

No Woman is an Island: Reconceptualizing Feminine Identity in the
Literary Works of Ayu Utami

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Ayu Utami's contribution to gender discourse in contemporary Indonesian literature. Structuring my analysis of *Saman* (1998) and *Larung* (2001) around the theoretical framework expounded upon by Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act* (1981), I argue that it is the inability of Ayu's novels to fulfill the utopian project of female emancipation from patriarchal structures of containment that succeeds in highlighting emergent as well as persistent ideologies at play within contemporary Indonesian society as it struggles towards a more democratic representation of women. I integrate the socialist feminist discourse of Cora Kaplan as well as examine the ideological paradigm of Indonesian feminism as a means of de-centering Jameson's class-centric argument and highlighting changing constructs of feminine identity and sexuality in Indonesian literature. This thesis articulates the dominant, persistent and emergent ideologies that emerge as textual contradiction in the literary works of Ayu Utami.

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INTRODUCTION

The Controversial Novels of Ayu Utami As Social Phenomena

Saman, the first in a two part series of novels written by a young, relatively unknown female journalist named Ayu Utami has, since its publication in 1998, sold over 80,000 copies and is currently in its 23rd press run¹- numbers unprecedented in a country where only a small minority of readers are interested in what is considered to be “serious” literature and where even fewer can afford the luxury of buying a Rp25.000 novel. The novel’s initial popularity could, in part, be attributed to the controversy and debate it generated in Indonesia’s literary circles and in the mass media. Many established writers and critics praised the novel for its daring originality while others condemned it for its lascivious depictions of female sexuality. And then there were those who doubted such a novel could be written by a woman, voicing suspicions as to the authenticity of Ayu Utami as the novel’s true author.²

Saman emerged at an opportune moment in Indonesian history, just months before the fall of President Soeharto, at a time when the New Order regime was beginning to crumble under the pressures of economic, social and political unrest. State control

¹Carry Nadeak and Hendri Firzani. “Semua karena Saman” in *GATRA – EDISI KHUSUS* (April 2004): 79.

² There were a number of articles written in the mass media that played on the controversy surrounding Ayu Utami and the suggestion that she may in fact have been used as a pseudonym for one of her close male associates at Utan Kayu. While a number of critics defended Ayu, they also noted certain aspects of her first novel that sounded like she had been “coached” by other contemporary writers. Bersihar Lubis and Joko Syahban, for example, end their article “Ayu Tak Mampir di Perabumulih” in *Gatra* on a slightly suggestive note: “According to *Kompas* on April 5th, Ayu has never actually done any research in Perabumulih (or Sei Lapan). Yet she claims to tell the story in “the first person”- and the particulars of Sei Kumbang are put forth by her in a very descriptive way. She even confesses that she can’t write poetry, although the language of *Saman* is very poetic. She also can’t tell the difference between *Dasamuka* and *Rahwana*, even though that very wayang metaphor is in *Saman*. Unfortunately, both Goenawan and Ayu have refused to be interviewed by *Gatra*.” (Translated from the Indonesian). See: Bersihar Lubis and Joko Syahban. “Ayu Tak Mampir di Perabumulih” in *Gatra* (April 18, 1998): 95.

over the thoughts and actions of its citizens was beginning to wane and while it was still dangerous to criticize directly the governmental regime, voices of opposition were growing stronger. The novel has been heralded as one of the first to use a directly critical voice to speak out against the New Order and Ayu Utami is seen as one of the first novelists to write without subtle innuendo and self-censorship about the traumas suffered by the Indonesian people at the hands of a corrupt and greedy governmental regime.³

But the initial frenzy surrounding the publication of *Saman* had less to do with the novel's direct confrontation of the New Order's legacy of control through violence and intimidation and more to do with its racy portrayal of the contemporary sex lives of Jakarta's young female urbanites. The novel revolves around a group of four female friends whose opinions of tradition, involvement in covert political opposition and celebration of a more liberated female sexuality undermine classical Indonesian representations of women in fiction.⁴ Controversial for its sexually explicit language and its sexually and socially liberated female characters, *Saman* was the first novel written by a woman to portray female characters that appear to transgress the boundaries of permissible female behavior in Indonesian society with few or no social repercussions.

Yet, *Saman* is more than just a sensationalized tale of sexual exploits and subversive political acts. Even before its official release and the media frenzy that ensued, the novel was unanimously selected as recipient of the Jakarta Arts Council Award (1998). According to Supardi Djoko Damono, a literary critic and one of the jurors of the competition: "The work of Ayu Utami exhibits a compositional technique that-

³ Using a comparative argument, I elaborate on this notion that Ayu Utami is one of the first writers in Indonesia to directly criticize the New Order regime in Chapter Three

⁴ In Indonesia's literary tradition, female characters are almost always defined in relation to their role as mother and wife within society.

long as I can remember- has yet to be tried by other writers in Indonesia, maybe even in other countries... on top of that is her unique way of blending narrative, essay and poetry... and all that accomplished in a language that astonished me and made me ask 'From whom could *this child* possibly have studied Indonesian?'"⁵ The comment seems to intimate that even the judges were curious to know who was really behind the eloquent and poetic writing of *Saman*.

So how is it possible that a young, relatively unknown female journalist could write such a complex and poetic piece of literature as *Saman*? Some columnists and critics suggested that it was more likely the work of Goenawan Mohamad or Nirwan Dewanto. Both men were closely connected to Ayu through their involvement in Utan Kayu, a non-state funded cultural organization of which Ayu was an active member. For these critics, whether consciously or unconsciously, it was hard to conceive of *Saman* as the creative product of a young woman's mind.

What emerged from these assertions over the novel's authenticity was representative of a larger debate of gender politics in Indonesian literature. For Ayu as well as many supporters who spoke out on her behalf, the desire to attribute the success of *Saman* to a male literary figure stems not only from within the male-dominated literary world but also from the patriarchal necessity in Javanese society to continually seek out the man who is ultimately responsible for any woman's success.⁶

⁵ XJB "'Saman', Generasi Baru Sastra Indonesia." *Kompas* 33 (5 April 1998): No page number available. "*Karya Ayu Utami memamerkan teknik komposisi yang- sepanjang pengetahuan saya- belum pernah dicoba pengarang lain di Indonesia, bahkan mungkin di negeri lain... ditambah lagi keunikannya sebagai perpaduan antara narasi, esei dan puisi... dan semua itu disampaikan dalam bahasa yang membuat saya terheran-heran dan bertanya bertanya "Kepada siapa gerangan "anak ini" belajar bahasa Indonesia?"*"

⁶ The "man behind the woman" concept was highlighted in various conversations with Melani Budianta as well as Intan Paramitha and Ayu Utami.

Regardless of these unfounded suspicions, Ayu's overwhelming success has led to new trends in women's writing in Indonesia. By the time *Larung*, the much-anticipated continuation of *Saman*, was released in November of 2001, the political, social and literary climate in Indonesia had changed considerably. The publication of *Saman* had been the catalyst for a relatively new phenomenon in Indonesian women's literature being referred to as '*Sastra Wangi*' (Fragrant Literature). And while many writers and critics contest the categorization of contemporary women's writing as an attempt to segregate women's fiction from the more 'serious', and therefore defined as masculine, realm of Indonesian literature⁷ it is undeniable that the success of Ayu Utami has inspired young women to write novels dealing with contemporary issues of identity and sexuality in what some would call more realistic and definitely more controversial terms. These women, mainly from Indonesia's urban centers are broaching issues of sexuality, gender, tradition, globalization and politics in new and often subversive ways not only in their own literature but also within their own choice of lifestyle. It is this relationship between transitions in women's fiction and transitions in Indonesia's socio-cultural landscape that is of particular significance to this thesis.

The relationship between women's rights and patriarchal structures of Indonesian national/ cultural identity is a complicated one and women's roles within society are not as clearly defined as they appear to be in state and cultural ideology- in particular the role women are to play in a 'new' post- Soeharto Indonesia as it attempts to regain economic and political stability. Ayu and her novels *Saman* (1998) and *Larung* (2001) do not fit into the traditional and safe categories that define the idealized woman as mother and wife. Within her novels and her own life, the absence of marriage and motherhood as thematics suggests that there are alternative ways of defining women

⁷In conversation with Sitok Srengenge, Melani Budianta and Ayu Utami.

and cultural values within Indonesian society to those that have hitherto been highlighted in ideology and practice.

The female characters in Ayu's novels are, for the most part, young, economically independent, urban women concerned mainly with social justice, exploring their own freedom and searching for a more liberated sexuality than has traditionally been allowed them. For some women, these constructed characters may play out an appealing fantasy of living a more independent lifestyle while for others, these characters perhaps do not seem far removed from their own reality as young women living and working in Indonesia's urban centers today.

In the aftermath of the fall of Soeharto and his New Order regime, there have been a number of democratic reforms yet the push for democratization in Indonesia still continues to struggle against the threats of ethnic tension, religious conservatism and political instability. And, as the country is struggling to redefine itself, women's right to define their own space within this process remains in tension with the patriarchal structure of both the Indonesian state and civil society.

I am particularly interested in how cultural and artistic products address social and political realities in Indonesia. In postcolonial terms, culture and identity are seen in constant transition, constituted largely through images and text. At specific moments, these images can act as tools of empowerment. Ayu's novels represent a specific "cultural moment", one that signifies a moment of increased freedom of expression in Indonesia and one that also signifies the beginning of a new and lucrative trend in Indonesian literature. If fiction is considered an imaginative representation of reality and if we are to assume that within fiction the reader must find something that he/she can relate to, then the popularity of Ayu Utami's novels

and the public discourse they have generated suggests that her writings have relevance in contributing to the redefinition of women's roles within contemporary society.

Ayu Utami undertakes the liberating project of reconceptualizing gender ideologies within Indonesian literature. In *Saman* and *Larung*, she is attempting to undermine the patriarchal structures of social control that have perpetuated the marginalization of alternative notions of feminine identity. Yet, Ayu's strong female characters are vulnerable to other themes that surface within the novels and threaten to overpower the feminist elements within the texts.

For the purpose of this thesis, a close analysis of *Saman* and *Larung* using both Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act* (1981)⁸ and socialist feminist criticism will be supplemented by an in-depth understanding of literary representations of feminine identity and their historic interconnectedness to the social, political and economic structures that govern Indonesian society. This thesis will argue that it is the ultimate inability of Ayu Utami's novels to fulfill the utopian⁹ project of female emancipation from patriarchal structures of containment that succeeds in highlighting emergent as well as persistent ideologies at play within contemporary Indonesian society as it struggles towards a more democratic representation of women.

⁸ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981.

⁹I apply the term utopian in this instance to define Ayu's project of attempting to create a more egalitarian space for female subjectivity in contemporary Indonesian literature. In Jamesonian terms the concept of utopia is one that involves the ultimate dissolution of individual, social and class boundaries. Utopia, understood as a structural concept rather than a Humanist construction, can only be imagined in so far as the current political and social structure will allow.

Theoretical Framework:

Marxism, Postmodernism and Feminism

Underpinning my thesis statement is an analytic framework specifically rooted in Fredric Jameson's notion of the Three Horizons- a method of analyzing literature through the restructuration of text at three separate levels which I will discuss at further length below. A supplement to this Marxian framework is Steven Best and Douglas Kellner's critique of Jameson and their call "For a Multidimensional and Multiperspectival Critical Theory" in their text *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (1991).¹⁰ As a means of de-centering Jameson's problematic privileging of class over all other forms of social determination, I will highlight the importance of gender in my analysis of Ayu's work by incorporating a number of feminist theoretical texts- in particular Cora Kaplan's work on subjectivity, class and sexuality in *Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism* (1986)-¹¹ that focus on textual analysis as well as works that deal specifically with gender ideologies in the Developing World and more notably within Indonesia.

I have chosen Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* for a number of reasons in light of poststructuralist and postmodern renunciation of Marxism as a totalizing theoretical framework. I would still argue for the centrality of a socially critical discourse that focuses on the interconnectedness of the political, economic and social domains. According to Best and Kellner, while postmodernism has effectively challenged many aspects of classic Marxism, it has neglected to construct an adequate analysis of capitalism, economy and the state "which arguably remain the most important

¹⁰ Steven Best and Douglas Kellner. *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1991.

¹¹ Cora Kaplan. "Pandora's Box: Subjectivity, Class and Sexuality in Social Feminist Criticism" in *Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism* (London: Verso Press, 1986): 147-176

structural determinants of current society.”¹² For the purpose of this thesis, Jameson offers an effective structural framework through which to analyze the literary texts of Ayu Utami in relation to Indonesia’s transforming cultural, economic, social and political discourses.

I will use Fredric Jameson to talk about the shift in Indonesia’s social and economic domains that led to the emergence of such novels as Ayu Utami’s. According to *The Political Unconscious*, there is a direct connection between capital development and aesthetic form wherein each stage of capitalism has a corresponding cultural dominant. Hence “realism, modernism and postmodernism are the cultural levels of market capitalism, monopoly capitalism, and multinational capitalism.”¹³ Jameson absorbs the fragmented discourses of postmodernism into a unified Marxian framework by addressing postmodernism not “as a style, but rather as a cultural dominant: a conception which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate features.”¹⁴ At the cultural level of multinational capitalism, realism, modernism and postmodernism coexist in the disjunctive texts of *Saman* and *Larung* and their relational forms allow for the exploration of the dominant, residual and emergent ideologies that are implicit in each of these cultural dominants.

Based on my assertion that Ayu is undertaking the utopian project of writing female characters that attempt to subvert many of the patriarchal norms existent in Indonesian society, Jameson’s notion of unified heterogeneity is an important one. Such a framework for analysis will allow me to look at how Ayu Utami, on the one

¹²Best and Kellner: 262

¹³ Best and Kellner: 185

¹⁴ Fredric Jameson. Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991): 56

hand, attempts this project of unification and how, on the other hand, her work embodies the struggle between dominant, persistent and emergent ideologies.

In this sense, Jameson is useful in reading Ayu Utami's texts against the idealism with which she writes her female characters. Jameson determines that contradiction is central to Marxist cultural analysis and this contradiction emerges when the master narrative- that is Desire itself for social totality and unity- struggles against repressive reality.¹⁵ The aim of Jameson's interpretation is "the explosion of the seemingly unified text into a host of contradictory and clashing elements"¹⁶ that determine our ultimate inability to attain the utopian universal/ collective in light of Late Capitalism or History. Literature itself, in Jameson's view, is understood as a strategy of containment, a method of denying intolerable contradictions that lie beneath the surface in order to create a formal unity.

Application of the Three Horizons

Jameson divides the perspectives involved in textual interpretation into three horizons, each one involving the restructuring of the text in various ways. In the first horizon, the *Political*, the text is grasped as a "symbolic act" (meaning a tangible representation of something that cannot be fully captured through language) wherein the "individual narrative, formal structure is to be grasped as the imaginary resolution of a real contradiction."¹⁷ This first horizon finds narrative, formal structure and the chronological political/ social context connected in complicated ways.

At the second horizon, the *Social*, the text is organized according to the larger category of class (relations of hegemonic class to the oppositional class which seeks to

¹⁵ Jameson. The Political Unconscious: 67

¹⁶ *ibid*: 56

¹⁷ Jameson. The Political Unconscious: 77

undermine their legitimation- in traditional Marxist terminology the “proletariat”) wherein two opposing discourses clash within the general unity of shared code.¹⁸

At the third horizon, the *Historical*, dominant codes such as those perpetuated by state apparatus, educational systems, government programs, culture, literature, even globalization, are identified and categorized as related to modes of production. It is at this level that the persistence of archaic structures such as patriarchy are revealed beneath later modes of production through an inability to reconcile or unify the text in a utopian framework that Jameson considers to be the unattainable return to a unified and collective existence.

I will use Jameson’s first horizon, the *Political Horizon*, to talk about the relationship between general social and political developments that have led to the production of overtly critical texts like the novels of Ayu Utami. At the *Political Horizon*, the textual analysis will be read as an intervention in Indonesia’s social and political discursive. The analysis will examine the novels within their historical context, placing them in relation to the psychology of sexuality in late New Order Indonesia, burgeoning political dissidence, traditional belief systems and images of women in an attempt to expose underlying social contradictions.

I will use Jameson’s second horizon, the *Social Horizon*, to talk about antagonistic class discourses. The contradictions that emerge in *Saman* and *Larung* in the first horizon will be reinterpreted at the *Social* level as one utterance in a dialogue between antagonistic class discourses (eg.- in the traditional Marxist sense the antagonism would exist between the dominant and labouring classes). In Ayu’s novels, the “*ideologeme*” that can be imagined as the minimal unit/ foundation

¹⁸ *ibid.* 84

around which a discourse of shared unity is organized would be one wherein the “narratives of individual freedom” struggle against “the strengths of tradition and authority.” As such, the text as *ideologeme* would thematize the rise of the New Order middle-class in antagonistic dialogue with the old colonial/ feudal elite as it was transformed by Indonesian independence and the politics of the New Order state. This struggle between individual freedom and the authoritarian state places writers such as Ayu Utami, those connected to the “*Sastra Wangi*” movement and middle-class intellectual dissidents in opposition to the state itself and the more conservative forces at work within it.

At the *Historical Horizon*, broader structures emerge and the text is grasped as part of the History of Ideology of Form. It is at this stage that persistent and emergent ideologies are tied to more formal elements of the novel. For example, in Ayu’s novels there are three literary frameworks at play- “*Sastra Pop*” (popular literature), traditional mythology and the realist psychological novel. “*Sastra Pop*” as a product of the developing market economy is a literary genre closely tied to the dominant ideology of the New Order. Traditional mythology is a formal structure that is ideologically rooted in modes of production associated with both the older feudal/ colonial social structures and Indonesia’s more modern political regimes. The realist psychological text is connected to emergent ideologies and Indonesia’s changing urban middle-class. In Utami’s novels, popular literature, mythology and the realist psychological novel coexist as distinct sign systems that converge and diverge, work together and against one another, and at times threaten to undermine the utopian project of her writings.

Marxism versus Gender: The Project of De-centering Class

There are a number of elements within Jameson's expanded Marxian framework that are conducive to a feminist analysis of text- namely his analysis of persistent and dominant ideologies such as patriarchy which underlie specific modes of production- and his expanded framework acknowledges that class is further complicated by previously marginalized categories such as gender, race and ethnicity. Jameson realizes the significant contribution of these standpoints and advocates, for example, a radical feminism in *The Political Unconscious*. He writes: "to annul the patriarchal is the most radical political act in-so-far as it includes and subsumes more partial demands, such as liberation from the commodity form- it is thus consistent with an expanded Marxian framework, for which the transformation of our own dominant mode of production must be accompanied and completed by an equally radical restructuration of all the more archaic modes of production with which it structurally co-exists."¹⁹ Yet, the focus of Jameson's literary analysis continually privileges class struggle over all other categories of social analysis.

Best and Kellner criticize Jameson's theories for the tensions they fail to differentiate between traditional class politics and a more pluralistic alliance politics suggesting that he could "resolve this tension by taking the neo-Marxist stance that while a radical politics requires struggles on numerous fronts, the class struggle retains ultimate importance."²⁰ In examining Ayu Utami's writings as radical political act, in-so-far-as they attempt the restructuration of patriarchal forms that have persisted as ideological processes tied in various ways to dominant modes of production like capitalism, a greater emphasis on gender and a more pluralistic alliance politics than Jameson articulates is necessary.

¹⁹ Jameson. *The Political Unconscious*: 100.

²⁰ Best and Kellner. *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*: 191

Feminist Approaches to Literary Criticism

The focus of this thesis is to examine to what extent Ayu Utami is capable of reconceptualizing Indonesian feminine identity within her novels. While Jameson is adequate for tying the texts of Ayu Utami to their social, historical and economic position within middle-class Indonesia, his work is too reductive in its analysis of gender. In Judith Lowder Newton's analysis of three feminist interpretations of text in her article "History as Usual? Feminism and the New Historicism," she illuminates the way in which feminist texts separate themselves from other forms of analysis by "breaking with the ideological division of the world into "public" and "private", man and woman, class and gender...determining that public and private are not separate but intersecting. In this sense, a significant contribution of feminist criticism is the de-centering of class and its binary emphasis on the public and private spheres by forcing it to share its place with gender at the "heart of middle-class culture."²¹

Nancy Holmstrom in her introduction to *The Socialist Feminist Project: A Contemporary Reader in Theory and Politics* (2002) contends with the complicated relationship between Marxism and Socialist Feminism. She determines that socialist feminists always view class as gendered but that "there remains a lack of clarity, and disagreement as to exactly how different forms of oppression are related."²² She emphasizes that the intent of most socialist feminist critiques is to expose the interconnectedness between class and gender in its multifarious forms through a close reading of text rather than through the application of a concrete theoretical

²¹ Judith Lowder Newton "History as Usual: Feminism and the New Historicism" in H. Aram Veerer, ed. *The New Historicism* (Great Britain: Routledge Press, 1989): 156

²² Nancy Holmstrom. "Introduction" in Nancy Holmstrom ed. *The Socialist Feminist Project: A Contemporary Reader in Theory and Politics*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002): 6

framework.²³ While Holmstrom does not advocate a theoretical framework, a close reading of *Saman* and *Larung* from a feminist or gender perspective will mesh well with Jameson's method by exposing the tensions at each of the proposed Three Horizons.

I will draw on Cora Kaplan's article "Pandora's Box: Subjectivity, Class and Sexuality in Social Feminist Criticism" to understand Ayu Utami's work within the context of her own gendered social and class position and how this, in many respects, could inform the development of female characters within her texts. As a further supplement to Jameson's argument put forth in *The Political Unconscious*, Kaplan emphasizes a connectedness between class, race and gender in relation to the psychic reading of text. She makes a case for the analysis of sexuality (erotic desires, practices and identities) in terms of class, race and gender and determines that gender itself cannot be isolated from other forms of social determination.²⁴ Kaplan's article will be useful in determining how sexuality, which plays a central role in Ayu Utami's novels, is representative of specific class/ gender mentalities.

Kaplan also forms an important relationship between feminist criticism and psychoanalysis that helps in deconstruction/ reconstruction of feminine identity in the novels *Saman* and *Larung*. She writes:

The ways in which class is lived by men and women, like the ways in which sexual difference is lived, are only partly open to voluntary, self-conscious political negotiation. The unconscious processes that construct subjective identity are also the structures through which

²³ Holmstrom: 6

²⁴ Kaplan: 149

class is lived and understood, through which political subjection and rebellion are organized.²⁵

Kaplan, like Jameson, is working from the Althusserian notion that the “appropriate object of study emerges only when the appearance of formal unification is unmasked as a failure or ideological mirage.”²⁶ This formal unification is our perceived relationship to reality and the appropriate object of study emerges when this, our perceived relationship to reality is exposed by the actual reality of that very relationship. In a sense it is the gap between how people perceive themselves as living within the constantly shifting and blurred boundaries of a specific class and how they are, in actuality, living. In relation to the writings of Ayu Utami what is important to look at is the perceived reality or goal of these texts and how these goals succeed or fail, whether consciously or unconsciously, to transgress the more dominant forms of social determination they struggle against.

Gendered Interjections into the Social and Historical

As a means of determining and tracing the presence of persistent, dominant and emergent ideologies in Ayu Utami’s novels, it is necessary to briefly review earlier works by feminist scholars concerning general patterns of gender construction in postcolonial societies and more specifically those that deal with gender within an Indonesian context. Social, political and economic transitions during the colonial, nationalist and New Order periods have been written about extensively in both Western and Indonesian social theory. Central to the study of contemporary women’s fiction in Indonesia and of particular importance for the purpose of this thesis, is to look at the way in which nationalist ideology constructs and deploys

²⁵ *ibid*: 150

²⁶ Jameson. The Political Unconscious: 56

particular representations of gender and how these constructed identities in turn inform women's writing and women's representation in literature.

