not just another female romance. To a certain degree, this genre presents an ideological projection about how a certain group of Indonesian girls and women perceive themselves. It is therefore imperative to critically assess such stories because they depict how women and girls deal with conflicts in their lives and how they make them entertaining and redeeming.

Exploring a variety of women's issues, the stories predominantly display female life stories. Fiction may function as a microcosm where female characters are portrayed as dynamic, rich, and complex. Dealing with women's issues in fiction, this chapter primarily uses feminist literary criticism to analyse the writings of the *metropop* authors. Being a feminist reader, I will position myself in the way pointed out by Belsey and Moore (1989, 1) when it comes to the role of feminist readers

[...] a feminist does not necessarily read in order to praise or to blame, to judge or to censor. More commonly she sets out to assess how the text invites its readers, as members of a specific culture, to understand what it means to be a woman or man, and so encourages them to reaffirm or to challenge existing cultural norms.

Based on this insight, the following discussion of *metropop* writings assesses and interprets what it means to be a woman in the *metropop* stories. Using feminist literary criticism, I highlight Adrienne Rich's monumental claim that this literary critique functions as

a radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, [that] would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see—and therefore live—afresh. (Quoted from Fetterley 1978, 568–9)

The following discussion revolves around the construction of romance, beauty, and identity politics of girls and women in contemporary Indonesian popular novels. It is necessary to scrutinise how such portrayals of morals and sensitivities are represented in popular novels by contemporary Indonesian popular authors, as this will in return demonstrate how these writers depict the contemporary identity of Indonesian women and girls in relation to social and cultural settings.

### **Place, space, and romance**

Place determines space, and space builds romance; this means that every romantic story is linked to a specific setting. The romance genre requires a space that is close to a real-life situation, rather than a utopian or dystopian setting. This notion is emphatically presented by many *metropop* novels. The term *metropop* itself suggests urbanised, metropolitan settings in which the stories take place. The stories of romance of this *metropop* category tend to present a hermetically sealed world in which locations outside urban settings are largely ignored. The most popular setting forms the city of Jakarta as the site for a fairy tale existence of wealthy characters in novels, such as in Ika Natassa's novels *Divortiare* (first published 2008) and *Twivortiare* (2012). In 2008 Ika Natassa was nominated for the Talented Young Writer Award by the jury of the prestigious Khatulistiwa Literary Award. She also made it to the finals of the Fun Fearless Female contest organised by *Cosmopolitan Indonesia* magazine in 2004, and in 2010 she was awarded the title "Women Icon" by The Marketeers, an Indonesian marketing company.

As suggested in the title, *Divortiare* revolves around the life of Alexandra Rhea after her divorce from her husband, Beno Wicaksono. The main protagonist, Alex, is a banker who was married to Beno, a famous heart surgeon. An 8-year age gap between Alex and Beno (25 and 33 years old respectively) did not stop them from getting married. However, only in their first year did the couple experience the happiness of married life. Their happy marital life changed into a nightmare after their second year together, because they considered their careers more important than their life together. As a relation manager at Borderbank, Alex worked long hours and travelled a lot. Being a successful surgeon, Beno often came home late due to emergency calls and numerous patient visits and surgeries. These circumstances gradually estranged them from each other, until finally they ended up divorcing.

Alex was still much in love with Beno but always managed to find ways to deny her feelings. Her close friend, Denny, started to court her and

proposed to her, but after first accepting the proposal she realised how much she still loved Beno and rejected Denny's proposal. Alex and Beno reunited when Beno treated Alex's ill mother who had been hospitalised. The novel ends with Beno inviting Alex to have dinner together.

If the novel's title *Divortiare* suggests a certain cosmopolitan worldview by using the Latin term for "divorce", the title of the sequel, *Twivortiare*, dealing with the next episode of Alex and Beno's love life, firmly establishes a connection with the global social media. The story is written in Twitter format. Using a Twitter account @alexandrarheaw, Alex tells the readers everything about her second marriage to Beno. Her tweets are mostly about her job and her love life, including her occasional quarrels with Beno. As the continuation of *Divortiare*, *Twivortiare* starts where the previous book ended, telling the readers how Alex and Beno started to date again, and finally decided to remarry.

The stories in both *Divortiare* and *Twivortiare* take place in Alex's office and her apartment in Jakarta. However, the Jakarta featured in this romance is a world away from the real Jakarta, the most densely populated city in Indonesia characterised by common urban problems, such as traffic jams, high crime rates, and other social problems. The Jakarta setting is highly romanticised, as if Jakarta was, as Bhabha (1994, 34) puts it, a city representing "a radical rhetoric of the separation of totalised cultures that live unsoftened by the intertextuality of their historical locations, safe in the Utopianism of a mythic memory of a unique collective identity". In these *metropop* writings, the city of Jakarta represents numerous and multicultural identities, but here it is the only place where everything seems beautiful, perfect, and magical, where the memory it carries only signifies attainment of romantic desire. Jakarta, in the novels, is a mythical city, a contemporary privilege represented by nothing other than high-rise office buildings and apartments. In the novels Jakarta does not know the typical problems of a metropolitan city in Indonesia such as poverty, transportation woes, overcrowding, pollution, waste management issues, and so forth. Jakarta in this novel misses the complex reality of urban life. In *Twivortiare* the readers are tweeted about how Alex accompanied Beno on a short visit to New York, another city evoking illusionary romantic feelings for those who are in love.

Urban space as presented in the novels is a space that only depicts that of the upper middle and upper classes of society. Alex's office in a leading bank and her apartment provide her with a social space only upper middle and upper-class people can afford. Alex's life is thus told only in a story where the pace and space of contemporary city life takes place. Alex's world only revolves around her job, her apartment, and eating out in fine

restaurants. Alex's milieu of an upper middle-class life (the life of a young urban professional, a yuppie) is easily identified. She consumes many high-end products indicating her social space where money is never a problem; she and Beno are extremely well paid in their jobs. As part of the newly rich generation, Alex and Beno fulfil what McNerney (2008) describes as a generation that has "the ideal of connoisseurship, the worship of brand names and designer labels, the pursuit of physical perfection through exercise and surgery". McNerney's characterisation sounds true; in the two novels, both Alex and Beno are portrayed as attractive young people, charming with perfect bodies. Alex is beautiful, slim and professional, while Beno is tall, handsome, and very masculine, and both have their dream jobs.

One issue that makes Natassa's stories particularly noteworthy is her writing style in *Twivortiare*. This novel is written in the format of tweets in Alex's Twitter account, @alexandrarheaw. The author classifies her novel as twitterature (a combination of Twitter and literature). Twitterature is a recent mode of storytelling by combining tweets. One of the first books in the twitterature category is Aciman and Rensin's *Twitterature: The World's Greatest Books Retold through Twitter* (2009). Using tweets, Aciman and Rensin retell classic stories in no more than 140 characters. Since then twitterature has become more diverse in presenting a variety of genres from poetry to drama to philosophy. As part of the digital media, Twitter has become one of the most popularly used social media platforms in Indonesia. The rise of twitterature is a contemporary phenomenon that is facilitated by the rapid advance of the digital media. This unconventional way of telling a story with only 140 characters per tweet requires special creativity of an author to captivate the twitter followers in a long series of tweets.

In Natassa's novel *Twivortiare*, through her tweets, occasionally responded to by her best friend Wina Soedarjo, @winasoedarjo, Alex unfolds the story about her second marriage to Beno. The language style of the tweets is an urban colloquial kind of Indonesian, as if Alex was chatting with Wina. In terms of language, this novel uses a specific register different from the one used in conventional storytelling, and it may be argued that this colloquial style presents a more poignant and intimate life story to the readers.

Learning from their mistakes in the previous marriage as depicted in the novel *Divortiare*, Alex and Beno mutually reinforce their efforts to keep their marriage alive. Readers of this sequel will encounter Alex's tweets about, again, her career and romance. Although the novel is a typical romance story with a lot of colourful suggestions about love and



relationships, the use of tweets to convey the story provides the novel with a distinctly modern touch. This new way of story writing suggests contemporariness that makes *metropop* writing connect to its readers in real life, but also emphasises the genre's evanescence. Using this format of Twitter writing, Natassa sends the message that a new generation of writers is born, whose births mark the power of social media and the Internet for the millennial readers, creating a strong bond between writer and readers. Natassa belongs to those millennial writers who frequently use digital media in their works. The term millennials here refers to those born between 1982 and 2004, most of whom know how to use digital technology (Howe and Strauss 2000, 3–29). This again corresponds to the reality of the lives of young Indonesians who are extremely fond of representing their existences in social media. Indonesian millennials are very much influenced by digital life. For these millennials, technology, to borrow Heryanto's term, is "empowering" (Heryanto 2012, 42), resulting in a hyper reality in which media technology produces an abundance of sounds, images, and other sensations. Moreover, this hyper reality creates shadows of the image that people find more credible than the image itself (Jurriëns 2012, 221). Alex's Twitter account still exists and has more than three thousand followers who may blur the boundaries between reality, fiction, and hyper-reality.

### **Changing language, changing identity**

For millennial readers, gone is the era when proper stories were written in standard Indonesian. There are new language trends, just as there are new trends of fashion, music, architecture, and taste. In many of the *metropop* writings, this new trend is to combine English and Indonesian (in its urban colloquial form). Interestingly, local languages hardly appear in *metropop* stories. This omission seems mainly due to the setting of these novels. As Jakarta is the most common setting, highly globalised and very much cosmopolitan, the megacity marks young Indonesians' association with the international world. English phrases are mixed with Indonesian and Jakartan vernaculars, making the characters in these *metropop* stories hybrid mixtures of Indonesian (Jakarta and its outskirts) and international identities. Unlike the love stories from the 1970s and 1980s by authors such as Marga T., La Rose, Iskariah Sumarto, NH Dini, and many others (Sumardjo 1995, 142), which mainly use standard Indonesian in combination with some expressions in vernacular languages such as Javanese, *metropop* narratives abound with cosmopolitan and global exposures indicated by the use of English. This new trend undeniably

ventures towards new ways of constructing identity, showing more hybridised life-worlds, and signalling local and global exchanges of identities often referred to as globalisation. In a chapter entitled “Cacoethes Scribendi” (Latin, “an insatiable urge to write”) Natassa wrote about the reason of being both a banker and a writer:

*People ask me when do I do have the time to write with my impossible working schedule. Dan jawaban saya biasanya adalah [and my answer is usually, translation DAA]: Business trips are the greatest perks of my job.... Those trips also provide me with the quintessential opportunity to learn about the people who have actually made it for themselves.... And what's even more fascinating is the fact that you will learn a whole lot about yourself by analyzing how you respond to what they say. (Natassa 2012a, 5-6, italics in the original)*

In the above quote, Natassa moves easily between English and Indonesian, while all the chapter titles in *Divortiare* are in Latin. Switching between standard Indonesian, Indonesian mixed with Jakarta vernacular, and English marks the shifting identities these young people have forged. They embody the fusion of global and local identities, “blending, mixing, adapting of two or more processes one of which must be local” (Khondker 2004, 6). Such globalisation and hybridisation are indeed typical of the millennials, and different from earlier generations from the 1970s or 1980s whose members displayed a more national and local focus instead of a global outlook. This may seem to overgeneralise the writers from the 1970s and 1980s, but compared to millennial writers they are much more localised in terms of language use and cultural expressions. Technological progress has facilitated these young people to become creators within global networks with a local taste.

