

# Socio-Political Issues in Women's Fiction of the *Reformasi*

by

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## Abstract

Long struggling for a platform for woman's voice, Indonesian women authors have been publishing novels and anthologies of stories, poetry and articles in unprecedented numbers since the beginning of *Reformasi*. Not unnoticed has been their common use of sex and sexuality as a prominent component of their writings. Many of the authors have been labelled with the term *sastrawangi*<sup>1</sup>; a friendly but patronizing and slightly derogatory label. The following critique illuminates the more important but previously un-investigated facets of literature from this generation of authors and brings to light the works of some authors that, due to the authors' avoidance of sex and sexuality, have been overlooked as subjects of criticism. Through close readings of writers including Ayu Utami, Helvy Tiana Rosa, Linda Christanty and Laksmi Pamuntjak, this critique exposes socio-political aspects and motivations in modern Indonesian literature written by women authors. The readings were undertaken using a cultural materialist framework, drawing out the socio-political issues identified within the stories. The stories of chapter two contain clear references to actual events in recent Indonesian history. They reveal authorial commitment to the exposition of social and political issues such as war, conflict and religious or ethnic tension. Chapter three analyses the socio-political effects of globalisation, westernisation and the inherent difficulties of early democracy in the anthology of short stories by Laksmi Pamuntjak *The Diary of R.S.: Musings on Art*. The analysis indicates that women writers of the *Reformasi* era are showing a commitment to articulating the socio-political tensions of their era and exhibiting a certain social struggle with the newfound 'freedoms' of post-Suharto Indonesia.

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<sup>1</sup> *Sastrawangi* is a label meaning perfumed literature, applied to literature written by female writers of the *Reformasi* and also to the writers themselves. The term implies that the literature of these writers is "relying for its success not on literary merit but on the good looks and marketing prowess of the writers and their publishers". (Allen 2007, p. 25)

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## **Dedication**

Dedicated to the memory of Dr Anthony James Hand.

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## Introduction

### Women, the Short Story and Politics

Writing of Indonesian literature, Tony Day (2007, p. 173) observes that “Indonesians have wondered how to define their country’s membership in the literary world”. For Indonesian women in the era of *Reformasi*<sup>2</sup> it has been rather a matter of defining women’s membership in the Indonesian literary world. The writing of women of this era was stereotyped early with the term *Sastrawangi* (‘perfumed literature’) following a short story by Bre Redana published in 2002, a satire that included as a protagonist *Dewi Sastrawangi* (the goddess of fragrant literature). (Danerek 2006, pp. 120-121) The term has also been used to refer to the authors themselves. The *Sastrawangi* set includes authors Ayu Utami, Fira Basuki, and Djenar Maesa Ayu amongst others. *Sastrawangi* became a stereotype initially used by some critics to generalise women’s writing of the post-Suharto era as sensationalist and “relying for its success not on literary merit but on the good looks and marketing prowess of the writers and their publishers”. (Allen 2007, p. 25)

Although the term *Sastrawangi* has derogatory origins it does refer to an “identifiable group of urban, middle class, young, educated female writers” (Danerek 2006, p. 13). According to Danerek, the literature written by these women represents the “most visible trend” in Indonesian short stories of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (2006, p. 27)

There may be some truths in this stereotype although there is an expectation by critics and the public that the writing of the *Sastrawangi* set includes depictions of female sexuality, which may be seen to undermine public morality, thus not conforming to the New Order

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<sup>2</sup> *Reformasi* is political reform, specifically for Indonesia the change in governance post-Suharto’s New Order ie 1998 onwards (Bresnan 2005, p. 138)

social and religious expectations of women defined through *kodrat wanita*<sup>3</sup>. However, in the short stories selected for discussion in this thesis the focus is not on sex or sexuality. As urban, middle class, young, educated female writers the authors do fit the *Sastrawangi* stereotype but the short stories chosen for analysis in this thesis do not exhibit the traits stereotyped as *Sastrawangi* writing.

The history of the short story (*cerita pendek* or *„cerpen*’) in Indonesia is intertwined with politics and the media. Danerek (2006, pp. 17-18) says of the genre that it developed in line with the requirements imposed by publishers, which were largely newspapers and magazines. During Suharto’s New Order publishers were careful to ensure that the content of their material did not draw the attention of government censors. In order to be published, authors complied through self-censorship. (2006, p. 143) Danerek also says of short stories that their readership is most likely much larger than that of novels in Indonesia because of the regularity with which they are published and the much larger distribution of newspapers and magazines in comparison to sales of novels. Authors find their material more easily published in the short story format and so production of this genre is more prolific than the production of novels.

Into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century the short story in Indonesia remains popular and continues to be used by authors as a medium for expressing political concerns and social change. Clearly, there are many socio-political issues with which Indonesian short story writers could engage; I have chosen to examine a selection of short stories that engage with religion, conflict and struggle. This is in line with ongoing conflict and political and social change in Indonesia during the *Reformasi* period.

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<sup>3</sup> *Kodrat wanita* was an idealistic notion of the New Order defining woman’s role, confining them to roles as wife and mother as determined by God’s will and biological „fact’ of nature, only participating in “non-political social organizations.” (Danerek 2006, p. 9)

*Reformasi* has delivered, among other notable changes (the greatest of which is democracy), a new position for women. Educated women have embraced new opportunities to express their political views and their experiences through writing. The Chinese-Indonesian Linda Christanty has a background of political activism and journalism which she began during the New Order period. Ayu Utami also began her writing career in journalism during the New Order period. (Berlin 2005) Of this new generation of Indonesian women authors, Harry Aveling says:

“They are tertiary educated and were educated in the Indonesian language. They have a close involvement with the mass media. Religion formed an important, and natural, part of their development. It is possible that these women writers ... were, and indeed still are, the forerunners of a whole post-Suharto era in Indonesian literature,...”(2007, p. 8)

Developments in nationalism, women’s rights and education, which took place under successive regimes during the twentieth century, have led to an environment in which women are now able to step outside the boundaries previously defining women’s roles. Suharto’s government, with the intent of furthering the cause of national unity, promoted a particularly patriarchal and Javanese role for women. (Adamson 2007, pp. 16-17) Women were to aspire to serve the nation, to be good wives and mothers and to maintain appropriate femininity in order to support national unity. By contrast women writers of the *Reformasi* period have engaged in expressing their sexuality, their political views and their social concerns.

From the late nineteenth century, nationalism, education and the rights of women were inter-connected by factions rejecting colonial rule. The letters of Javanese Raden Ajeng Kartini to her mentor Rosa Abendanon-Mandiri, written between 1899 and 1903 (Cote 2005) are the first records of the dissatisfaction amongst women with polygyny and the restrictions on education for girls. Kartini also addressed the issue of release from Dutch colonial rule. In 1912 Dr. Aletta Jacobs, a physician from the Netherlands, and Carrie Chapman Catt, an American campaigner for women’s suffrage, travelled to Java and Sumatra promoting their

early feminist and suffragette ideals, in line with the emerging feminist movement in the United States and Europe. (Taylor 1997, p. 2) Literacy and education were key issues in this movement.

Kartini was not alone in her concerns for the rights of Indonesian women. In the decades following her death in 1904 several girls' schools were opened. Women's journals in this period promoted education, with *Poetri Merdeka* (Daughters of Freedom) connecting the rights of women to a „political solution’; that is that changes in government policies had the potential to improve the status of women in respect to suffrage, education and polygamy. (Cribb 2004, pp. 457-458) During the same period the reading and writing of literature was promoted by the Dutch colonists, who both promoted literature and censored its content.