Chapter One

The Feminine in Indonesia: Constructing Women's Identity in the Political, Social and Literary Realm

To say that female characters in Indonesian fiction are restrained by their biological functions as mothers and wives would appear to be a sweeping generalization of modern Indonesian literature. Yet, women surrendering to their 'natural' fate as mothers and wives is a central theme and a common conclusion in nearly all 20th century Indonesian novels that in one way or another involve a central female character. To understand the lack of strong and autonomous female figures in Indonesian literature it is necessary to examine larger issues of gender at work within the Indonesian political and social realm. How over the course of centuries has this image of 'woman' as the subdued and loyal mother and wife become the dominant female construct in light of other more autonomous images of woman in tradition, reality and myth? In this chapter, I will define where these submissive and patriarchal archetypes of female characters emerge in relation to social, political and economic structures and how they have been perpetuated by such influences as colonialism, nationalism and state ideology.

Myth and the Roots of the Meta-Narrative

The idealized image of femininity was not always one of women's surrender and submission to their biological role as mother and wife. Javanese myths tied to early agrarian society fertility cults and later incorporated into Hindu and Buddhist belief systems celebrated the strength and fecundity of the female form. Such mythical figures as *Nyai Loro Kidul*, the reigning queen of the South Seas of Java and *Ken Dedes*, the semi-historical Queen of Singosari whose reproductive strength emanated from her groin as a ray of sensual light and whose political power was coveted by the

men who would seek to rule, are examples of alternative constructs of feminine identity rooted in these more ancient, sexually potent and powerful female archetypes.²⁷

According to Nancy K. Florida, early legends of *Nyai Loro Kidul*, Queen of the South Seas of Java, tell the tale of a girl child born to Prabu Sindhula, ruler of the West Javanese kingdom of Galuh in the 12th century. Through her chasteness and extreme asceticism she transcended into spirit-form and has since ruled over all other sea spirits in Java from her throne in the South Seas, at times enticing and wreaking havoc on sailors and swimmers alike.²⁸ The strength of *Nyai Loro Kidul* in this tale is not in her power as nurturing mother or devoted wife but in her power as temptress, ascetic and mystic.

As more structured political and economic systems began to take hold in the Indonesian archipelago, alternative versions of these powerful myths began to surface. For the Hindu kingdoms that vied for power in insular Southeast Asia (9th-14th century ce.), the Javanese courts, and particularly the newly burgeoning Islamic faith (14th century ce. in Java), such mythical figures as *Nyai Loro Kidul* posed a threat to the establishment of patriarchal authority. Although these myths did not necessarily “disappear” they were countered by other myths that negatively portrayed the autonomous female figure as either something to be feared or as something to be contained.

²⁷ Barbara Hatley. “Nation, Tradition and Constructions of the Feminine in Modern Indonesian Literature” in Schiller, Jim and Barbara Martin Schiller eds., *Imagining Indonesia* (Athens Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1997): 100.

²⁸ Nancy K. Florida. “The Bodhaya Katawang: A Translation of the Song of Kangjeng Ratu Kidul” in *52 Indonesia* (April 1992): 21-32.

In one such example of differing interpretations of myth, the tale of *Nyai Loro Kidul* transformed into a 15th century tale of marriage between the spirit world and the powerful rulers of the Mataram kingdom. The partnership between the rulers and *Nyai Loro Kidul* was maintained through ritual gift-giving in return for her supernatural powers that protected the kingdom and reinforced the ruler's authenticity and supremacy. Such a union ensured that the powers of *Nyai Loro Kidul* would be harnessed within the more 'natural' boundaries of wifely devotion. To this day, the line of descent from this marriage between *Loro Kidul* and the Mataram rulers can be traced to the contemporary sultanates of Yogyakarta and Solo.

Sylvia Tiwon's article "Models and Maniacs: Articulating the Feminine in Indonesia" identifies instances within Old Javanese and Malay texts that highlight the danger of the autonomous female in society.²⁹ In these tales the woman is seen not as an individual but as part of a faceless crowd of women. The woman is no longer tied to her individual identity as defined by her rank within the family or by her fixed role as mother and wife but rather with no ties to husband or children, she is seen as having no rank and no social status.³⁰

Based on the belief that women are incapable of controlling themselves, each story focuses on the frenzied response of women to handsome male heroes in a crowd situation where the boundaries of containment are transgressed. They are running amok, flinging their suckling infants to the roadside, acting in explicitly sexual ways, tearing at their clothes, clutching their naked breasts, completely forgetting their modesty, their morality and their duties.³¹ The scenes are clearly meant to emphasize

²⁹ Sylvia Tiwon. "Models and Maniacs: Articulating the Feminine In Indonesia" in Laurie J. Sears ed., Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996)

³⁰ Tiwon: 65

³¹ *ibid*: 62

the patriarchal notion that the uncontained woman somehow poses a threat to society. They attempt to validate, through story and myth, the model image of the submissive and contained woman by tales that portray the nature of the uncontained female as potentially destructive and maniacal.³²

Traditionally gender separates the roles of men and women within Javanese elite society. The woman, as self-sacrificing mother and nurturer, inhabits the inner, private sphere of the home. By contrast, the male inhabits the outer, public sphere and distances himself from the domesticity of the home. Containment of the woman in the private sphere is based on the inherent 'nature' of woman as nurturer and the belief that women are more emotional creatures and lack restraint (i.e.- need to be controlled) while men are considered the woman's more rational and self-restrained opposite. Where this public/private division appears to breakdown is in the area of finances. Javanese women claim a certain amount of "autonomy" when it comes to finances and often work outside the home in order to contribute to the financial well being of the household.³³ For the Javanese, especially those of the *priyayi* class (Javanese elites), gender divisions are part of their worldview and adherence to the duties these divisions imposed upon both sexes leads to a sense of moral fulfillment.³⁴

In comparative anthropological studies of traditional East Asian and Southeast Asian culture, a commonly identified difference between the two has been the position of

³² *ibid.*: 60-62 . The passages Tiwon uses are from the Old Javanese *Kakawin Bharata Yuddha*

³³ The notion that women's autonomy is somehow related to their economic freedom is contested by Madelon Djajadiningrat-Niewenhuis. See following discussion.

³⁴ Niels Mulder. *Inside Indonesian Society: Cultural Change in Java*. (Amsterdam: The Pepin Press, 1996). It is relevant to note that this division of duty is not necessarily a fixed relationship; rather it is a dominant ideological structure. For example, amongst the peasant classes, the role of women and men involved in agrarian lifestyles would not have been divided so clearly along the lines of private and public spheres whereas amongst the increasingly Dutch influenced *priyayi* class of the 19th and early 20th century, the woman may inhabit the private realm entirely and have very little input into financial affairs or decision-making processes both inside or outside of the home.

women within society. Typically, Southeast Asian women are said to enjoy a greater degree of autonomy and hold a more valued position within their family and the surrounding community. Early scholars trumpeted the seemingly egalitarian nature of Javanese society, wherein the women maintained control of finances both inside and outside the home and issues of inheritance and property rights were, more often than not, divided equally amongst men and women. Yet according to Suzanne A. Brenner, “one of the very characteristics that appears to give women so much autonomy and power in the household- their economic prowess- is also one of the main factors detracting from their prestige.”³⁵

The notion of equal but gender specific roles between men and women is largely a misconception on the part of early Western scholarship. Borrowing from Benedict Anderson’s study of Javanese concepts of power, Madelon Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis illustrates how the Western perception of power “with its heterogeneous sources such as wealth, status and profession” are not applicable in the Javanese sense.³⁶ Power, for the Javanese *priyayi*, comes through asceticism and the distancing of oneself from such individual concerns as wealth acquisition and personal desire. Djajadiningrat- Nieuwenhuis writes that, “According to the Javanese idea of the woman’s role, she is more bound to social and material context and consequently less suited for asceticism, which after all means distancing one-self from one’s social environment. Only in very exceptional cases can women muster sufficient *kekuwatan batin* (mental strength) to acquire Power.”³⁷

³⁵ Suzanne A. Brenner, “Why Women Rule the Roost: Rethinking Javanese Ideologies of Gender and Self-Control” in Aihwa Ong and Michael G. Peletz eds. *Bewitching Women, Pious Men: Gender and Body Politics in Southeast Asia*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995): 26

³⁶ Madelon Djajadiningrat- Nieuwenhuis “Ibuisim and Priyayization: Path to Power?” in Elsbeth Locher-Scholten and Anke Niehof, eds. *Indonesian Women in Focus: Past and Present Notions* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1992): 46

³⁷ Ibid: 47

While there is very little historical evidence of *priyayi* social practices previous to the 17th century, it must be noted that the division of social roles based on gender in *priyayi* society has likely been impacted by the spread of Islam throughout the region and by the Western and Christian values of the Dutch colonial system. These influences may account, in part, for the shift away from the more complimentary gender divisions present in pre-Islamic and pre-colonial Java. In the Islamic belief system, *Kodrat Allah* is the natural order of things as determined by God. Women's *Kodrat* (nature), which in Indonesia is referred to as *Kodrat Wanita*, states that women should be meek, passive and obedient to the male members of their family, sexually shy and modest as well as self-sacrificing and nurturing. According to *Kodrat*, the natural drive in women is to mother and they should find their main vocation within marriage and motherhood. The general move towards a less egalitarian position for women within Javanese *priyayi* culture could be due, in part, to the syncretism between Islamic and *priyayi* belief systems: both adhering in different ways to the concept of gender specific roles for men and women within society.

If the very foundation of a society were based on gender division and the containment of women within the rigid boundaries of these categories, then strong and autonomous (meaning women not tied to men as mothers and wives) or sexually provocative female figures would in fact pose a great threat to social order. Wieringa, in discussing women in Islam, concedes that women's disobedience is much feared in the Muslim world and that:

Rigid sex-role stereotyping is so fundamental to hierarchical order, that when women challenge the status quo, they threaten not only the

patriarchal power (their relation to the husband) but the very existence of the entire system (and more specifically God's claim to obedience).³⁸

Containment of women within the established societal structure necessitated the construction of what Tiwon has defined as the model/maniac scenario³⁹- a culturally and socially reiterated binary that highlights the model woman (i.e.- the submissive mother and wife) by placing her in stark opposition to the maniacal woman (i.e.- the dangerous, sexualized and uncontrolled woman in the crowd). This binary is one that has been manipulated by both the state and civil society and it continues to persist in various forms to present day.

Myth Management: Women and the Nation

Elsbeth Locher-Scholten writes that "feminism in colonized countries developed under the aegis of internal forces and external influences: the prevailing indigenous cultures and nationalism on the one hand and colonial dominance and Western feminism on the other hand."⁴⁰ By the end of the 19th century, Dutch policy in the colonies was undergoing a phase of liberalization. There was a growing need for educated Indonesians to work as civil servants within the Dutch bureaucracy. At the same time, the Dutch were acutely aware of the nationalist sentiments beginning to develop amongst the local educated elite. The incorporation of educated Indonesians of the *priyayi* class into the governmental system was the beginning of what Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis calls *priyayization*- the marriage of Javanese concepts of power through social positioning with the Western concept of power through class

³⁸ Secondary Quote- Mernissi in Saskia Wieringa "Sexual Metaphors in the Change From Soekarno's Old Order to Soeharto's New Order in Indonesia" (1998) *RIMA* 32: 150

³⁹ Tiwon uses these terms to identify the two archetypical female characters that stand in binary opposition

⁴⁰ Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, "Morals, Harmony, and National Identity: 'Companionate Feminism' in Colonial Indonesia in the 1930's" in vol.14 No.4 *Journal of Women's History* 2003 (Indiana University Press): 38

status.⁴¹ While inevitably the Dutch program of integration did little to assuage nationalist intentions, the institutionalization of *priyayi* ideologies has greatly influenced Indonesia's political and social development as a nation.

Most scholarship thus far has identified the major influence of Dutch colonialism on gender relations as being its emphasis on the nuclear family as society's basic unit and the ideal image of the Indonesian woman as *huisvrouw* (housewife). As part of its educational reform, the colonial government established schools and programs to better educate young Indonesian girls in the domestic arts. The implications of this educational system are said to have had a weakening affect on indigenous female autonomy especially through the encouraged separation of the extended family support system.⁴² Both the Guided Democracy and the New Order would later appropriate, to varying extents, the compromising notion of the nuclear family and the Dutch housewife as ideal in their attempts to maintain social stability.

Women's education and the reform of marriage laws were the earliest initiatives undertaken by Indonesian feminists. Of these early feminists, the contributions of Raden Adjeng Kartini (1879-1904) are perhaps the most significant. The daughter of the Regent of Jepara, Kartini wrote extensively on the inequalities faced by upper-class Javanese women. She promoted women's education and advocated the reform of polygamous marriage in Java. While these initiatives were taken up by later women's organizations and would eventually have widespread effects on female emancipation in Indonesia, at the time such issues as female education and elimination of polygamy

⁴¹ Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis: 49

⁴² Barbara Hatley. "Postcoloniality and the Feminine in Modern Indonesian Literature" in Keith Foulcher and Tony Day eds. Clearing a Space: Postcolonial Readings of Modern Indonesian Literature (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002): 147

(as an elite form of marriage that required a certain amount of wealth) were largely the concerns of middle and upper class women.⁴³

Organized women's groups began to emerge in the 1910's and 1920's.⁴⁴ According to Locher-Scholten, the feminist movement fully developed in the 1930's as "it broadened its program to include larger economic and social issues: campaigns of literacy for women, salaries, health, marriage, and divorce. By then most women's organizations, even the independent ones, had close ties with nationalist parties or shared their ideals."⁴⁵ Many of these early Indonesian feminists and nationalists advocated a more conservative feminism than that of the Dutch feminists of the time, citing the tactics of Western feminism as morally unsuitable for their own project of female emancipation.

What the early nationalists saw as a potential threat to social order was the modern images of the "emancipated Western woman" that were emerging in the later years of Dutch colonial rule. There was the fear that the influence of Western modernization would undermine the nationalist program by leading Indonesian women astray from their duties as mother of the nation and purveyors of cultural tradition. At the same time, forward looking, Western educated Indonesian women were thought to be better suited for supporting the progressive and modern Indonesian man. Both Indonesian women and men were expected to maneuver effectively between the Western and Eastern worlds. These expectations were conflicting but for women the underlying message was essentially the same; Indonesian women were meant to play a supportive and subordinate role to men in the building of national identity. As active participants in the movement, the concern for national unity took priority over

⁴³ Elsbeth Locher-Scholten: 41

⁴⁴ *ibid*: 40

⁴⁵ *ibid*: 42

the progress of women's rights and in the name of the nationalist cause women's organizations were content to define themselves within the nationalist program as mothers and wives.

In general, the development of nationalist movements led to broader social reforms within newly emerging nations. While female emancipation and equality of citizenship are tied to these social reforms, the relationship between women's rights and nationalism is a complicated one. Deniz Kandiyoti describes the janus faced quality of nationalism as it "presents itself both as a modern project that melts and transforms traditional attachments in favor of new identities and as a reaffirmation of authentic cultural values culled from the depths of a presumed communal past."⁴⁶ Women are invited into civil society as active members of the nationalist cause but remain restricted by the boundaries of acceptable female conduct. In most cases, the larger issues of nation building subsume gender interests articulated in the early stages of the nationalist struggle. Woman, who is already defined by her biological function as mother and wife, becomes the "mother" of the nation. She symbolizes the traditional, "authentic" cultural values of the communal past while men in turn present the modern and forward-looking aspect of the nationalist project.⁴⁷ For women's groups, the nationalist program was in many ways dangerous in that it validated pre-existing patriarchal systems through the institutionalization of gender divisions.

Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis defines this newly constructed role for women within the nationalist project as *Ibuism*: "The ideology, which sanctions any action provided

⁴⁶ Deniz Kandiyoti, "Identity and its Discontent: Women and the Nation" in *Millenium Journal of International Studies* (1991): 378.

⁴⁷ Anne McClintock, "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family" in *Feminist Review* (Summer 1993): 66

it is taken as a mother who is looking after her family, a group, a class, a company or the state, without demanding power or prestige in return.”⁴⁸ A similar notion is evident in the examination of the relationships that existed between men and women of the nationalist movement. Locher-Scholten identifies the dominant depiction of the idealized woman during the nationalist period as being one wherein a woman’s equality lies in her ability to reconcile emancipation with many non-Western attitudes towards femininity that were based upon the idealized Javanese *priyayi* characteristics of refined, subservient behavior. Identified by Locher-Scholten as “companionate feminism” this form of feminism was meant to promote a progressive yet harmonious relationship between husbands and wives based on Western concepts of equality and Javanese *priyayi* rules of acceptable social conduct.⁴⁹

Saraswati Sunindyo’s article on gender and the armed forces highlights the contradictory image of Indonesian women during the nationalist struggle and the early years of independence in a variety of propaganda campaigns. The nation, in times of crisis is more often than not referred to in gendered terms as the sexualized and suffering woman (The Motherland/ *Ibu Pertiwi* in Indonesian). Sunindyo suggests that “sexual, familial and domestic iconography are often employed and manipulated in the construction of nationalism”⁵⁰ and that while the role of women in the pre-independence struggle was emphasized as an egalitarian effort, the reality was rather different.

Sunindyo uses the song “Jasmine Flower at the Front Line” to illustrate the contradictory image of the woman as combatant, the military as masculinized

⁴⁸ Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis: 44

⁴⁹ Elsbeth Locher-Scholten: 51

⁵⁰ Saraswati Sunindyo “When the Earth is Female and the Nation is Mother” in *Feminist Review* (Spring 1998): 3

protector and the nation as mother. In the song the female freedom fighter is called *Srikandi* in reference to the great warrior wife of Arjuna popularized in the *Mahabharata* epic.⁵¹ She is described as the “eternal female defender,” the “beautiful woman defender,” but at the end of the song is urged to “return to [her] mother’s embrace.”⁵² Sunindyo notes that the “song is powerful and romantic, and its message is clear: *go back to the domestic sphere*.”⁵³ In nationalist discourse, mythical figures such as the powerful *Srikandi* are often manipulated to conform to the patriarchal demands of nationalism.

Trends in Indonesian Women’s Literature of the 1930’s

C.W. Watson gives a general overview of the various genres of early Indo- Malay literature in his article “Some Preliminary Remarks on the Antecedents of Modern Indonesian Literature.”⁵⁴ Of particular significance to the examination of literary constructs of feminine identity are the *nyai* (concubine) stories popularized during the 19th and early 20th century. According to Watson, the earlier *nyai* tales (the most famous of which is *Nyai Dasima* of 1897) favor the relationship between the *nyai* and her *Tuan* (master) and vilify the characters within the stories that attempt to come between them.⁵⁵ The class, gender and ethnicity of the author can in part explain this idyllic depiction of concubinage in some of the popular literature of this time period.

⁵¹ The Srikandi image appears over and over again in association with strong female characters. Another of Arjuna’s wives, Sumbadra symbolizes the ideal wife- shy and obedient. Later on the Srikandi image would take on a more negative context in light of the events of 1965 and the involvement of *Gerwani* (the Indonesian women’s group closely associated with the communist PKI). The Sumbadra/Srikandi binary becomes another example of what Sylvia Tiwon terms the model/maniac scenario.

⁵² Sunindyo: 6

⁵³ Sunindyo: 6

⁵⁴ CW Watson “Some Preliminary Remarks on the Antecedents of Modern Indonesian Literature” in vol.127 *Budragen Tot De Taal-, Land-, En Volkenkunde* (1971): 417-433.

⁵⁵ Watson: 428

Many of the writers were of Dutch or Indonesian-Dutch origin writing in Malay for small publishing houses or for serial publication in newspapers.⁵⁶

By the 20th century, this depiction of the *nyai* as having an enviable position within Indonesian society is more often than not countered by negative depictions of the *nyai/tuan* relationship.⁵⁷ Most *nyai* stories emphasize the sad and pitiful marginalization of the indigenous woman who takes up sexual relations with a European man. Typically, the *nyai* figure becomes symbolic of the violation of the native at the hands of the colonial powers. These tales are largely understood in postcolonial terms as a commentary on the racial inequality between the colonials and the colonizer. Due to changing European perceptions of concubinage and growing anti-colonial sentiment, the popular *nyai* stories all but disappeared with the establishment of the government run publishing house, *Balai Pustaka* in 1908.⁵⁸

Pujangga Baru (New Writer), the first cultural periodical to be published entirely in the Indonesian language, was established in 1933. At the time, there were few options available for having work published other than through *Balai Pustaka*, the highly selective, government run publishing house.⁵⁹ Heather Sutherland notes the significant aspirations of *Pujangga Baru* found in the words written by Professor RA

⁵⁶ *ibid*: 419- Watson discusses the various media through which these early works would have been published as well as who the authors of the time were.

⁵⁷ W.V. Sykorsky argues against Watson's selectiveness in choosing *nyai* stories that do not necessarily depict the genre in a truthful light as one that is "characterized by a clear anti-colonial and social tone" in "Some Additional Remarks on the Antecedents of Modern Indonesian Literature" in vol.136 *Budragen Tot De Taal-, Land-, En Volkenkunde* (1980): 504.

⁵⁸ *Balai Pustaka* (1908) was part of the educational reform initiative set up by the Dutch government. Published literature was to be used for educational purposes within the new school system. As well it was meant to provide greater access to acceptable literature for the Indonesian populace. The selective nature of the publishing house meant that literature counter to Dutch sentiment was rejected or heavily reworked.

⁵⁹ Heather Sutherland "Pujangga Baru: Aspects of Indonesian Intellectual Life in the 1930's" in vol.5-6 *Indonesia* (1968): 106-127.

Djajadiningrat in the preface to the periodical's first edition. He states that "every group must work for the progress of the Indonesian spirit (*semangat Indonesia*), and that literature and language could not be left out of this process of national development."⁶⁰ While the intentions of *Pujangga Baru* were nationalistic, they fell short of representing the cause of the common Indonesian. Rather the publication reflected a very small but significant sector of society- the Western-educated, Indonesian intelligentsia- whose main concerns revolved around reconciling the aspects of Westernization they continued to embrace with their growing nationalist spirit.

The debate between modernization and traditional culture was particularly evident in women's literature of the 1930's. The pressure for women to retain their more traditional roles contradicted the need and desire for women to modernize alongside their male counterparts. The dominant image of the modern Indonesian woman firmly rooted in tradition was one that in actuality was very difficult to reconcile. Women's novels of the 1930's explore the complex reality of this dominant and idealized construct of feminine identity that portrays women as bridging the past and the future without compromising the integrity of traditional Indonesian femininity.