Apart from Ika Natassa’s novels, also *Celebrity Wedding* (aliaZalea 2011), *Sunshine Becomes You* (Ilana Tan 2012), *Autumn Once More* (2013, a collection of *metropop* short stories), *Kartini Nggak Sampai Eropa* (Sammaria 2008), and *Pagi Ini Di Seberang Jalan* (2014, another collection of short stories) all have the mixed usage of Indonesian (both standard and vernacular) and English in common. These novels carry numerous English expressions but revolve around local characters, ethics and values, demonstrated by the use of local Indonesian names, the proscription of pre-marital sex, heterosexual relationships according to Indonesian norms that prohibit kissing or sex only to allow holding hands, and many other characteristics that follow present-day Indonesian societal norms.

Identity politics shown by the characters of the *metropop* novels, whose language is a mixture of Indonesian and English, suggest that

young Indonesians live their lives within symbolic functions that are part of global and local identities. The use of hybrid multilingual expressions may be understood as a metaphor for a language of materiality: mixtures of languages draw attention to their identity politics rather than just engrave an easy, translucent relationship between words and the world. The term linguistic hybridisation alludes to a multitude of languages the *metropop* novels celebrate. It produces a diversity of the linguistic situations of the speaker. A young Indonesian moving easily between Indonesian and English indicates that s/he situates herself/himself in situations that are signifying the local identification of the self as well as the global, which are considered not in contradiction with but complementary to each other, as is suggested by the *metropop* authors.

*Metropop* authors do foreground linguistic hybridisation. Following Kristeva, language is not only a matter of expression, but it potentially relates to the ways in which an individual looks at, and identifies herself/himself with the world. Two modalities in language, the Symbolic and the Semiotic, enable an individual to signify herself/himself. The symbolic content of language relies much on the use of symbols in the ways an individual communicates with her/his world, which is one of many ways in which subjectivity is constructed. The Semiotic content of language signals the ways in which meaning is created by an individual in relation to her/his culture and how social and political positioning is constructed. In her *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva expounds:

We shall call the first ‘the semiotic’ and the second ‘the symbolic.’ These two modalities are inseparable within the *signifying process* that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse (narrative, metalanguage, theory, poetry, etc.) involved; in other words, so-called “natural” language allows for different modes of articulation of the semiotic and the symbolic. On the other hand, there are nonverbal signifying systems that are constituted exclusively on the basis of the semiotic (music, for example). But, as we shall see, this exclusivity is relative, precisely because of the necessary dialectic between the two modalities of the signifying process, which is constitutive of the subject. Because the subject is always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either ‘exclusively’ semiotic or ‘exclusively’ symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both. (Kristeva 1984, 24)

The above quote underlines that the language an individual or a subject speaks is never fixed, and being constituted by language, the speaking subject remains unstable. The speaking subject is always in a process of mutually constructing meaning out of the symbolic and the semiotic.

Identity is never fixed once and for all but always in a process of becoming.

Language dictates and reflects the ways in which its speaker perceives her/his world. In the case of *metropop* authors, who freely switch between languages, this may mean that linguistic differences between Indonesian and English create and mark an identity that is more cross-cultural, multiple, and hybrid. It seems inevitable that for these authors such hybridisation establishes a coherent cultural identity that is dynamic. Cross-cultural wordplay may be understood as part of a hybrid identity in the context of which these authors attempt to translate their Indonesian cultural identity into contemporary English (global) terms. Language hybridisation is the bridge that closes the gap supposedly separating global culture and Indonesian culture.

English has long been used in Indonesian works by writers in earlier periods of the Indonesian literary tradition, and is not the only foreign language used in Indonesian literature. Pramoedya Ananta Toer opines that in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries quite a number of Malay works were written in mixed registers of Dutch-Malay and Malay-Chinese. Moreover, Malay itself at that time, Maier (1993) argues, was developed from a heteroglossia (a hybrid collection of utterances) into a polyglossia (when multiple languages are separated and coexist in the same area and at the same time). If language varieties are taken into account, Indonesian literature, with Malay writings as the pioneer, has always been linguistically hybrid. The difference between then and now lies in the languages used and the former lack of a standard register. Dutch (the colonial language), Malay (regional variant), or Chinese words hardly, if ever, appear in Indonesian popular fiction anymore; their positions are replaced by English (the foreign language) and *Bahasa Indonesia* (the national language).<sup>3</sup> Young Indonesians today no longer see themselves as colonial subjects affected by the usage of Dutch as the colonial language but as global individuals using global English. To put it simply, Indonesians have now gone global. Although this may seem very simplistic, as the linguistic situation in Indonesia is very complex with an enormous variety of languages, the mixture of Indonesian and English is more common than any other foreign language and is considered a typical feature of an individual going beyond the confinements of locality.

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, this does not mean that there are no words of Chinese, Malay, or Dutch origin in the language used in the popular novels, as some of the words have been absorbed in the everyday speech of young Indonesians. For instance, the pair *gue* and *lu*, used as first and second person singular personal pronouns, originate from Hokkien.

Young Indonesians today, whose linguistic registers may include a mother tongue and one or more other languages (mainly Indonesian and English), show that the identity politics they create are always fluid and enact both local and global formations. Although globalisation has replaced a singular, local Indonesian identity for these young people, this does not mean that they oppose the global in favour of the local. Globalisation, they believe, can coexist with localisation, and they are proud of being both global and local, not either or. Heryanto (2012, 29) remarks that Indonesian millennials have embraced fluid identity politics that are highly different from their predecessors: “contemporary Indonesian society is marked by plurality, centred-peripheral politics and ideological contestations.” Post-New Order politics tend to be lenient and create more open spaces that spur the birth of new identity politics.

### **Beauty, fashion, and patriarchy**

Beauty fascinates us all, regardless of race, social and cultural standing, or religion. Still, it seems to be ascribed to women in particular. Not only is beauty used to evaluate women, but it has also become an identity marker for them. In line with feminist theory, Naomi Wolf, in her book *The Beauty Myth* (first published in 1991), discusses the concept of beauty as a means of social control to define women as wives and child bearers. According to Wolf, this concept reduces women to being viewed as creatures having primarily nurturing abilities. She argues further how the concept of female beauty has obsessed women and eventually entrapped them in the grip of patriarchy. The media are instrumental in this, by propagating a one-sided representation of beauty for women and girls. Through mass media, popular culture has flooded us with images of beautiful women and girls, which are not only utopian but also still trapped in old stereotypes. Women have been taught to become obsessed with their beauty and body. What is hip and trendy, what is not, what women should follow, what they should not, and the dos and don'ts, are frequently stereotyped by the media.

Being a mass-mediated genre, popular novels by Indonesian *metropop* writers carry similar notions when depicting female beauty and body. “Hidupnya Tina(h)” (Tina(h)'s Life, 2014), a short story by Lusiwulan, depicts the life of a girl named Tinah who was born poor and unattractive. Later in her life, she is abandoned by her boyfriend because of her dire circumstances. Tired of her unfortunate condition, Tinah moves to the big city, works as a call girl, and transforms herself into Tina (which is supposed as a more sophisticated urban variant of the name Tinah) who is

physically attractive and fashionable. Due to her new look, Tina marries a rich, much-older man who provides her with financial security. Tina's story perhaps reminds the readers of a modern Cinderella story. However, Tina is not as naive and sweet as Cinderella but rather a resentful girl, full of revenge. She is determined to take revenge on those who have done her wrong. Changing her physical appearance from plain to pretty, she finally manages to have the world at her command. She becomes a famous, rich, and respected socialite. Tina's wealthy husband is, in fact, the father-in-law of her ex-boyfriend who dumped her after she gave up her virginity to him. Unlike Cinderella, who is the proverbial angel, Tina is a monster. As indicated in feminist literary criticism, female characters are often divided into two opposite categories: if not an angel, they are monsters, and Tina represents the latter. She is pretty and smart but also lethal and disastrous in addition to being promiscuous. When a woman has power she becomes dangerous; this seems to be the message the story delivers.

The story of Tina(h) reflects the common idea that beautiful looks can work as a ladder to reach a higher social position and gain economic wealth. This story centres on the way a girl's body is used in relation to social stratification. A female body is not merely a corporeal body; it is also a social body that signifies social position. Being an ordinary-looking girl is highly undesirable because such girls are stereotyped as being low class, and they are associated with a poor, unstable standard of life. The myth prevails that poor girls are physically unattractive. This is not to say that all poor girls are represented as unappealing, for there is also a common stereotype of poor girls who are beautiful and pious, but the latter stereotypical characterisation is usually related to more religious contexts. A female body becomes a mark of economic and social differences. When Tinah first moved to the big city, despite her intelligence, she was humiliated and discriminated against because of her ordinary looks (Lusiwulan 2014, 44). But soon after she had transformed into Tina, she became a *nouveau riche*, a socialite and highly respected member of the upper class (Lusiwulan 2014, 50). Physical attractiveness or beauty for women functions as a ground that allows for distinguishing between classes, status, and wealth. Differences in intelligence, culture, talent, creativity, usefulness, and even morality are simply reduced to female beauty. Beauty is powerful, this story tells us, and beauty defines class. Tina(h) reinforces stereotypes according to which a girl or a woman cannot be high class if she looks unattractive, although she attends a college, is intelligent, cares about larger issues, or has a good personality. Beauty dictates women, and men dictate women to have it:

The quality called “beauty” objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it. This embodiment is imperative for women and not for men, which situation is necessary and natural because it is biological, sexual, and evolutionary. (Wolf 2002, 12)

Wolf (2002, 13) further contends that beauty is merely a myth that “is not about women at all. It is about men’s institutions and institutional power”. To prevent women from challenging men’s power, this myth has ideologically obsessed many women, old and young. Little wonder that beauty pageants and cosmetic/aesthetic surgery have become a flourishing business over the past decades. Who is beautiful and who is ugly becomes the only foreseeable identification for women like in the story of Tina(h) who is assigned her social status due to her looks and nothing else. The terms “beautiful” and “ugly” themselves serve for trapping a woman within the shackles of others’ constructions: the confinement of patriarchy. “By using ideas of ‘beauty’, it reconstructed an alternative female world with its own laws, economy, religion, sexuality, education, and culture, each element as repressive as any that had gone before” (Wolf 2002, 22). Wolf also argues that female beauty has become an unconscious hallucination that is “more influential and pervasive” (17), inspiring a multibillion-dollar industry mostly owned and controlled by men. It is this very hallucination or dreamlike beauty that many popular novelists offer their readers. The characters of Alex in Natassa’s novels and Tina(h) in Lusiwulan’s story are beautiful, fashion conscious, and sexually attractive. They draw attention only to the imagery of female beauty and neglect the conditions of real women’s bodies and looks.

*Hair-Quake* (2014, first published 2008) by Mariskova echoes the female body discourse similar to what we have encountered in Lusiwulan’s story. Mariskova tells the story of an English teacher named Andita Soekardi, aged 25 and still single, who is obsessed with having long, straight hair. Andita was born with curly hair, and she hates it. Andita’s motto is that “*better hair brings better luck, better love, and better life*” (Mariskova 2012, 12, italics in the original). Andita finds it increasingly awkward to deal with her hair. She believes that her curly hair puts her in many unpleasant situations. Andita even becomes a national laughingstock when photographs of her appear in *MC* (a prestigious woman’s magazine) with the caption HAIRSTYLES: WHAT’S SO DECADE AGO. The magazine also qualifies her hairstyle as *hairosaurus* (a combination of hair and dinosaur). Andita considers her hair to be more than just a mess, it is a disaster, which makes her straighten and change the colour of her hair from reddish into black at the hairdresser.