In Indonesia literature has been intertwined with politics at least since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch colonists ruled Java and much of the archipelago that is now known as the Republic of Indonesia, expanding their domain over time. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, under continuing Dutch governance, fundamental socio-political themes were emerging and developing in the form of a nationalist movement. As a part of the Dutch Ethical Policy introduced in 1901, the Dutch rulers began a formal endeavour to encourage education and to promote the reading of literature among the Javanese elite.

From 1920 until 1950 literature in the colony was published largely by the Dutch publishing house *Balai Pustaka*. Through *Balai Pustaka* the Dutch were able to censor literature whilst promoting education and a sense of nation in line with continued Dutch rule. The published books were most often written in Malay or Dutch. On May 20, 1908 rumblings of nationalism were beginning to surface in *Budi Utomo*, an organisation initially comprised of students. (Anderson 2002, p. 79)

Dutch colonial rule continued until World War II, when the Japanese invaded in 1942. The Japanese invasion inadvertently resulted in the nationalist movement gaining a stronghold. Putting an end to Dutch rule, the Japanese encouraged a sense of nation establishing “the army as the central long-term force in the country” and implementing a national language: a derivation of Malay that was to become known as *bahasa Indonesia*. (Reid 2005, p. 171) Following the war, Sukarno proclaimed an independent Indonesia on the 17<sup>th</sup> of August, 1945. In 1949 Indonesian independence was formally recognised with the support of the United Nations. (Vickers 2005, p. 85)

Sukarno became the first President of the newly formed Republic of Indonesia and continued to govern until 1966. The Republic of Indonesia was governed from Jakarta and was perceived to be Java-centric on account of its minimal contact with the outer regions of the republic. The writers of the generation *Angkatan 45* (including Pramoedya Ananta Toer) considered themselves to be an integral part of the revolution that led to independence. Pramoedya was imprisoned from 1947 until 1949 by the Dutch colonial government after being “picked up” in possession of incriminating (anti-colonial) papers (Teeuw 1994, p. 165). The works of the *Angkatan 45* writers show their political intent, with Pramoedya in particular gaining attention for his writing for which he was imprisoned for the second time, on this occasion by the Suharto government. The impact of this centralised government on the literature of the period, and on future literature, was to solidify the use of *bahasa Indonesia* as the national (and unifying) language. Those who wrote in Javanese were limited by the government’s concentration on a national culture; they did not have easy access to publishing houses or to other cultural facilities such as libraries.

During the Sukarno era, the women’s organisation *Gerwani* (*Gerakan Wanita Indonesia*, Indonesian Women’s Movement) was established under the PKI (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, Communist Party of Indonesia). Also in alliance with the PKI, several artists of

the era formed an organisation that they called *Lekra* (*Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat*, The Institute of People's Culture). *Lekra* was formed on the 17<sup>th</sup> August, 1950 in an effort to further the arts as a method to express and address political struggle. (Foulcher 1986, p. 17) It was in opposition to the liberal idea that art should be for art's sake, and consequently distancing it from socio-political issues. *Lekra* argued that art, culture and politics were interconnected and that the value of art is its contribution to culture and the betterment of the people rather than the value being in its material worth. According to Martina Heinschke *Lekra* "measured literary value principally according to the social context of a text..." (1996, p. 149)

Following the putsch that eventually led to Sukarno being ousted from his presidency and under the governance of Suharto and the New Order, organisations that were aligned with communism and/or the PKI were banned. This included *Gerwani* and *Lekra*. Leaders of *Lekra* were either killed or had lengthy prison terms imposed on them. (Teeuw 1996, p. 38)

Prior to *Reformasi* women authors were not at the forefront of Indonesian literature. Several factors hindered the participation of women in this field. One factor was the role for women promoted by the New Order government, whose position on the role of women was cemented through its own women's organisation *Dharma Wanita* (Women's Duty), and the ideals of *kodrat wanita*. Wieringa (2003, p. 70) notes that *Dharma Wanita* was "intended to re-subordinate rather than emancipate women." In fact prior to *Reformasi* men maintained the dominant voice in writing on female sexuality and the role of women. Diah Arimbi Ariani says that while, from the 1970's in particular, women began a more active participation in writing fiction, "these writings, by and large, ignore social and political issues that women have to face in maintaining their existence." (2009, p. 77) She also says that while women were participating in writing, they were largely marginalised in respect to

the Indonesian literary canon due to their “positioning as popular romance authors...” (2009, p. 80)

Promoting the ideology of *kodrat wanita*, the New Order government cemented its patriarchal hierarchy. (Robinson 2009, p. 10) As a result of the fall of Suharto and his New Order government Indonesia entered the period now known as *Reformasi* in 1998. Post-New Order, the government-promoted borders that had defined and inhibited the ways in which women could participate and express their views of socio-political issues have been challenged. Women authors have tackled sex and politics without hesitation, challenging their readers to consider the role of women whilst entertaining them with their stories.

Seeking new definition is not always about deviating from social norms. In the Indonesian tradition of writers groups, on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1997 a small contingent led by author Helvy Tiana Rosa held the inaugural meeting of *Forum Lingkar Pena* (Pen Circle Forum). *Forum Lingkar Pena* (FLP) is a writers group whose aims include fostering the abilities of emerging writers and harnessing their talents to provide good literature, to stimulate good readership and encourage the growth of literacy amongst the Indonesian population. FLP literature is focussed largely on Islamic values although there is apparently no religious exclusivity in membership. The organisation promotes (in the values of Islam) a responsibility on the part of the author to contribute to the betterment of society with the view that the publication of a story or novel carries with it a permanence of responsibility lasting beyond the life of the author. (Arnez 2009, p. 49)

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century women’s rights have come to the forefront of issues for FLP, not intentionally but in response to the number of women involved in the group and the opportunity this presents to “champion” women’s rights. (Ahnaf 2007) Also in this era freedom of speech is embraced and writers freely breach the structured cultural past of

Indonesia. Both established and budding authors seek renewed definition where past governments have provided barriers to cultural expression.

FLP developed in conjunction with the advent of the internet, the demise of Suharto's rule and in conjunction with the extraordinary era of globalisation which enabled a wider scope for communication and the sharing of ideas. This era gave rise to a proliferation of new political parties, a widespread sense of freedom of speech, and an unprecedented rise in the number of newspapers and magazines.

The proliferation of novels and short stories produced by women authors during the period of *Reformasi* is a notable feature in Indonesian literature. The aim of this thesis is to analyse a selection of this literature, focussing on the socio-political issues depicted within short stories, and investigating the ways in which female Indonesian writers have expressed their views of Indonesia in the *Reformasi* era. My aim is to provide a contextualised reading of the chosen texts within Indonesian socio-political reality. While not ignored, authorial intent is not especially privileged as the context of the story is read according to the socio-political setting of each story regarding real events, place and temporal perspective. Where authors have openly revealed their intentions, how they relate these intentions through their literature will be incorporated into the analysis.

This is a new generation of Indonesian authors. It is a generation defined by Garcia as Generation 98. (2006, p. 185) *Generasi 98* is also sometimes referred to as the Generation of the year 2000. I have chosen to use *Generasi 98* as it appeals as a precise indication of the political changes that facilitated the proliferation of women's writing. It is also the year that Ayu Utami's novel *Saman* was first published, heralding this new era. Chosen for analysis in this thesis are short stories by Ayu Utami, Linda Christanty, Helvy Tiana Rosa and Laksmi Pamuntjak. Covering a variety of short stories, my analysis examines a cross-section of

women's writing of this period. The stories are narratives reflecting life in Indonesia. War, a legacy of trauma, transmigration, religion, politics and globalisation are melded into fiction; these stories contrast positive developments in Indonesia with the tragedy and transition from President Suharto's corrupt and authoritarian New Order government to a nation in early democracy from 1998 onwards.