In their study of women's writing of the 1930's, Barbara Hatley and Susan Blackburn identify magazine publications affiliated with women's organizations and novels in both the popular literature and serious literature genre as the two main avenues for women's writing at the time. Most authors of both articles and novels were from similar socio-economic classes, the majority of them working as schoolteachers or journalists and all of them being politically and socially active in women's organizations. With the low rate of literacy and education in Indonesia at the time, it

⁶⁰ Sutherland: 111-112.

is safe to say that these women were writing for a readership of women from similar socio-economic classes as their own.⁶¹

In her research, Barbara Hatley highlights the similarity between popular literature (those published in serials or in small pamphlet form) and *Balai Pustaka* literature (serious literature). According to Hatley there is little distinction to be made between the two:

Love and marriage are the predominant themes, set in the context of changing values and norms, and shaped significantly, through melodramatic twists of the plot, to the mysterious workings of fate. A key trope is that of marriage as a site of conflict between the individual wishes of youthful protagonists and the pressure of family and society. Such love relationships frequently fail, and the novels end with the deaths of one or both of the protagonists.⁶²

Hatley's analysis includes three well-known prewar novels: *Kalau Tak Untung* (1933) by Selasih, *Kehilangan Mestika* (1935) by Hamidah and Soewarsih Djojopoespito's *Manusia Bebas* (retranslated from Dutch *Buiten Het Gareel* [Out of Harness] in 1975). Comparatively speaking all three novels have an inward looking narrative that gives an autobiographical feel to the text; there is "considerable correspondence between the subject matter of these novels and the personal experience of their authors."⁶³ Soewarsih's novel is the only one of the three texts that strays from the conventions of the romance novel and presents itself in more realistic terms as a diary of sorts

⁶¹ Barbara Hatley and Susan Blackburn "Representations of Women's Roles in Household and Society in Indonesian Women's Writing of the 1930s." Koning, Nolten, Rodenburg and Saptari eds., Women and Households in Indonesia: Cultural Notions and Social Practices. (Richmond Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000) 45-67.

⁶² Hatley and Blackburn: 55.

⁶³ *ibid*: 58

confronting relevant issues faced by women at the time. It is by some considered to be the first realist Indonesian novel.⁶⁴

In each text, Hatley acknowledges a counter-discourse which “implicates though never explicitly identifies male weakness, selfishness and insensitivity. In much of women’s fiction, a more forthright or worldly-wise female companion of the pure, innocent female protagonist is used to challenge accepted notions of the feminine.”⁶⁵ The underlying mistrust of male counterparts and the suffering of the central protagonist in women’s novels of the nationalist period represents, to a certain extent, the apprehension with which women, as subservient and supportive partners, viewed their reliance on men within the nationalist project.

Literary Trends in the Post-Revolutionary Period and Under Guided Democracy

World War II and the Japanese occupation saw a lull in the publication of literary texts in Indonesia. During the revolutionary period and later under Guided Democracy, the cultural debate of the 1930’s re-emerged. In the 1950’s two cultural groups were of particular significance: the *Angkatan 45* whose espousal of the tenets of Universal Humanism was linked to the prewar *Pujangga Baru* group; and those writers affiliated with the cultural organization, *LEKRA*. *LEKRA*, from its inception in August of 1950, was closely associated with the Indonesian Communist party. It advocated “for a literature which was socially oriented, both in its content and in its intention.”⁶⁶ In turn, the *Angkatan 45* group rejected the notion of cultural nationalism associated with *LEKRA* and “in its place they asserted that the autonomy

⁶⁴ Keith Foulcher “Literature, Cultural Politics and the Indonesian Revolution.” D.M. Roeskies ed., *Text/Politics in Island Southeast Asia: Essays in Interpretation* (Athens Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1993): 225.

⁶⁵ Hatley and Blackburn: 59

⁶⁶ Keith Foulcher *Social Commitment in Literature and the Arts : the Indonesian "Institute of People's Culture", 1950-1965* (Clayton, Victoria : Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1986): 18

of the individual artist, free from political involvement, was the precondition for genuine aesthetic achievement.”⁶⁷ While these two groups were essentially rooted in the same desire to find an identifiable Indonesian culture they became increasingly polarized as *LEKRA* and the Communist party gained strength. Regarding the cultural debate of the period, Keith Foulcher writes “in the years leading up to 1965, the strength of the radical challenge meant that those writers and intellectuals who worked within the *Angkatan 45* tradition increasingly found themselves denying the political-ideological context in which literature was produced.”⁶⁸

Most novels written in the post-revolutionary period continued to tell revolutionary tales. Female characters play vital roles as doctors, nurses and freedom fighters in the war of independence but the novels continue the prewar debate surrounding modernization and the more traditional systems of women’s *Kodrak* and the Javanese social structure. There are many examples of modern, ambitious and independent female characters but their strength is undermined by the lack of recognition these characters acquire from other players within the novels, especially from the central male protagonists.⁶⁹

The greatest difference between these female characters and those written before them is the theme of multiple male partners. In these revolutionary tales, female characters have more freedom than their prewar counterparts in choosing love matches and determining their own paths both sexually and romantically. Yet, while

⁶⁷ Foulcher. *Text/Politics*: 246

⁶⁸ *Ibid*: 247

⁶⁹ Tineke Hellwig *In the Shadow of Change: Images of Women in Indonesian Literature* (University of California at Berkeley: Center For South and Southeast Asia Studies, 1994): 65

the freedom to choose is available to them, they ultimately suffer for any transgressions beyond the acceptable boundaries of female conduct. In her analysis of the revolutionary novel, Hellwig writes, “the images of women found in these novels are at first glance strikingly different from those of the prewar novels. However, the underlying gender ideology is basically the same: women are subjugated to the male system and cannot extricate themselves from that system without being punished.”⁷⁰

GERWANI- The Making of Modern Day Myth

With the end of the revolution and the establishment of Soekarno’s Guided Democracy, women were given equal rights under the Indonesian constitution of 1949. While most women’s groups active during the revolution began to dissolve or turn their attention to social issues, *Gerwani*, a women’s organization formed by members of earlier women’s groups and leftwing nationalists, remained active in the political arena. As the organization grew and initiated grassroots campaigns to support women workers, improve literacy rates and establish kindergartens, the membership’s dynamic changed to incorporate poor urban workers of peasant backgrounds as well as lower class women.

Gerwani became increasingly associated with the *PKI* (Indonesia’s Communist Party), which had been gaining in popularity since the 1950’s, and had close ties with President Soekarno. This is not to say that *Gerwani* always agreed with the policies of Guided Democracy and the *PKI*. They still staged anti-government protests that addressed such issues as the not-yet-reformed marriage law and polygamy. *Gerwani* was active and vocal but didn’t go so far as to challenge the central role of women as mothers and wives. They “upheld the ideal of women living in morally correct,

⁷⁰ Hellwig: 67

heterosexual, monogamous families”⁷¹ but adamantly contested the subordination of women within these roles.

The *Gerwani* women were often associated with the strong and independent *wayang* character *Srikandi* as opposed to the more dominant and idealized female image of *Sumbadra*. The positive connotation of the term *Srikandi* derives from its use earlier in describing the strong and independent women of the revolution. Yet, more often than not, it is used in a negative way in relation to the idealized *Sumbadra* as a binary setup similar to that of the model/maniac scenario discussed above. During the political instability of the 1960’s, it was this more negative connotation of *Srikandi* that emerged as *Gerwani*’s strong and independent voice threatened the more conservative elements within Indonesian society.⁷²

Gerwani became the central character in perhaps the greatest myth-making piece of fiction in Indonesia’s modern history. *Gerwani* and the *PKI* were implicated in an attempted coup following the kidnap and murder of six generals at *Lubang Buaya* on the night of September 30, 1965. Stories began to circulate in the media about the involvement of *Gerwani* in the events at *Lubang Buaya*. Falsified news accounts of members stripping naked in front of the generals, raping and castrating them before they were murdered and participating in wild orgies with members of the communist youth group spread. There were constructed “eyewitness” accounts and personal confessions of *Gerwani* girls who supposedly took part in the licentious events of that night.

⁷¹ Saskia Wieringa “Ibu or the Beast: Gender Issues in Two Indonesian Women’s Organizations” in 41 *Feminist Review* (Summer 1992): 109.

⁷² See Saskia Wieringa *Sexual Politics in Indonesia* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002).

Wieringa identifies one instance of a young fifteen-year-old girl who became known in the press as the “*Srikandi of Lubang Buaya*.” Her story appeared in four different newspapers as first-hand interviews yet the articles were exactly the same, word for word, as though they had been prepared beforehand.⁷³ The media frenzy over the events at *Lubang Buaya* seems to have been part of a propagandistic campaign instigated, in part by Soeharto, who had within days of the attempted coup, taken over control of the army.

Wieringa suggests the success of the campaign lay in “the deliberate manipulation of the collective cultural and religious conscience of the Indonesian population on which Soeharto built his road to power.”⁷⁴ The stories circulated in the media pandered to the conservative Javanese and Islamic conscience. They played on the Islamic and Hindu fears of woman’s disobedience. *Gerwani* became the disobedient woman who threatened to undermine the social order. *Gerwani* became the much-feared maniacal crowd of women from Old Javanese and Hindu legends. In part, the *Gerwani* myth contributed to the subsequent massacre of nearly 500,000 Leftist sympathizers in the guise of restoring social stability.

Myth and the New Order Meta-Narrative

The aftermath of the massacres of 1965-66 and the myths constructed surrounding Gerwani involvement in the events at *Lubang Buaya* have had a lasting affect on women’s activism in Indonesia. Monuments have been erected; museums dedicated and histories written to immortalize the events that supposedly took place that night at *Lubang Buaya*. In a speech in 1967 President Soeharto “stated explicitly that the disappearance of the difference between men and women in the Soekarno years was

⁷³ Saskia Wieringa, “Sexual Metaphors in the Change from Soekarno’s Old Order to Soeharto’s New Order” in 32 *RIMA* (1998): 156

⁷⁴ *ibid*: 160

one of the main features of its political and social instability and he implicitly committed the New Order to re-instituting gender divides.”⁷⁵

State *Ibuism* became the domesticating policy of the New Order. Ideologically connected to the Dutch notion of the *huisvrouw* and Javanese and Islamic concepts of social hierarchy, the program delineated the five major duties of the Indonesian woman: to function as assistant to the husband, to take responsibility for household tasks, to rear and raise children, to be a member of society in so far as she serves her husband and children and if necessary to seek supplementary income.⁷⁶ The New Order government used mass propaganda, bureaucracy and organizations such as the state sponsored *Dharma Wanita* and the *PKK* as vehicles for the propagation of their gender ideology.⁷⁷ Soeharto and the New Order had, through a series of manipulations, managed to institutionalize an ideal and safe construct of feminine identity based on the subordination of women.

The gender ideology of the New Order didn't just exist within the hierarchy of state organizations but permeated the social fabric of society. The restrictive image of the ideal woman appeared in various forms in the mass media, film and literature.

Suzanne Brenner, in her study of images of women in the print media describes the many faces of the ideal/ modern woman that appeared in a variety of magazines during Indonesia's economic boom. Audiences were bombarded by visual and verbal images of the “modern Indonesian woman in her many incarnations: as happy consumer-housewife, devoted follower of Islam, successful career woman, model

⁷⁵ Krisna Sen, “Gendered Citizens in the New Indonesian Democracy” in 36 *RIMA* (2002): 53.

⁷⁶ Niels Mulder: 85

⁷⁷ See: Wieringa's “Ibu or the Beast” for an analysis of the *PKK* (Family Welfare Movement) and Julia Suryakusuma's article “The State and Sexuality in New Order Indonesia” in *Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia* for analysis of *Dharma Wanita*: 92-119

citizen of the nation-state and alluring sex symbol.”⁷⁸ Yet, underlying these images was the central belief that the modern woman is first and foremost mother and wife. Coming to the same conclusions as Brenner, Krishna Sen’s extensive analysis of women in film during the late 1970’s and 80’s confirms that the “only acceptable female character is the married, monogamous, child-bearing and rearing, housekeeping creature or one who is prospectively so- with very few exceptions.”⁷⁹

Literature Under the Watchful Eye of the New Order

Angkatan 45’s call for the disengagement of art from the direct politics of the nation was taken up again in the years of the New Order Regime. When the spirit of Universal Humanism re-emerged in the late 1960’s, Keith Foulcher describes its claim to legitimacy as being “the heritage of a type of literary expression which regarded a historical and political consciousness as nothing to do with the business of the writer, and was more concerned with religious sensibility and aesthetic experimentation.”⁸⁰

It was in the interest of maintaining hegemonic control over the nation that the New Order attempted to eliminate the subversive nature of art as a political tool. Under Soeharto, cultural guidance became increasingly systematic with the establishment of government-run censorship boards. In the aftermath of the massacres of 1965-66, which included the death and imprisonment of many outspoken cultural workers, writers and artists were not only faced with state censorship but also began (whether consciously or subconsciously) to practice a form of self-censorship, choosing to maneuver within the apolitical parameters of the New Order rather than be deemed as subversive to the regime.

⁷⁸ Suzanne Brenner “On the Public Intimacy of the New Order: Images of Women in the Popular Indonesian Print Media” in *Indonesia* (April 1999): 17

⁷⁹ Krishna Sen “Women in Indonesian Film” in *Prisma* (1984): 29

⁸⁰ Foulcher. “Literature, Cultural Politics and the Indonesian Revolution.” *Text/Politics*: 247.

While plotlines may have shifted away from the revolutionary tales popularized under the Guided Democracy, there are certain underlying ideological constructs that persisted in the literature of the New Order- in particular those pertaining to the containment of women. The New Order's constructed mythology surrounding the *Gerwani* woman is a modern version of the uncontrolled and maniacal female and a continuation of the legacy of storytelling utilized as a tool for the validation of patriarchal structures of control under the pretext of maintaining social order.

During the New Order, the most common model/maniac scenario was that of the *Gerwani/Kartini* binary, wherein *Kartini* came to symbolize the idealized Indonesian woman as sacrificing wife and mother and *Gerwani* the crazed, sexualized and maniacal female. It would not be hard to imagine that the fate of the *Gerwani* woman and the fear of association were not far from the thoughts of female writers at the time. There is thus a definite absence of independent, assertive and sensual female characters in literature of the New Order.

Beginning in the 1970's, as a result of economic growth and educational development, women of the newly emerging urban middle-class were freed to write as well as read more than they ever had in the past.⁸¹ Appearing in newspapers and magazines as serials and in novel form, women were writing about topics that were affecting their lives, such as social change and urbanization. In these works, the central character is sophisticated and urban, "innocent, gentle, refined of feeling, resistant to temptation, sometimes the victim but never the initiator of lustful encounters."⁸²

⁸¹ Hellwig: 162

⁸² Hatley "New Directions in Indonesian Women's Writing? The Novel *Saman*" in 23 *Asian Studies Review* (1999): 453

Both serious and popular fiction dealt with the reoccurring themes of “love, virginity, marriage, family, and the position of the young *janda* (divorced or widowed woman).”⁸³ Taboo issues like unwed motherhood, loss of virginity, infidelity and lesbianism were also addressed but in non-sexualized and reconciliatory terms often ending in punishment for the characters who transgressed the ‘natural’ boundaries of women’s behavior. Hellwig concedes that for literature of the New Order, “despite the external changes, a deeply anchored traditional frame of mind is confirmed and the male-oriented ideology reaffirmed, by women as well.”⁸⁴

⁸³ Hellwig: 165

⁸⁴ Ibid: 165.

Chapter Two

The Political Horizon: Political Dissidence and The Psychology of Sexuality in the New Order as “Subtext” in *Saman* and *Larung*

Literature as a strategy of containment- understood as an ideological structure through which society provides a perceived resolution to its own reality through the suppression of the underlying contradictions of History- disguises its ideological conflict beneath the language and structure of text, and it is this resolution, the absence of oppositional ideological positions (in Marxist terms this oppositional ideological position is typically representative of the marginalized class) in literature, that is addressed in the First Horizon of *The Political Unconscious*. Jameson’s initial step in the analysis of text is “the rewriting or the restructuration of a prior historical or ideological subtext, it being always understood that “subtext” is not immediately present as such, but rather it must itself always be reconstructed after the fact.”⁸⁵

In my exploration of *Saman* and *Larung* at the Political Horizon, I will organize my analysis into three general and overlapping categories following loosely the structural, narrative and thematic divisions within the texts. I will begin with an analysis of the realist aspects of both novels, examining in turn the figures of Saman (Wisanggeni) and Larung, the male characters after which the novels are titled, and political and social ideologies underpinning their political dissidence. From there I will move on to a discussion of the four female characters- Yasmin, Cok, Shakuntala and Tala- that figure centrally in both novels and their role in political activism as it is tied to issues of sexual identity and the woman’s body. In the restructuration of text at the Political Horizon I will pay particular attention to the shift in the treatment of taboo political subjects between the publication of the first novel in 1998 and its successor in 2001.

⁸⁵ Fredric Jameson. *The Political Unconscious*: 81

Central to this shifting political climate is the theme of women's sexuality and how as a form of political protest, the woman's body becomes a potential tool for transgressing social and political taboos while at the same time risking, through internal and external pressure, being reincorporated into the dominant gender ideology.

The Realist Novel: Text and Subtext in the "True" Tales of *Saman* and *Larung*

The uniqueness of Ayu Utami's first novel *Saman* (1998) lies in its direct treatment of the sensitive issues of politics and sexuality. The realist narrative of the text reads as an almost historical fiction of the protest movement in the late New Order, drawing upon actual events and building around them a story of resistance to state oppression. The absence or near absence of self-censorship in *Saman* and the very fact that it is published by the mainstream publishing house of KPG (*Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia*), signifies the weakening of the New Order ideology and its corporeal and cerebral hold over the thoughts and actions of its citizens. As a realist text, it differs in content from earlier examples of realist fiction in the New Order. Its censure of social and political injustice defies the apolitical nature of the "Universal Humanist" tradition advocated by the government and its censorship boards.

There were, of course, voices of dissent in literature previous to the publication of *Saman* but these voices were veiled in convoluted postmodern narratives and subtly reconstructed traditional myths.⁸⁶ The disjunctive narratives of postmodernism had initially been adapted as a means of resistance to the "strong commitments to standardization, homogeneity, formal structure, hierarchy, centralization, discipline,

⁸⁶ See Marshall Clark's discussion of the appropriation of tales from the Ramayana as political tools of opposition in "Shadow Boxing: Indonesian Writers and the Ramayana in the New Order" in 72 *Indonesia* (October 2001): 159-187

stability, and an ambition for progress”⁸⁷ promoted by the New Order. There are similar postmodern narrative techniques and myth reconstructions evident in both *Saman* and *Larung* yet these techniques are no longer understood as stylistic tools of concealment meant to hide political and social criticisms. In comparison to earlier works, Michael Bodden categorizes this new trend in literature, of which Ayu Utami is a pioneering figure, as ‘topical literature’- a “literature that may still contain remnants of postmodern disjuncture and irony, or magic realist dream logic, but [which] tends to focus more directly, in a generally ‘realist’ style, on a variety of social/political issues that were difficult to handle in straight-forward fashion prior to 1998.”⁸⁸

The publication of *Saman* coincided with a surge in oppositional movements that had been building and diversifying since the 1980’s. Writing in 1996, Ariel Heryanto anticipated an impending crisis for the New Order regime. He remarked that while the government “holds a virtually monopolistic power it nonetheless depends on the collaboration of the rest of the population to sustain the status quo, just as these subjects depend on the favour and patronage of the New Order’s state agents.”⁸⁹ Dominant forms of protest against the New Order had, until the 1980’s, been elitist and reformist in nature and largely unconcerned with overthrowing the governmental system that had restored social and economic stability to the nation in the aftermath of massacres of 1965. In contrast, “Rather than maximizing the resources within the given parameters set by the government, or negotiating the existing boundaries of what is permissible, these contemporary opposition movements

⁸⁷ Ariel Heryanto, “What Does Post-Modernism Do in Contemporary Indonesia?” in 10 *Sorjourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* (1995): 42

⁸⁸ Michael H. Bodden “Seno Gumira Ajidarma and Fictional Resistance to an Authoritarian State in 1990’s Indonesia” 68 *Indonesia* (October 1999): 155.

⁸⁹ Ariel Heryanto, “Indonesia: Towards the Final Countdown?” in *Southeast Asian Affairs* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1997): 108

[had] taken unilateral action to practice a new political language, create new social organizations, and expand political imagination beyond the narrow limits circumscribed by the New Order.”⁹⁰ By 1996, inter-class opposition groups had managed successfully to distance themselves from the New Order government and entangled forms of elitist protest.

The complexity of inter-class activism emerges as a significant theme in *Saman*. The central male figure in the novel, Wisanggeni,⁹¹ is a catholic priest stationed at a parish in Perabumulih, South Sumatra. He is drawn into a life of social activism when he meets Upi, a mentally challenged “*anak transmigrasi*”⁹²(*Saman*: 68) whose penchant for masturbation and whose seemingly possessed and almost carnal sex drive makes her a threat to herself and those around her. Wis’s desire to create a more humane existence for Upi leads to his personal involvement in the revitalization of the village of Lubukrantau where Upi lives with her family. Lubukrantau is a representation of a kind of plantation village in the area of Sei Kumbang that would have been left impoverished by Soeharto’s ill-conceived and exploitive Transmigration program.⁹³ By 1990, with the help of Wis, the village has begun to prosper with replanted crops

⁹⁰ *ibid*: 117

⁹¹ The name Wisanggeni comes from the Ramayana. He is one of the sons of Arjuna.

⁹² “Child of transmigration”

⁹³ The transmigration policy was one that had initially been implemented by the Dutch colonial government in the 1930’s. Its intentions were to move peoples from the more densely populated islands in an attempt to alleviate overpopulation as well as to establish lucrative industries in the outer regions. Under the New Order, “relocation” programs concealed underlying political intentions- as a means of controlling areas of potential anti-governmental conflict. The relocation of peoples meant that often times the government had appropriated their traditional land and the relocated farmers or workers would be forced to lease their new land from the government or larger-scale private operations. The farmers would be put in a position wherein they were forced to buy the seeds and tools to work the land from the government or company- perpetuating a sort of indentured labour system- one that ensured the poverty of its participants and their dependence. In *Saman*, it is this very scenario with which the villagers of Lubukrantau are faced. See Karl Fasbender and Susanne Erbe *Towards a New Home: Indonesia’s Mass Migration: Transmigration between Poverty, Economics and Ecology* (Hamburg: Verlag Weltarchiv, 1990).

and a small smokehouse and generator but the relative prosperity of the village was short-lived.

Problems arise when the villagers of Lubukrantau refuse to replace their rubber trees with palm crops that would be used to supply the new company that has taken over a nearby factory and converted its latex operations into an oil palm processing plant. In response to the villager's defiance, rumours begin to circulate that Wis's true intention for revitalizing the area stems from his desire to convert the Muslim population to Catholicism and that, as evidence of this claim, his good friend Anson (Upi's older brother) has been seen consuming pig's meat. The rumours are soon followed by warnings when a group of men arrive at the village and attempt to bully the villagers into signing a contract ensuring that they will replant their crops with seed and tools supplied to the farmers by the new palm company. When the villagers refuse, the men threaten to bulldoze their crops. The longer the villagers resist, the more the rumours and threats turn to violence.

In *Saman*, the coercive tactics of the unnamed enemy seem to work to a certain extent amongst the villagers. The villagers are influenced by the rumours circulating around them that have been conjured in order to stir up ethnic tension amongst various groups living and working within the area. As Wis sits listening to the villager's heated debate over their current circumstances, he hears Anson claim: "Right now, it is the Chinese who colonize us. It's the natives that are forced to work as poor laborers."⁹⁴ (Saman: 94) He is shocked at the villager's misperception of their true enemy and the more he listens the more he realizes that "in spite of six years of living together, he still can't even fathom so many of their thoughts."⁹⁵ (Saman: 96)

⁹⁴ "Orang Cina kini menjaja kita. Orang pribumi disuruhnya menjadi buruh miskin saja"

⁹⁵ "meski enam tahun hidup bersama, sungguh banyak pikiran mereka yang tidak ia duga."