Now her hair resembles the supposedly beautiful style portrayed in the ubiquitous shampoo commercials. However, straightening her hair turns into another disaster, and the story ends with Andita cutting her hair very short into a crew cut hairstyle. Interestingly, Andita's masculine haircut receives praise from two friends who are competing for her heart, saying that the crew cut looks cute on her.

Andita's story may suggest two things. On the one hand, Andita's self-esteem seems to parallel her feminine and masculine self. Feminine Andita with the disastrous hairstyle equals failure, while Andita with the masculine haircut is a success. Somehow, her more masculine appearance awards her with some form of achievement. Here again we see the patriarchal ideology at work. On the other hand, it is quite typical in Indonesia that a woman is valued on the basis of her hair. There is an Indonesian saying that a woman's hair is her *mahkota* (crown). This implies that female identity is centralised in a part of a woman's body. Women's subjectivity is policed and vested in a certain part of the female body that in the end will determine the place or condition considered "normal". For Andita, hair represents beauty, identity, and self-esteem. The *hairosaurus* Andita is considered ugly and has low self-esteem, as she is not feminine enough with proper, long, straight hair. But a masculinised Andita with short hair suddenly gains momentum, achieves success and receives compliments from her suitors. The story of Andita indicates how masculinisation works to revise failure to success.

Andita's obsession with hair mirrors Tina(h)'s obsession with beauty. Despite her intelligence, Andita, like Tinah, is ridiculed and bullied simply because of her hair. At the end of the story, the language institute where she works awards Andita a scholarship to continue her studies in the United States. Although *Hair-Quake* concludes with a positive ending depicting Andita's pride and high self-esteem with her short hair, thus seemingly ending her obsession, the hair issue clearly shows that women are still not considered free to choose and exercise the notion of *women's bodies*, *women's rights*. Andita's decision to cut her hair short is simply not because she wants to but because she has been *forced to*. Andita's obsession to have long straight black hair was prompted by the beauty construction in women's magazines that have bombarded women with exactly the same standard for beautiful hair. It is indicative of the notion that magazines ideologically dictate the identity of women. As Wolf (2002, 64 and 70) argues:

Women's magazines for over a century have been one of the most powerful agents in changing women's roles, and throughout that time—today more than ever [...] Women are deeply affected by what their



magazines tell them (or what they believe they tell them) because they are all most women have as a window on their own mass sensibility.

Women need to be tall, slim, pretty, and have long, straight hair to fall into the category of being “beautiful”, so these magazines propagate. But, of course, women’s magazines are not alone in creating standards of female beauty; film and television also play a significant role in forming a standard imagery. Media function as a means of institutionalising this “mass sensibility” that states that women can only be defined by forces outside themselves and never by themselves. Although Wolf mainly refers to white middle-class women, this trend is evidently global, affecting women around the world. Female characters like Andita and Tina(h), for example, who grew up during the new media age, forge their identities in close connection with representations and constructions found in the new media. Indonesian women are not much different from their sisters in other parts of this world. This is perhaps what we might call the price of globalisation. The flood of representations in the media inspires women to construct their identities on the basis of their appearance.

Women’s identity politics, especially in relation to their physical appearance, may remind us of Virginia Woolf’s narrative “The Lady in the Looking Glass: A Reflection”. Women need a looking glass (a mirror) to see the truth about themselves. In much of the patriarchal world today, this mirror constitutes men and their attitude towards women. Women see themselves through men’s eyes, hardly if ever with their own eyes, especially when it comes to their appearance: “woman is made especially to please man [...] If a woman is made to please and to be subjugated, she ought to make herself agreeable to man” (Rousseau 1991, 358). Women’s natural position is merely a complement to men. That beauty is just a myth, as Wolf so strongly posits, is represented in many Indonesian contemporary popular novels where female characters are, or strive to become, beautiful. Beauty is not only considered a myth; it has been turned into a dream in accordance with the earlier reference to Hoggart’s work at the start of this essay. Indonesian women and girls fantasise about being beautiful, slim, and tall. A Cinderella discourse is at work throughout much of popular fiction, which in this respect does indeed reflect reality. Teen and women’s magazines, television, and advertisements make sure that women will tend to identify themselves as bodily creatures agreeable to men. Unlike men, who are associated with more intellectual beings, women are trapped within this discourse around the face and the sexualised body. They are victimised by “the structure of fashion and beauty system which acts as an authoritative regime” (McRobbie 2009, 68) only to win men’s attention. Fashion and beauty

indeed are patriarchal conceptions aimed to construct women within the purview of patriarchy.

Fashion and beauty, too, work as—to borrow Kristeva’s term—the symbolic, in which women are simultaneously inscribed into the dominant language of patriarchy:

The fashion-beauty complex, standing in for the Symbolic, is charged with the role of imposing new time frames on women’s lives. As a result there is a proliferation of activities which impose new temporalities through, for example, beauty products routinely recommended to very young girls as well as so-called age defying treatments for young women who are barely in their twenties. (McRobbie 2009, 63)

The fashion-beauty complex functions on behalf of patriarchal authority so as to ensure the stability of the heterosexual matrix especially when it is threatened by social changes brought about by women coming forward into the world of work and employment. It is also a key mechanism in the active production and reproduction of racialising differences. And likewise the various forms of feminine popular culture whose focus of attention is sexuality, desire, and the conduct of love and intimacy [...] are so deeply inscribed within the dominant language of love, and what young women now need to do to secure a partner or husband (the so-called rules). (McRobbie 2009, 71)

The extended quotes from McRobbie’s book here indicate several things. Most importantly is that fashion and beauty indeed are the core of women’s identity politics. Second is that such politics lead and reinstate typical formula about love relationships between men and women, boys and girls, allowing only for heteronormativity in women’s lives. With the help of the fashion and beauty industries, patriarchy maintains the institution by which the female is controlled and shaped.

### **Marriage and domesticity**

Romance plots that end in marriage are exceedingly common in contemporary Indonesian popular narratives. Marriage, followed suit by domesticity, is a formula that seems to have undergone no change from the birth of Indonesian modern literature in the 1920s until today. A normative life cycle model for women—following love affairs, marriage, bearing children, growing old together with their spouses, and all the trials and tribulations of domestic life—has become common practice in many societies. The normative model reinforces feminine subjectivity that has long been ingrained in female identity politics. In Natassa’s *Twivortaire*,

Alex longs for such a norm: “The simplest things in life are what makes us happy eventually. A warm and comfy home, being loved, and knowing that somebody can’t live without you” (Natassa 2012b, 218). Although Alex is a very successful banker, her professional life means nothing without a happy and comfortable home (domesticity). Fantasising about home is primary for Alex. Home here is used not without significance: “Home also symbolises part of that complex knot of feelings, ideas, and activities which have structured a sense of feminine self” (Light 1991, 219, quoted in Dixon 1999, 175). Like other popular fictions, romances published by Mills & Boon portray a similar meaning of home. It is “that ultimate female space—to express not only a physical space, but an ideology that encompasses a re-ordering of society, with women at its centre. It is an ideal to be attained by both sexes, a symbol of society, of female civilization” (Dixon 1999, 175). Alex believed that home was where she could find happiness and comfort. As home is Alex’s source of happiness, having a child and motherhood will bring her to the centre of female identity, a bearer of civilisation. After several years of married life, Alex and Beno had yet to bear a child. Often asked by their relatives, they simply answered that they needed to balance career and marriage before having a child. The story ends with a hopeful future of having a child after several attempts have failed (several times Alex experienced a false alarm of being pregnant). In this perspective, for Alex motherhood is highly important in domestic life. As a wife, Alex was required to do domestic chores just like any other wife in Indonesia. Despite her inexperience in cooking, for example, Alex tried to provide home cooking for Beno’s birthday. The feminine subjectivity of marriage and domesticity is forced and reinforced in this story.

Women’s dependency on men in the form of marriage recalls the patriarchal power upon women and how women must pay for this control with their freedom; “upon marriage, the woman was subsumed into the man’s identity in terms of name and legal status, to become his possession” (Chance 1994, 60). In this *metropop* fiction, a female character is delighted to enter or even passionately awaits the moment of married life. The final “w” in Alexandra’s Twitter account, @alexandarheaw, which refers to her husband’s last name, serves as a confirmation of her ideal status.

Marriage and domesticity form the most consistent plot elements in any popular romance and Indonesian romance fiction is no exception to this general rule. As women seem to have gained better access to employment, female domestic life is more often combined with a career outside the home. The combination of home and work may have a

different significance compared to earlier Indonesian popular romance from the 1920s up to the 1970s. In the past, female characters were mostly depicted as housewives and mothers, exemplified by Sitti Nurbaya in Marah Rusli's *Sitti Noerbaya* (1922) or Miranti in Ike Soepomo's *Kabut Sutura Ungu* (1978). Contemporary Indonesian popular fiction no longer ostracises female characters from the world of work. Millennial women have a career or a job combined with domestic life (including love and romance).

aliaZalea's *Celebrity Wedding* (first published 2011) tells the story of a simple yet very smart singleton named Inara Hanindita who works as a public accountant in an accounting firm. In the story Inara is forced to marry Revelino Darby, a famous musician, a celebrity, "the most eligible bachelor in town and Mr. Playboy of the Year" (aliaZalia 2013, 9). Inara refuses at first but then accepts the contracted marriage to save Revel's (Revelino's nickname) career, as he has been gossiped to have impregnated his former girlfriend Luna. Revel's reputation was cleared when Luna made a statement to the press, saying that Revel was not the father of her child. Inara's arranged marriage was rocky at first, two strangers coming together and learning to live in harmony, but they fell in love in the process. This kind of plot is archetypical in romance fiction. According to Dixon, marriage in romance stories such as those published by Mills & Boon usually falls into two categories: marriage of convenience and forced marriage (Dixon 1999, 155).

As the title implies, *Celebrity Wedding* tells a Cinderella-like story, of fantasy, of the dream that a simple, ordinary girl is able to tame a Prince Charming who is also a rebel. But unlike Cinderella, Inara is a working girl, a successful accountant with many clients who are pleased with her professionalism in accounting services. Unlike their predecessors, millennial girls are not just housewives but also career professionals who enjoy top jobs with high salaries. Income from employment (outside the home) for these working girls is important and gives them a certain degree of independence. All working female characters, like Inara in *Celebrity Wedding*, Alex in *Divortiare* and *Twivortiare*, and Tina in "Hidupnya Tina(h)", are economically independent from men. Their decision to marry rich men has nothing to do with a supposed economic incapability: it is a desire for romance and home (domesticity). The romantic novels published by Mills & Boon, the world-famous publisher of romance, display similar characteristics as found in abundance in Indonesian popular stories:

Mills & Boon romances combine the cult of domesticity with women's need to work by joining the home and the workplace in various ways [...]

although not ignoring those women who preferred to stay at home, Mills & Boon novels have argued throughout this century for women's rights to work, before and during marriage, and after having children. (Dixon 1999, 124 and 132)

In the lives of female characters depicted in this discussion it is evident that these women are working women who choose to keep their jobs even after their marriage. Having a job provides a woman with an opportunity to become independent. However, Indonesian society today still expects a working woman to trade her economic independence from men for dependence in marriage in order to gain happiness and security.