Historically in Indonesia, literature and its oral predecessor of story-telling have been ways of discussing socio-political issues, sometimes subversive to the constraints of censorship enforced by successive governments. During the New Order period in particular, short stories and novels were a method of expressing opposition to the government's involvement in KKN<sup>4</sup>, racism, violence and brutality. Literary techniques were applied in order to lessen the dangers of repercussion. (McGlynn 2000, p. 42) For example, rather than name the site of a political conflict in which the military were implicated writers would refer to places through insinuation, using names for characters particular to a region and/or dates that indicated a well-known event. Around the same time as the 1997 Financial Crisis the internet was fast becoming a tool for Indonesian political activists; activists were more readily mobilised and dissenting views were more easily shared, particularly among students.

## **Outline**

My overview of successive authoritarian regimes, the short story, and women in Indonesia is the backdrop for the analysis of the short stories of women writers of *Reformasi* era. Chapter one of this thesis addresses the theoretical framework used to read these stories, as well as discussing previous research in the area of Indonesian women's writing. An overview of previous research identifies the gaps that direct the course of this thesis. This leads to the rationale for a cultural materialist theoretical approach.

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<sup>4</sup> KKN is acronym for *korupsi, kolusi dan nepotisme*. Simply: corruption, collusion and nepotism – a description of the methods of Suharto's government.

Focussing on conflict and struggle, in chapter two, I analyse stories by Ayu Utami, Linda Christanty and Helvy Tiana Rosa. These stories reveal the legacy left by conflict between Suharto's New Order government and marginalised groups or regions. This legacy affects populations of regions of Indonesia, in particular outlying areas of the archipelago: Kalimantan, Aceh and East Timor (which is now independent from the Republic of Indonesia). The selection of stories for chapter two was made on the basis that they depict conflict and its legacy of trauma for the population of Indonesia and were written during the *Reformasi* period. Of these authors, Linda Christanty has been underrepresented in critical analysis.

Socio-political issues are not confined to war, conflict and religious or ethnic struggles. Chapter three is an examination of Laksmi Pamuntjak's "The Diary of R.S.: Musings on Art" in which the focus is on the concept of Indonesian-ness in a country grappling with the social and political effects of globalisation, westernisation and the inherent difficulties of early democracy. Despite being a prominent author, Laksmi Pamuntjak has also been under-represented in academic critique. This is also despite *The Diary of R.S.: Musings on Art* having been written in English, widening the possibility of Western critique. This anthology differs from the stories of chapter two through its fulcrum of art and its use of the English language, but more importantly through its detail of life during the period of transition into *Reformasi*. Laksmi Pamuntjak acquaints the reader with women in the detail of their lives. She exposes their innermost foibles, their desires and their struggles and in doing so she allows the reader an amplification of their lives, revealing the social issues in Indonesia during the early years of *Reformasi*.

While one author may privilege woman as pivotal to the community, another may privilege the effects of violence on community and family. Laksmi Pamuntjak explores woman, her community, the twenty-first century and sexuality as well as the impact of

western influence, but on a micro-social level. Helvy Tiana Rosa writes of conflict and religion and subsequently the effects of violence and displacement on society. Ayu Utami uses the voice of a temporarily mentally ill priest, who is bound to neither side of the conflict in Kalimantan in the year 2000 in her story *Bau*, exploring racism, religion and human nature. The engagements of authors with socio-political issues reveal a desire to illuminate the human suffering, caused by conflicts, that is not easily portrayed in the media.

## Chapter 1: Literature Review and Theory

During *Reformasi* there has been an active pursuit by female poets, short story writers and novelists to illuminate for readers their own political and social commitments. With politics and historical perspective in mind I will use a cultural materialist approach for my analysis of these stories, contextualising their engagement with historical, political and cultural realities. In this chapter I review previous research on women's literature of the *Reformasi* era. I then outline the theoretical framework of cultural materialism for the critique of literature that draws from the engagement of writers with broader socio-political issues.

### Literature Review

Some of the authors have works that have previously been the subject of academic criticism; others have yet to receive critical attention. Critiques of works by *Reformasi* women writers have largely been in response to moralistic reviews on women writers' approach to sex and sexuality in their literature. Notably, Ayu Utami's 1998 novel *Saman* and the 2001 sequel *Larung* have drawn significant academic interest including articles by Arnez (2010), Campbell (2007), Sears (2007), Marching (2007), Bandel (2006), Adipurwawidjana (2004) and Budiman (2003). Intan Paramaditha (2007) also explores the feminine in *Saman* and *Larung* along with Djenar Maesa Ayu's novel *Nayla*. However in her article "Tracing the white ink" she analyses the maternal body rather than the 'erotic body'. This is a step away from the critical focus on sex; however the concentration is again on resistance to the patriarchal construct of Indonesian society.

Early in the *Reformasi* period Hatley (1999) addressed the new phenomenon of women writers of *Reformasi*. She argued that *Saman* represented the erosion of barriers for women and the participation of women writers in a period of dramatic socio-political change.

A focus on sex and sexuality in women's writing was a notable feature of critical analysis in the early years of *Reformasi*. The inclusion of sex and sexuality exhibits a revolt by women authors against the social constructs of the New Order era. Hatley defends the sexual content on the grounds that it laid the path for women writers of this new era to expand the borders that once defined and confined their lives. Since Hatley's article, women writers have written on a broad range of areas, including sexuality, but they have displayed within their stories that the socio-political realm is a vital component of their literature. This is again not in the New Order script of woman's role, as Hatley describes it: "modest, virtuous and compliant, dependent upon and supportive of men". (1999, p. 451)

Danerek's 2006 book, *Tjerita dan Novel* begins with a history of the development of short stories and the novel in Indonesia, and examines works by various authors. He identifies *keterbukaan* (openness) as "the main emerging trend" (2006, p. 197) in literature of the *Reformasi* and concentrates his analysis of this trend on sexuality in the novels *Saman* and *Larung*. Although discussing the sexual politics depicted in these novels, he does not address politics as a distinct theme.

Diah Ariani Arimbi's 2009 essay "Reading Contemporary Indonesian Muslim Women Writers" examines the status of Indonesian Muslim women as depicted in the works of Titis Basino P.I., Ratna Indraswari Ibrahim, Abidah El Khalieqy and Helvy Tiana Rosa. In her view the diversity and cultural differences in Indonesia have given rise to differences in the status of Muslim women in Indonesia relative to those in Middle Eastern countries. She concludes that while Indonesian Muslim women "arguably enjoy a better social position than their sisters in more conservative Islamic regions" (Arimbi 2009, p. 184) their position in relation to their male counterparts is still restricted. While Arimbi's focus on depictions of Muslim women is an alternative to other critics' greater concentration on sex and sexuality,

she does not dwell on depictions of religion in connection to conflict or the broader socio-political issues faced by Indonesian women.

Academic critique of the writers under discussion here has thus far largely adopted a feminist perspective, leaving open the opportunity for critique with an alternative theory that examines not only feminist but also other socio-political facets of their writing. In this thesis, I do not ignore the feminist content of the selected stories but rather I read them with a view to identifying their broader socio-political meanings.

Indonesian women writers are providing insight into the violent struggles that have impacted on Indonesian communities. Previous analyses of the works of women writers have included discussion of the themes of nation, religion and sexuality (Campbell 2007, Hellwig 2007, Bandel 2006, Hatley 1999, Danerek 2006). However there remains a gap in the analysis of literature on the themes of religion, politics, resistance and conflict as they connect and overlap in the *Reformasi* short stories of Indonesian women writers.