As the villagers struggle, Wis becomes conscious of the fact that he is not engaged in the struggle to the same extent that the villagers are: “I will have lost nothing at all if this village is destroyed. I can return to the church where the parish women will shower me with attention as I preach to them and deliver the sacrament.”⁹⁶ (Saman: 96) While he would be able to escape the situation and return to a life of relative security, he recognizes such an option is not available to the villagers as a marginalized group. His revelation exposes an underlying subtext concerning the complexity of grassroots activism and inter-class alliances. As grassroots organizations and middle-class activists began working together in an attempt to establish effective modes of resistance to the New Order, an important and irresolvable discourse materialized, particularly amongst the middle-class intelligentsia: How should the cause of the disenfranchised and marginalized groups in Indonesia be addressed and who amongst them, as members of a privileged class, has the right or the authority to speak or act on behalf of the *rakyat*?

This discourse plays out on two levels in the novel *Saman*: In one sense it consciously shapes the relationship that develops between Wis and the villagers of Lubukrantau and in another more subtle or unconscious way, it informs the narrative structure of the work. It is from the perspective of a well-educated priest from a middle-class background that the reader comes to know the village and the characters of Lubukrantau. Alternative voices and actions come to the reader already filtered through the educated and somewhat removed perspective of Wis. When Anson reviles the Chinese as Indonesia’s new colonizers (Saman: 94), the reader, through Wis, becomes privy to information from which Anson and the other villagers appear

⁹⁶“*tak akan kekurangan apa-apa sekalipun kebun ini dimusnahkan. Aku bisa kembali ke gereja di mana ibu-ibu paroki merawatku dengan aten untuk mengkhobahi mereka dan memberi sakramen.*”

to be excluded. In a sense, the reader feels that they have a better understanding of the villager's predicament than the villagers themselves. While it appears that Wis, as a character, has come to some revelations about marginalization and the privileging of one class voice over another, it is a resolution that is undermined in turn by a narrative which fails to give an "authentic" representational voice to the marginalized villagers of Lubukrantau.

The forces against which Saman and the villagers of Lubukrantau clash are never directly named but there is little mystery surrounding who might be responsible for these acts of terror; in particular the final attempt at intimidation wherein Upi and her sister-in-law are raped, the village is burned and Wis is kidnapped by men in tall black boots.⁹⁷ After countless days of torture and interrogation, Wis is forced to admit to his captors that he is a communist (an untrue statement made under duress). When he eventually escapes and seeks shelter at his parish, he is made aware of the fact that he has been chastised in the media as a priest- turned- communist subversive and that for him life at the parish must end. Wis is forced underground; he changes his name to Saman⁹⁸ and continues to work for the cause of social justice until he is forced to escape Indonesia four years later and reestablish himself as an Indonesian activist in New York City.

The New Order's increasingly transparent strategy for maintaining hegemonic control, in particular through the invocation of the "Communist Threat" works as subtext in *Saman*. Regarding the coercive tactics of the regime, Heryanto writes:

⁹⁷ The black boot was taken up in the iconography of protest art in the late New Order, often symbolizing the New Order's authoritarianism and the military's control through violence and repression.

⁹⁸ The name *Saman* will be used in all further textual references to the character of *Wis*.

Invoking the communist threat has been the standard strategy of the New Order for various political ends: to stigmatize political enemies, to enhance eroded legitimacy, to invent convenient scapegoats, to deflect public anger, to mobilize the people's support, or to improve internal cohesion. The New Order's legitimacy to rule and the main reason for the collaboration of the population stems from the narrative of the communist *coup d'etat* of September 1965.⁹⁹

Ayu's negative depiction of New Order tactics suggests that while the regime retains coercive control through the use of brute strength and manipulation, the mythologies around which it had originally organized its ideological hegemony have lost their validity especially when they are activated as weapons of violence and control against a marginalized group in society.

Same Story, Shifting Antagonisms

Both *Saman* and *Larung* are tales of activism set against the backdrop of Indonesia in the 1980's and 1990's, their time frames, their characters and their storylines intertwining and overlapping. But there is a distinction to be made between the two novels and their ideological subtext. Ayu was, in 1998, bold enough to point a suspicious finger at the military and its involvement in the systematic kidnapping and torture of social activists, but she was even less inhibited by self-censorship in the writing of *Larung* in 2001.

In *Larung*, Ayu's direct implication of the military police in the kidnapping of Larung and *Saman* and her rewriting of the New Order's meta-narrative surrounding the events of 1965- the foundation upon which the New Order validated its power and control- signifies some key changes in the dominant ideological structures of Indonesian society in the post-Soeharto era and in the subtext of the second novel.

⁹⁹ Ariel Heryanto "Indonesia: Towards the Final Countdown?" *Southeast Asian Affairs* 1997 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1997): 110

No longer was the New Order reading over the shoulder of Indonesian writers and journalists and no longer could the histories of 1965 and the ideologies constructed around them justify the New Order's hegemonic control over its citizens.

Ayu Utami absolves herself of dealing directly with the problematic issues of class marginalization in *Larung*. The marginalized become an abstract cause around which middle-class activists organize themselves. Jameson would contend that the absence of class representation signifies an irresolvable ideological contradiction of which, I would argue, Ayu herself would have been aware. I would also argue that this "absence" in the second novel signifies a transition in activism in a post-Soeharto era wherein the necessity to build a unified inter-class alliance that depended upon the mobilization of the masses (as a source of strength in numbers) to overthrow the Soeharto regime no longer exists in the same capacity as it had during the *Reformasi* period and the writing of *Saman*.

In *Larung*, inter-class contradiction is replaced by the ideological antagonisms that arise amongst middle-class activists. Issues addressed represent the concerns of the urban middle and upper class whose education and relative economic security in comparison to lower-class labourers or farmers, permits them a greater degree of freedom to contemplate ideological barriers and exercise alternative methods of resistance. These freedoms have in turn created a certain amount of confusion over what strategy to adopt now that Soeharto, their main enemy, is gone and have led to a splintering of the once unified reform movement.

Readers are introduced to a new character in the second novel- Larung Lanang. Larung's twisted inner-rationality and oscillating political opinions agitate the seemingly unified goals of middle-class activism and raise suspicion amongst the other

activists in *Larung*. In reference to Indonesia's social, political and economic turmoil and its potential causes and solutions, the following excerpt between Larung and a young blacklisted dissident illustrates the contentious ideological spectrum that exists between various activist groups:

“This boat is an analogy for Indonesia,” said Wayan in a conversation with Larung last night. They were sitting at the open-air canteen enjoying the sea breeze and the respite from the stench of their cabin. “Yah! It's about class division!”

Larung didn't glance up. “Why is it that you think Socialism holds the answer?”

Wayan Togog winced. He couldn't believe that the person helping them could ask something like that.

“Socialism erases class boundaries” his harsh tone suggesting: How can you not know that?

Larung smiled his usual smile, kind of flat. He looked with interest at the overflowing garbage bin.

“This boat isn't falling apart because there's no socialism. This boat's gone to hell because of a monopoly.” He played with something in his mouth, maybe a toothpick left over from dinner. “If you still believe in an attitude of anti-individualism, you will build a system that ends on this boat.”¹⁰⁰ (*Larung*: 210)

Larung antagonizes the young activists from *Solidaritas Wong Alit*, taking sick pleasure in playing the devil's advocate to their socialistic idealism. The exchanges between Larung and the activists highlight the complex nature of heterogeneous

¹⁰⁰ “Kapal ini adalah analogi dari Indonesia,” kata Wayan Togog dalam sebuah obrolan dengan Larung semalam. Mereka duduk di kantin yang terbuka, menikmati angin laut dan kelegaan dari bau busuk kabin. “Huh! Perbedaan kelas!”

Larung tidak menoleh. “Lalu kenapa kamu percaya bahwa sosialisme merupakan jalan keluar?”

Wayan Togog memicing, seolah tak percaya bahwa orang yang menolong mereka menanyakan perkara dasar itu.

“Sosialisme menghapus perbedaan kelas.” Nadanya yang agak keras seperti menyampaikan: masa kamu tidak tahu?

Larung tersenyum seperti biasa, datar. Ia memandang dengan tertarik tempat sampah yang kepenuhan. “Kapal pelni ini buruk bukan karena tidak ada sosialisme. Kapal ini brengsek karena monopoli.” Ia memainkan sesuatu di mulutnya, barangkali tusuk gigi sisa makan malam. “Kalau kamu masih percaya sikap anti hak milik pribadi, kamu akan membangun system yang berakhir di kapal ini.”

social, political and class alliances and the differing ideological programs of the many parties involved in redefining Indonesia's political and social landscape in the *post-Reformasi* period.

Larung is the owner/operator of *BaliAge*, a bilingual tourist magazine. He is closely associated with members of the Alliance of Independent Journalists and the Surabayan Journalist's Forum through his work with Yasmin as an underground publisher (Larung: 169). He, Yasmin and Saman are involved in the start up of an underground press operation along with the development of a secure network to pass information between journalists via the Internet for wider distribution.

The political activities in which Larung, Yasmin and Saman are involved are a case in point of the type of activism that Ariel Heryanto describes as existing outside the parameters of the government in its establishment of new and innovative methods of organizing political opposition.¹⁰¹ One such group that strove to distance itself from the cultural dominance of the New Order state was *Teater Utan Kayu* in which Ayu Utami was intimately involved. Established in response to the banning of three major media sources on grounds of subversion in 1994¹⁰², the organization was formed by a number of established members of the media community in alliance with younger journalists, many of who were associated with the *Aliansi Jurnalis Independen* (Alliance of Independent Journalists), an organization banned under the New Order Government.

¹⁰¹ Refer to earlier discussion of Ariel Heryanto in the introduction to this chapter: 41

¹⁰² On June 21, 1994 the publishing licenses for three magazines- TEMPO, DETIK and EDITOR- were revoked for various reasons such as having the potential to destabilized national security, failure to register correctly with the Ministry of Information and misrepresentation of intent. (See: M. Djadjiono "Implications of the Banned Press" in *Kompas* (22 June 1994): 189-191). Ayu Utami published a response to the ban in "Bredel 1994: Kumpulan Tulisan Tentang Pembredelan TEMPO, DETIK, EDITOR published by the *Aliansi Jurnalis Independen* (1994).

The vision of *Utan Kayu* was to create a community that cultivated freedom of speech and freedom of expression. Ayu Utami was active in the development of the community, initially as a member of *AJI*, then as a participant in the development of the *Institut Studi Arus Informasi* (Institute for the Study of the Flow of Information), which would quickly become identified as the political wing of *Komunitas Utan Kayu*. Initially, Ayu's work at *ISAI* and *Utan Kayu* involved the establishment of a network of journalists connected via Internet as well as the production of "buku-buku instan"¹⁰³ (instant books) as alternative media sources to the government-censored information available through the mass media.¹⁰⁴ It is impossible not to draw parallels between the political activity of the characters in *Saman* and *Larung* and the political activity of Ayu during the *Reformasi* period.

Women's Participation: Conflicting Gender Politics as Subtext in *Saman* and *Larung*

Kathryn Robinson connects the re-emergence of women's participation in politics to social and economic change during the 1980's and 1990's. With economic growth and industrialization came the need for more workers and tapping into the female labour pool led to what she refers to as the "feminization of Indonesia's industrial workforce."¹⁰⁵ With the opening up of the Indonesian market economy, the country was exposed to outside influences that brought with them globalized pressures from non-government organizations and the United Nations. As participants in the UN's Rights for Women Decade, a new awareness for women's issues was fostered in

¹⁰³ Hastily produced books often photocopied and distributed hand-to-hand. The process avoids reliance on state regulated means of publication and distribution.

¹⁰⁴ Information regarding the development of *Utan Kayu* is garnered in part from conversations with Ayu Utami and Sitok Srengenge as well as information supplied by *Komunitas Utan Kayu* at Jalan Utan Kayu no. 68H, Jakarta Timur.

¹⁰⁵ Kathryn Robinson "Indonesian Women: A Survey of Recent Developments" in 31 *RIMA* (1997): 145

Indonesia.¹⁰⁶ In time, middle-class women and lower-class female workers in association with NGO's began to form groups like *Solidaritas Perempuan* (Women's Solidarity for Human Rights- est. 1990) and to participate more actively in the political process.

Alternative notions of feminine identity began to set in motion opposition to the dominant image of the idealized woman as mother and wife in New Order Indonesia. Kathryn Robinson and Iwu Dwisetyani Utomo suggest that the regime's disregard for the fact that "the cultural and economic currents which accompanied the movement of global capital in Indonesia worked against the socially conservative rhetoric" of the New Order.¹⁰⁷ Thus feminine identity, particularly in the later years of the New Order regime, was far more fluid than the static image of woman cultivated by the state apparatus.

During the *Reformasi* period,¹⁰⁸ the New Order's emphasis on the proper roles assigned to women and men within the nuclear family lost relevancy as widespread unemployment and inflation put added pressures on the constructed notion of the "harmonious" family unit. Melani Budianta notes that for many women "the economic crisis [1997-1998] brought about the realization that society at large was

¹⁰⁶ Kathryn Robinson notes that in response to the UN sponsored Decade for Women, the Indonesian government established a junior ministry for women's affairs in 1978 that developed, five years later, into its own ministry- See: Kathryn Robinson. "Women: Difference Versus Diversity." Donald K. Emmerson, ed. *Indonesia Beyond Suharto: Polity, Economy, Society, Transition*. (London: ME Sharpe, 1999): 239

¹⁰⁷ Kathryn Robinson and Iwu Dwisetyani Utomo. "Introduction" in 37 *RIMA* (2003): 6.

¹⁰⁸ Melani Budianta defines the *Reformasi* period as the period of intensified social and political protest in the late 1990's. She uses the term not as a tool of analysis but as a way of referring to "political, economic and social responses to a multi-dimensional crisis that provided an outlet for previously repressed and widespread demands for structural change." Quote taken from: "The Blessed Tragedy: The Making of Women's Activism During the *Reformasi* years." Ariel Heryanto and Sumit K. Mandal eds. *Challenging Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia: Comparing Indonesia and Malaysia* (New York: Routledge Press, 2003): 146.

structured in ways that put people- especially women and children- in an unfavourable position.”¹⁰⁹ Under these conditions the concept of *Ibuism* was freed to a certain extent from its ideological underpinnings in New Order rhetoric as the ideological gulf grew between the New Order- with its *priyayi* concepts of social, class and gender division- and its disillusioned citizens.

Indicative of this changing social consciousness, *Dharma Wanita* (literally meaning “Women’s Duty”- a state-run women’s organization whose membership was mandatory for the wives of civil servants and female civil servants) was the first group to urge Soeharto to step down from his role as president and it was the more heterogeneous woman’s group *Suara Ibu Peduli* (The Voice of Concerned Mothers) that organized the first street demonstrations in February of 1998 to protest the impact of the failing economy on the nation’s children.¹¹⁰ According to Budianta, these women’s organizations working within the established framework of the woman as *Ibu* were reconstituting the image of motherhood to suit their political agendas and to oppose, peacefully, the masculine violence of the Indonesian military.¹¹¹

By contrast, Krishna Sen maintains a more jaded opinion of the mobilization of *Ibuism* as an oppositional tool. Criticizing the tactics of women’s groups like *Suara Ibu Peduli* that unify under the banner of *Ibuism*, Sen writes:

The point is, however, that Jakarta’s most sophisticated feminists could find no other symbol through which to insert themselves into the political watershed of Indonesia’s transition to democracy, other than through motherhood...It is not surprising then that women exited the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid:146.

¹¹⁰ Melanie Budianta. “Plural Identities: Indonesian Women’s Redefinition of Democracy in the Post-Reformasi Era” in 36 *RIMA* (2002): 42

¹¹¹ *ibid.* 42

New Order as they had entered it: as inadequate, as sub-human creatures who could be raped with impunity, and as mothers defined by the act of feeding the children.¹¹²

Sen highlights the potentially negative implications *Ibuism* can have on women in the post-*Reformasi* period at the same time she alludes to the competing ideological paradigms at play in the Indonesian women's movement.¹¹³

As literary subtext, these competing ideological paradigms in Indonesian feminism find their awkward resolution in the construction of female characters in *Saman* and *Larung*. The crudest method for illustrating this resolution is to accentuate the way in which Ayu Utami separates her female characters into oppositional categories- those that are defined as “mother” and those that are “not-mother.” These divisions are apparent thematically and stylistically within both novels. Those characters that are “not-mother”- Yasmin, Cok, Laila and Shakuntala¹¹⁴- are part of the realist text, generally connected to *Saman* and *Larung* through Yasmin's role as a lawyer and political activist. These “not-mother” characters appear to change very little in the progression of the two novels. Those characters that are “mother”- *Saman*'s *Ibu* and *Larung*'s *Simbah* (grandmother)- exist in the convoluted spaces of *Saman*'s and *Larung*'s memories and inhabit both an alternative reality of spirits, mysticism and the supernatural and the world of the psychological realist novel. While there is little change amongst representation of the four “not-mother” characters there is a significant transition in the treatment of the “mother” figure in *Saman* as compared to

¹¹² Krishna Sen. “Gendered Citizens in the New Indonesian Democracy.” In 36 *RIMA* (2002): 59

¹¹³ There has been a tendency in Indonesian women's movements to avoid the use of such terms as “feminist” and “feminism” due to social backlash that sees feminism as a potential danger to social harmony. See *Jurnal Perempuan* interview with Melani Budianta “Perempuan Pun Bisa Sangat patriarkis” in *Jurnal Perempuan* (Edisi XII-1999): 14-16.

¹¹⁴ Of the four women it is only Shakuntala who oscillates between a world of reality and the supernatural

Larung. How the separation of these differing female constructs ultimately affects the feminist project of the novels will be dealt with at the Social and Historical Horizons.

Exercising Rights: The Body as Politics and Sexuality as Political Activism

Writing about the sexual wasteland of modern Indonesian literature in 1969, Harry Aveling remarks:

In modern Indonesian literature, we miss those themes so common in the classical indigenous, and other, modern, literatures: the themes of flirtation, seduction, adultery, rape, and full bodily, intellectual and emotional commitment of lovers (married, or not) to each other as equal human beings. There is, on the contrary, a prudery about the body and its functions, and an elaborate pretense that marriage- and even parenthood- is sustained without reference to sex.¹¹⁵

In response to Aveling, Goenawan Mohamad concludes that the absence of sexual intimacy in Indonesian literature stems from the writer's own loss of intimacy with his/her audience and a growing self-consciousness when faced with a widening readership that harbours diverse cultural and religious opinions.¹¹⁶

Saman was the first novel to portray female characters that transgress, without social repercussion, the boundaries of permissible sexual behavior in Indonesian society. The segments of *Saman* and *Larung* dedicated to the four female friends tackle themes like virginity, lesbianism, promiscuity, extra-marital affairs and sadomasochism in direct and intimate terms. These are single women (except for Yasmin), members of the urban, educated middle and upper class, economically independent and very

¹¹⁵ Harry Aveling. "The Thorny Rose: The Avoidance of Passion in Modern Indonesian Literature" 7 *Indonesia* (April 1969): 69.

¹¹⁶ Goenawan Mohamad *Seks, Sastra, Kita* (Sinar Harapan: Jakarta, 1980)

much in control of their own sexuality (with the exception perhaps of Laila who continues to struggle with her own moral guilt).

There are a number of economic and social developments linked to changing perceptions of women's sexuality that would have contributed to its enthusiastic return to the genre of contemporary fiction. Kathryn Robinson's theory of economic development as catalyst in the re-emergence of the women's movement in Indonesia connects the separation of sexuality from reproduction to the New Order's economic development strategy. According to Robinson, "the program had the consequence, intended or not, of separating sexuality from reproduction. Increasing numbers of women were using contraception...techniques they used made it easier for these women to make reproductive decisions without consulting male partners...women were increasingly likely to view their sexuality not within the context of family and motherhood but as an expression of their own personal freedom."¹¹⁷ This freedom coupled with better education, economic independence, and a delay in the average age of marriage as well as increased exposure to Westernized images of sexuality in the mass media all contributed, whether negatively or positively, to changing social perceptions especially amongst urban middle and upper class women.

Ayu Utami's novels have been touted as a breakthrough in Indonesian women's literature while at the same time they have been chastised for their perpetuation of patriarchal gender divides. In "Larung dan Remahnya Seksualitas Perempuan" Intan Paramiditha writes: "We can see two different areas, the public and the domestic, both give birth to two central themes in *Larung*: politics and sex."¹¹⁸ Claims that the

¹¹⁷ Kathryn Robinson "Women: Difference Versus Diversity": 257.

¹¹⁸ "Dapat kita lihat dua wilayah yang berbeda, publik dan domestik, sama-sama melahirkan dua tema utama dalam *Larung*: politik dan seks." The article "Larung dan Remahnya Seksualitas Perempuan" (Larung and the Triviality of Women's Sexuality) was supplied by its author, Intan Paramiditha. Intan

novels of Ayu Utami are “*kurang feminis*” (“less than feminist” or “not feminist enough”) are based upon the observed imbalance that exists between the male characters (Saman, Larung and to a lesser extent, the activists from *Solidaritas Wong Alit*) that inhabit the public world of politics and the female characters (Yasmin, Laila, Cok and Shakuntala) that inhabit the private and “trivial” world of sexuality. Ayu herself is even reluctant to label her novels as feminist, citing that many critics suggest otherwise given the fact that the lives of her female characters still revolve around issues of a private nature.

Yet in the waning years of the New Order regime it became increasingly apparent that the woman’s body and women’s sexuality were not protected within the private domain but were in fact political and public battlegrounds.

In these turbulent years, Indonesian women contended not only with the severe economic crisis that marked the end of an authoritarian regime, but significant events that brought women’s bodies to the centre of national and public attention. Among the events that exposed the crudest commodification and subordination of women in the hegemonic formation of the New Order were the rapes of Chinese-Indonesian women and the disclosure of several cases of violence against women in the areas of military conflict in Aceh, Irian Jaya and East Timor.¹¹⁹

Issues of political dissidence do appear as secondary to issues of sex and sexuality in the storylines of these women and the novels do appear to separate the important world of men and politics from the inconsequential world of women and sexuality. But, in light of a long history of politicization of the female body, I would counter the argument that claims such issues of sexuality are not part of the more public and

teaches literature at the University of Indonesia at Depok and has written extensively on sexuality in Indonesian women’s literature.

¹¹⁹ Budianta “The Blessed Tragedy”: 147

significant sphere of politics. Following this same line of reason, I would also charge that this absence of overt sexuality in literature, articulated by Harry Aveling and Goenawan Mohamad respectively, is due, in part, to the grotesquely sexualized mythologies constructed around the *Gerwani* women at Lubang Buaya. To present alternative representations of women's sexuality, in particular, sexualities that exist outside of normative social practices would be to risk offending or threatening the more conservative elements governing Indonesian society and to risk stigmatizing oneself as a sexual radical- a *Gerwani*- and it is in defiance of this subtext that the representation of sexuality in literature becomes a political act in itself.

In *Saman* and *Larung* there is a subtle but significant difference in the treatment of sensitive political issues and inter-class relations. The divergence in *Larung* is suggestive of underlying transitions in social and political discourses and increased freedom of expression in the aftermath of Soeharto's resignation. While the four women act as supporting characters in the storyline of political dissidence, their focus on women's sexuality is no less political in light of oppressive and violent gender politics of the New Order. It is the personal/ political struggle of these four female characters and how the texts attempt to resolve the conflict between the New Order's dominant gender ideology (ie. - the ideal role of woman as supportive wife and mother) and this new breed of the globalized and cosmopolitan woman that will be the central focus of this thesis at the Social Horizon.