"Thirty Something" (2013), a short story by Anastasia Aemila, clearly portrays the duality of a woman's independence from/dependence on men. The story revolves around the uneasy life of Rachel, who is in her thirties and still single. Rachel has befriended Erik for a long time. They both love each other as best friends, but their friendship gradually turns into love, especially on the part of Erik. He accepts a job offer in Japan for three years and promises to return to Jakarta to marry Rachel. At first Erik has high hopes that Rachel will accept his love. He kisses her on the night before his departure, wishing that she would no longer consider him a best friend but a potential lover. Erik thought that he may be successful in wooing her, only to realise that she is already engaged with a man named Artha when he finds Rachel's engagement ring that accidentally dropped out of her purse that night. The story ends with Rachel's dismay. She sighed, "*Being thirty-something and single is not that easy in my family, Erik. You know that*" (Aemilia 2013, 35, italics in the original). It turns out that just before Erik had an opportunity to declare his love to her, the grandmother forced Rachel to become engaged with Artha. This story underlines the importance of a woman's marital status in Indonesia when she has reached a certain age. Inevitably, Rachel's independence must change into dependence through marriage, and she has no way to reject her family's power. This is typical of certain Indonesian settings. The idea of letting an independent woman live the life she wants while still being single would violate the norm that only through marriage (including domesticity) a woman can be regarded as a full member of society. Her full status only applies when her status as a married wife is added. Virginity is highly valued, but marriage is socially preferred. It is not surprising that an Indonesian term for old spinster is *perawan tua* (old virgin).

Rachel's coerced engagement with Artha signifies how a woman's sexual desire must immediately be controlled by the institution of marriage. Being unmarried, there is a danger that a girl or a woman will let loose her sexual desire. This is considered a challenge to patriarchy, as

sexually liberal women signify their independence from men. Bates et al. succinctly explain Rachel's unease as a *perawan tua* and how women in her position may experience similar problems:

For many women, the quest for freedom of choice in making a marriage may well lead us back into the maze of cultural demands and social pressures from which we had sought escape. As young women, we have often spent our times grooming ourselves to fit the description of the "ideal" wife. We study what men want and like and try to conform as closely as possible to the conflicting images which guide us—in modern times, in the pages of magazines, in motion pictures, or in television advertising. For some women, wifehood is a career. Even if we consider it only a possibility, we may think twice before undertaking work or studies which we imagine will interfere with marriage. Women today are often not much freer than our predecessors and our contemporaries elsewhere in the world from the informal social and familiar pressures that drive many of us into marriage that benefit others far more than ourselves. (Bates et al. 1983, 257)

Women can never have a choice of their own; this Rachel understood. Pressure by family and society exerts too much of an influence in controlling the destiny of women.

## Conclusion

'A man's self,' William James wrote in 1890, 'is the sum total of what he can call his; not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife, his children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank account' (quoted in Hobsbawm 1989, 165). The qualities of the individual's life can be measured in material terms: wealth and the status it brings, a privileged relationship with the law, education and even religious establishments, and power over others such as wives, children and employees. Material things have therefore both practical and psychic consequences; they bolster the sense of valuable personhood for the individual who does the 'owning', producing and reinforcing a measurable estimate of his worth. Provided the individual remains within certain limits of action—primarily that he does not infringe the rights/privileges of others who share his status—he is very free in action he is permitted. (Robbins 2000, 22)

The above quote indicates the definition of personhood, unfortunately, only for men. A woman's personhood seems to be the opposite, or complementary to that, of a man. Contemporary Indonesian popular fiction depicts how women see their personhood from the view of female authors. Indonesian popular authors like Ika Natassa, Lusiwulan,

aliaZalea, Mariskova, and Anastasia Aemilia still, like authors from earlier generations, create images of women in their stories that are potentially limited. These are images that reduce “the female subject to the status of object, mak[ing] ideal images that are not often congruent with reality, into powerful ideological tools for the control of women who have been devalued if they do not have ‘good’ looks . . . woman is damned if she does, and damned if she doesn’t pay attention to her looks, to her image, to how she looks and how she is seen” (Robbins 2000, 51). Images of women in popular fiction (novels and short stories) are never quite liberating. Female characters in the stories, like Alex, Tina(h), Rachel, Inara, and Andita are never free from the patriarchal forces that have formed them. Beauty, fashion, romance, marriage, and domesticity commonly render women into a delimitation of their identity politics. The control of feminine sexuality, like in the story of Rachel, indicates an ideology of domesticity that sets woman apart from the centre of power. These stories also reestablish the norm of our society, according to which the ultimate goal of a woman’s life is marriage: the only place where she can find true happiness. Contemporary Indonesian *metropop* stories confirm that an absolutely free woman is utopian, as imaginary women in literary texts (including popular fiction) and women in reality are not that much different. To a large extent women are still controlled by an objectification of women in the context of which their bodies and ideologies are not their own property.

One should notice that millennial authors, though sharing imageries of women being controlled by patriarchal forces like earlier generations of authors, depart in many ways in their use of language. The use of English, standard Indonesian, and Indonesian mixed with the Jakartan vernacular mark the difference these authors connote compared to previous authors. The digital world and the easy access to the Internet leave the choice of identification for the women in the stories, in the perspective of the multiple languages used, ambivalent; these women show that they are capable of being global and local at the same time. Because language is the most generally acknowledged of all signifying practices, the multiple languages suggest a freer construction of women’s identity. In that case, women become speaking subjects who could go far from a unitary concept, making them hybrid and multi-dimensional.

The women or girls in *metropop* writings are somehow mixed in between. On the one hand, due to their multiplicity of language use, they are capable of forging their own multifarious identities. On the other hand, they are still trapped within power relations that privilege men over women. However, what is most important is that these writings have

contributed significantly to advancing the notion that there could and should be ways for women to look at and define themselves on their own terms. Despite the patriarchal projection contained in these writings, the authors have achieved success in making women see how they are locked within social and cultural factors contextualising them. Although patriarchal shackles on women are still clearly visible in these writings, they also challenge them by speaking out with their own voice. These women authors are feminists in a sense that they subvert patriarchal control by assessing their own life, using their own perspectives. Moreover, by using colloquial Indonesian and English they challenge the very idea that women's place is only at home. By using a mixture of local and global registers they show the world that they have moved beyond the confinement of their homes, in opposition to a Javanese proverb saying that women should never step out of their homes. These millennial authors seem to turn against this saying: women, do step out of your homes by using this type of language. Let women speak what they want! And through these writings at least this wish is fulfilled.

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# TAUFIQ ISMAIL AND THE MUSLIM MISSION OF COMMANDING RIGHT AND FORBIDDING WRONG

E.P. WIERINGA

In this chapter I would like to focus on the poetry of Taufiq Ismail who, in the words of Andries “Hans” Teeuw (1979b, 135) in his classic overview of modern Indonesian literature, has “a very distinct voice in the polyphonic chorus of present-day Indonesian poetry”. This judgment, emphasising individuality and uniqueness, implies that this poet cannot be consigned to any pigeonhole. However, when H.B. “Hans” Jassin proclaimed the birth of a new literary “Generation of 1966”, he counted Taufiq Ismail among its most prominent members. In fact, the latter had in 1966 become “something of a national celebrity” (Teeuw 1979b, 132), due to his role in the student movement and two collections of resistance poetry, viz. *Benteng* (Fortress) and *Tirani* (Tyranny), initially published under the pseudonym Nur Fajar (Light of Dawn). According to Jassin, the character of the Generation of 1966 became visible in their battle poems that he viewed as “manifestations of the spirit of the new freedom fighters” (Teeuw 1979b, 43). In his oft-republished anthology of writings by this so-called cohort, Jassin included no less than nine poems by Taufiq Ismail, six of which being characterised as “demonstration poems” (*sajak demonstrasi*) (Jassin 1968).<sup>1</sup> His “demonstration poems” have brought their author lasting fame and belong to the very kernel of his poetry.

Teeuw (1979b, 133) characterised Taufiq Ismail as someone “who needs an audience because he has a message, a message based on a strong Islamic religious conviction and who at the same time remains deeply involved in the sociopolitical issues of his time”. This message, as Teeuw (1979b, 133) rightly observes, has been “present in his poems from the

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<sup>1</sup>The only other poet in this anthology who is also accorded with this maximum of nine poems, is Goenawan Mohamad.

very beginning”. Taufiq Ismail’s religious conviction guides and motivates his sublunary actions. Being an observant Muslim, he sees it as his duty to raise his voice in public, driven by the central moral Islamic tenet, already mentioned in the Qur’an, known as “commanding right and forbidding wrong” (*al-amr bi’l ma’rūf*).<sup>2</sup> He is always the moralist. As this characterisation might give rise to misunderstandings, it should perhaps be further elucidated. The term “moralist” is sometimes negatively regarded in the Euro-American world, in the sense of “[o]ne who is unduly concerned with the morals of others” (Pickett 2000, 1142). However, throughout its entire history, Indonesian literature always has had a distinctly moralistic-didactic outlook, and so Taufiq Ismail’s preoccupation with what is right and wrong is not remarkable *per se*. What makes his poetry so different from the mainstream Indonesian Islamic poetry scene is that it does not give moral advice in a tedious or self-righteous way. It does not just preach to the converted but is accessible and understandable to the Indonesian public at large.<sup>3</sup>

In the following pages, I will present some of the most salient features of Taufiq Ismail’s oeuvre as a whole, drawing on the three-volume bilingual edition of his poetic work with English translations by Amin Sweeney, the most recent poems dating from 2013 (Ismail 2014a-c).<sup>4</sup>

### Coming of age as a poet

Taufiq Ismail was born on 25 June 1935 in Bukittinggi, the heart of the Minangkabau highlands, in the province of West Sumatra.<sup>5</sup> His parents were Abdul Gaffar Ismail (1911-1998) and Siti Nur M. Nur (1914-1982) who were both graduates from Islamic schools: his father from Sumatera Thawalib Parabek in Bukittinggi, and his mother from Diniya Puteri School in Padang Panjang (Zon 2014, 1371). His father was active in the nationalist movement, and due to his political activities, the Dutch colonial authorities sentenced him to leave West Sumatra, after which he chose to

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<sup>2</sup> See Cook (2000) for an exhaustive discussion of this important concept in Islamic thought.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Noor (2014, 380, 389); Hadi (2008, xxxv).

<sup>4</sup> This chapter is a heavily truncated version of my introductory essay in this edition, viz. Wieringa (2014: xxv-lxxiii).

<sup>5</sup> Secondary literature stubbornly and erroneously, places his year of birth in 1937. I am embarrassed to confess that I, too, made this mistake in my introductory essay to Taufiq Ismail’s “complete works” (Wieringa 2014). Although kindly corrected by Taufiq Ismail himself (see Wieringa 2014, xxviii), several phrases unfortunately still betray that my calculations were based on the year 1937.

move to Pekalongan in Central Java, working as a teacher of Islam but also as a journalist.

Judging by the bibliographical data collected by Kratz (1988, 236), Taufiq Ismail started his career as a creative writer by publishing *Dadang, Pemetik Kecapi Tua* (Dadang, the Old *Kecapi* Player, Ismail 2014a, 4-5), which appeared on 25 July 1954 in the Jakarta-based magazine *Siasat*.<sup>6</sup> This poem was dedicated to Bahrum Rangkuti (1919-1977), a fellow Sumatran poet who, at the end of the 1940s and in the early 1950s, was not only known for his call for indigenous Indonesian Islamic literature but also for his lionisation of the poet, philosopher, and politician Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), Pakistan's spiritual father (see Teeuw 1979a, 139).<sup>7</sup> However, as Teeuw (1979a, 139) puts it, in the years after Indonesia's independence Bahrum's ideals "remained practically the voice of one crying in the wilderness, and no Moslem author achieved any stature in creative literary work which could be called typically Moslem." Paying tribute to this "lonely voice", Taufiq Ismail showed at a very early age that he was not afraid to take up the gauntlet and to prove that genuinely Indonesian Islamic literature was not impossible.