In the context of *sastra reformasi* (Literature of Reformation post-1998), Aveling (2008) suggests that women writers are confronting the impact *Reformasi* has had on society. Aveling examines prose and poetry by Helvy Tiana Rosa, Ayu Utami and Dewi Lestari. He says that the works of women writers of the *Reformasi* era ought to be examined in the context of the post-New Order age of vast political and social change. Aveling concludes “The challenge is to learn how to respond to these works and adjust to the post-modern, and post-Reformation, humanity which they represent.” (Aveling 2007, p. 26) The aim of this thesis is to address this challenge, offering a broad view of the socio-political agendas of selected *Reformasi* women writers, connecting their short stories to the real events that are depicted in their fiction.

## Theory

In reading Indonesian texts as a Western critic, I am located outside the culture in which the texts were created and for which they have meaning. I am a western scholar bringing western theoretical frameworks into the study of Indonesian literature. Allen (2007) suggests that, Indonesian literature “is in need of a new literary paradigm, one that can properly take into account the context in which this work is being written.” In the 1980’s the debate around the subject of *sastra kontekstual* emerged, inspired by discussions at an arts workshop in Solo, 1984. The *sastra kontekstual* debate centred around the idea that Indonesian literature should be read in terms of the Indonesian experience encompassing historical and political context. (Allen 1999, p. 20) Although cultural materialism is a western theory and is not specific to Indonesian literature, it does go some way to situating Indonesian literature within an Indonesian context. The methodological approach I am taking is that of cultural materialism, underpinned by Wolff’s theory of the ‘female stranger’.

In order to undertake this analysis, the socio-political context of each story will be identified. A reading of the texts, using cultural materialism as the framework, will facilitate drawing out this context. The intent of the author, although not central to the analysis, is a point of interest as it is the author’s views of important aspects of Indonesia’s socio-political reality that is depicted. In a cultural materialist analysis of fiction the critic consciously takes into account his/her own knowledge of the world and experience of it.

Cultural materialism, Raymond Williams’ theory derived from Marxism, involves identifying the historical context in which the text was written and using critical methods that enable the analysis of a text, identifying how the text may subvert dominant hegemonies. In other words, historical context becomes the point of reference in the examination of the literary text. Therefore, the analysis is that which (as a product of culture) is presented and how it relates to reality. Using cultural materialism as a theoretical tool allows for a

multidisciplinary analysis of a text, one that may include feminism, politics, religion, globalisation and history.

Williams firmly connects the arts to politics. His cultural materialism does not distinguish ‚high culture’ from popular culture. Instead it includes all forms of literature as valid products of the socio-political contexts in which they were written. Thus cultural materialism enables an analysis of literature within its cultural and historical place.

Drawing on Williams’ cultural materialist theory, Andrew Milner (1996) also argues for the importance of works which, while they may not reach the realms of high literature, provide invaluable insight into socio-political concerns. The authors subject to critique in this thesis are not part of an identifiable Indonesian literary canon. However, through their stories they provide us with imaginings of the real world.

These texts have clear socio-political themes that are incorporated by the reader into his/her knowledge of the world. Cultural materialist theory is based on the premise that a text, as a product of a culture, enables a connection between author and reader through forms relating thought and experience, in a material format. The importance of this connection is that, as a product of a culture, and consequently the socio-political circumstances of a time, literature provides a bridging from the cultural through the text to socio-political issues (Milner 1996, p. 51). This allows for a definitive theorising of the ways in which female Indonesian authors are engaging with socio-political issues.

The most striking commonality between these stories is their connection to the real world. The stories all express social realities, some telling stories of conflict in Indonesia, others of women searching for a new definition of their role in *Reformasi* Indonesia. The stories blur the boundaries between the political and the personal.

Within the confines of a short story, a socio-political context facilitates a connection between past and present generations. Creating something for the present and the future from events of the past, like a sculpture created using recycled materials, Indonesian women authors are creating literature (a product) but also becoming a part of a fluid cultural process; it is constantly changing and developing. Aveling, in his article on the study of Indonesian literature in Australia discusses the value of literature:

“Rather than being of little relevance, literature and its related art forms (and this is where cultural studies comes in) continue to carry the stories which shape a culture’s deepest understandings of itself...” (Aveling 2009)

The feminist theories of Wolff (1990, 1995) align with cultural materialism. In particular, her theory of the ‘female stranger’ aids in positioning the short stories included for analysis in this thesis as stories from the ‘stranger’. That is as Wolff explains,

“For the woman writer who is... culturally marginalized (immigrants, subjects of external and internal colonialism, subjects of racial, gendered, or sexual oppression) it may be her very identity as woman which enables a radical re-vision of home and exile.” (1995, p. 9)

The stories are written by Indonesian women who may be identified as strangers to the New Order, strangers to *Reformasi* and to Indonesian literature. They are writing in a period of change from the New Order to *Reformasi*, they are operating in a medium historically dominated by men and they bring a new outlook to Indonesian literature, one that can be aligned with Wolff’s notion of the fresh outlook provided by ‘strangeness’ and marginality. Wolff defines the ‘stranger’ as one who travels but not necessarily geographically; it may be language or the stance of an outsider (in this case a woman) that provides the distinction of a traveller. In this way the stranger has marginality and objectivity, but may also exhibit subjectivity in light of new experiences related to his/her marginality or more specifically, ‘strangeness’.

For this thesis I have also drawn from Gibson and Huemer's *The Literary Wittgenstein* (Huemer 2004). Recognising the value of Wittgenstein's philosophies to understanding literature, the two scholars collated and contributed to a collection of essays. *The Literary Wittgenstein* involves a way of applying Wittgensteinian theory in "reading literature for life". It strengthens the case for critiquing from a cultural materialist perspective, analysing political, cultural and historical content. It does this by validating literature as having an actual effect on real values and the world views of readers. So where cultural materialism validates the text as a product of a culture, Gibson's interpretation of Wittgensteinian theory validates the *effect* of the text as *becoming* a part of a culture. In this way it reconciles fiction with the reality of world perspective and experience.

Gibson speaks of authorial intent to incorporate values and world perspectives, derived from their places and experiences in their culture. He begins by posing two poles for reading literature. To one pole he ascribes the approach that literature is fictional and that it does not instruct the reader in matters of the real world. On this approach, a text is isolated, that is, as Gibson puts it, this is the approach of "literary isolationism" (Huemer 2004, p. 110).

To the other pole Gibson ascribes the notion that the readers' interpretation of a text diminishes the fictional aspects in that the reader will draw from the values within the text and apply them to his/her relationship with and knowledge of the world. Gibson suggests that literature invites us to read into the fictional story, drawing out realities of morals and values.

By marrying these two perspectives Gibson is upholding the analysis of literature for the contribution it makes to the understanding of a culture and a society. Thus cultural materialism gives us one line of analysis. This line is the historical, political and cultural

context that has resulted in the production of the text. Gibson's Wittgensteinian theory progresses from this line on another tangent effectively allowing a reading of the text telling us what it really contains; that is, what *the text* is really saying about the world, and the morals and values of societies.