Chapter Three

The Social Horizon: Antagonistic Discourses as *Ideologeme* and the Problem of the Subject in *Saman* and *Larung*

In reference to female subjectivity in 19th century British fiction, Cora Kaplan writes:

In these texts, the difference between women is at least as important an element as the difference between the sexes, as a way of representing both class and gender. This salient fact often goes unnoticed in the emphasis of bourgeois criticism on male/female divisions and opposition. In turn, this emphasis on heterosexual antagonisms and resolutions effaces the punitive construction of alternative femininities in women's writing. If texts by women reveal a 'hidden' sympathy between women, as radical feminist critics often assert, they equally express positive femininity through hostile and denigrating representations of women. Imperiled bourgeois femininity takes meaning in relation to other female identities, and to the feminized identities of other social groups that the novel constructs and dialogizes.¹²⁰

In her analysis of women's writing Kaplan emphasizes the significance of Bakhtin's notion of the "dialogic" that works to undermine the unity a literary text is attempting to construct; this "dialogic" also being the critical method expounded upon in Jameson's *Social Horizon* as a means of textual restructuration wherein exposed contradictions materialize as perceptible and antagonistic class discourses.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Cora Kaplan "Pandora's Box: Subjectivity, Class and Sexuality in Socialist Feminist Criticism": 167-168

¹²¹ The dialogic is a term used by Mikhail Bakhtin in reference to the intertextuality of literature and language. He suggests that literature and language do not exist in a vacuum but are informed and in turn inform those literary and linguistic processes that precede them at the same time they anticipate and inform those that succeed them. It is literature's dialogic response to earlier forms and its anticipation of new forms that construct textual contradiction and it is this contradiction that Cora Kaplan and Jameson link to larger issues of gender and class discourse.

Given that the central focus of this thesis is upon women's sexuality and the shifting constructs of feminine identity in the literary texts of Ayu Utami, I will prioritize the struggle between individual sexual freedom and the dominant gender ideologies of the New Order as the *Ideologeme* at the Second Horizon. Reiterating my assertion that the "personal" discourse surrounding women's sexuality in *Saman* and *Larung* is in fact a highly politicized discourse, I will examine how the New Order's norms/mythologies attempt to manipulate women's identity to conform to the needs of the state at both the social and economic level. As such, analyzing the manner in which these female characters- Yasmin, Laila, Cok and Shakuntala- resist or reaffirm the gender ideology of the state becomes vital to an examination of dominant, residual and emergent ideological constructs.

The generally progressive discourse surrounding the sexuality of these four women as the *Ideologeme* of individual sexual freedom is negatively affected by other elements in the texts that are connected to the struggle of the individual but remain external to the personal and psychic exploration of sexuality- particularly the way in which Ayu constructs complex relationships between the individual characters and their mother figures as well as the way in which she negatively depicts alternative notions of femininity. It is at this juncture that I will examine the two male characters of *Saman* and *Larung* in relation to how they assist in the construction of women's identity and how Ayu Utami's thematic separation of the "non-mothers" (read Yasmin, Cok, Laila and Shakuntala) from the "mothers" (read *Saman's* mother and *Larung's* grandmother) is problematic for the overall resolution of women's psychic economy in the texts.

Concurrent to this thematic contradiction are the ambiguous representations of the *Ibu* figure. *Saman's* mother and *Larung's* grandmother are characters that can be read

at once in negative and positive terms dependent upon whether one's analysis focuses on the realist or mythical aspects of *Saman* and *Larung*. At this particular horizon, I will foreground the realist and therefore negative depictions of the *Ibu* figures as a means of setting up potential contradictions that threaten the positive images of feminine identity constructed in the texts.

Feminized Narration

The unorthodox narrative voices of Yasmin, Cok, Laila and Shakuntala (Tala) lend a sense of intimacy between character and reader. The structure of these sections of the novels, as they are divided like dated journal entries, implies a certain reality or truthfulness in detail- as though the reader is privy to the personal reflections of each of these women. The implication of multiple first person narratives is that perspective is not limited to a single character and their complexity builds in the eyes of the reader, as we are witness to the characters' personal understandings of themselves and of one another. The mounting interaction between the inner and outer worlds of these characters works to expose the contradiction that materializes in the construction of their psychic and social selves.

“This story comes from the groin. The groins of my friends themselves: Yasmin and Saman, Laila and Sihar.”¹²² (*Larung*: 77)

As Cok bluntly states in *Larung*, this is a story about sex; sex and the problems of sexuality faced by a new generation of Indonesian women. Both *Saman* and *Larung* are dedicated, in part, to the social and psychic exploration of Yasmin, Cok, Laila and Tala and their individual struggles towards a greater sense of female emancipation. These are stories about the transgressions of sexual taboos. They are tales of promiscuity, of illicit affairs, of female domination and same-sex encounters set

¹²² “1996. *Cerita ini berawal dari selangkangan. Selangkangan teman-temanku sendiri: Yasmin dan Saman, Laila dan Sihar.*”

against the globalized backdrop of political dissidence and the urban centers of Jakarta, Medan and New York. Cok, the successful hotelier with a light heart and free spirit (*Saman*: 146) is the most sexually liberated of the four friends; nicknamed *perek*¹²³ by Yasmin, she is described as always having a disheveled post-coital glow (*Larung*: 117). Yasmin, the wealthy activist lawyer, is the janus faced image of the idealized modern Indonesian woman: she is beautiful, successful, rich, intelligent, devout, dedicated to her family and her husband and just happens to be having an affair with Saman, an ex-catholic priest and political dissident. Laila, the manager of a small independent production company, is the somewhat unkempt and frumpy thirty-year-old virgin bent on pursuing a dead-end affair with a married man. And Tala is the flat-chested androgen¹²⁴ dancer that uses her craft as a means of exploring her own multiple gender identities and as a way of escape from the evil clutches of her dominating father- both spiritually through the inner sanctum she has found in her dance and literally through her acceptance of a scholarship to study and perform in New York City.

These four women narrate their worlds from a class-specific femininity that “constructs us as readers in relation to that subjectivity through linguistic strategies and processes of the text.”¹²⁵ Their perspective is representative of a relatively new social dynamic that has materialized in the major urban centres of Indonesia. They characterize a class of women that is educated and economically independent. They

¹²³ The term *perek* is an acronym for *perempuan eksperimental* (experimental woman or slut). The term was popularized in Jakarta during the 1990's and refers to “trendy or promiscuous young women for whom sexual relationships tend to be motivated by sexual pleasure alone.” Excerpt taken from Iwu Dwisetyani Utomo. “Sexual Values and Early Experiences Among Young People in Jakarta.” Lenore Manderson and Pranee Liamputtong eds. *Coming of Age in South and Southeast Asia: Youth Courtship and Sexuality* (Curzon Press: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2002): 208

¹²⁴ Laila uses the term *androgini* to describe the visible way in which Shakuntala shifts from one gender to another when she dances (see *Larung*: 126)

¹²⁵ Cora Kaplan: 162

are a social group that tends to remain single¹²⁶ for a longer period of time, marrying at a later age than the average Indonesian woman. As such these women have more opportunities between puberty and marriage to date and engage in sexual relationships.¹²⁷ They are privileged white-collar professionals that have benefited in many ways from the same global economy that has marginalized Indonesia's working-class women. They embrace the positive aspects of the globalized market economy as it provides for increased economic freedoms and access to alternative philosophies of female equality and sexuality. They are a significant class of women as far as they hold a certain amount of political, economic and social leverage; but they remain a relative minority in Indonesian society- a minority of which Ayu Utami is a part.¹²⁸

State Polity and Shifting Female Subjectivity

With its burgeoning economy, the New Order recognized the significance of promoting a feminized workforce but failed, for the most part, to acknowledge the changing dynamic of female subjectivity in its development of social policy. According to Sylvia Tiwon, the 1993 *GBHN* (*Garis Garis Besar Haluan Negara* or General Outlines of State Policy) continued to pursue the campaign of women's subordination by "enshrining the *Kodrat Wanita*"¹²⁹ in its policy resolutions:

¹²⁶ In conversation with Ayu Utami, she makes an interesting point about the societal perceptions of "single" as "*belum kawin*" (not yet married) in the Indonesian sense versus "single" (no significant other) in the Western sense. In Indonesia, you remain single until you are married. There is no positive alternative label for one that chooses to remain unmarried yet is involved in a long-term relationship. She points out the linguistic absence of terms such as "partner" in Indonesian as a sort of societal rejection of alternative notions of sexual union.

¹²⁷ Gavin W. Jones "The Changing Indonesian Household" in Kathryn Robinson and Sharon Bessell eds., *Women in Indonesia: Gender Equity and Development*. (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002): 232.

¹²⁸ Ayu Utami herself notes that she writes about the world of women she knows and at the time of writing *Saman* most of her female friends were unmarried. Thus the issues surrounding these women are the issues relevant to young single professional women.

¹²⁹ Refer to previous discussion of *Kodrat Wanita* in Chapter Two: 20-21

The fostering of the role of women as equal partners of men is aimed at increasing their active role in development activities, including efforts to materialize (*mewujudkan*) a healthy, prosperous and happy family, as well as the development (*pengembangan*) of children, adolescents and youths, within the framework of the development of the complete Indonesian human (*manusia Indonesia seutuhnya*). The position of women within the family and society and their role in development must be maintained and increasingly stepped up in order to provide the greatest possible contribution towards the development of the nation, while being mindful of their essential nature (*kodrat*) and dignity.¹³⁰

The gendered discourse around which the New Order organized depended upon the subordination of women as mothers and wives within the contained family unit.

With regards to New Order authority Kathryn Robinson writes:

...polity was theorized as resting on the family foundation (*azas kekeluargaan*) which put collective above individual good, and required democracy within leadership, leadership understood implicitly as the 'natural authority' of the father. Thus the patriarchal family has been invoked as the basis of authority relations within society, and the family at the core of the state has been institutionalized.¹³¹

Yasmin, Cok, Laila and Tala resist this state sponsored gender discourse of tradition and collective responsibility. As individual characters they struggle against the patriarchal authority of the family and the social and cultural discourses that reinforce the gender divide and the subordination of women within the family unit—the family unit read as the microcosm of the state and its dominant ideology. Their individual struggles for sexual freedom are an expression of the Indonesian

¹³⁰ Sylvia Tiwon "Reconstructing Boundaries and Beyond" in Koning, Nolten, Rodenburg and Saptari, eds., Women and Households in Indonesia: Cultural Notions and Social Practices (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies: Curzon Press, 2000): 73.

¹³¹ Kathryn Robinson "Indonesian Women- from *Orde Baru* to *Reformasi*" in Louise Edwards and Mina Roces eds., Women in Asia: Tradition, Modernity and Globalization (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000): 141

nationalist/ Western liberal discourse that emphasizes individual rights in response to the Integralist revivalism promoted by the New Order regime in the 1980's.¹³²

Yasmin, Cok, Laila and Shakuntala find freedom in the spaces that the New Order neglects to acknowledge or is incapable of absorbing into its dominant ideology. This freedom comes in part through the New Order's inability to reincorporate the shifting female subjectivities resulting from increased education and economic independence. The economic class status of these four female characters frees them, to a certain extent, from the restrictive constructs of feminine identity dictated by the New Order. As independent professionals, these women are no longer defining themselves vis-à-vis their supportive roles as mothers and wives within the patriarchal family unit. They are neither mothers, nor wives (with the exception of Yasmin) and the prevalent themes of marriage and motherhood that have traditionally dominated female characters in literature appear to be entirely displaced by the more controversial and relevant themes of sex and sexuality.

Cok As Female Emancipation Re-incarnate

Of the four female characters, Cok through her actions and through symbolic association seems to be constructed to best exemplify the image of a modern and sexually emancipated woman. Her transition from the oppressed 11th grader who is sent to Bali to live with relatives after her parent's find a condom in her bag (*Saman*: 151) to the fully emancipated and sexually liberated young woman with parents who

¹³²See: David Bouchier "Totalitarianism and the "National Personality": Recent Controversy about the Philosophical Basis of the Indonesian State" in Imagining Indonesia: Cultural Politics and Political Culture Jim Schiller and Barbara Martin-Schiller eds., (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1997): 157-185. Integralism was a philosophy first advocated by Supomo in the drafting of the constitution of 1945 that conceived of Indonesia as a nation "committed not to individual rights or particular classes but to society conceived of as an organic whole." (Bouchier: 161) Its potential to turn Indonesia into a totalitarian regime was balanced out by the accepted philosophy that all citizens would be given the right to freedom of individual expression and association under the 1945 Constitution.

have given up trying to control her is seemingly effortless (*Saman*: 153). She is capable of completely separating her sexuality from the reproductive and biological functions of womanhood defined by the conventions of state and society.¹³³ She feels no moral guilt for her sexual “promiscuity” nor does she express any sense of moral obligation to the institution of family (ie. – state ideology): she is neither a mother, nor a wife and for her, the discourse of social, familial and religious obligation does not exist except to the extent that she sees it as negatively affecting the sexualities of the women around her.

In *Larung*, Cok’s emancipation takes on symbolic significance. Larung first meets Cok at a Balinese cremation ceremony for his grandmother Adjnani where, according to Larung, it was “Cok who had emerged from amongst the smoldering corpses.”¹³⁴ (*Larung*: 169) The passage conjures Cok as the embodiment of female emancipation rising from the ashes of a funeral pyre stoked by the corpse of Larung’s *simbah*, the physical manifestation of dominant feminine archetypes; it is through the life and death of Larung’s grandmother, Adjnani, that the patriarchal origins of feminine archetypes are deconstructed, dissected and destroyed. In *Larung*, Adjnani- whose significance I will address in the closing section of this chapter- and Cok come to signify the alpha and omega of female emancipation.

As a narrator, Cok embraces a crude vocabulary, laying out her sexuality and the sexuality of her friends (as she sees it) in its most naked form, stripped bare of sacral attachment and romantic illusions. While there is a sense of empowerment about her

¹³³ My argument that Cok has completely disengaged her sexuality from her reproductive role as a woman stems from Kathryn Robinson’s discussion highlighting the contrary affects of the New Order’s development strategy in placing the onus of controlling reproduction largely in the hands of women- a policy procedure that has shown in case studies to have inadvertently led to an increased sense of sexual liberation amongst women. See Chapter Three: 55.

¹³⁴ “*Cok yang muncul di antara asap-asap mayat.*”

straightforward views of sex and sexuality, her crude nature and her sexual prowess could easily be misconstrued as reaffirming the dominant gender stereotype of the “desirous nature” of woman. Cok as representative of the fully emancipated female in a number of ways mirrors the image of the much-feared sexualized and autonomous woman of traditional and contemporary myth.

Yet, constructing a character that represents a fully emancipated and unified female subjectivity is a complicated project and one that, in light of persistent patriarchal structures, only exists as part of the utopian imaginary. Cok appears emancipated to the extent that she is in full control of her own sexuality and she is economically independent but there are aspects of her character that betray this emancipated image. With regards to the misrepresentation of women’s psychic economy, Cora Kaplan notes, “How often are the maternal, romantic-sexual and intellectual capacity of women presented by feminism as in competition for a fixed psychic space.”¹³⁵ The absence of the maternal or romantic-sexual capacity in Cok- those elements of the woman’s psyche that have been appropriated as patriarchal tools of subordination- symbolizes an uneasy resolution to the construction of the emancipated female, one that denies the full capacity of a woman’s psyche to undermine the perceived oppositional categories of male/female: nature/nurturer: reason/passion. For Cok, her emancipation comes through her inversion of the male/female: dominant/subordinate binary and her denial of her maternal or romantic-sexual capacity. In Jameson’s utopian sense, the emancipated female character must be able to embrace the maternal or romantic-sexual as positive, non-subordinate aspects of feminine identity in order to break free of compromising gender divides. In this manner, rather than merely reconfiguring the male/female: dominant/ subordinate binary, a new and

¹³⁵ Cora Kaplan: 159

more egalitarian relation between men and women is formed, at least in what Jameson refers to as the utopian imaginary.

Laila Tak Mampir di New York¹³⁶

Comparatively speaking, Laila is a far more problematic character than the other women in the novels. More so than in the case of Cok, there is an attempt to show the complexity of her psychic economy as she struggles to resolve the patriarchal ideologies that imprison her conscious and unconscious thought processes. Laila is aware of the fact that she is a victim of social and gender oppression to the extent that she feels unable to express her own sexuality without attaching to it feelings of guilt ascribed by religious, social and familial structures (*Saman*: 2,3,26,28,31) (*Larung*: 98,104). Yet she is unconscious of the extent to which she has internalized the very patriarchal structures she struggles against.

The New Order society modeled itself around the concept of *Azas Kekeluargaan* (Family as Foundation). Part of the validation for the containment of women within the parameters of the patriarchal family unit stems from traditional Javanese/ *priyayi* gender constructs and the belief that by 'nature' women are emotional creatures and lack restraint. This lack of restraint, often expressed through myth as uncontained sexual desire, threatens social stability and must be controlled through women's subordination to their more rational male counterpart.¹³⁷ At the same time, there is the contrary view in popular Javanese culture that men "find it much more difficult to

¹³⁶ The full title of Ayu's first novel *Saman* is *Saman: fragmen dari novel Laila Tak Mampir di New York* (*Saman: Fragment from the novel Laila Is A No Show In New York*). When asked why both of her novels are named for their male characters, Ayu says her original title for *Saman* was in fact *Laila Tak Mampir di New York* but as writing progressed she realized that the character of Saman was beginning to take up more space than she had originally intended. She notes that the stories of Saman and Larung dominate the novels but that women's issues remain the most important themes within the both texts.

¹³⁷ See Chapter One for discussion of traditional gender roles in Javanese *Priyayi* culture: 20-23.

contain their innate desires than women do.”¹³⁸ The confusion Laila feels about her body and her sexuality stems from her internalizing of these contrary gender ideologies as a child. She recalls her mother’s rationalization for using all sorts of traditional and painful remedies to visibly conceal Laila’s passage into womanhood:

So this way you won’t tease your friends and your teachers, for that matter the people in the street. Because to them a woman’s body is captivating. And that is dangerous. This way you’ll stay a child until the time comes to be an adult.¹³⁹ (*Larung*. 105)

The passage reinforces this confusing double bind that exists for women in Javanese society. It stresses the gender stereotype that women’s sexuality and men’s innate weakness poses a threat to social stability and justifies the containment/ repression of women’s sexuality as necessary for the maintenance of social and moral harmony. As well it instills in women a sense of fear that they must be vigilant in protecting their purity from falling victim to men’s uncontrollable desire (which is contrary to the very notion that by ‘nature’ men are more rational and less influenced by desire). Either way, whether initiated on the part of the man or woman, the onus of sexual transgressions lies squarely on the shoulders of women.

Kathryn Robinson writes that one of the key difficulties for women of the new middle class- as a “culturally defined group united by consumption and lifestyle”- is the “pressure to conform to an emerging middle-class ideology.”¹⁴⁰ Laila has difficulty reconciling the “progressive” and modern views of women’s sexuality that she is

¹³⁸ Suzanne April Brenner *The Domestication of Desire: Women, Wealth, and Modernity in Java* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1998): 149.

¹³⁹ “*Sebab dengan begini kamu tidak membuat teman dan gurumu, bahkan orang di jalanan, tergoda. Sebab bagi mereka tubuh wanita begitu menawan. Itu berbahaya. Biarlah kamu menjadi anak-anak sampai tiba saatnya menjadi dewasa.*”

¹⁴⁰ Kathryn Robinson “Indonesian Women from *Orde Baru* to *Reformasi*” in *Women in Asia: Tradition, Modernity and Globalization*: 154

exposed to- for the most part through her friendship with the other women- with her more traditional Javanese upbringing. For Javanese middle and upper class women, virginity has been internalized as something that must be cherished and protected (a concept particularly influenced by both Islamic and colonial Christian values).¹⁴¹ In marriage, a woman's purity is insisted upon and to forsake one's virginity before marriage leaves a woman vulnerable to social and familial marginalization. An impure woman is often considered "damaged goods"¹⁴² and an unmarried woman is unable to fulfill her collective and familial obligations as wife and mother. As part of a new generation of Indonesian women living a non-traditional lifestyle and exploring the increased freedoms this more liberal lifestyle allows, Laila struggles to reconcile her individuality and sexual curiosity with her sense of collective duty and moral obligation to the family unit (the family unit being the symbolic extension of the dominant state ideology of tradition/ collective responsibility).

Laila's choice of romantic partner and her virginity become central issues around which much of the women's conversations revolve (*Saman*: 121-124, 126-134/ *Larung*: 100-102, 120-128). Shakuntala feels that Laila has alienated herself from her own sexuality by internalizing the traditional notion that virginity is something that must be protected; the thin layer of the hymen being the only physical evidence of a woman's purity and self-worth (*Larung*: 145). It is for this reason that she continues to pursue her affair with Sihar. Laila's relationship with Sihar is complicated by a number of factors: namely Laila's confusion with regards to her virginity and what it symbolizes for her as a woman and Sihar's marital status and his convoluted views about women's purity. Sihar seems to blame Laila's virginity for the stagnancy in

¹⁴¹ Hellwig. *In the Shadow of Change*: 194.

¹⁴² Shakuntala's mother makes the analogy between an impure woman and a broken china plate. An unmarried woman whose hymen has been broken is as useless as a piece of broken china that is tossed into the garbage heap or used to decorate the walls of cemeteries. (*Saman*: 124)

their relationship yet at the same time he refuses to take it upon himself to deflower her for the very fact that he does not want to be responsible for ‘ruining’ her for other men (*Larung*: 98, 127). Both Tala and Cok point out the irony in the fact that Sihar has placed so much emphasis on Laila’s virginity but that he, as a man married to a divorcee, doesn’t necessarily conform to the patriarchal norm of men who insist upon a women’s purity. Tala believes Laila chooses ill-fated relationships and unattainable men because subconsciously “she is a child terrified by the delicate formation of her hymen.”¹⁴³ (*Larung*: 145)

Laila, on the other hand, feels Sihar is the man she wants to lose her virginity to. She sees the opportunity to meet with Sihar outside of Indonesia as a chance finally to overcome the barriers that have held them back from having sex in the past- her overprotective father, her sense of moral guilt, her fear of the social repercussions of losing her virginity and the ever-threatening presence of Sihar’s wife. For Laila, visiting Shakuntala in New York City and meeting with Sihar offers the prospect of sexual freedom that she is incapable of achieving for one reason or another in Indonesia:

Maybe I’m just worn out by everything that stands in our way in Indonesia. Tired of the values that sometimes feel like they’re terrorizing me. I want to leave that all behind and let the things we want to happen just happen. Break through what has up until now been a barrier between my connection with Sihar. Maybe.¹⁴⁴ (*Saman*: 28)

¹⁴³ “ada seorang anak yang terteror oleh jalin-jalin halus selaput dara.”

¹⁴⁴ “Barangkali saya letih dengan segala yang menghalangi hubungan kami di Indonesia. Capek dengan nilai-nilai yang kadang terasa seperti teror. Saya ingin pergi dari itu semua, dan membiarkan hal-hal yang kami inginkan terjadi. Mendobrak yang selama ini menyekat hubungan saya dengan Sihar. Barangkali.”

But as the alternative title for *Saman* suggests- “*fragmen dari novel Laila Tak Mampir di New York*”- the Laila that Laila is searching for in New York never actually “shows up” or materializes. Her plans to lose her virginity to Sihar are foiled when Sihar’s wife decides to accompany him on his trip to New York. Ultimately, physically escaping Indonesia for the “sexual freedom” of New York doesn’t free Laila from her unresolved psychic self. For Laila, New York merely becomes an extension of her confining relationship with her own sexuality.