His firm resolve went against the grain of his time, because in the 1950s the Indonesian Islamic discourse still judged against literature most harshly on account of the condemnation of poets in the last verses of Sura 26 as evil and possessed by the devil.<sup>8</sup> However, as Taufiq Ismail explained in an interview in 1995, at the time these verses were originally revealed to the Prophet, the Companions, who were also poets, burst into tears and asked for clarification, upon which the following concluding verse was revealed: "Not so those [poets] who believe, do good deeds, [and] remember God often" (Sura 26, 227; Abdel Haleem 2005, 238). This shows, according to Taufiq Ismail, that God loves poets very much, giving them a clear guidance in life (see Wieringa 2006, 105).

The first poem in the most recent three-volume bilingual edition (Ismail 2014a-c), apparently written by Taufiq Ismail in 1953, is entitled "Doa dalam Lagu" (Prayer in a Tune). According to Kratz (1988, 236),

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<sup>6</sup> *Kecapi* is explained in Stevens and Schmidgall-Tellings (2004:461) as "a boat-shaped, plucked zither of West Java."

<sup>7</sup> Incidentally, Acep Zamzam Noor (2014:391) notes that in 1964 Taufiq Ismail, together with Ali Audah and Goenawan Mohamad, translated Muhammad Iqbal's 1930 *The reconstruction of religious thought in Islam* into Indonesian, which is an influential work of modern Islamic thought.

<sup>8</sup> For an overview of the Islamic discourse on modern Indonesian literature, see Kratz (1986:60-93). This debate still continues, as shown e.g. in the collection of essays by Irawan MN (2013).

however, it was not his earliest published poem, because it first appeared in the Jakarta-based magazine *Gema Islam* (Echo of Islam) in 1963. It is rather simple, if not to say sentimental, adopting the thankful, pious tone of a teenager at the threshold of adulthood (Ismail 2014a, 2-3):

<i>Ibuku karena engkau merahimiku</i>	Mother, because you bore me in your womb
<i>Merendalah tenteram karena besarlah anakmu</i>	Crochet your lace in peace for now your child has grown
<i>Ayahku karena engkau menatahku Berlegalah di kursi angguk; laki-laki anakmu</i>	Father, because you shaped me Relax in the rocking chair; your child is a man
<i>Tuhanku karena aku karat di kakiMu</i>	Oh Lord, because I am like mere rust at Your feet
<i>Beri mereka kesejukan dalam dan biru.</i>	Give them inner peace and coolness in hues of blue.

This kind of “confessional poem” may surprise the average Western reader who has grown accustomed to the idea that rebellion against one’s parents is the accepted norm. In fact, the dominant pedagogical view in the West that adolescents do not want to be like their parents is regarded as perfectly normal and even necessary in the coming of age process. In this respect, it is a telling fact that in modern English literature Philip Larkin’s poem “This Be the Verse”, with its notorious, provocative opening line “They fuck you up, your mum and dad”, belongs to his best known and most frequently quoted poems. Larkin (1922-1985) was a confirmed atheist and a relentlessly downbeat poet who once exclaimed: “Religious feelin [*sic*] be damned”, and whose last lines of “This Be the Verse” contained the advice: “Get out as early as you can, / And don’t have any kids yourself.”<sup>9</sup> It is hard to think of a more startling contrast with Taufiq Ismail’s calm and peaceful celebration of a time-honoured, God-fearing upbringing.

But even if the narrative content of “Prayer in a Tune” is strictly traditional, we see the youthful poet experimenting with stereotypical figures of speech. Intriguingly, Larkin’s opening has a double meaning, “that parents psychologically damage their offspring and that they copulate their children into existence, both of which are totally explicit”

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<sup>9</sup> The scathing remark on religion was made in a 1960 letter, see Burnett (2012:370). For the text of the poem *This be the Verse*, see Burnett (2012:88).

(Osborne 2008, 126). Taufiq Ismail, too, uses the device of paronomasia, exploiting the multiple meanings of words, but unlike Larkin who used “puns as verbal nitroglycerine” (Osborne 2008, 126) as a deconstructive technique, Taufiq Ismail employs word play to infuse even greater lyrical intensity into his poem. For example, in the first line he makes use of the possibilities offered by the homonym *rahim*, which may derive from (1) Arabic *rahim* (womb) or from (2) Arabic *rahim* (mercy, merciful). Naturally, a mother bears her child in her womb (*rahim*<sup>1</sup>), but the Malay verb *merahimi*, which is based upon *rahim*, is most uncommon for conveying “to bear in the womb”. In fact, the dictionaries only explain this verb under *rahim*<sup>2</sup> as “to have mercy on, take pity on” (see e.g. Stevens and Schmidgall-Tellings 2004, 797; Sugono 2008, 1133).<sup>10</sup> Choosing the verb *merahimi* enables the poet to subtly allude to *rahim*<sup>2</sup>, which not only strengthens the image of maternal tenderness but also immediately evokes the *basmala*, i.e. the invocation *bismillah al-rahman al-rahim* (In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful), which opens the Qur’an and which should be recited at the beginning of every (important) act.

The traditional ideal image of Minangkabau women finds expression by the title of *bundo kanduang* (mother of the womb, one’s own mother), who is equated with the central pillar of the traditional house (Van Reenen 1996, 2-3). But whereas the maternal womb bears the lyrical I of the poem enabling the start of his life, it is the father who has “shaped” him. Once more, Taufiq Ismail deliberately employs a verb (*menatah*) that expresses multiple meanings, conjuring up images and connections. Its base can be *tatah*<sup>1</sup> (chisel), hence the verbal meaning “to carve, chisel, sculpt”, and it is along this line that Sweeney achieved his translation. However, one could also think of *tatah*<sup>2</sup> (inlay, inlaid work), whose literal meaning “to inlay, set (jewels) into a surface” might poetically suggest the sexual act of impregnation. And then there is *tatah*<sup>3</sup> (tottering, unsteady on one’s feet, wobbly), with the verb *menatah*, meaning “to lead a child who is learning to walk” (Stevens and Schmidgall-Tellings 2004, 1003; Sugono 2008, 1410).

As Sweeney noted in his unpublished draft introduction: “The very title tells us much of the future of his poetry, for over the next half century he will offer many prayers in the form of poems. And his *puisi lagu* (poetry of song, or poetry of tunes) will fill a volume and provide the

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<sup>10</sup>However, on an Internet search, I came across an Indonesian blog by the Minangkabau student Septri Lediana, with the motto “Merahimi imajinasi, apresasi dan opini dengan rasa. Melahirkannya dalam bentuk kata-kata” (<http://lediana.wordpress.com/author/lediana/>, last visited 27 May 2012).



lyrics for a host of hugely popular songs.”<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Sweeney observed that “[i]t is worth noting that this first poem is devoted to Taufiq’s parents. This is a concern—may one still speak of a theme?—that occupies the poet’s attention 00 times in his poetry. Apart from his own mother, the poet celebrates mothers in general. ‘Heaven is under the sole of a mother’s foot’, goes the Minang customary saying.”<sup>12</sup> However, as Sweeney also rightly remarked, “When Taufiq’s poetry is translated into English it is confronted by English poetry. That is, it is judged by established tastes in poetry. Poems on mothers will sound alarm bells. Sickly sweet and sentimental.” The latter risk seems to truly ring, I think, in the lines of “Ibunda Kita Surga Kita” (Our Mother is Our Heaven, 1985, Ismail 2008, 53), which in my view is a typical tearjerker, while “Berilah Kado bagi Ibunda” (Give a Gift to Mother, 2006, Ismail 2014c, 1246-7) reads like an average Mother’s Day poem. However, there is no accounting for taste: as Taufiq Ismail points out in a footnote to “Our Mother is Our Heaven”, this song elicited profound emotional responses from an Indonesian expat audience when it was sung by Sam Bimbo in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in December 1985. “Never before”, Taufiq Ismail (2008, 53) remembers, “have I seen an audience shedding so many tears”.

In his earliest poems Taufiq Ismail showed a certain predilection for themes related to simple village life and nature, which for centuries have been a staple of Malay literature and provide a well-stocked inventory of clichés and stereotypes for any aspiring wordsmith. Let us look at the way the budding poet handles this inherited material in *Kemarau di “Desa Bangkirai”* (Drought in Bangkirai Village), which was published in July 1955 and which opens with an evocation of a nightly scenery in a Minangkabau village located in the vicinity of Padang Panjang (Ismail 2014a, 8-9):

*Seekor anjing melolong larut di  
lereng bukit bertubir  
Bulan merah di sungai bulat  
mengapung. Hangus dan pijar*

A dog howls late at night on the  
slope of the ravined hill  
A red moon floats on the river  
round and full. Burnt and glowing  
hot

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<sup>11</sup>Amin Sweeney, who translated the complete work of Taufiq Ismail into English, had also prepared notes for the introduction, but they remained unfinished due to his death in 2010. I am grateful to his widow, Sastri Sunarti Sweeney, who allowed me to use Sweeney’s unpublished observations.

<sup>12</sup>This Minangkabau saying is indeed very well known and is attributed to a saying (*hadīth*) of the Prophet Muhammad: “Paradise is located beneath the soles of the feet of the mother” (Van Reenen 1996, 5).

*Kurus lembah kuning patah daun  
tebu didukung punggung gunung*

*Melantun bayang tetes pancuran:  
tubuh jerami merapuh*

Gaunt valley yellowed sere  
sugarcane broken borne by  
mountain back  
Shadows bouncing wellsprings  
dripping: rice stalks fragile

This opening passage begins with what appears to be a naturalistic description, but its language is studiously literary. For example, in the first line the phrase, *bukit bertubir* seems to have been chosen on account of the euphonious sound effect with the *u-i* vowel sequence. As *tubir* denotes “ravine, abyss”, it seems that *bukit* should be interpreted as “mountain” rather than “hill,” but I have to admit that I am not familiar with the local geography. In the second line, the moon (*bulan*) is described as “round” (*bulat*), a pun that plays on the fact that the difference in Malay is merely one grapheme. This full moon is red, which is a bad omen, portending death; its redness symbolises the burning heat that has become almost intolerable for the village, yielding a poor harvest. The valley is said to be *kurus*, of which the core sense is “thin, slim, meagre”, but the subsense is “arid, barren, dry, infertile, unfruitful (of soil)” (Stevens and Schmidgall-Tellings 2004, 540). The third line is full of assonance, e.g. *kurus lembah | kuning patah* and ends with the *u-ung* sequence (*didukung punggung gunung*) three times. Furthermore, lines three and four display a definitive poetic structure, constantly making use of inverted constructions.