This analysis is not only the setting of the short story but the context of its place as a product of culture and society. Not only does the critic draw from previous experience but also anticipates the actual (real) experience of reading. Diah Ariani Arimbi describes this in relation to reading the works of Indonesian women writers:

“In literary analysis fiction is no longer read without critically questioning images produced within its narrative. As fiction is constructed from the interweavings of cultural narratives,...For the readers, reading such stories – looking at other stories – creates a bond connecting the readers and the characters that continuously engages readers in the process of identity formation” (Arimbi 2009, p. 19)

In his book *Fiction and the Weave of Life* (2007) Gibson ascribes a cognitive value of cultural understanding to fiction. He asserts the connection between fiction and reality:

“...if we look outside literature, it is rather easy to find cultural practices that use fiction as a medium for exploring the real. In fact, it seems to be only when we consider literature that we speak about fictions as somehow constitutionally opposed to the real. If we switch perspectives, leaving aside for a moment the arts, it becomes clear that we have a general idea that the fictional and the real come together quite easily, and quite frequently.”(2007, p. 175)

Gibson's explanation of fiction as a tool for understanding reality stabilises the cultural materialist framework. In particular he is concerned with the way literature, through its fictional realm, aids the reader in making sense of the real world. I add that on reading, a novel becomes a part of the reader's world experience.

Julia Suryakusuma is a noted Indonesian author, feminist and intellectual. In her essays, collected in *Sex, Power and Nation* (2004), Suryakusuma offers a feminist critique of governance and politics. Suryakusuma analyses the effects of a patriarchal state on

Indonesian women, concentrating on gender roles. Her work aids in understanding the role of women leading up to *Reformasi* and beyond 1998. *Sex, Power and Nation* gives an Indonesian perspective to the socio-political issues faced by Indonesian women connecting the „State’ and sexuality. Julia provides insight into her Indonesian feminist stance in her theory of „State Ibuism’. Alongside cultural materialism and Wolff’s theory of the female stranger, her work will provide the theoretical understanding of socio-political issues affecting women.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse socio-political issues in a selection of short stories of Indonesian women writers, focussing on the Indonesian context. Although not a specifically Indonesian theoretical framework, cultural materialism, combined with Wolff’s feminist approach help emphasize the real meaning of the Indonesian woman’s experience of conflict, religion, and social change. Cultural materialism demands knowledge of the historical context, making it fundamental to the analysis of a text. It is therefore relevant to the cultural origin of the text under analysis and contributes to a deeper understanding of the meaning of its literature.

## Chapter 2: Representing Religion and Ethnicity, Expressing Trauma and Repression

### Introduction

In May 1998 riots in Jakarta, Medan, North Sumatra and Solo triggered by the Asian financial crisis resulted in thousands of casualties (injuries and rape victims) and in the vicinity of a thousand deaths (Nathalia 2008) including members of the Chinese-Indonesian population, who were targeted by the rioters. Following these events President Suharto resigned and so began Indonesia's period of *Reformasi*. Since this shift in Indonesia's governance eruptions of violence have not diminished. There continues a stream of incidents marring the landscape of Indonesia and the lives of Indonesians. Outer regions of the archipelago suffer particularly, with religious and ethnic clashes and political obstacles and interference factored in as triggers. (Beittinger-Lee 2009, pp. 97-98) Beittinger-Lee documents historical experiences, state violence, tradition and a "culture of violence" and prejudice (including religious and ethnic) as well as "weakening of the state post-1998", frustration, military and police provocation and economic crisis as the combination of reasons for the continued violence in Indonesia. (2009, pp. 99-101) Such a diversity of contributing factors renders the task of making sense of the violence difficult for Indonesians.

The May 1998 riots are markers to the end of Suharto's 30 year rule. The beginning was also marred by violence. Schreiner analyses the 1965 killings of Indonesian generals in the context of the trauma these killings had on the population. He says of trauma on a society that it

"is simultaneously a continuous and interrupted process. It marks a deep interruption in the life story of any individual and in the history of a society, but at the same time represents the beginning of a new history that is linked to that very event." (2005, p. 271)

However, despite acknowledging the fact that trauma stemming from violence is continuous, Schreiner's markers of new histories may not be clear to those experiencing recurrent violence in Indonesia. Schreiner connects the history of the New Order to the experience of violence and the resultant trauma to the population during *Reformasi*. In the following analyses of short stories with themes of violence, ethnicity and religion the authors show resistance to the continuance of Indonesian conflict. They privilege the voices of victims while critiquing governance and those who stir up violence. They express the effects on people's lives of the continuance of violence in Indonesia.

### **Ethnicity or Politics, an Alternative Perspective on the Cause of Violence**

*Transmigrasi* is defined in clause 1 of the Basic Transmigration Act of 1972 as:

“...the removal and/or transfer of population from one area to settle in another area determined upon within the territory of the Republic of Indonesia, in the interests of the country's development, or for other reasons considered necessary by the government.” (Hardjono 1977, p. xiv)

In 1902 the Dutch colonial rulers of Indonesia implemented *Transmigrasi*. In 1952 the Sukarno government began its own extension of this program. The government used the program purportedly to alleviate the large population of the islands of Java, Madura and Bali; also shifting portions of the populations where there was under-employment and unemployment, thereby alleviating the strain on the infrastructure of those areas. *Transmigrasi* was also intended to facilitate a wider use of the arable land and natural resources on outer lying islands. Additionally it was intended to facilitate integration (disperse separatist movements) of a unified country by transferring Javanese inhabitants, along with their customs and nationalist inclinations to less populated areas. (Hoey 2003, pp.

111,123) In reality there were many problems associated with the *transmigrasi* program such as “corruption, human-rights abuses, and ecological disaster”. (Hoey 2003, p. 123)

In 2001, Kalimantan, the Indonesian region of the island of Borneo, was the site of what is now referred to as the Sampit conflict. Sampit is a town located in Central Kalimantan. Said to have been sparked by an incident involving an attack on a Dayak citizen in late 2000, the Sampit conflict escalated on February 18<sup>th</sup> 2001 when two Madurese civilians were attacked by a group of indigenous Dayaks. (Ukur 2001) The conflict continued throughout the year and the resultant deaths numbered in the hundreds. Over 40,000 Madurese were displaced as a result of the conflict. (Wahid 2001) Although ethnic conflict has recurred sporadically at least since 1967 (Davidson 2002, p. 80) it is considered by Beittinger-Lee that the peak of the conflict occurred in 2001. (2009, p. 106)

*Transmigrasi* (transmigration) has contributed to ethnic and religious conflict but it does so in combination with other factors. Ayu Utami presents *Bau*, a short story critiquing racism, superstitions, governance and biological factors as catalysts for conflict between indigenous Dayaks and Madurese transmigrants. *Bau* is a fictional report filed by a Catholic priest, Father Janoko, following a day of slaughter of Madurese transmigrants by Dayak people in 2000. According to the forward of the story Catholicism has maintained a presence in Kalimantan for two centuries, with many of the Dayak perpetrators of violence on the Madurese having been baptised into Catholicism. (Utami 2007, p. 2)

A foreword to the report in the third person recounts how Father Janoko had earlier that day performed a blessing of sick chickens for a local Catholic poultry farmer. Contrasting priorities, the foreword to the report explains the concerns of a poultry farming parishioner who interrupted Father Janoko as he was writing a report of the massacre:

“...if he did not take any emergency action, the entire coop would be dead within three days, and nothing would redeem them. He was a third generation Catholic, and beginning with his parents, the family had ceased to believe in shamans. He believed in the priest. Or, to be precise, he held hope in the priest.”