Globalization and the Significance of Place and Space in the Struggle for Individual Sexual Freedom

The significance Laila attaches to New York City as a potentially liberating “space” in which to explore her sexuality is part of a larger discourse of globalization at work in the novels. For Yasmin, Cok, Laila and Shakuntala, the opportunity to express their individual sexuality has a significant connection to the globalized world they inhabit as middle-class women. This is best conveyed by the ease with which they move between the boundaries of Indonesian and American culture. For the four women, New York offers a space in which to explore a variety of possibilities. It should be noted that in Indonesian literature America and Europe have traditionally symbolized a sexual potential that lies outside the range of possibilities dictated within Indonesian society.¹⁴⁵ Yet for Cok, Yasmin and Tala who already have a healthy sense of their own sexuality, the sexual possibilities offered by traveling to the West are merely an extension of the sexual freedoms they assume for themselves at home in Indonesia. For Laila, who continues to struggle with her individual sexual identity, America and New York retain their traditional role in literature as places of symbolic escape from the sexual repression she feels in Indonesia.

¹⁴⁵Hellwig *In the Shadow of Change*: 196.

The women in *Saman* and *Larung* exploit the New Order's vulnerability to the effects of globalization by embracing the various "spaces" made available to them as members of the privileged middle-class with access to the global community. While entrance into the global marketplace marked a strengthening of the New Order economic system, it also meant that the New Order's hegemonic control would become increasingly vulnerable to oppositional global influences. Indonesia's entrance into the global economy marked a transition in women's roles within society especially amongst the new middle class. Globalization opened a space for alternative views of feminine identity; at the same time the economy was pulling women out of the homes and into the workforce. By the mid 1980's women were actively participating in the public and political arena. Yasmin, Cok, Laila and Shakuntala are all involved to a certain extent in the public and political realm whether through work or political dissidence.

Although it has been noted that the public and political activities of these women are marginalized by the more personal themes of sex and sexuality,¹⁴⁶ I would here expand on my earlier argument and say that by the late 1990's (the period in which these novels were written) women had already begun to establish themselves as part of the public/ political discourse although their representation in the institutions of the state remained marginal.¹⁴⁷ As characters, the capability of these women as political actors, especially Yasmin as a lawyer and NGO activist, is already assumed and therefore becomes a supporting (but not necessarily insignificant) theme within the two novels. On the other hand, women's rights to equality of citizenship free from the "equality through difference" (ie. - woman's worth as defined primarily by

¹⁴⁶ See: Chapter Three discussion in reference to Intan Paramiditha's article "*Larung dan Remehnya Seksualitas Perempuan*": 55-56

¹⁴⁷ See: Kathryn Robinson "From *Orde Baru* to *Reformasi*" in Women in Asia: Tradition, Modernity and Globalization : 153-155

her ability to contribute to society in the capacity of wife and mother and secondarily through her participation in the economic development of the nation) rhetoric of the state remains an area of contention and as such becomes the main focus around which these women organize their struggle for individual sexual freedom against the dominant ideology of the state.

Significant portions of *Saman* and *Larung* are dedicated to “spaces” outside the physical realm of Indonesia. Much of the novel takes place in New York City and illustrates the freedom of these women as global citizens. Another significant “space” within the texts is cyberspace- a byproduct of globalization that exists outside the control of the New Order. Cyberspace allows Yasmin, Saman and Larung to organize a resistance movement and works as a subversive tool for their political dissidence. It links them to a national network of journalists and political activism at the same time it connects them with the global NGO community. For Yasmin cyberspace is a forum for the expression of her political views as well as a place to explore her personal/sexual self. In relation to the *Ideologeme* of individual sexual freedom, it is important to note that in both *Saman* and *Larung*, the unfurling of Yasmin’s psyche occurs in cyberspace where she and Saman relive their illicit sexual affair and share their most intimate thoughts via email.

Shakuntala’s Rainbow

There is no room for alternative gender identities in an ideology rooted in “*azas kekeluargaan*” (the family as foundation). According to the New Order, social stability relied upon maintaining the distinct separation of gender roles between men and women within the nuclear family. There is little space within the modern/national discourse for gender constructs that exist outside of the prescribed heterosexual relationship, even amongst the progressive middle-class. In connection

to the marginalization of gay and lesbian subjectivity in Indonesia, Tom Boellstorff writes that, "It is through heterosexuality that gendered self and nation are articulated."¹⁴⁸ As the only character that represents an alternative to the central discourse of heterosexuality, Shakuntala struggles and finds freedom in a distinctly different space than the other three women. She inhabits a world unlike any of the other characters and it is from this space that she dances releasing her multiple sexualities, free from the constraints of dominant heterosexual gender ideologies.

Shakuntala's parents raised her within the strict boundaries of the Javanese belief system. Yet unlike Laila, who remains a victim to her upbringing, Shakuntala has internalized these experiences and gained a sense of empowerment from them. Through tactics of fear and brutality her father as the patriarch of the family attempted to instill in Shakuntala a sense of the proper role for woman within Javanese society- the *Kodrat Wanita*:

My parent's believe that men are rational and women are emotional. Because of that men rule and women love. Men create and women nurture. Men make children and women give birth to them.¹⁴⁹
(*Larung*: 136)

Female sexuality was something that needed to be controlled according to Tala's father. His didacticism drew upon a canon of Javanese myths meant to frighten Shakuntala into believing that her sexual purity was under constant attack: The first thing he taught her as a child was that there is a certain type of *raksasa* (demon) that can smell the putrid scent of women's urine and that just like a shark these *raksasa*

¹⁴⁸ Tom Boellstorff "Gay and *Lesbi* Subjectivities, National Belonging and the New Indonesia" in Kathryn Robinson and Sharon Bessell eds., Women in Indonesia: Gender, Equity and Development (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002): 98.

¹⁴⁹ "Orangtuaku percaya bahwa pria cenderung rasional dan wanita emosional. Karena itu pria akan memimpin dan wanita mengasahi. Pria membangun dan wanita memelihara. Pria membikin anak dan wanita melahirkan."

know the scent of a virgin like they know scent of flesh and in just the same way they can pick up on the scent of a non-virgin (*Larung*: 137).

At a young age Shakuntala learns to undermine her father's patriarchal control by inhabiting and reappropriating, in her own way, the very worlds her father constructs to imprison her. She falls in love with the *raksasa* she has been taught to fear and she offers to him, at the tender age of nine, her hymen- a red spidery web tucked into a small box (*Saman*: 124). Shakuntala narrates her past as though it is a dark blend of fairytale and reality; how her father learns of her secret communion with the *raksasa*; how she is sent to a strange city as vast and dark as the forests where the *raksasa* live; to a new school, surrounded by a deep river, full of ancient fish. It is here she first meets Laila and here that her father gives his first lessons about the conventions of love in a very brutal and unconventional way:

Here, in this city, at night he tied me to my bed and gave me my first two lessons about love. These were his instructions: *First*. It's only a man that can approach a woman. A woman who chases after a man is a slut. *Second*. A woman will give her body to a man who is suitable, and that man will provide for her.¹⁵⁰ (*Saman*: 120-121)

Shakuntala rebels against the gender ideology imposed upon her by her father. Her emancipation comes in the form of dance. It is through dance that Shakuntala first encounters her other selves: "Twirling I imitate a whirling Dervish...then take flight and feel something release from me: him. If I keep twirling faster and faster, then other forms will unravel from within me. Two, then three, then four, then many,

¹⁵⁰ "Di sini, di kota ini, malam hari ia mengikatku pada tempat tidur dan memberi aku dua pelajaran pertamaku tentang cinta. Inilah wewejangnya: Pertama. Hanya laki-laki yang boleh menghampiri perempuan. Perempuan yang mengejar-ngejar lelaki pastilah sundal. Kedua. Perempuan akan memberikan tubuhnya pada lelaki yang pantas, dan lelaki itu akan menghidupnya dengan hartanya. Itu dinamakan perkawinan."

each with their own gender.”¹⁵¹ (*Larung*: 133-134) For Shakuntala, dancing is a medium through which to release her multiple forms, not female, not male but sexual beings that emanate from her and are part of her sexual identity.

What is particularly transgressive about the character of Shakuntala is that she finds her sexual freedom in the traditional and mythical reaches of the Javanese past as well as in a globalized present. Like the other women, who find strength as global citizens in a modern world, Shakuntala uses her opportunity to go to New York and dance as a means of escaping her father and the narrow patriarchal world he represents. Yet, unlike the other women that tend to marginalize the trappings of Indonesian/Javanese tradition, Shakuntala reaches back in time, reappropriating the myths of the *Ramayana* through her dance and performing them on a stage that exists within a global context. Shakuntala puts a particularly Javanese spin not only on her exploration of gender through dance but on her interpretation of the beast or *raksasa* of the West that is New York City (*Saman*: 139-140). Thus her understanding of self or subjectivity as a global citizen is specifically informed by her origins as a Javanese woman.

Laila and Shakuntala: A Metaphorical Release

Shakuntala sees the only way to free Laila from the imprisonment of her sexuality is to show her sexual pleasure. Laila has never experienced an orgasm and Shakuntala decides she is not going to let her go until she learns to know her own body (*Larung*: 153). In patriarchal societies, control of female sexuality is part of maintaining societal stability. Lesbianism, as it exists as a sexual relationship determined by two women, lies outside the control of men and thus poses a threat to the patriarchal

¹⁵¹ “*Berputar-putar aku menirukan seperti darwis...lalu aku melayang dan merasa ada yang terlepas: ia. Jika aku berputar terus dan berputar kencang, maka sosok-sosok lain akan berlepasan dari diriku. Dua, lalu tiga, lalu empat, lalu banyak, dengan kelaminnya masing-masing.*”

structures of power. The encounter between Laila and Shakuntala is unprecedented in Indonesian literature not because lesbianism has never appeared as a theme before- it has many times. Rather it differs in the way in which the same-sex encounter is resolved within the text. The repercussions for Laila and Tala's transgression are left unexplored- although there is a sense that the experience will have the positive effect on Laila's sexual self- whereas in earlier depictions of lesbianism, the characters are always punished for their transgressions; as a means of resolving the text they are almost always reincorporated into the structure of a controlled heterosexual relationship.¹⁵²

Shakuntala teaches Laila about her sexuality the only way she knows how- through dancing. She teaches Laila the tango- a dance that is not about romance but about sensuality, a dance that doesn't depend upon the mind but uses the body (*Larung*: 131). Laila is entranced and confused by Shakuntala's sexuality as she dances the tango. Pressed up against her, the light is low and she catches glimpses of Tala in her various forms. She sees images of Sihar and Saman in Tala's face and in her movements (*Larung*: 131). Confused by it all, she thinks: "Right now I don't know who she is anymore. Is it Tala, is it Saman, is it Sihar?"¹⁵³ For Shakuntala, the experience is more didactic. She notes the slow weakening of Laila, how she succumbs to her movements and is taken over with emotion. For both women, the encounter is not romantic but rather sensual. The reader as witness to this foreplay between Laila and Tala, is left with only a metaphor for the actual event:

BECAUSE THE VAGINA IS A TYPE OF CARNIVOROUS FLOWER
SIMILAR TO SEMAR'S POCKET. BUT IT DOESN'T INVITE
INSECTS, BUT MUCH LARGER ANIMALS- DUMB AND SPINELESS-
BY MANIPULATING THE AROMA OF ITS MUCUS MUCH LIKE

¹⁵² See Tineke Hellwig *In the Shadow of Change*: 189

¹⁵³ "Sebab kini saya tak tahu lagi siapa dia. Apakah Tala apakah Saman apakah Sihar." : 132.

THE ROTTING WILD LILY DOES. IN TRUTH, THE CARNIVOROUS FLOWER DOESN'T EAT THE MEAT BUT RATHER SIPS THE NECTAR FROM THE CREATURE THAT IS TRAPPED WITHIN ITS CAVITY BEHIND A WARM SHEATH. ITS MUSCLES ARE STRONG, ITS WALLS IMPENETRABLE AND ITS WETTENED OPENING MILKS THE ANIMAL THAT ENTERS, WITH A REPETITIVE MOTION THAT ASSURES THE FLOWER RECEIVES THE NECTAR IT IS THIRSTY FOR. NITROGEN FOR NEPENTHES , SPERM FOR THE VAGINA.

YET THIS CLITORIS FLOWER KNOWS HOW TO GIVE PLEASURE TO ITSELF WITH THE VIBRATIONS BROUGHT BY THE WIND.” ¹⁵⁴
(*Larung: 153*)

The metaphor subverts the masculine/feminine: dominant/ subordinate sex roles. It makes it clear that a woman who knows how to get what she wants from a man, first knows her sexual self. By showing Laila that she has the capacity to reach orgasm on her own, Shakuntala teaches her to become an active participant in her own sexuality rather than the timid and passive recipient.

*Owning Bahasa*¹⁵⁵

Kris Budiman suggests the metaphor is employed as a means of “shattering” the gendered dichotomy that is “demarcated in Indonesian as the opposition between

154 (Capitalized in text) “SEBAB VAGINA ADALAH SEJENIS BUNGA KARNIVORA SEBAGAIMANA KANTONG SEMAR. NAMUN IA TIDAK MENGUNDANG SERANNGGA, MELAINKAN BINATANG YANG LEBIH BESAR, BODOH, DAN TAK BERTULANG BELAKANG, DENGAN MANIPULASI AROMA LENDIR SEBAGAIMANA YANG DILAKUKAN BAKUNG BANGKAI. SESUNGGUNYA, BUNGA KARNIVORA BUKAN MEMAKAN DAGING MELAINKAN MENGHISAP CAIRAN DARI MAKHLUK YANG TERJEBAK DALAM RONGGA DI BALIK KELOPAK-KELOPAKNYA YANG HANGAT. OTOT-OTOTNYA YANG KUAT, RERELUNG DINDINGNYA YANG KEDAP, DAN PERMUKAAN LIANGNYA YANG BASAH AKAN MEMERAS BINATANG YANG MASUK, DALAM GERAKAN BERULANG-ULANG, HINGGA BUNGA INI MEMPEROLEH CAIRAN YANG IA HAUSKAN. NITROGEN PADA NEPENTHES, SPERMA PADA VAGINA.

TAPI KLITORIS BUNGA INI TAHU BAGAIMANA MENIKMATI DIRINYA DENGAN GETARAN YANG DISEBABKAN ANGIN.

¹⁵⁵ Language

meN- [active] and *di-* [passive] (to kiss versus to be kissed, to have sex with someone versus to be had [sexually] etc.)¹⁵⁶ By evading a description of the lesbian “encounter” in direct terms, neither Shakuntala nor Laila is forced to represent a linguistically prescribed dominant (*meN-*) or passive (*di-*) role. I would also add that there is a more practical explanation for employing a metaphor. Using poetic terms in place of describing a sexual encounter functions to avoid pushing too far beyond the boundaries of normative society or into the controversial realm of what many would perceive as pornography or eroticism.¹⁵⁷

In the linguistic processes of the text there is an attempt on the part of the author to show how these women claim equality in language as well as by their actions. Thoughts and actions are articulated in a vocabulary that suggests these women are taking control of their sexuality. Cok recounts how she realized as a teenager that her inability to enjoy sexual encounters was due to the oppressive religious and social pressures placed upon a woman and her purity and how she initially made the decision to just “*melakukannya*” (do it) as a way of reclaiming her sexual identity. Her word choice to describe her first encounter with sex is noteworthy. Had she used the more ubiquitous “*kehilangan perawan*” (lose one’s virginity) she would have appeared as the passive recipient/ victim to the sexual act. As a turn of phrase, “*melakukannya*” suggests her decision to no longer “protect” her virginity is entirely of her own volition. (*Larung*: 83)

¹⁵⁶ “*tertera di dalam bahasa Indonesia sebagai oposisi meN-x di- (mencium x dicium; menyetubuhi x disetubuhi, dst.)*” see: Kris Budiman. “Dari Saman ke Larung, Menemukan Kembali Sisa-Sisa Fемinitas” in *30 Jurnal Perempuan* (2003): 13.

¹⁵⁷ See my earlier references to Harry Aveling and Goenawan Mohamad’s discussion of the absence of sex in modern Indonesian literature in Chapter Three: 55.

Ayu also notes that she wasn’t interested in telling a story about sex rather she wanted to bring to the fore the problems associated with women’s sexuality. See: Agus Surono and Shinta Teviningrum. “Ayu Utami: Seks Itu Problem Perempuan” *Intisari* (September 1998): 12-21.

Not only do these women reclaim equality through language, they also expose the masculine construction of language and its connection to the loss of feminine subjectivity. In the most telling of email passages, Yasmin re-explores her childhood fantasies through the framework of Freudian psychoanalysis, admitting to fantasies about victimizing men sexually. She claims that as she grew up she began to be embarrassed by these thoughts and hid them away. This shame she associates with her entrance into the patriarchal world where she feels she has lost her subjectivity and has become merely an object (*Larung*: 159). Yasmin describes her transition from subject to object at this stage in her life: “*Aku kehilangan keperempuanku dan menjadi wanita (Larung: 159).*”¹⁵⁸ The term *perempuan* being derived from the root word *empu* suggests skill and knowledge, authority and strength whereas *wanita*, as a Javanese term suggests bravery or courage but only when guided or led.¹⁵⁹ *Perempuan* as a more emancipatory term is favored by feminists in Indonesia as a non-gendered alternative to the term *wanita* that reaffirms the dominant male/female binary. Essentially, what Yasmin is articulating through her careful choice of words is that she feels she has lost her power as a woman to define herself independently of men.

Yasmin: Sex and the City

Yasmin’s illicit affair with Saman allows her to reclaim her subjectivity as a *perempuan*. Their relationship opens a space for her to delve into her own psyche and explore- seemingly without the expectation of solving- the contradictory nature of her own feminine identity. Yasmin, as the other characters perceive her, most closely resembles the image of the idealized and modern Indonesian woman. She is

¹⁵⁸ “I lost my femininity/ female-ness and became a woman/ lady”- The significance of the transition between *keperempuan* and *wanita* is lost slightly in the translation of the two terms.

¹⁵⁹ MB Wijaksana “Marriane Katoppo: Yang Hampir Terlupa Dari Sastra Indonesia” 30 *Jurnal Perempuan* 2003: 112

intelligent, wealthy, successful, a good daughter, a good Catholic and a good wife to her husband Lukas. Yet there are specific moments when the other characters question whether Yasmin is being truly honest in how she presents herself to the world and how she perceives herself within that world:

That's what I mean. She's a hypocrite. She's always calm and polite, like the kind of white-collar worker that all boarding house mothers yearn to have. But I'm positive that way down deep inside she's just like me. Wild. Have a look at her clothes: her jacket, a blazer with shoulder pads, like she's some sort of executive or a T.V. anchorwoman. But I'm positive that underneath it all, her bra and panties are definitely fancy."¹⁶⁰ (*Larung*. 79)

What Cok sees as hypocrisy in her friend can better be defined as the dilemma of the young, urban middle class woman. As a character, Yasmin is representative of a new social discourse that Yatun Sastramidjaja describes as the New Order notion of *kodrat wanita* meets girl power: "As young women oscillate between these two strong images of female identity, they experience serious but usually hidden inner conflicts, particularly in the area of sexuality."¹⁶¹

Yasmin has always lived by the *Pancasila* ("by the book"). She grew up doing her homework on time, joining all the extra-curricular clubs her parents wanted her to join, was a good Catholic, went to university, met her future husband Lukas there and married him after she graduated. Now she works in her father's law firm and on the side manages to lobby for Human Rights and work as a political dissident. Everything Yasmin has done in life she has done because it was the next "logical" step. She

¹⁶⁰"*Itulah. Dia munafik. Dia selalu tampil kalem dan sopan, seperti karyawan baik-baik yang diidamkan ibu-ibu kos. Tapi gue yakin, di dasar hatinya yang paling dalam dia sama dengan aku. Binal. Perhatikan pakaian kerjanya: stelan, blazer dengan bantalan bahu, kayak eksekutif atau penyiar berita teve. Tapi gue yakin beha dan celana dalamnya pasti fansi.*"

¹⁶¹ Yatun Sastramidjaja "Sex in the City: Between Girl Power and the Mother Image, Young Urban Women Struggle for Identity" *Inside Indonesia* (April-June 2001): 14

struggles against social conventions at the same time she puts forth an image of the perfect Indonesian woman and her secret escape eventually comes in the form of Saman.

In comparison to the conventional sex life she feels she must adhere to in her marriage to Lukas, with Saman, Yasmin can explore her own sexual fantasies that have long been repressed. Saman gives her back the power that she feels has been stolen from her by a world that worships the phallus and mythologizes the purity of women (*Larung*: 161- 162). Through Saman she can express her masochistic sexual fantasies:

But what I experienced with you astonished me. You let me tie you to the iron bedpost like one of those rabbits used for experimental testing. You let my fingers play with your body like the Lilliputians exploring some human that has been cast upon their shore. You let me hurt you like the secret police interrogating a captive spy. You had no other choice but to let me delay your orgasm, or to let me deny you entirely, let you suffer a literal *coitus interruptus*. Saman, I had never done that before.¹⁶² (*Larung*: 157)

While Yasmin seems to gain a certain amount of psychic and sexual emancipation from her relationship with Saman, there are tensions that undermine this newfound freedom. In a sense, there is an inversion of constructed gender roles; it is not that the role of masochist is a prescribed masculine position- Yasmin notes the bias of such theorists as Deleuze who claim masochism to be an essentially masculine trait- rather

¹⁶² “Tapi yang kualami bersamamu menakjubkan aku. Kamu biarkan aku mengikatmu pada ranjang seperti kelinci percobaan. Kamu biarkan jari-jariku bermain-main dengan tubuhmu seperti liliput mengeksplorasi manusia yang terdampar. Kamu biarkan aku menyakitimu seperti polisi rahasia menginterogasi mata-mata yang tertangkap. Kamu tak punya pilihan selain membiarkan aku menunda orgasmemu, atau membiarkan kamu tak memperolehnya, membuatmu menderita oleh *coitus interruptus* yang harafiah. Saman, aku belum pernah melakukannya.”

that the balance between Yasmin and Saman, as two characters involved in a consensual sexual relationship, is not equal.

Saman, as Yasmin's lover, becomes the willing victim to Yasmin's sexual fantasies. Yet, coupled with this willingness is Saman's own sense of sexual inadequacy. In the first novel he recounts the night that he lost his virginity/celebrity to Yasmin and his feelings of failure in his inability to bring Yasmin to climax. (*Saman*: 177) Saman, through his inexperience is stripped of any sort of sexual power. His awkward understanding of sexual desire is already established early in the first novel in his interactions with Upi, the imbecile [sic] whose character is dominated by an animalistic sex drive. This powerlessness that Saman feels in his relationship with Yasmin could not be any more apparent than in the last line of the novel wherein he calls upon Yasmin to teach him, to rape him: "Yasmin Teach me, Rape me."¹⁶³ (*Saman*: 197) Saman asking Yasmin to rape him, an action conceived of as the most extreme and objectifying act of female subordination, symbolizes the ultimate shattering of the male/female: dominant/subordinate binary in the sexual relationship between Yasmin and Saman. But the violence of the term "rape" always suggests a position of dominance and subordination. Saman is "feminized" through his subordinate position as victim while Yasmin takes up the "masculinized" role of rapist. The dialogue suggests there is no potential for the construction of an egalitarian relationship between Yasmin and Saman; rather that Yasmin's sexual freedom can only come through the construction of unequal power relations.