This is “old-fashioned, highly wrought stuff, making use of a deliberately high-romantic tone” (Skelton 1971, 57), but in contrast to average Malay pastoral poems, which use high-sounding literary language in order to describe an idyllic place, Taufiq Ismail adopts this “beautiful” register to depict a dystopia. The subsequent lines, though still literary, are less baroque, and draw us into the small suffering community (Ismail 2014a, 8-9):

*Malam Ramadan dinginnya  
menusuk ke hulu tubuh  
Kemarin tengah hari udara meleleh  
di Padang Panjang  
Kerbau si Sati, kambing coklat  
mengah-ngah  
Kilangan berputar deriknya ngilu  
tebu begitu kurus-kurus*

A Ramadan night, the cold pierces  
to the very marrow  
Yesterday, midday the air melted in  
Padang Panjang  
Sati’s buffalo, brown goats all  
panting  
The press rotates, its creaking truly  
grates, the sugar cane’s so thin

The poem succeeds at creating the mounting anxiety within the tiny village (Ismail 2014a, 8-9):

*Di ladang padi sekeping bumi  
kering makin retak-meretak  
Di jantung penghuni rindu dan  
dahaga tetak-menetak*

In dry hill paddies, parched earth  
grows ever more fissured, cracked  
The hearts of the inhabitants with  
longing and thirst are wracked

Whereas the days are unbearably hot, the nights of Ramadan are “bone-chilling” (line 12). Normally these nights, when the fast has ended for the day, are joyful, but in this village the suffering is not eased for a single moment. The burning question for the villagers is: *Musim manis pabila tiba?* (When will the season of sweetness arrive?) (line 17). The phrase *musim manis* (sweet season) is not a fixed expression but particularly apt in this context. As in many languages, the word “sweet” denotes “pleasing” in general, but here it may also more specifically allude to the sugarcane (line 3). However, as we know that the drought takes place in the Muslim month of fasting, its much-wished-for end might be compared to the “Feast of Breaking the Fast” (Arabic: *‘Īd al-Fiṭr*; Malay: *Idulfitri*). Etymologically, Ramadan is derived from the root *r-m-d*, referring to the heat of the summer, and the drought, which is a prolonged period of absence (of rain), is not unlike the fast in Ramadan, which is marked by abstinence. In a later poem, “Malam Lebaran” (The Eve of ‘Idul Fitri, 2006, Ismail 2014c, 1240-3), we read: “For a month we have together felt the pangs of hunger / For a month we have together been parched by thirst.” Ramadan is considered one of the holiest months, and this may perhaps account for the rather ornate style of the opening lines that set the scene and mood. The festival, which ends the fast, is one of the greatest feasts in the Muslim calendar, “initiated by the sunset that follows the moment when religious leaders (*‘ulamā’*) first observe the crescent moon” (Martin 1995, 172). At the heart of the poem there is a tension between the harsh, difficult time of Ramadan and the hope for a brighter future associated with *‘Īd al-Fiṭr*. The poet uses the opposing images of the full and crescent moon to help realise this theme. Furthermore, *‘Īd al-Fiṭr* is “oriented on the family and the community” (Martin 1995, 172). At this festive occasion children receive gifts and sweets; coincidentally this festival is commonly known in Dutch as “sugar feast” (*suikerfeest*). The final lines of the poem are a literal outburst of jubilation as the rapturous inhabitants of the village roar (Ismail 2014a, 8-9):

*Musim hujan datang! Musim hujan  
datang!  
Hujan oooi, hujaaaaaan!  
Hujan oooi, hujaaa-aaa aa-aaan!*

The rainy season is here! The rainy  
season is here!  
Rain oooy, raaaiiin!  
Rain oooy, raaa-aaa aa-iiin!

While in many modern Indonesian poems, including Taufiq Ismail's later work, "rainfall is the natural accompaniment of melancholy" (Spurr 1988-9, 69), in this poem the monsoon shower is benign, and rainwater produces fertility.

The reason why I have dwelt at some length on "Prayer in a Tune" and "Drought in Bangkirai Village" is because these juvenilia show that Taufiq Ismail displayed a remarkable talent and mastery of the craft at a very young age. Very early he found a personal style, though opinions may differ with regard to what his first "perfect" poem is—"perfect" in the sense of Helen Vendler (2003:2), meaning that it manifests "a coherent and well-managed idiosyncratic style voiced in memorable lines".

### The message of Islam

In the introduction to her account of *Coming of Age as a Poet*, Helen Vendler states that she does not pay much attention to a poet's finding a theme, not because she thinks that themes are unimportant but because she emphasises poetical techniques used in establishing style, whereas in her opinion "themes change over a poet's lifetime" (Vendler 2003, 8). However, as we have seen (above), right from the start, Taufiq Ismail found a very central theme—"the abstraction, or concept, or message, that will press voice into impassioned speech" (Vendler 2003, 8)—something that would accompany him throughout his life, viz. Islam, the message of the Prophet Muhammad. An early example is *Muhammad Menjelang Baytil-Maqdis* (Muhammad visits Baitul-Maqdis, Ismail 2014a, 46-7), first published in April 1960, but repeatedly reissued (cf. Rosidi 1988:56):

*Langit yang melengkungkan dada,  
biru hitam*

*Muka tengadah denyut darah  
tertahan*

*- Kutoreh dadamu al-Amin,  
jantung baiduri*

*- Kubuka langitKu bagimu,  
mata hujan dan salju*

*Di tangannya waktu meleleh*

*Lumat gurun dan lembah. Berlalu*

*Gerimis cahaya melinangi bumi*

*Lekah dada dan langit baginya.  
Selalu.*

A sky that curves the chest, dark  
indigo

Face turned upwards, the  
throbbing of blood controlled

- I score your chest, Truthful  
One, precious in heart

- I open to you My sky,  
source of rain and snow

In his hands time melts away  
Pulverized are hills and valleys.  
Passing on

A drizzle of light casts a glow  
upon the earth

Split open are chest and sky for  
him. Always.

*Baitul-Maqdis*, literally “House of the Holy”, refers to the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem or, by extension, to the place where it is situated, i.e. Jerusalem, the third holiest city in Islam, after Mecca and Medina, since it is the site from where the Prophet Muhammad made his ascension (*Mi‘rāj*) through the Seven Heavens after the Night Journey (*Isrā’*) from Mecca to Jerusalem. This poem refers to a famous miraculous sign of Muhammad’s calling, viz. the opening of his breast to remove from it the black spot of sin. In the earliest accounts of the Prophet’s life, we already find two stories of Muhammad’s chest being split open: one when he was still a small child and the other one when he was an adult, just prior to the Night Journey. The ritual of cleansing the Prophet’s heart has been studied extensively, and scholarly readers will be familiar with associations to shamanic soul flight, but Taufiq Ismail’s lyrical account sets its own accents.<sup>13</sup>

The poem may be viewed as an example of what Robert Skelton (1971, 31) called “the Contrast Plot”, when a poet gives his poem “a progression and meaningful shape” by presenting two opposing views of an event. Taufiq Ismail contrasts the opening of Muhammad’s breast with God’s opening of the sky. We encounter here, once again (cf. the poem “Drought in Bangkirai Village” above), the use of water imagery that can be found in different Islamic poetries of the world (cf. Ranne 2010). In the Qur’an, water and purification are closely connected; Sura 8:11 states that God “sent down water from the sky to cleanse you, to remove Satan’s pollution from you to make your hearts strong and your feet firm” (Abdel Haleem 2005, 111). The poem recounts that in this unique mystical moment of close proximity between God and His messenger, heaven and earth were intimately brought together. The Prophet is depicted as the “Truthful One, precious in heart”, for whom God in return opens His sky. However, this happening is not just a momentary event, this wonderful relationship will last forever—“always” is the significant last word of this poem.

Although the world of Islam may now have shifted “from the realm of musty archives and academic conferences to the evening news” (Lewis 2012, 251), I fear that the religious and cultural meanings of Taufiq Ismail’s work may easily escape the notice of a global audience, simply due to ignorance of the Indonesian context. Here we touch upon a very basic problem involving the translation and interpretation of literary texts rooted in a specific culture and period of time. Marshall Clark, who prepared a translation of poems by the contemporary Indonesian Islamic

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<sup>13</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the Islamic discourse on the Night Journey and the Ascension, see Buckley (2012).

poet Binhad Nurrohmat (b. 1976, inland Lampung, South Sumatra) and was hence also confronted with the difficulty of presenting a bilingual edition to an international public, argues that “we must be extremely mindful of the cultural phenomena underpinning the manner in which the poetry was originally composed, produced, and interpreted” (Clark 2009:1). However, in the same breath he states that “[i]ronically, despite the recent trend towards reconnecting writers with their ethnic or cultural roots, our translations must also appeal to our new, global audience” (Clark 2009, 1).

Furthermore, an Indonesian audience still values (and even expects) didactic-moralistic literature, and I can very well imagine that a poem like “Nasihat-nasihat Kecil Orang Tua pada Anaknya Berangkat Dewasa” (Titbits of Advice from a Parent to His/Her Child Approaching Adulthood, April 1965) will strike an appreciative chord among Indonesian readers (Ismail 2014a, 152-3):

<i>Jika adalah yang harus kaulakukan</i>	If there is something you should do
<i>Ialah menyampaikan Kebenaran</i>	It is delivering The Truth
<i>Jika adalah yang tidak bisa dijual-belikan</i>	If there is something that cannot be bought and sold
<i>Ialah yang bernama keyakinan</i>	It is named Conviction
<i>Jika adalah yang harus kautumbangkan</i>	If there is something you must fell
<i>Ialah segala pohon-pohon kezaliman</i>	It is the trees of tyranny
<i>Jika adalah orang yang harus kauagungkan</i>	If there is one whom you must exalt
<i>Ialah hanya Rasul Tuhan</i>	It is the Messenger of God alone
<i>Jika adalah kesempatan memilih mati</i>	If there is a chance of choosing how to die
<i>Ialah syahid di jalan Ilahi.</i>	It is the holy death on the path of Allah.

Reading a moralising poem like this, I am immediately reminded of an observation the Malayist Cyril Skinner (1978, 473) once made about the trigger word *nasihat* or advice when writing about the 19<sup>th</sup>-century author Munshi Abdullah’s combination of “the worst features of the Islamic ‘khotbah’ and the Christian sermon, causing us to shift uneasily in our seat whenever the dreaded word ‘Nasihat’ looms up on the page.” The uneasiness among Anglophone readers is easily explicable if one is aware of the fact that in English the word “sermon” has a negative undertone, defined in the *Oxford Dictionary of English* as “a long or tedious piece of admonition or reproof” (Soanes and Stevenson 2006, 1613). The word

*nasihat* or “advice, counsel; moral; admonition, warning reprimand” (Stevens and Schmidgall-Tellings 2004, 657) makes a Western public fear for the worse to come. However, Muslims may retort with a saying of the Prophet Muhammad, who reportedly said: “Religion (*ad-dīn*) is advice (*naṣīha*).”

Although the advisory poem is deceptively simple and does not pose any linguistic difficulties, a proper translation of the final line must have caused Sweeney some trouble. Especially in the post-9/11 era, the final two lines could easily lead to a misapprehension of the poem’s intention. I assume that Sweeney has therefore deliberately opted for a judicious translation without bellicose expressions in order to avoid steering this poem too much in the direction of “jihad” with all its concomitant negative connotations in the West. Sweeney knew what he was doing. In his 1992 review article of *The Poems of Hamzah Fansuri*, edited by the Dutch scholars G.W.J. Drewes and L.F. Brakel, he had severely criticised their quoting Winstedt’s translation, “complete with exclamation marks”, of the lines *Hunuskan mata tunukan sarung, ithbātkan Allah nafikan patung* as “Burn the sheath and draw the blade! Be idols abandoned and Allah obeyed” (Sweeney 1992, 99; reprinted in Sweeney 2011a, 235). Sweeney pointed out that such a rendering merely perpetuated common negative Western stereotypes of Islam as “always spreading the word with the sword” (Sweeney 1992, 99; reprinted in Sweeney 2011a, 235). However, as Sweeney explained, the context of Hamzah Fansuri’s poem “demonstrates clearly that the couplet refers to the shedding of the outer self in the quest to achieve union with God” (Sweeney 1992, 99; reprinted in Sweeney 2011a, 236).