Prior to Catholic and government intervention, the Dayaks held predominantly animist beliefs. Davidson (2002) explains that the Catholic Church had been slow to convert Dayaks, but found renewed vigour in the 1970s with the military facilitating mission work to bring the Dayak population into line with state religious policies. (2002, p. 76) Davidson notes “the term „Dayak’, particularly in West Kalimantan’s western half, is nearly synonymous with „Christian’.” (2002, p. 76)

Following the blessing Father Janoko became ill, contracting the highly contagious avian influenza but he was determined to complete his report for the church on this most recent massacre of Madurese people. He ponders (before knowing the fate of the blessed poultry) if God would spare the chickens when he had not spared the Madurese. He completes his report (which he refers to as his masterpiece) despite his high fever and a swelling on his brain which is not discovered until later. On receipt of the report, the church dismisses it as the ravings of a seriously ill man. Even on his recovery, Father Janoko himself does not understand it and questions what his point was.

As the crux of his report, Father Janoko has focussed on the rumour that the Dayak used their legendary keen sense of smell to detect their enemy, the Madurese. It is said in the forward that on raiding trucks full of people the Dayaks “ordered all the inhabitants or passengers to gather around, and with their sense of smell, they accurately separated those with Madurese blood and those without.” (p. 2)

In his discussion of the high olfactory abilities of the Dayak people Father Janoko poses the idea that in humanity the sense of smell is a fundamental (but largely dismissed) layer of identification of ethnic group. He does not pass a judgement on the use of smell in

this way; rather it is his recognition of its use that is the focus of his report. It is in this recognition of a physical explanation (for a process passed off by the church as a superstitious belief) contrasted with the blessing of the contaminated poultry farm (which could be said to be a superstitious practice – it has neither physical nor scientific basis) that religions are critiqued in the story. The keen sense of smell of the Dayaks and the relationship of this keen sense of smell to racism form a pretext on which methods of control by Suharto's New Order government are critiqued.

Father Janoko discusses the use of an acronym ERROR “Ethnicism, Racism, ReligiOnism and Inter-gRoupism” (p. 6) This is likely a play on the acronym SARA (*Suku, Agama, Ras dan Antar Golongan*/ethnicity, religion, race and interclass), which was used by the New Order government. SARA was introduced by the New Order in the 1970s in an effort towards a unified nation under the umbrella of *Pancasila*<sup>5</sup>. Almost as if Father Janoko feels he has had an epiphany, he announces in his report that the problems of ‘ethnicism’, racism, ‘religionism’ and ‘intergroupism’ are not ideological issues but rather they are biological; and at the crux of this biology is the sense of smell. With his high fever well settled into his body, Father Janoko offers responses to his own questions (and so complements the idea that he is delusional):

“Question: when did this primitiveness reappear in humans?

Let me answer, for a question is a pretext for an answer.

The answer is: when names lost their addresses. Yes, when names became homeless, language became a curious vagabond.” (p. 10)<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Pancasila is a term introduced by former Indonesian President Sukarno. It is the Indonesian state philosophy based on the five principles. “Belief in God (*keTuhanan*), with the obligation for adherents of Islam to practice Islamic law, in accordance with the principles of Humanity that is just and civilized, Unity of Indonesia, Democracy guided by the wisdom of representative deliberation, and Social Justice for all Indonesian people.”

<sup>6</sup> “Pertanyaannya: kapan kepurbaan itu muncul kembali?

Perkenanlah saya menjawab. Sebab pertanyaan adalah alasan untuk mengajukan jawaban.

Jawabnya: ketika nama-nama telah kehilangan alamat. Ya, ketika kata-kata telah tuna wisma.”(Utami 2007, p. 11)

The national unity promoted by the Indonesian government increased division between certain ethnic groups. There are broad implications for the failure of integration of ethnicities, especially where economic hardship is experienced. Tomlinson quotes George Monbiot discussing the need for ethnic diversity in promoting unified ethnicities:

“As languages die, the concomitant loss of meaning compromises everyone’s ability to sustain both a peaceful and purposeful life...Without pluralism there can be no peace. In society as in ecosystems, diversity affords stability. (Monbiot 1995)” (1999, p. 79)

As the divide between the Dayak population and Madurese communities widened the tension between them increased. Father Janoko is implying that a threat to ethnic values and traditions constitute the reason for the Dayaks return to the use of instinctive behaviour. He is not condoning the behaviour but rather offers an explanation of it. The Dayak population became dissatisfied with what they saw as allocations of their land to the transmigrant Madurese settlers. The Madurese were disillusioned with their move to Kalimantan, lacking basic facilities they had been led to believe would be available.

Both the Madurese and the Dayaks experience unexpected and unwelcome change resulting in the loss of place for both ethnic. The Madurese experience loss through transmigration and the Dayaks experience loss through invasion of their land (although initially peaceful and through government directives). In Father Janoko’s eyes, this is the catalyst for what he describes as primitive war. It is the catalyst for the Dayaks reverting to the use of their keen sense of smell in this time of conflict.

There is the possibility that the problems associated with *transmigrasi* are caused by socio-ethnic incompatibility. However, some suggest that the problems are more likely caused by economic difficulties due to government mismanagement. In a discussion of the problems of *transmigrasi* Dawson (1992) mentions poor living conditions (housing, access to clean water), unprepared land and lack of opportunity to integrate resulting in ethnic tension.

Dawson says that a “heterogeneity of cultures, languages and religious beliefs within a settlement makes social integration difficult”. (1992, p. 49)

Father Janoko continues his report, outlining the methods of dealing with ERROR (SARA). He discusses the manipulation by the New Order government of this acronym. To improve the government’s power structure it used ERROR (SARA) to systematically dispose of dissenters of the Suharto regime. Father Janoko’s acronym is woven into an analysis of human nature’s tendency to refer to a group rather than an individual, especially in reference to critical events; or in reference to an individual to stereotype him/her as a part of a particular ethnicity or religion. By labelling groups or individuals as communist, the New Order government in effect allowed itself the scope to order their elimination, promoting brutal and often fatal, racially driven attacks. These attacks were then either largely dismissed by the police or out of their control. When Father Janoko says:

“The New Order launched a crusade against any forms of ERROR, ERRORISTS and ERRORISM. For years, the New Order detained people, tortured people, day and night, imprisoned them without any documentation, without any clear charge other than the secret charge of committing ERROR, being an ERRORIST and practising ERRORISM.” (2007, p. 6)

he is saying the New Order government fought ERROR with ERROR. What he does not say is implicit: the fight against ERROR was a manipulation by the government to stifle freedom of speech, rid itself of dissenters and increase the power of the autocracy. (pp. 6-8) The government manipulated the population through the guise of creating a unified nation and providing security for the population. It accentuated or overstated ‘difference’ as non-conducive to this security and unification.

One of the effects of the demise of Suharto's rule was the relaxing of the security provided by the New Order government (albeit through ruthless and fatal measures<sup>7</sup>). In reference to this Father Janoko is suggesting a complex weave of a number of factors contributing to the violence seen in Kalimantan: The New Order government and its *transmigrasi* program resulting in conflicting ethnicities and religion have been replaced by a new government with less clearly defined boundaries and control, but with the existing conflict between ethnicities and their land resources remaining.

The reader assumes that the priest plays a vital role in the community, with his contribution expected to be of hope and assistance. Although Dayaks are predominantly Catholic or Christian and Madurese are largely Muslim, Father Janoko expresses concern for the Madurese, confirming an objective stance and consequently the rigour of his report, despite the apparent incoherence of it. While Father Janoko is Indonesian (as his Javanese name indicates) he belongs to an institution (the Catholic Church) that has its roots in Italy. He does not, however, express notions of being "the stranger". In this particular conflict it is the Madurese who are "the stranger". According to Jamie Davidson (2008) the violence in 2001 in Kalimantan cannot be explained by religious or separatist issues alone but rather was a continuance of a complex series of events and politics initiated decades before.