Yasmin, Cok, Laila and Shakuntala are representative of young Indonesian women capable of liberating themselves from the state's ideal of the normative duties for women. They use the tools of the privileged middle-class to maneuver in a world

¹⁶³"*Yasmin, Ajarilah aku, Perkosalah aku.*"

that, on the surface at least, appears to be unrestricted by the gender conventions of marriage and motherhood. None of these women are defined or define themselves in terms of their roles as wives and mothers. In this manner, their emancipation is characterized to a certain extent by what they *are not* as much as for what they *are*. Yet Yasmin, Cok, Laila and Tala still struggle at a psychic level against the traditional/collective restraints placed upon them by society, which in the individual struggle for sexual freedom is understood as microcosmic representation of the state apparatus. While it is impossible ever to reconcile subjectivity or according to Marxist criticism, to ever exist entirely outside of dominant ideological structures, these characters as representative of a cross-section of urban middle-class Indonesian women are generally positive reconceptualizations of feminine identity working towards a unified female subjectivity.

Marginalized Subjectivity

While these four images of female subjectivity constructed by Ayu Utami are generally positive in and of themselves, their portrayal as relatively progressive and emancipated women is dependent upon the way in which other characters are constructed in *Saman* and *Larung*. Returning to the quote that opens this chapter, Cora Kaplan makes an important point about the harmful way in which women's texts "express positive femininity through hostile and denigrating representations of women. Imperiled bourgeois femininity takes meaning in relation to other female identities, and to the feminized identities of other social groups that the novel constructs and dialogizes."¹⁶⁴ To a certain extent the positive female characters in *Saman* and *Larung* take on dominant positions in relation to other characters who are negatively depicted as taking on the qualities of femininity that are most often associated with the subordination of women. In *Saman* and *Larung*, these disparities

¹⁶⁴ Cora Kaplan: 167-168

amongst the representations of characters further complicate the individual struggle of the texts towards a unified resolution. In the above section, I have attempted to illustrate in one particular case how Saman's sexual self falls victim to "feminization" within the text. Yet, there are other ways in which the individualist struggle of middle class feminism is unconscious of how it undermines alternative representations of female identity.

The competing ideological paradigms of Indonesian feminism can be identified through the division and treatment of "mothers" within both texts. For the most part, the absence of *Ibu* is the most telling contradiction in the texts; it is as though *Ibu*, with its inextricable link to the gender constructs of the New Order regime, is a representation of feminine identity that cannot be resolved through the lives of these four women and is thus denigrated, marginalized and for the most part, ignored by the realist elements of the texts. There are a few instances in *Saman* and *Larung* where the maternal actions of the mother figures are portrayed as damaging to the psychological development of the four female characters. Particularly for Shakuntala and Laila, their mothers, acting in their capacity as supportive wives and purveyors of "traditional" values, have complicated these young women's understandings of their own sexuality.

Saman's mother and Larung's grandmother are two images of the *Ibu* that figure most prominently in *Saman* and *Larung*. An analysis of these women within the context of the modern/ psychological realist novel reveals that neither one is a particularly egalitarian figure; rather both are negatively typed as subservient and dominant respectively. Yet it must be noted that these women do not just signify a reaffirmation of a traditional gender binary; they too transgress patriarchal norms and stereotypes to a certain extent in ways that are marked as positive on at least one

level. But these transgressions appear in their relationship to traditional mythology and the supernatural and not necessarily in connection to the realist project of the texts. The more positive aspect of the *Ibu* characters and their role in the subversion of patriarchal norms through their connection to Javanese mysticism and traditional mythology (as cultural forms representative of earlier modes of production) will be left to the final and conclusive horizon as part of the *Ideology of Form*. As part of the *Ideologeme* of individual freedom, I will look at the negative depictions of these two women, particularly in relation to Saman and Larung, and at how these denigrated images of femininity undermine the utopian project of the texts.

A Priest and His Mother: The Troubled Relationship Between Saman and *Ibu*

Saman's mother exists only in Saman's sentimental and somewhat haunted childhood memories. As part of his narrative she has no voice of her own nor is she referred to by any name other than *Ibu*- it is as though she exists only in her capacity as mother. She is a meek character with a delicate constitution, highly susceptible to supernatural forces that seem to govern over her and distance her emotionally from her son Saman:

His mother who was still noble and beautiful was an entity that could not be defined in rational terms. It was often apparent that she wasn't in the same place as he was or she was off in a place where he wasn't...Sometimes her silences would come to an end after she had gone off to an unknown spot, maybe a place that wasn't really anywhere: a sort of in-between and empty space. But if she happened to be in the same place as him, she was very affectionate and engendered a feeling of love, so that her husband and others forgot that other part of her that was hard to understand.¹⁶⁵ (*Saman*: 44)

¹⁶⁵ "Ibunya yang masih raden ayu adalah sosok yang tak bisa dijelaskan oleh akal. Ia sering nampak tidak berada di tempat ia ada, atau berada di tempat ia tidak ada...Kadang kebiasuannya diakhiri dengan pergi ke tempat yang tidak diketahui orang, barangkali suatu ruang yang tidak di mana-mana: suatu suwung. Tetapi jika dia sedang berada di tempat dia ada, maka dia adalah wanita yang amat hangat dan

The character of Saman's mother introduces to the reader a world of "irrational" Javanese mysticism and the supernatural that contrasts sharply with the rational beliefs of Saman's father who is a hard working man, a dedicated husband and father and a devout Catholic who refuses to acknowledge his wife's attachment to the spirit world.

Through her subservience to an alternate power, Saman's *Ibu* fails in her terrestrial role as wife and mother. In comparison to the idealized role of *Ibu* in New Order ideology, she is neither a reliable companion to her husband nor is she particularly successful at rearing and raising children. Of the four children she gives birth to, only Saman survives- two mysteriously disappear from her womb and a third dies shortly after birth. As Saman understands it, his younger siblings are taken away from the world of reality by some sort of supernatural entity to a place where Saman's mother can only visit them if she is off in a world that he cannot see or be a part of but where he is always haunted by their cries. (*Saman*: 44- 57) Saman spends his childhood feeling jealousy and anger towards this entity and the spirits of his younger siblings that take his mother's love and affection away from him. While it is not directly stated in the text, the inability of Saman's mother to fulfill her role as maternal figure seems to create a closer bond between Saman and his father and drive Saman to reject the supernatural in exchange for the more rational world of Catholicism.

Saman's mother confirms the more traditional stereotypes concerning the nature and place of women in Javanese society. As *ibu*, Saman's mother reaffirms the Javanese notion that women are more "irrational" by nature and must be guided by their more

membangkitkan rasa sayang sehingga suaminya dan orang-orang lupa pada sisi lain dirinya yang sulit dipahami."

“rational” male counterpart. At the same time she fulfills this negative image of the weak and subservient woman although, in this case, her subservience is to a masculinized supernatural entity rather than to the family she has made with Saman’s father. Ultimately, it is this aspect of her character that exists outside of the realm of normative society (referring back to Sylvia Tiwon’s model/ maniac scenario) that has the most destructive effect on her family and on Saman in particular.

In comparison, the spiritual realm that Saman’s mother appears to be at once married to and a victim of becomes a source of strength for other women in *Larung* and *Saman*. Shakuntala inhabits a world of “*jins*” and “*peri*” not unlike Saman’s *ibu* yet she draws from the dark forest of the *raksasa* a sense of empowerment and release. In *Larung*, the character of Larung’s grandmother reappropriates the negative image of *Ibu* in the first novel and imbues it with a certain amount of social and political clout bringing an alternate voice to ancient and modern tales of female subordination.

A Self/ -ish / -less Act: The Euthenization? Of Adnjani

Larung and his grandmother Adnjani are introduced for the first time in the beginning of the second novel. Larung is in the process of gathering the black magic needed to kill his grandmother whose supernatural powers refuse to let her die. While the storyline of Larung’s struggle to kill his grandmother and the modern tale of the four female characters seem completely disconnected, the emancipation of these women as individuals is tied thematically to Larung and the actions in the first section of the novel: on a symbolic level the death of Adnjani signifies the death of the negatively constructed images of the *widow*, the *witch*, and the *gerwani* woman in Indonesian/ Javanese myth and thus opens up a space for the reconceptualization of new forms of feminine identity in the text. Yet, the complicated and troubling rendering of Adnjani and Larung as characters within a realist psychological novel

and their ambiguous relationship with one another is not as easily reconciled with the rest of Ayu's feminist project of subverting the image of the much-feared autonomous woman of myth.

Larung's mother depicts his grandmother in her younger years as a woman "that was strong, sharp-tongued and arrogant. She was unusually brave and never felt she was ever in the wrong."¹⁶⁶ (*Larung*: 13) For the most part, the figure of Adnjani- in the eyes of Larung's mother, the other women within the text (her nurses), and often times Larung- is a vicious and much-feared character not unlike those perpetuated by the age-old myths she works to undermine. Utami seems to emphasize her controlling nature by writing Adnjani against the other women in the text. Her overwhelming domination of Larung's psychic self- an extension of which is his intimate first person narrative- pushes the other women within the text to the periphery, leaving them without voice or representation. But from the few glimpses the reader has of Adnjani's interaction with women in the text, she appears intolerant of other forms of feminine identity especially those that are meek or sentimental like Larung's mother and the virginal nurses that are hired in succession to treat her. Overall, there is no compassion left in the real and aging figure of Adnjani and her vicious nature only seems to complicate the purity of Larung's agenda to "euthenize" her.

In an idealized scenario, the responsibility of killing an elderly and ailing woman would fall into the hands of an unproblematic and reliable agent. But the way in which the narrative structure constructs an intimate portrait of Larung at both the conscious and unconscious level exposes the contradictions between Larung's thoughts and action, casting doubt on his pure intentions for killing his grandmother.

¹⁶⁶ "yang kuat, cerewet, dan pongah. Ia luar biasa berani dan tak pernah merasa salah."

Ayu exposes the contradiction of Larung's personality in a number of ways. Initially, it emerges in the 'subtexts,' the internal dialogue Larung holds with himself in relation to those he vocalizes to the outside world. These inconsistencies emerge often in bracketed form or in lengthy internal digressions that negate the vocalized statements that come either before or after these sexualized or fetishized utterances. As in the case of Larung's encounter with a woman at the train station who has kindly returned his forgotten address book:

"Child, you forgot your address book" ...

When she nodded towards her fingers that clasped my notebook, I saw her ear right there in front of my eyes. Hmm, the recesses, every ear is a labyrinth covered with small delicate hairs. And the ear, my friend, is the one part of our body that never ages... Look at her inner ear, her lobe, the dust mixed with the wax that smells all oily and salty, and that dark canal, glistening with the lubricant that protects its soft drum, that lubricant that gives off a bitter pungency so no insect wants to venture there. The vaginal canal reminds me of a network, the dark place where life is first flexed, the acidic smell that awaits the neutralizing sperm, wet and warm, but the ear canal reminds me of death: an ending with no end.

Ibu, your ears are pointed like a *mambang* (a type of supernatural creature)

"Oh my God, thank you very much, Bu."¹⁶⁷ (*Larung*: 4)

¹⁶⁷ "Anak ketinggalan buku alamat" ...

Ketika ia menunduk ke arah jari-jarinya yang menggenggam notesku, aku melihat kupingnya yang berada di depan mataku. Duh, relung, setiap telinga adalah labirin dengan bulu-bulu kecil. Dan kuping, sahabatku, adalah tubuh kita yang tak pernah menjadi tua... Lihatlah ulirnya, cupingnya, debu bercampur minyak di sana yang menimbulkan bau bantat yang gurih, dan liang gelap itu, di mana ada cairan lumas yang melindungi gendang yang lunak, dan gemuk itu mengeluarkan bau pahit yang sengak sehingga serangga tak mau pergi ke sana. Liang vagina mengingatkan aku pada jaringan seperti malam tempat hidup pertama dilentuk, bau asam yang menanti basa mani, lembab dan hangat, tapi lorong telinga mengingatkan aku pada kematian: sebuah akhir yang tak selesai.

Ibu, pucuk daun kupingmu runcing seperti mambang.

"Aduh, terima kasih banyak, Bu."

There is a sardonic and deceptive quality to the nature of this interaction between this woman and Larung, emphasized by the lengthy and seemingly unrelated digression in contrast to the polite and immediate way he addresses the Ibu in the vocalized section. Through these insightful digressions, the reader becomes aware of the dark and complicated inner workings of Larung's psyche that is more often than not concerned with the fetishization of body parts and the ear in particular.

Further complicating Larung's psyche is his inability to separate himself from Adnjani or to define, in any concrete terms, their relationship. The presence of Adnjani permeates Larung's narrative in a number of ways both in the psychological and supernatural sense. On some occasions he speaks directly to her in his thoughts and in other instances her presence is felt through stimulations like scent or the eerie feeling that she is right there beside him. (*Larung*. 23-24) While she depends on him to care for her physically, he questions, in a psychoanalytic sense, the reasons for her dependency. Whether it is because "she only cherishes the men in her family. Or maybe she only loves men. Who am I to her: her grandson, her son, her husband?"¹⁶⁸ (*Larung*. 9) Larung is also conflicted by what his grandmother represents to him, whether she has assumed the dominant role of patriarch in the absence/ death of Larung's own father or whether she is in fact his "darling"¹⁶⁹ (*Larung*. 56) as he refers to her on one occasion. Bothered by this ambiguity, Larung at the same time finds solace in his grandmother's need for him.

It is Larung's inability to come to terms with whether he is killing his grandmother out of compassion or out of his own selfish desire to escape her dominating presence that has the greatest potential to undermine the feminist project at work within the

¹⁶⁸ "ia hanya menghargai keturunan laki-laki. Atau ia hanya mencintai laki-laki. Siapakah aku bagi dia: cucu, anak, suami?"

¹⁶⁹ "kekasih"

text. Larung rationalizes his desire to kill his grandmother as being a compassionate act that will relieve her from the demeaning state of old age. He also convinces himself that in killing his grandmother he is carrying out the wishes of his mother (*Larung*: 16, 23). It is only Suprihatin that is willing to state the obvious, that it is Larung that wants his grandmother dead not his mother (*Larung*: 32). Ultimately, it is a combination of the fear of his life being dominated by his grandmother as well as a sense of compassion for her decaying condition that compels him to kill her. Larung's killing of his grandmother is a rebellion against the image of the dominating and vicious woman of myth. As such, the figure of Adnjani in the realist text comes to represent the very negative image of the dangerous and autonomous female perpetuated by patriarchal structures of legend and myth that as a character in the mythological text, she struggles to subvert.

For the most part, the middle class feminist dialogue of the four female characters is a positive move towards the reconceptualization of feminine identity in Indonesian society. However, none of these emancipated images completely embodies (nor is it possible in light of the psychic alienation that is symptomatic of this current stage of Late Capitalism) a character that "has reached the balance between connectedness and autonomy."¹⁷⁰ Yet this does not necessarily diminish what I perceive as Ayu's attempt to construct a feminist text. The complex psychological development of the four female characters of Cok, Yasmin, Laila and Shakuntala shows each of these women maintains or is working towards a progressive understanding and awareness of social injustice especially with regards to the inequality that exists between men and women in Indonesian society. The greatest threat for the undermining of Ayu's feminist project comes from the complexity of her characters in certain relationships—particularly the sexual relationship that develops between Saman and Yasmin, the

¹⁷⁰ Hellwig: 201

negative impact of the *Ibu* figures upon the psyches of their children and the mother/son relationships between Saman and his *Ibu* and Larung and his grandmother that are both complicated by the subaltern world of Javanese mysticism and mythology (following chapter). The negative depiction of Adnjani and Saman's mother and their complex relationships with Larung and Saman respectively could be acknowledged as an attempt on the part of Ayu to write novels that are not easily misconstrued as "*sastra pop*" (popular literature).

By countering her exploration of the trials and tribulations of women (similar themes to those taken up in the 1970's and 80's by popular women's fiction writers but dealt with in more conventional terms) with complex psychological characters and the mythological substratum of Javanese culture, Ayu's goal of writing "serious" literature is achieved. Inadvertently, it also establishes three distinct literary categories that have the potential to support or undermine the feminist project of the text at the third and final Horizon: traditional mythology versus the modern realist psychological text versus the pop-fiction novel.

Chapter Four

The Historical Horizon: Traditional Mythology versus Realist Psychological Fiction versus “*Sastra Pop*” as the *History of Ideology of Form*

At the Historical Horizon persistent, residual and emergent ideological forms are connected to the formal elements of texts. Jameson writes that “all previous modes of production have been accompanied by cultural revolutions specific to them...The concept of cultural revolution, then- or more precisely, the restructuring of the materials of cultural and literary history in the form of this new “text” or object of study which is cultural revolution- may be expected to project a whole new framework for the humanities, in which the study of culture in the widest sense could be placed on a materialist basis.”¹⁷¹ He goes on to emphasize that “cultural revolution” does not necessarily imply a complete transition from one dominant form/ mode of production to another dominant. Rather it is a “diachronic” transformation between dominant, residual and emergent modes of production that are in a permanent struggle against one another.

Kaplan relates this same “diachronic” account to the changing subjectivity of women in literature and writes; “This process is not marked by a simple progression from one position or subjectivity to another. Rather it is characterized by an oscillation between moments of relative incoherence- the breaking up of old political languages and positions- and moments when new formulations- often tentative and transitory- are being realized.”¹⁷² In *Saman* and *Larung* there are three literary forms that can be linked to specific modes of production in oscillation: traditional mythology as a cultural form closely tied to feudal/ colonial modes of production is an oral and

¹⁷¹ Jameson *The Political Unconscious*: 96

¹⁷² Kaplan: 164

literary tradition that has been used to validate the worldview of ruling Javanese courts and later, as part of that great continuum, reincorporated into the mythology of political regimes like the New Order; “*sastra pop*” as a literary genre that is linked to the capitalist commercialization of Indonesia’s market economy as well as being a cultural form that has generally reaffirmed New Order social and gender rhetoric; and the realist psychological novel that can be connected to emergent ideologies and the new “democratic” Indonesia. Ayu Utami plays to a certain extent with the undermining of two of these cultural forms, specifically through her deconstruction of traditional mythology and her desire to distance herself from the ideological trappings of “*sastra pop*” while at the same time exploiting certain elements of the market and genre of popular literature. The goal at the final Horizon is to analyze how Ayu’s treatment of each of these cultural forms as part of her utopian project manages to resist, reaffirm or transgress the dominant ideologies that her texts struggle to subvert.

New Order Literary Norms: Women’s Writing Blurs the Boundaries between Serious Literature and “*Sastra Pop*”

Women’s literature popularized during the economic boom of the 1970’s and 80’s usually centered on a middle-class female protagonist and focused on the themes of marriage and romance set against a backdrop of urban Indonesia and the conflicts of modernization. Often times, these novels and newspaper serials dealt with such racy and taboo subjects as extramarital affairs, divorce, unwanted pregnancy, rape and lesbianism amongst others. But popular women’s fiction of the time almost always reaffirmed the traditional gender framework of the New Order. While the boundary between “*sastra pop*” and more serious literature (*sastra berbobot*) is blurred as far as thematic content, both Tineke Hellwig and Barbara Hatley suggest that in comparison serious literature tends towards characters that are psychologically more developed

and that within serious literature there is more of an attempt on the part of the author to embrace and explore the traditional elements of Javanese society.¹⁷³

Being that “*sastra pop*” is fueled by the market economy, the New Order could never directly enforce its dominant ideology upon the literary genre (although its censorship boards did work to eliminate oppositional ideological views within the arts). However, during the economic boom these authors and their burgeoning middle-class readership were benefiting from the economic and social policies of the New Order, hence it would seem somewhat natural that novels of this specific cultural moment would embrace those particular elements of New Order policy that have been deemed beneficial to the program of social and economic stability. As the Indonesian economy began to crumble in the 1990’s and the New Order was increasingly implicated in monetary scandals and human rights abuses, there was a noticeable shift in public opinion. As a literary genre closely linked to the market economy, “*sastra pop*” has the potential to undermine or reconfigure the feudal ideologies and social relations of the New Order- the very ideologies it had earlier seemed to reaffirm- as long as its criticisms and reconfigurations remain representative of its middle-class readership.

Ayu’s novels could be misconstrued as “*sastra pop*” in so far as they deal with the personal issues of women; they are “sensationalist” in their treatment of sex and sexuality; and have been marketed in a mainstream fashion that is rarely associated

¹⁷³ Barbara Hatley. “Nation, Tradition and Construction of the Feminine in Indonesian Literature” in Imagining Indonesia: Cultural Politics and Political Culture: 107. Likewise Hellwig warns that the term “*sastra pop*” is used too loosely especially in relation to women writers. It could be suggestive of the gender bias that exists in the literary world that assumes only men are capable of writing “serious” fiction. See: Hellwig: 161-196.

with serious literature that tends to have a relatively small following.¹⁷⁴ The success of her novels stems, in part, from her ability to reach out to those segments of the population more inclined towards reading popular, sensationalist literature. Ayu's name has become synonymous with the "*Sastra Wangi*" movement that seems to be overtaking the literary world: young, attractive, urban women writing provocative literature that sells!¹⁷⁵ But part of Ayu's project in *Saman* and *Larung* seems to be to distance herself from the genre of popular fiction by integrating serious social commentary as well as elements of psychological depth and "irrational" Javanese mysticism in her texts.

Ayu takes up the theme of Javanese mysticism as a means of transgressing the carefully ordered boundaries of New Order society. In popular literature there appear to be two very different but interrelated motivations for the avoidance of Javanese mysticism. On the one hand, there is the sense amongst urban Indonesians that Javanese mysticism is "*kampungan*" (backward or countrified) and as such it doesn't figure well in the popular novels of the modern and urban middle class. On the other hand, the irrational world of Javanese mysticism is difficult to reconcile with literature that works to reaffirm the ordered and rational world of New Order Indonesia. As evidence of the potentially subversive nature of mysticism, the New Order spent considerable time and energy marginalizing or attempting to

¹⁷⁴ I would say that Ayu's strength, as a writer, is often overshadowed by the "celebrity" status that has developed around her. From my own observations of magazine and even some journal articles, her physical attributes as a young, hip, sexy and beautiful woman often supercede her attributes as an intelligent and accomplished writer and social critic.

¹⁷⁵ Ayu Utami's personal opinion of "*Sastra Wangi*" differs somewhat from the general criticism that the category perpetuates the separation of women's writing from more "serious" literature. She suggests that *Sastra Wangi* has the benefit of expanding the readership base and exposing the general population to more serious forms of literature. She also points out the negative potential of *Sastra Wangi* and its tendency to marginalize other contemporary writers, in particular men and older women who are producing quality work but are not as "media friendly." In addition she suggests that the mass media's hunger for attractive women writers often neglects to judge these women based upon their ability to write good fiction. In conversation with Ayu Utami: June 2004.

reincorporate the ritual practices of rural Java into their controlled image of “national culture.”¹⁷⁶ It is this fear of Javanese mysticism, as it exists outside of the control of the New Order, that Ayu plays upon in her texts in the two contradictory characters of Saman’s mother and Larung’s grandmother, Adnjani.

Mothers, Mysticism and Mythology: Transgressing Archaic Forms of Patriarchal Domination

Having already discussed the negative aspects of Saman’s mother and Larung’s grandmother as characters in a realist text, we can now turn to their positive contributions to the subversive project at work in *Saman* and *Larung*. Both women inhabit a potentially transgressive space outside of normative society through their delving into the subaltern world of Javanese mysticism. Saman’s mother offers an alternative take on the terrestrial realm- indulging a young Saman in stories of spirits and fairies that inhabit the woods behind their home and she has a deep knowledge of each and every tree that grows there. She is in rhythm with a more ancient natural and supernatural world that is absent in the rest of the text except in the character of Shakuntala. Saman’s mother’s subordination/ marriage to the “*makhluk halus*” (supernatural entity) takes her outside of the normative heterosexual and wifely ideals of the New Order. She fails in the New Order sense as a wife and mother (although she has a certain allure that ensures the love and adoration of her husband, son and others) but inadvertently succeeds in linking Saman (and the reader) to the world of the supernatural and the *rakyat*. Saman returns to Perabumulih to come to some sort of resolution with his childhood and with the “*makhluk halus*” that still haunt him and his search for answers leads him to the rural village of Lubukrantau and a life of social activism outside the patriarchal structures of the church and state.