Sweeney concluded that the treatment by Drewes and Brakel was inadequate, “considering that the reader postulated by the editors is a novice in things Islamic” (Sweeney 1992, 99; reprinted in Sweeney 2011a, 236). But now he himself was confronted with a similar problem. Who would the non-Indonesian public of the present collection of poems by a contemporary Indonesian Islamic poet be in all likelihood? Rather than specialists in the study of Islam, they would probably also be “novices”, non-experts who might easily see their prejudices and worst fears confirmed. Yet there is no denying the fact that the last two lines address jihad: a Muslim who dies fighting “in the Path of God” (the Arabic phrase *fi sabīl Allāh*), i.e. for the sake of God, is a martyr (*shahīd*) and is assured of Paradise. The tricky word here (in the final line) is *syahid*, which has long since entered the English lexicon (spelled *shahid*), and is commonly associated in the Anglo-American world with terror and suicide attacks. However, the struggle on behalf of God cannot only be waged with the

sword but also by the tongue or pen. Sweeney's elegant translation makes this Islamic poem more easily accessible to non-Islamic Anglophone readers, without, however, betraying the poem's message.

Focusing upon the historical context of its genesis, it could be regarded as an example of Islamic political protest, directly inspired by the grim atmosphere of the mid-1960s. However, Ezra Pound famously described literature as "news that stays news", and the poem could also be read as the expression of a timeless admonition, handed down from generation to generation, underlining the central moral tenet in Islam, which is known as "Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong". This is not merely theoretical or hypothetical. During the student protests in 1998 Taufiq Ismail's poem "Seorang Tukang Rambutan pada Istrinya" (A Rambutan Hawker to His Wife, Ismail 2014a, 192-3) was photocopied and displayed in the Faculty of Letters of Universitas Indonesia in Jakarta (Kurnia JR 2014, 7). This poem contained "news that stays news", originally written in 1966 and belonging to what Jassin (1968) characterised as "demonstration poems" of the Generation of 1966. Agung Irawan MN (2013, 148), who is a younger Indonesian critic, born in 1979, is even "convinced that the poems on tyranny by Taufiq Ismail will always be of universal value".

Apart from some knowledge of Islam, at least some familiarity with modern Indonesian history may be helpful with interpreting certain allusions. For example, the poem "Elegi" (Elegy), written in 1965, at first seems to focus upon a theme from the earliest period of Islam (Ismail 2014a, 160-1):<sup>14</sup>

<i>Telah terbunuh tiga</i>	Three have been killed
<i>Dari empat</i>	Out of four
<i>Khalifah</i>	Caliphs
<i>Telah terbelah</i>	The Community of Islam
<i>Ummat</i>	Has been split
<i>Dalam firqah-firqah</i>	Into factions
<i>Di tengah rumah</i>	Within the household
<i>Sengketa</i>	Conflict
<i>Menetes duka</i>	Dripping sorrow
<i>Menetes darah</i>	Dripping blood
<i>Angin panas</i>	Scorching wind
<i>Awan merah</i>	Red clouds
<i>Ya Rasulullah!</i>	Oh Rasulullah!

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<sup>14</sup> However, Kratz (1988, 236) mentions the literary magazine *Horison* 9, 3 (1968), p. 273 as its first publication.



Its interpretation seems clear enough: Elegy is “a formal poem of mourning for the dead”, often used in modern literature as “an occasion for meditation on other serious matters” (Spurr 2006, 375).<sup>15</sup> The poem mourns the first four “Rightly Guided Caliphs” (*al-Khulāfa’ al-Rāshidūn*) who led the community in its early period after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Only Abu Bakr, who took over the rule of the community as the first *khalīfa* or caliph in the year 632, died a natural death in old age. The split in the community, of course, refers to the schism between Sunni Islam and the Shi‘a, or “party” of Ali.

According to Ajip Rosidi (1988, 57), however, the elegy is not merely about the distant past but also about the “here and now”. The poem, in his view, urges the Islamic community to be united in the face of atheism, and he interprets the lines “Scorching wind / Red clouds” as allusions to the danger of the PKI or Communist Party of Indonesia. This interpretation is perfectly valid and makes good sense, but the political suggestions are barely recognisable. The poem requires a knowledge of three facts: first, background information about its time of creation; second, familiarity with the colour red as associated with communism; and third, and perhaps most importantly, awareness that Taufiq Ismail has a well-deserved reputation as a “red-baiter”.

### Light verse, heavy punches

Arguably, Taufiq Ismail’s lasting masterpiece is the oft-cited “Kembalikan Indonesia Padaku” (Give Indonesia Back to Me, 1971, Ismail 2014a, 306-9) which, due to its length, will only be quoted in translation here:

(to *Kang Ilen Surianegara*)

The future of Indonesia is two hundred million gaping mouths

The future of Indonesia is light bulbs of 15 watts, half of them  
coloured white and half of them black, which light up by  
turns

The future of Indonesia is a ping pong match continuing day and  
night with a ball shaped like a goose egg

The future of Indonesia is the island of Java sinking under the  
weight of its hundred million inhabitants

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<sup>15</sup> I am aware that Arabic poets, esp. women, excelled in the elegy genre, *rithā’*, but Taufiq Ismail is following Western models here.

*Give  
Indonesia  
Back to me*

The future of Indonesia is a million people playing ping pong day  
and night with a goose egg as the ball under the light of a  
15 watt lamp

The future of Indonesia is the island of Java slowly sinking under  
the weight of its burden then to have geese swimming  
about above it

The future of Indonesia is two hundred million gaping mouths,  
and in those mouths are light bulbs of 15 watts, half of  
them coloured white and half of them black, and they come  
on by turns

The future of Indonesia is white geese swimming around while  
playing ping pong above the island of Java which has sunk  
taking with it a hundred million 15 watt light bulbs to the  
sea bed.

*Give  
Indonesia  
Back to me*

The future of Indonesia is a ping pong match continuing day and  
night with a ball shaped like a goose egg

The future of Indonesia is the island of Java sinking under the  
weight of its hundred million inhabitants

The future of Indonesia is light bulbs of 15 watts, half of them  
coloured white and half of them black, which light up by  
turns

*Give  
Indonesia  
Back to me*

Paris, 1971

This poem, which has a declamatory style about it, has been a great success for Taufiq Ismail at poetry readings both at home and abroad (Teeuw 1979b, 134). As Harry Aveling (cited in Teeuw 1979b, 134) comments:

The poem becomes more and more convoluted, and finally climaxes in swimming white geese playing pingpong over the island of Java as it sinks to the bottom of the ocean carrying 15 watt light bulbs inside two [read: one] hundred million open mouths. The poem attacks hunger, overpopulation and the poor living conditions caused by bureaucratic inefficiency. This last feature is superbly symbolized by the deficiencies of the Indonesian electricity supply. It affirms a demand for popular control in political and economic fields.

The Indonesian literary critic Herman J. Waluyo (2002, 112) also sees a political message in this poem, interpreting the “me” in the refrain “Give Indonesia back to me” as a representation of the Indonesian people, while mentioning in the same breath that the Indonesian people are increasing in numbers on a daily basis, so its leaders should govern the country in a responsible way. Waluyo reckons this poem among the “demonstration poetry”, for which Taufiq Ismail is well known, and states that the poet is urging Indonesian leaders to give Indonesia back to the people and to put the interests of the people first. Therefore, the leaders should not “play ping pong with a goose egg”, as ruling the country should be a serious affair.

But is not Waluyo having his cake, and eating it, too? In his interpretation, the people of Indonesia are active subject and passive object at the same time. However, a critical political message is, in my opinion, not really that straightforward. At the time of writing, prior to 1971, many students, Islamic politicians, and anti-communist intellectuals were still backing Soeharto’s New Order, full of hope for a new future. I am therefore rather hard pressed to identify in this poem signs of weakened support for the new leaders who had only recently been applauded for completely destroying the organised left in the aftermath of the 1965 coup. Rather than placing the burden of blame for Indonesia’s vicissitudes on its leaders, the central opposition in this poem is between Java and the so-called Outer Islands. Furthermore, the future of Indonesia is described as being threatened by the poverty and overpopulation of Java that is ultimately dragging the whole of Indonesia down to the bottom of the ocean. Playing devil’s advocate, one might even argue that the poem supports New Order policies; in fact, at the time Soeharto, on the advice of his technocrats, sought to remedy unchecked population growth by promoting a policy of family planning (cf. Elson 2001, 173).

On the other hand, however, Taufiq Ismail has time and again sharply criticised the circumstance that the Indonesian people and its official representatives have become strangers to one another. For example, the poem “Kembalikan Merah Putih pada Si Toni” (Return the Red and White

to Our Toni, 1979, Ismail 2014a, 364-7) with its final lines “Return / the Red and White / to me” (*Kembalikan / Merah-Putih / padaku*) is in this respect highly reminiscent of “Give Indonesia Back to Me”. In one of his short stories, “Garong Garong” (translated as “Stop Thief!” by Roskies 1997, 84-103), published in 1968, we also find his concern for the “destiny of Indonesia and all its hope of a better future” (Roskies 1997, 201). This short story satirises constituted authority “with its waywardness and arbitrary character” (Roskies 1997, 202), but the Indonesian society at large is not free of complicity either. A children’s choir sings the national anthem, which begins as follows:<sup>16</sup>

<i>Indonesia tanahnya garong</i>	Indonesia, Land of Robbers
<i>Tanah tumpahnya garong</i>	My True Homeland stiff with thieves
<i>Di sanalah aku menggarong</i>	In the future, I shall plunder
<i>Jadi garong ibuku</i>	While my <i>ibu</i> , she shall seize—

Taufiq Ismail’s anger and frustration about his fatherland is perhaps most poignantly voiced in the title of his 1998 collection of poems, *Malu (Aku) Jadi Orang Indonesia* (Ashamed (I Am) to Be an Indonesian).

In his draft introduction, Sweeney succinctly noted about “Give Indonesia Back to Me”: “Wonderful incongruence. It so well reflects the feeling of so many Indonesians about the insane situation that is Indonesia.” Yet there is something paradoxical about this poem: While the overall “meaning” may perhaps be clear to most readers, the imagery is not easy to grasp. Taufiq Ismail uses grotesque phrases that seem to make no sense at all. This poem derives its excitement from free association, leading to surprising leaps, from light bulbs to goose eggs to ping pong balls.<sup>17</sup> When the future of Indonesia is described as “white geese swimming around while playing ping pong above the island of Java, which has sunk, taking with it a hundred million 15 watt light bulbs to the sea bed”, this vision is patently absurd, but on the other hand exactly “the insane situation that is Indonesia”. The poet’s use of farcical imagery is absolutely central in his making of the poem; the images are ludicrous and have to become increasingly more so, to convey the absurd nature of Indonesia’s problems that are becoming ever more critical.

According to Teeuw (1979b, 134), this poem is remarkable “for its experimentation with free forms, its playfulness, and its satirical tone, which make its ‘message’ all the more convincing”, calling Taufiq Ismail

<sup>16</sup> The Indonesian text is taken from Hoerip (1986, 69); the translation is by Roskies (1997, 97).