By weaving into the story a twist in the form of the priest's illness it is possible to critique aspects of humanity, racism, 'ethnicism' and of the New Order government. The violent past of Kalimantan has not been resolved within the population and understanding the

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<sup>7</sup> In reference to Suharto's method of rule, Berger says "...he led Indonesia to stability and nurtured economic growth. But these successes were ultimately overshadowed by pervasive and large-scale corruption; repressive, militarized rule; and a convulsion of mass bloodletting when he seized power in the late 1960s that took at least 500,000 lives. ... Mr. Suharto and his family became notorious for controlling state enterprises and taking kickbacks for government contracts, for siphoning money from state charities and for committing gross violations of human rights. " (Berger 2008)

cause of violence is difficult amid a web of suppositions. The effects of Father Janoko's illness (high fever and swelling on the brain) allow a particular cognitive leverage. This enables Father Janoko's to express otherwise hidden or repressed thoughts of a natural and/or biological tendency of people to exhibit racist traits. Ayu Utami has woven political, religious and racial components into *Bau*. Through the use of a character suffering temporary, illness-induced delusions, she has proposed an alternative position for the understanding of long-term and ongoing ethnic conflict.

### **A Silent Struggle**

From Dutch colonial times, there was an "indigenous/non-indigenous dichotomy" (Siddique 1981-82, p. 670) with the Chinese-Indonesian population often given preferential treatment by the Dutch over the indigenous population. During his reign, Suharto made the distinction between Pribumi (indigenous) Indonesians and non-pribumi, specifically including Chinese-Indonesians in the non-pribumi category. The Chinese-Indonesian population were subjected to racist campaigns. Brutal attacks by both civilians and the military occurred in 1966 and again in 1998, leaving many Chinese-Indonesians raped, dead or homeless after their homes were burned by mobs. Siegel says "Though to say 'the government' instigated the riots would be too broad" (1998, p. 81) However, financial hardship caused by the Asian Financial Crisis fuelled existing resentment towards Chinese-Indonesians, who were regarded as affluent and had also been subject to the Suharto government's campaign to combat supposed communist elements and maintain national unity.

Beittinger-Lee says of the „mob justice' that was carried out against the Chinese that "These codes of conduct became ingrained in the local cultures over the centuries and may

still play a role...” (2009, p. 184) and that “Before 1998, vigilante justice was the logical concomitant of a corrupt and repressive regime that failed to give justice to its people.” Beittinger-Lee also explains that *Reformasi* has led to an increase in vigilante justice.

Linda Christanty’s *Makam Keempat* (The Fourth Grave) (2004) is the story of an elderly couple narrated in the first person by the husband. The story is an account of the couple coming to terms with the disappearance of their daughter Paula. Paula, it seems, was a university student who became involved in an uprising against Suharto and his authoritarian government. The husband is a tobacconist. Since his daughter’s disappearance he has lacked motivation in his work. His wife, Elia, refuses to accept that Paula will not return.

The narrator and his family are Chinese-Indonesians. He describes how he read to his daughter from the stories of Chinese-Indonesian author, Kho Ping Hoo, when she was young. The stories contained imagery of supernatural beings who championed for those in need. His wife blames him for initiating Paula’s enthusiasm to fight for the common people through reading these stories.

Only vague clues as to their daughter’s whereabouts exist, but Elia insists that her husband search for her. Elia is convinced that her daughter is truly lost only after several months of her husband searching, and ultimately her own part in the futile search. It is at this point that the narrator is able to convince his wife that it would be appropriate to mark Paula’s demise with a grave placed next to that of his mother. When Paula last visited her parents she had expressed concern that she may have been followed. She would not reveal more to her parents for fear of endangering them.

As a result of 10 months of economic hardship triggered by the Asian Financial Crisis, and resentment towards the supposedly affluent Chinese-Indonesians, demonstrations in Jakarta against “the rise in prices that accompanied the fall in value of the rupiah” (Siegel

1998, p. 74) occurred on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1998. This resulted in the deaths of four student activists who were shot either by the police or members of Suharto's military. May 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, 1998 mark an uprising in Jakarta of disenfranchised youth targeting Chinese-Indonesian residents and businesses, looting, raping and murdering their victims. (Siegel 1998, p. 76)

*Makam Keempat* begins late at night with the narrator experiencing a ghostly vision of his daughter. She disappears leaving rays of light in her wake and no scent. The story is coloured with human senses, superstitions and religion. Scent is again mentioned when the narrator retires to his bedroom, with the aroma of jasmine filling the room. He recalls that early in his marriage mosquitoes would fill the room and keep him awake. He did not welcome the presence of mosquitoes, nor did he like the smell of insecticides to kill or deter the insects. His wife would become upset and blame herself for his discomfort, for letting the mosquitoes in through the open door. However, at this point the narrator has come to accept the mosquitoes, almost appreciating their companionship in the lonely, dead of night. Although somewhat non-eventful, this ordinary event illuminates for the reader that for the couple who have lost their daughter, mosquito bites in the night, rather than being a nuisance and a trivial matter, now represent a connection to the past when life was not the grief-ridden existence that it has become.

The narrator describes his tobacco shop, the aromas of the different tobaccos, the differences in the tastes between hand-rolled and tailor-made cigarettes and the pleasures of an expensive cigar for the few customers that could afford them. The narrator's work is his only glimpse of normality since the disappearance of his daughter. He struggles with maintaining the motivation necessary to continue his work but the reader assumes that although he may not achieve the same level of dedication to his operations as may have once been the case, he does continue. Again, the author documents a seemingly trivial part of a

man's life, but it is the trivial that stresses the loss of normality and feeling of limbo that Paula's parents are experiencing.

The interesting aromas and smells, and the imagery provided in the descriptions of light illuminating the room, or rays of light beaming from the ghostly figure of the narrator's daughter add depth to the descriptions in the story. This is where the documentation of history fails and the connection of fiction aids in the relating of the human story. The reader can readily relate to the descriptive words of the story: "*Aku menyebut namanya, dengan tekanan dan perasaan beragam; haru, senang, cemas, putus asa.*"<sup>8</sup> Here, the narrator relates that, on seeing an apparition of his daughter, Paula, he has called out her name and notices in his own voice a tumult of feelings, emotional, happy, worried and despairing.

A humble couple is portrayed - hard-working, simple and yet with ambitions for their child that require sacrifice on their part. These ambitions are compared, with irony, to the fate determined by one's birth and birthplace. The narrator notes with a touch of bitterness: "*Namun, air tanah yang kau minum rupanya menentukan jalan hidupmu.*" (2004, p. 127) ("However, it is the groundwater you drink that determines your life path.")

The aromas and visions of light connect the reader to the senses of the couple, who in their grief and bewilderment remember, not so much what happens around them, but the things they experience in their senses. In contrast to their life prior to Paula's disappearance, their existence now is marred by the numbness of loss and unknowing that has continued for almost five years. It is this prolonged unknowing that motivates the husband to regain some of his former existence by moving on; and although he wants to move on, he does not do so until his wife is also ready to accept and mark the death of their daughter.

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<sup>8</sup> I include in this analysis some quotes in the Indonesian original to demonstrate the poetic feel of the language used by the author.

*Makam Keempat* illuminates the manner in which superstitions and religions are melded in Indonesian belief systems. As mentioned, the story begins with the narrator experiencing a ghostly vision of his daughter. He and his wife also discuss the silent way his late mother enters their house. He refers to her as his mother, not his late mother. Finally, when the couple have lain to rest memories of their daughter, by constructing a corpse-less grave, they attend church and pray. They experience their fifth Christmas without her; the mention of which signifies their Christian belief. Paula's parents believed that when she was young she had experiences with the supernatural in the form of the ghost of her grandmother, with whom, they supposed, she had conversations. Later, after Paula's death, the narrator believes he can hear her laughter and that she is being held safe by his mother.