¹⁷⁶ For further discussion see: John Pemberton On the Subject of “Java” (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994).

In *Larung*, Adnjani's connection to Javanese mysticism wards off the dangers that threaten her family. According to Larung's mother, there wasn't a mountain or gravesite that his grandmother hadn't been to in her search for knowledge of the supernatural.¹⁷⁷ During the events of 1965-66, Adnjani calls upon her spiritual strength to protect Larung and his mother from becoming victims of the massacre. Ayu uses the strong figure of Adnjani (through the convoluted first person narrative of Larung) to undermine the ancient *Calon Arang* myth as well as the modern myth of the *gerwani* woman that the New Order relied upon to validate its control. But subverting these myths also means that Adnjani must partially acquiesce in them, becoming the figure of the dominant and much-feared autonomous woman in order to restore "the voice to which they (these myths) were initially opposed, a voice for the most part stifled and reduced to silence, marginalized, its own utterances scattered to the winds, or reappropriated in their turn by hegemonic culture."¹⁷⁸

The Widow Witch and the Gerwani Woman

The *witch*, the *widow* and the *gerwani* woman are familiar and much-feared characters in Indonesian literature and popular culture. The character of Larung's grandmother, Adnjani, is an amalgamation of these female archetypes that have been mythologized through various forms of cultural production and state apparatus. Contributing to a recent trend of rewriting age-old myth,¹⁷⁹ Ayu Utami reconstructs the stories of the widow witch, *Calon Arang* and the *gerwani* woman and places them within the ideological framework of *Ibuism*, a tool of resistance to which I alluded in

¹⁷⁷ In Larung's own search for the source of his grandmother's power he is made aware of the fact that she has doomed her male heirs to an early death in exchange for supernatural strength and longevity. Thus Larung's quest to kill his grandmother takes on greater significance. He must kill her in order to save himself.

¹⁷⁸ Jameson: 85

¹⁷⁹ See Barbara Hatley's discussion of the *Calon Arang* myth: "Postcoloniality and the Feminine in Modern Indonesian Literature" in *Clearing a Space: Postcolonial Readings of Modern Indonesian Literature* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002): 145-182.

my analysis of text at the Political Horizon. It is through the narrative of Larung, that Adnjani and her *pawang* friend Suprihatin reweave the stories of women, ancient and modern that have traditionally been used as tools for the suppression of strong and independent female voices. Through Suprihatin and Adnjani, these stories become the stories of women's oppression, of women's desire to protect themselves as well as their families from the destructive nature of patriarchy.

Telling the story of *Calon Arang* to Larung, Suprihatin emphasizes the misfortune of women who are widowed or unwed, who are considered worthless without a man-marginalized by a patriarchal society. As in other rewritings of the *Calon Arang* myth, the marginalization of *Calon Arang* and her daughter *Manjali* and the trickery of *Airlangga* is emphasized. Suprihatin validates the pestilence and death *Calon Arang* spreads over Airlangga's kingdom as the wrath of a woman betrayed by her own society and as an *ibu* fearful that her daughter will suffer that same fate as an unwed woman. In describing her mother's rage Manjali writes with her tears:

My mother- her hatred didn't come from nothingness. Like humankind didn't come from nothingness, but rather from an essence with no true beginning, like fate: Where are its limits? My mother-her spite didn't come from nothingness. But from a deep source. A prejudice that is old and weary.¹⁸⁰ (*Larung*: 39)

In the above passage, the actions of *Calon Arang* are justified by her long suffering at the hands of patriarchy that, like fate, seems always to have existed having arisen from some ancient and unknown source. While the passage validates the actions of *Calon Arang*, it does not necessarily portray her as transgressing or eliminating the source of her frustration and anguish. For Manjali and her mother patriarchy is

¹⁸⁰ " *Ibuku- kedengkiannya tidak datang dari kosong, seperti manusia tidak datang dari kosong, melainkan dari sebuah isi yang tak berawal, seperti bilangan: di mana batasnya? Ibuku- kedengkiannya tidak datang dari kosong. Tapi dari sebuah nilai yang panjang. Prasangka yang tua dan melelahkan.* "

something that can be battled but never completely eliminated, it is something that feels as ancient, as omnipotent and as everlasting as fate.

As Adnjani takes up the myth, “*Calon Arang’s* destructive powers are not refuted or reinterpreted but invoked for strategic purposes.”¹⁸¹ As a child Larung equates the figure of his grandmother with the image of *Rangda* blurring their two identities. He remembers the villagers whispering about how his grandmother was a *leak* (evil spirit). But after he hears the traditional version of the *Calon Arang* tale from neighbours, he brings the story to his grandmother and she warns him not to hate the figure of *Rangda* “because vengeance saves us from other vengeances, death revives us from the death that awaits us. My evil staves off those who condemn us.”¹⁸² (*Larung*: 12) In the sense that Adnjani is *Calon Arang/Rangda* she validates her actions as a means of protecting herself and her family. The notion of *Ibuism* is given license in the retelling of *Calon Arang* and it emerges as a tool for women’s empowerment within the text.

In a final act of demythologizing, Ayu turns to the more contemporary myth of the *gerwani* woman. In her moment of death, Adnjani becomes the agent in the retelling of the events of 1965. Since she is unable to speak, Larung reads her story from behind her eyes. The tale that surfaces humanizes the image of the *gerwani* woman. She defines them as misunderstood women and exposes their vulnerability as mothers and outsiders within the community. She points out the absurdity of the rumours being circulated about the *gerwani* women:

¹⁸¹ Barbara Hatley “Literature, Mythology and Regime Change: Some Observations on Recent Women’s Writings” in Kathryn Robinson and Sharon Bessell eds., *Women in Indonesia: Gender, Equity and Development* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002): 139.

¹⁸²“*Sebab dendam menyelamatkan kita dari dendam yang lain, kematian menghidupkan kita dari kematian yang akan datang. Kejahatanku mengusir orang-orang yang mengutuki kita.*”

“I had already heard the whispers before, the people accusing me of keeping a snake in the folds of my sash. That grandmother is a *leak*, Rangda with her *sad tatayi* [In old Javanese this translates as the “six evils” forbidden in the Hindu faith, one of which is the practice of black magic] because each widow is a potential danger. Strip her of the cloth around her waist and we’ll find her talisman...then I heard that people were calling your mother *gerwani*. They said that your mother wore a black bra with a red star symbol on one cup and a hammer and sickle on the other. She gathered women together and taught them to dance naked, then sent them to seduce soldiers with their hips so that they would believe in communism and not in god almighty... But I knew that your mother, and the wife of Nyoman Pintar, would often go to the public hall and teach the wives of the soldiers how to make rice-cake packages out of coconut leaves. They were all newcomers. And *genjer* [a form of Balinese music which became associated with the communist party. It is also the name of an edible plant that grows near rivers] were just vegetables that made your feces long and sticky...So I said to the group that came [to get Larung’s mother]: I am the eldest in this village. My daughter-in-law is not *gerwani*. Even if she were *gerwani* she has a baby that has to be raised. But I am the one who is *gerwani*.”¹⁸³ (*Larung*: 68-70)

When the crowd came to take away Larung’s mother Adnjani prevented them by using their fear of her as a *leak* (witch). She used her power and the power of the *Calon Arang* myth to turn them away. She did this in her capacity as a mother protecting her family. At the same time she recounts this story to Larung, she

¹⁸³ “Telah kudengar sebelumnya, bisik-bisik orang menuduhku menyimpan ular di lipatan stagen. Nenek itu *leak*, Rangda dengan *sad tatayi*, sebab setiap janda adalah potensi bahaya. Telanjangi dia dari kain pinggangnya maka kita temukan jimat...Lalu aku mendengar orang-orang menyebut ibumu *gerwani*. Ibumu memakai beha hitam dengan lambang bintang merah di satu pucuknya, palu arit di pucuk yang lain, kata mereka. Ia mengumpulkan perempuan-perempuan dan mengajar tari telanjang, dan mengirim wanita-wanita untuk merayu para prajurit dengan pinggul mereka agar percaya pada komunisme, bukan pada segala tuhan...Tetapi aku tahu ibumu dan istri Nyoman Pintar kerap berada di bangsal dan mengajari sesama istri tentara membikin ketupat dan janur dari daun nyiur. Mereka semua pendatang. Dan daun *genjer* hanya sayuran yang membuat tinjamu lengket panjang...Lalu kataku pada rombongan yang datang: aku yang tertua di kampung ini. Menantuku bukan *gerwani*. Kalaupun dia *gerwani*, dia punya bayi yang harus dibesarkan. Tapi akulah yang *gerwani*.” Excerpt Leslie Dwyer. “Larung.” 3 *Latitudes* (Apr 2001): 64-66.

humanizes the image of the *gerwani* woman, portraying them as outsiders struggling to belong and as mothers who need to nurture their children.

Suprihatin and Adnjani effectively subvert the negativity associated with the myths of the *Calon Arang* and the *gerwani* woman. In the utopian sense, these women have ventured far enough in their narratives (or is it Larung's narrative?) to lay to rest the dominant theme of patriarchy that informs these myths. Saman's mother too, challenges social conventions in her marriage/ union with the spirit world. Through *Ibu* (the only name given Saman's mother), Ayu reunites the reader with a submissive female archetype whose subservience to an alternate reality demands a subtle shift in the dominant structure of "*azas kekeluargaan*" (family foundation). The love and acceptance that Saman's mother engenders from those around her subverts the "bad girl" image that is associated with female figures intimately connected to the supernatural world. By contrast, Adnjani and as an aside, her companion Suprihatin, reaffirm this image of the "bad girl" but justify it as a necessary evil for marginalized women if they hope to survive in a patriarchal society.

The Realist Psychological Text

According to traditional Marxism, of all cultural forms, the realist aesthetic comes closest to a true representation of social reality. In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson writes of the realist novel:

... realistic representation has as its historical function the systematic undermining and demystification, the secular "decoding," of those preexisting inherited traditional or sacred narrative paradigms which are its initial given. In this sense the novel plays a significant role in what can properly be called a bourgeois cultural revolution- that immense process of transformation whose life habits were formed by

other, now archaic, modes of production are effectively reprogrammed for life and work in the new world of market capitalism.¹⁸⁴

Ayu commits herself to the realist aesthetic by constructing characters that are not forced into artificially didactic roles. This “realism” emerges through a complex narrative structure that employs multiple first and third person narratives. As such Yasmin, Cok, Laila and Shakuntala as well as Saman, Larung and their maternal figures are constructed as psychologically complex characters and it is this complexity that threatens the unifying project of the text at the same time as it succeeds in fulfilling other facets of Ayu’s project related to the deconstruction of myth and the reappropriation of certain elements of popular fiction.

In the realist text, it becomes apparent that there are certain aspects of feminine identity that are negatively portrayed whether consciously or unconsciously in the intricate construction of Ayu’s characters. Yasmin, Cok, Laila and Shakuntala are physically and psychologically distanced from conventional forms of feminine identity that tie women to their role as mothers and wives. They avoid completely the notion of *Ibuism*—that their central role in society is to act as supportive wife and mother. These women also show great disdain for the conventions of marriage and the partnership of women within that union. Cok is highly promiscuous, Yasmin disregards her own marital vows and Laila’s moral guilt has very little to do with the fact that the man she is having an affair with is married. To hold these women up as idealized representations of feminine identity thus means completely rejecting the New Order stereotype of good and bad womanly behavior that has been personified by the *Ibu* figures. The absence of issues of marriage, motherhood

¹⁸⁴ Jameson: 152

and moral judgment limits their representation as modern women at the same time as it frees them from convention and enables them to explore new possibilities of female subjectivity.

The theme of middle-class men and their complicated relationships with dominant female figures emerges in the sexual relationship between Saman and Yasmin and in Saman's relationship with his mother that dominates his psyche in the first novel. As well, Larung's connection to his grandmother combines a confusing sense of physical and psychological domination. In the realist text, Saman's mother's supernatural bond leads to a sense of abandonment on the part of Saman, whereas Larung feels overwhelmed and dominated by his grandmother's supernatural strength. To a certain extent Saman's mother and Larung's grandmother must acquiesce in their roles as subservient and dominant women in order to deconstruct the myths that are meant to marginalize them from normative society. But as these characteristics are carried over into the realist psychological texts they work against the positive nature of their characters in relation to Ayu's goal of demythologizing female archetypes. In the case of Saman, his mother's subservience to the supernatural is closely equated to her failure as a mother. For Larung, the dominant personality of Adnjani complicates his rationale for killing her.

Larung killing his grandmother creates a sense of tension between resistance and reaffirmation in the realist text. Symbolically, it can be seen as the death of the mythologized woman that has continually reaffirmed patriarchal control. At the same time there is the strange brutality involved in Larung's careful dissection of his grandmother's body and the psychoanalytical way in which his desire to kill his

grandmother is explored (*Siapakah aku bagi dia: cucu, anak, suami?*).¹⁸⁵ (*Larung*: 9) Adnjani's death is at the hands of her grandson who seems mainly concerned with murdering his grandmother in order to free himself from the ambiguous and restrictive connection she has with him. The symbolic death of the mythologized woman is, in a sense, liberating but at the same time it is an act that is brutally masculinized in the realist text by Larung's underlying fear of his grandmother.

"*Sastra Pop*," Traditional Mythology and the Realist Text as Limiting Situation

With regards to the Third Horizon, Jameson writes, "the relationship of the 'third term' or historical situation is not construed as causal (however that might be imagined) but rather as one of a limiting situation; the historical moment is here understood to block off or shut down a certain number of formal possibilities available before, and to open up determinate new ones, which may or may not ever be realized in artistic practice."¹⁸⁶

Ayu effectively incorporates elements of "*sastra pop*" into her texts while attempting to define her novels, whether consciously or otherwise, against the very conventions of that genre. As a market fueled genre "*sastra pop*" can only push the boundaries of convention so far as its middle-class readership will allow. It is evident that contemporary *sastra pop* can no longer reaffirm the New Order rhetoric of social and economic stability, especially in light of the economic crisis, the fall of the regime and the subsequent exposure of the New Order's indiscretions. The publication of Ayu's novels coincides with a time of struggle for increased freedoms in Indonesian society and her subject matter seems to represent that specific cultural moment. This is not to say her novels have not been met with opposition or criticism for their supposed

¹⁸⁵ "She only cherishes the men in her family. Or maybe she only loves men. Who am I to her: her grandson, her son, her husband?"

¹⁸⁶ Jameson: 148

immorality but that their widespread popularity suggests their eager acceptance by those interested in both “serious” and popular literature. It is impossible to know whether these reading masses are indulging in her novels for their sensationalist, “*sastra pop*” elements or for the elements that define her as a “serious” writer- her sharp social criticism, her complex development of character and her incorporation of Javanese mythology. For the interest of this thesis, it is Ayu’s attempt to work within the genre of popular literature and at the same time undermine the thematic and stylistic conventions of that genre that sets up a telling example of what Jameson refers to as the “limiting situation.”

Javanese myth and mysticism are elements at play within Ayu’s texts that add an alternative dimension to the popular tales of political dissidence and the cosmopolitan Indonesian women and their sex lives. Mysticism and traditional myth have long been manipulated to suit dominant structures of control, particularly those constructed to maintain social harmony through the perpetuation of a strict gender divide. Ayu continues with this tradition of myth manipulation to suit her own needs as an author working towards the emancipation of women in literary form. *Saman* and *Larung*, through their deconstruction/ reconstruction of myth and mysticism, manage to disempower patriarchal mythologies ancient and modern that have validated structures of control. *Larung* transcends the dominant ideology of patriarchy that informs the archaic as well as modern artistic practice through its depiction of strong and independent women that find strength in their struggles against the injustices of patriarchal society. In *Saman*, this transgression comes more through Saman’s mother, as she exists outside of the boundaries of normative society. In both texts this transcendence comes in part through the re-appropriation of the New Order rhetoric of *Ibuism*.

Yet, the strength gained through traditional myth and mysticism are somewhat diminished by Ayu's project to construct complex psychological characters in order to define herself against the conventional tropes of popular fiction. As I have noted above, the emancipatory acts of Adnjani and Saman's mother are undermined as these characters make their transition into the realist psychological text. It is at this juncture that as dominant and subservient characters they are implicated in the complex and irresolvable psychological drama of the men they have raised. Their strength within the mystical and mythical realm is diminished by what can only be seen as their failure in the "real" world as characters within a realist text.

This inability to reconcile the image of the strong and supernatural feminine entity with the cosmopolitan image of the modern day Indonesian woman is additional evidence of the "limiting situation." Traditional mythology and modernity are treated as two distinctly differing storylines within both texts. Traditional mythology and mysticism remains separated from the female characters of Yasmin, Cok and Laila connected to them only loosely through the characters of Saman and Larung and to a certain extent through Shakuntala. As characters in a realist text, Yasmin, Cok, Laila and Shakuntala are not necessarily fully emancipated but they definitely signify a positive "oscillation" of sorts, a transitional moment in which women's subjectivity can be reformulated. But it is as though this achievement comes through the neglect of dealing with or resolving key factors that affect, whether directly or indirectly, the lives of most modern women- tradition, marriage and motherhood.

This irresolvable contradiction is most evident in the treatment of *Ibuism* within the texts. In the mythological segments, the rhetoric of *Ibuism* is reformulated; Adnjani, Suprihatin and Saman's mother all find a means of resisting patriarchal control through the guise of *Ibuism*. Yet the position of *Ibu* within the realist text is entirely

ignored or denigrated. Whereas *Ibuism* is used in the mythological text as a tool of empowerment, in the realist text *Ibuism* appears as an ideological weight tying these women (and men to a certain extent) to New Order gender ideology. The contradiction sets up the possibility for women to be defined in the realist sense in non-traditional terms, as women defined as individuals and not only by their success or failure in their “natural” role as mother and wife. Yet, the diminished presence of the potential strengths of *Ibuism* in the realist texts limits Ayu’s mission for the emancipation of female subjectivity through the demythologizing of traditional female archetypes.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

To reiterate my initial argument: it is the ultimate inability of Ayu's novels to fulfill the utopian project of female emancipation from patriarchal structures of containment that succeeds in highlighting emergent as well as persistent ideologies at play within contemporary Indonesian society as it struggles towards a more democratic representation of women. On all three of my analytical Horizons there is evidence of progressive and positive terms but when these texts are read as a whole, wherein each seemingly separate part works upon one another, the pressures of contradiction become more apparent.

At the first horizon, it is the absence of ideological opposition in literature that must be reexamined as subtext in the novels. In Marxist literary criticism, more often than not, it is the voices of the marginalized group or class (as ideological opposition) that is absent from Bourgeois literature. In *Saman* and *Larung* the dominant voices are those of the marginalized and oppressed- particularly women; in this case it is New Order ideology and the rhetoric of Indonesia's moral majority that act as subtext by way of their absence as noticeably dominant ideological structures within the texts. The significance of ideological subtext appears generally in the subtle shift in the treatment of politically volatile issues and inter-class relations from the first text as compared to the second. But most significantly on the Political Horizon it is the secondary role that political dissidence takes in comparison to women's sexuality in both texts. I argue at this Horizon that the politicization of the woman's body by the New Order forces us to acknowledge that writing a text wherein the dominant theme is one of overt female sexuality is in fact an act of political opposition. Therefore Yasmin, Cok, Laila and Shakuntala's deliberations on the private issues of their own

sexuality do not necessarily reinforce the traditional binary of male/ female: public/ private but are taken up in the texts as a powerful tool of resistance. Where this progressive examination of female subjectivity falters is in its thematic separation of “non-mother” characters from “mother” characters. It is a contradiction that when read sub-textually, exposes competing ideological paradigms in Indonesian feminism. There is a definite rift in the feminist movement in Indonesia, a division that became increasingly apparent during the post-reform period; on the one hand there are those Indonesian feminists that have embraced and reappropriated the New Order concept of *Ibuism* to suit their emancipatory needs while on the other hand some Indonesian feminists reject this notion of women unifying under the concept of *Ibuism* as being detrimental to the progression of Indonesian feminism and female emancipation. This subtext accounts, in part, for the segregation of female character types in the text and is connected on all three levels of analysis to the contradiction that undermines Ayu’s project of female emancipation.

At the Social Horizon, my analysis of the individual female characters of Cok, Laila, Shakuntala and Yasmin shows how, as individuals, they struggle for sexual freedom against the dominant gender ideology of the New Order. The complex psychological development of these female characters illustrates a generally progressive move towards a more emancipatory image of women in Indonesia- at least amongst the urban middle and upper middle class. But at this Horizon contradiction emerges in the denigrating way in which these progressive images of femininity are highlighted through their juxtaposition with other images of feminine identity in the realist text. There is a distinct separation between the sexually liberated cosmopolitan female character and the more repressive traditional image of the *Ibu*. In the realist text, each character that comes to represent the *Ibu* figure or the concept of *Ibuism* has a

negative impact on the psychological development of other characters within the text.

At the final Horizon, Ayu's project of emancipation is expanded upon. The positive reformulation of feminine identity in the realist psychological text collides with other emancipatory projects at work in *Saman* and *Larung*. Part of Ayu's project involves the reappropriation of the key tropes of popular women's fiction that have traditionally reaffirmed the gender ideology of New Order Indonesia. She is also attempting to subvert even older forms of patriarchy in her demythologizing of traditional and modern myth. Both of these projects are transgressive in and of themselves. The psychologically intricate and socially critical aspects of *Saman* and *Larung* that are tied to the realist text have, as I have shown, undermined the formulaic gender constructs of "*sastra pop*" while at the same time Ayu's subject matter and the savvy marketing of her texts retain certain aspects of popular literature that make these novels more digestible for a wider audience. In her demythologizing, she uses *Ibuism* as a tool of empowerment for the reconstruction of the myths of *Calon Arang* and *Gerwani*. She uses the reformulated ideology as a means of exposing the underlying systems of patriarchal control that have led to the unjustified marginalization of alternative forms of feminine identity. But at this third Horizon contradiction emerges in the attempted unification of these three literary forms predominantly in the conflicting way in which the rhetoric of *Ibuism* works within the mythological and psychological levels of the text. On one level it is invoked as an emancipatory tool whereas on another level it is understood as a regressive or persistent form of patriarchy that cannot be reconciled with the image of the modern Indonesian woman as fully emancipated.

If we are to assume that fiction is an imaginative representation of reality and as such must contain views and experiences the reader can relate to, then perhaps a feminist project that completely resists the patriarchal pressures placed upon it by society is not a project that can be easily related to by people living within that system. The overwhelming popularity of *Saman* and *Larung* suggests there is something within Ayu's fiction that readers can identify with; perhaps it is the tension that exists between her characters as they both resist and reaffirm pre-existing patriarchal norms. Ayu has undertaken the enormous project of deconstructing traditional gender stereotypes within her novels. Irresolvable contradictions are unavoidable when dealing with such complex ideas and formal structures and therefore it is unlikely that Ayu could completely resolve the complexity of the project she has taken up. Nor is it entirely possible at this stage of material development given Jameson's theory of the utopian imaginary and its "limiting situation" as well as Kaplan's notion of the oscillation of subjectivity. Ayu's texts and her characters are ambiguous and this ambiguity in *Saman* and *Larung* captures a transitional and very significant moment in Indonesia's recent political and social history. By leaving her characters unresolved whether consciously or unconsciously, Ayu has opened a space in contemporary Indonesian literature for a multitude of possibilities in the reconceptualization of feminine identity.

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