<sup>17</sup> On free-association in the creation of poetry, see Skelton (1971, 3-5).

“probably the most humorous of Indonesia’s leading contemporary poets”. But is “Give Indonesia Back to Me” really funny? In this case there is a “darker side to this, the side that involves ‘funny’ in the sense of ‘funny peculiar’” (Bennett and Royle 2009, 96). The plot resembles a hallucinatory fantasy, a terrifying nightmare, and yet tragedy is not the opposite of comedy, “but the same, viewed from a different perspective” (Bennett and Royle 2009, 102). Furthermore, “all of this is in a sense only happening *in language*, as something being narrated” (Bennett and Royle 2009, 102). Funny is here definitively ambiguous, meaning both “amusing” and “strange” (Bennett and Royle 2009, 96). A threnody for vanishing Indonesia is nothing to make us laugh out loud, but what creates laughter in “Give Indonesia Back to Me” is hyperbole and visual comedy.

About another funny poem, the rather long narrative “Balada Teknologi dan Siman” (A Ballad of Technology and Siman, 1977, Ismail 2014a, 352-63), Sweeney remarked: “Comedy of the absurd. Incongruous, but not just to get a laugh. Humorous yet poignant.” The moral didacticism that permeates all of Taufiq Ismail’s poetry makes me doubt Teeuw’s assessment that in Taufiq Ismail’s lighter forms of poetry “everything is not taken so seriously” (Teeuw 1979b, 135). To substantiate his claim, Teeuw (1979b, 134) points to the ironical rephrasing and reinterpretation of traditional proverbs in “Petatah-petitih Baru” (Neoproverbs, 1972, Ismail 2014a, 332-5). This is a technique Taufiq Ismail sometimes revisits still today, e.g. in his satirical comment on the dire economic situation of 1998 (*Gurindam satu setengah* or Gurindam one and a half, Ismail 2014c, 779):

<i>Harimau mati meninggalkan belang</i>	A tiger dies leaving his stripes
<i>Pedagang mati meninggalkan hutang</i>	A trader dies leaving debts

<i>Rakyat mati tinggal belulang.</i>	The little people die, their hide is left.
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This is a variant of the saying *harimau mati meninggalkan belang, gajah mati meninggalkan gading, manusia mati meninggalkan nama* (when a tiger dies, it leaves its stripes, when an elephant dies, it leaves its tusks, when a man dies, he leaves his reputation) (Stevens and Schmidgall-Tellings 2004, 353). The original proverb expresses the idea of immortality as succinctly summed up in Horace’s Latin phrase *non omnis moriar* (I shall not wholly die), but in Taufiq Ismail’s rewording nothing much will survive of human endeavours, and in this sense he also alludes to another proverb, viz. *seperti harimau menunjukkan belangnya* (as the tiger shows its stripes), equivalent to “revealing one’s true character” (cf.

Brown 1951, 180). The formulation of such pithy wisdoms may be humorous, but the underlying seriousness lends heaviness to what is commonly described as “light verse”. This kind of word games, in which humorous effects are achieved by semantic shifting that results in the words or phrases getting new meanings, is very popular in Indonesia and is known as *plesetan* (plays on words, from Javanese *plèsèdan*, to slip and slide for fun; punning, engaging in wordplay, see Robson and Wibisono 2002, 582). Such punning mostly belongs to fun in what Mikhail Bakhtin terms “a ritualised rebellion against authority in all forms” (Bayat 2010, 153).<sup>18</sup>

In other so-called playful poems we are also able to discern edgy undertones. For example, the poem “Takut ’66, Takut ’98” (Fear ’66, Fear ’98, 1998, Ismail 2014b, 730) belongs to the formula tales of the folktale, viz. Aarne-Thompson tale-type 2320, also known as the “Clock tale”, i.e. “a form of endless tale that always returns clockwise to the point of departure” (Dégh 1972, 72):

<i>Mahasiswa takut pada dosen</i>	Students afraid of the lecturer
<i>Dosen takut pada dekan</i>	Lecturer afraid of the dean
<i>Dekan takut pada rektor</i>	Dean afraid of the rector
<i>Rektor takut pada menteri</i>	Rector afraid of the minister
<i>Menteri takut pada presiden</i>	Minister afraid of the president
<i>Presiden takut pada mahasiswa.</i>	President afraid of the students.

It is the suspense that makes this poem funny; “the joke relies on a certain surprise—the surprise of the punchline—and a certain recognition: you know that a punchline is going to come and what sort of punchline it will be, but you cannot tell exactly what it will be” (Bennett and Royle 2009, 98).

The conclusion seems to be warranted that Taufiq Ismail’s “light verse” can be considered to be rooted in the wider framework of “Islamic humour in Indonesia”, in which “Islamic religious messages are conveyed through humorous means of narration” (Graf 2010, 36). An example of the rather popular genre of Sufi humour, mostly originating from Persia, Turkey, and the Arab world (Graf 2010, 36-7), is the narrative poem “Kisah Saudagar dan Burung Beo” (The Tale of a Merchant and a Myna, 1977, Ismail 2014a, 346-9), which is a retelling of an ancient joke about a parrot feigning death, most famously known through the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Persian poet and mystic Rūmī (see Perry 2003, 69-71; Kemmerer 2012, 265-6). The only humorous anecdotes that do not have a deeper meaning seem to be “Bayi Ajaib” (The Wonder Baby, 2005, Ismail 2014c, 1202-5)

<sup>18</sup>For a lucid discussion of *plesetan* and politics, see Labrousse (2002).

and “Atap Rumah yang Berderik-derak” (The House Roof That Went Crick-Crack, 2005, Ismail 2014c, 1200-1).

### The horizon of expectations

The bulky three-volume bilingual edition testifies to the prodigious output of Taufiq Ismail, and the great merit of this collection is to present his creative work to a global audience. In his draft introduction, Sweeney commented: “He writes so much. The ‘problem’? Where other people would give a speech, offer a tribute, in prose, Taufiq would accomplish such tasks with a poem.” But then, for Taufiq Ismail poetry is not just a pastime but a way of life. As Robin Skelton (1925-1997), a critic and himself a poet, once wrote: “The poet is one who thinks in poetry, and who, very often, cannot understand easily except in poetry” (Skelton 1971, 143-4). Sweeney, never known for mincing his words, wrote with remarkable candour that he was not always impressed with the results: “As he became more popular, he got more official requests. More of a smell of the laureate. Disaster.” Sweeney does not mention any concrete examples of the poems he deemed rather weak, although he notes an “uninspiring part” in the long poem *Buku* (Books, 2006, Ismail 2014c, 1262-71). For me, *pièces d’occasion* such as “Syair tentang Sebuah Pesantren Pertanian yang Berumur Empat Puluh, Tahun 2000” (A Poem about an Agricultural Pesantren Forty Years Old in 2000, Ismail 2014c, 924-5) come to mind, which in my opinion is a rather uninspired thank-you poem full of hackneyed phrases and platitudes. For example, the clichéd ebb and flow metaphor is used to denote the ups and downs of the past, while the perfunctory nautical comparison of the boarding school (*pesantren*) to a ship (*bahtera*), in order to describe its future course in terms of a naval enterprise, is also unoriginal and trite.

A specific case of occasional poetry is verse written to commemorate disaster. Particularly over the past few years Indonesia has experienced a disproportionate share of mishaps. As Taufiq Ismail phrases the general feelings in his country (“Kesabaran dalam Berdoa” or Patience in Prayer, 2007, Ismail 2014c, 1284-5):

*Bencana demi bencana  
Seperti tiada habisnya  
Di tanah air kita  
Terjadi merata  
Belum selesai sebuah musibah  
Datang lagi musibah berikutnya*

Disaster after disaster  
It all seems never ending  
In this motherland of ours  
All consuming, everywhere  
Before one disaster is over  
On its tail there’s yet another

<i>Bencana demi bencana</i>	Disaster after disaster
<i>Memaksa kita bertanya</i>	Forces us to ask
<i>Apa salah kita</i>	What wrong have we perpetrated
<i>Apa dosa kita</i>	What sin have we committed
<i>Mari kita merenung dengan jujur</i>	Come let us ponder in honest reflection
<i>Bersama menemukan jawabannya</i>	To find together an answer to this question
<i>Mari kita bersihkan hati kita</i>	Come let us cleanse our hearts
<i>Mari kita bersihkan hati kita</i>	Come let us cleanse our hearts
<i>Kejujuran antara sesama</i>	Mutual honesty
<i>Keikhlasan dalam bekerja</i>	Wholeheartedness in avocation
<i>Kesantunan sebagai bangsa</i>	Gentility as a nation
<i>Kesediaan memberi</i>	Readiness to give
<i>Kesediaan menerima</i>	Readiness to receive
<i>Kesabaran dalam berdoa</i>	Patience in prayer
<i>Kesabaran dalam berdoa.</i>	Patience in prayer.

Quite a few contemporary poems dwell on this theme, e.g. “Bencana” (Disasters, 2006, Ismail 2014c, 1244-5) or “Lumpur Menyembur di Sidoarjo, 2006” (Mud Spurts in Sidoarjo, 2006, Ismail 2014c, 1278-81). The great tsunami of 2004 was a disaster of the first magnitude in recent Indonesian history, and Taufiq Ismail has devoted many poems to this catastrophe. How does a poet embark upon the creation of such a work?<sup>19</sup> Contrary to popular belief, poetry is not just about pouring out one’s feelings. As the English author Martin Amis puts it: “When you’re told about the death of a friend you can burst into tears but you can’t burst into song” (cited in Singh 2012). The English wit, writer, and actor Stephen Fry, in his “how-to” guide to poetry, devoted a rather long, humorous chapter to the composition of a “disaster poem”, making it abundantly clear that all too easily the result may be “a disaster for a disaster” (Fry 2005, 162). Discussing long-forgotten examples from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Fry did not need to use tact and sensitivity, but when it comes to more recent cases it is much more difficult to delve into questions of aesthetics without appearing heartless or coldly cynical. Is there such a thing as “good disaster poetry” that could be judged as “enjoyable”?

Disaster poetry confronts the poet with poetic and moral dilemmas: which words and images should s/he choose to represent something deemed “unspeakable” and how should s/he comment upon it? Taufiq Ismail’s tsunami poetry can be regarded as much a solemn

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<sup>19</sup> For a fuller discussion of Indonesian Islamic tsunami poetry, see Wieringa (2010).



commemoration of a major tragic event as a personal contemplation of his religious convictions. As he insistently asks in “Membaca Tanda-Tanda” (Reading the Signs, 2004, Ismail 2014c, 1130-1):

مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا

*Apa gerangan yang Dikau  
kehendaki dari ini umpama?*

*Bilakah gerangan kami mampu  
membaca tanda-tanda?*

مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا

What might it be that You require  
from this example?

When might it be that we shall  
learn to read the signs?

The (untranslated) Arabic phrase is, of course, from God’s Word itself, viz. Sura 2:26, which reads: “What does God mean by such a comparison” (Abdel Haleem 2005, 6).

Sweeney made the astute remark that the poems were supposed “to fit in with what’s expected”. Obviously, the “horizon of expectations” (Hans-Robert Jauss’s so-called *Erwartungshorizont*) of Taufiq Ismail’s intended audience and a non-intended Western professor of literature is not identical. But then, “[i]t would be unfortunate”, as Sweeney wrote on another occasion, “if Indonesian and Malaysian authors were to write for a postulated audience of Western professors rather than for their own societies” (Sweeney 2011b, 603).

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