Written during Reformasi, the story is personal but also critiques the Suharto government's method of disposing of people who dared to dispute the method of rule in place. The author's method of critique is almost concealed; throughout the story there are only two mentions of the government. One is a whisper from daughter to father that she and some friends were working towards circumstances where everyone could enjoy prosperity and safety. The other mention is a rumour that Paula has been locked up by the despotic ruler. Suharto is not mentioned by name but it is reasonable to assume that the despotic ruler referred to is indeed Suharto.

The inclusion of the senses of taste, smell and sight humanise the story, enhancing the „personal encounter' between the reader and the narrator. There is little needed to explain the catalyst for the couple's loss, with the expectation of extra-textual knowledge of the consequences of those who betrayed the Indonesian government during Suharto's rule. The result of the story is that it provides an extra dimension to the well known facts of this period in Indonesian history; this dimension being the connection to the reality of the tragedies that have been documented in factual texts. This is the connection between that which is actual

history and that which is emotion and experience. For many it is only the words of the story that can illuminate their experience. John Gibson (2004, p. 115) notes that

“literary works, though largely composed of fictive content, can also engage in straightforward psychological, political, and theological commentary; that novelists, when so inclined, can do exactly what historians or philosophers do.”

It is through this connection of literature to reality that an author is able to reveal the truth. The reader accepts that while the story is fictional it also reveals aspects of the truth that may otherwise remain hidden.

*Makam Keempat* does not tell the story of Suharto, his government or the victim, Paula; the politics behind the story are critiqued through the account of the impact on innocent people. *Makam Keempat* is a story of those left to deal with the aftermath; those whose lives continue but who cannot continue in the way that they had once lived.

The signifying segments of the story provide insight into the enormity of what was experienced during the Suharto regime. For many families this experience of loss and not knowing was the result of a son or daughter, husband or wife, relative or friend exhibiting a public dissatisfaction at the treatment of the general population by the Suharto regime. Suharto’s method of contending with denigrators was to have them disappear. Although this was widely known it did not deter all.

The story has a subdued tone, relying on a descriptive narration. The flow of the story gives way to the flow of emotions experienced by people in situations similar to that which is depicted. Superstition and religion combine to give meaning to their loss.

“A new grave was set beside my Mother’s grave. Rest my child. Even champions must rest. Suddenly there was movement in the boughs of the Ylang-

ylang tree. Flowers were falling. I could feel my wife's hand cool in my grasp. Mother has received our child, she whispered, with relief." (2004, pp. 133-134)<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the narrator describes how the couple's acceptance of death brings a new stage in their lives where grief may settle.

"This morning we are well dressed. I wear my best suit, and shiny leather shoes. I look at Elia who is increasingly aging and shrinking in her black dress. It is so black, like the crows which cry and swoop in my mind. My tears fall. Elia looks at me. She wants to speak, but she can't. Soon we will go to church and pray. This is our fifth Christmas without Paula" (2004, p. 134)<sup>10</sup>

This writing by Linda Christanty presents Chinese-Indonesians who became victims after participating in the struggle for a democratic Indonesia or who became victims of mob violence such as in 1998 in Jakarta. The story reminds the reader, in particular the ordinary Indonesian reader, of the Chinese-Indonesian history of suffering and it breaks down the bigoted stereotyping of this minority group. The story humanises Chinese-Indonesians and their experiences as a minority group.

## **Trauma and Superstition**

East Timor was first colonised by the Portuguese in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Unlike Dutch colonies of the archipelago, East Timor was returned to its former coloniser after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. It remained a Portuguese colony until 1974. Despite an attempt by the East Timorese to declare independence, Indonesia, under the rule of Suharto's New Order government began its occupation of East Timor the following year. The Indonesian expectation was that the takeover would take a matter of weeks. However what ensued was a

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<sup>9</sup> "Sebuah makam baru berdiri di sebelah makam Ibu. Istirahatlah, Nak. Pendekar pun butuh istirahat. Tiba-tiba dahan-dahan kenanga berderak. Bunga-bunga berjatuhan. Kurasakan tangan istriku yang dingin dalam genggaman. Ibu sudah menerima anak kita, bisiknya, lega." (2004, pp. 133-134)

<sup>10</sup> "Pagi ini kami sudah berpakaian rapi. Kukenakan setelan terbaik dan sepatu kulit bersemir. Kupandangi Elia yang makin tua dan murung dalam gaun terusan hitam. Begitu hitam, seperti burung-burung gagak yang berkaok-kaok di benakku. Air mataku meleleh. Elia menatapku. Ia ingin mengatakan sesuatu, tapi gagal. Sebentar lagi kami akan pergi ke gereja, berdoa. Ini Natal kelima tanpa Paula." (2004, p. 134)

violent clash lasting for 24 years and costing over 200,000 East Timorese lives. (Dunn 2003, p. 379)

It was not until 1999 that the East Timorese had gained enough international support for a United Nations organised vote for self-determination. Support came initially from the Catholic Church and ultimately from the United Nations, Portugal and the United States. Australia also gave its support, disrupting its own developing relationship with the Republic of Indonesia. (Ayson 2006, p. 250) The East Timorese population voted overwhelmingly in support of independence from Indonesia. Despite this vote, eruptions of violence continued with many more lives being lost and countless atrocities committed.

*Kuda Terbang Maria Pinto* (Maria Pinto's Flying Horse) (KTMP) (Christanty 2004) is a short story about the effects of the East Timor conflict, told in magic realist style. The protagonist of the story is Yosef Legiman, a soldier in the Indonesian military. Following an explanation of an encounter between Yosef and Maria Pinto, a brief description is given of the plight of East Timor (identified not through name but through reference to "the land of oranges and coffee") in an overview of Maria Pinto's destiny. Maria Pinto had been an ordinary girl who after dropping out of university in Jakarta returned to East Timor, which was in the midst of a crisis. In superstitious tradition the shaman of her tribe anointed her *panglima*, or supreme commander, empowering her with the gift of sorcery and a flying horse to lead her ghostly and dangerous troops.

The story returns to Yosef as he describes his confession of events that he was involved in in East Timor to a fellow passenger on a train journey to an unnamed city. Yosef had witnessed the transformation of Maria Pinto from the 'ordinary girl' into a mystical figure who, using flying horses and wearing a flowing, white gown, sabotaged the Indonesian military's efforts. She did this by passing through the middle of armed conflicts and so

concealing the East Timorese soldiers from the Indonesians. Yosef recollects that while in the midst of a particular battle he became separated from his unit and during his efforts to reunite with them he came upon Maria Pinto in a hut. Yosef had the opportunity to kill her but instead fainted, not awakening until he heard the voices of his fellow soldiers.

Maria Pinto in this instance was a sleeping girl lying on the floor of the hut, clutching a wooden toy horse with wings, rather than the flying figure he had heard of. When she rose from her sleep her body appeared translucent and alien. However Yosef knew her to be Maria Pinto. Although clearly mythical, for Yosef, who believes he has seen her, the effect and impact is real. He carries this effigy in his mind, throughout what amounts to be the short remainder of his life.

The representations of the reality of the war and the beliefs of many Indonesians in the supernatural combine, revealing the trauma and feelings of desperation experienced by the soldiers. Yosef's perspective as a soldier in the Indonesian military is one which is rarely told. Yosef describes to his fellow passenger, a young woman, how he came to be in the army. He was from a poor village with scarcely enough to eat. For Yosef and his brother, joining the army was a way to escape poverty and gain respect. His brother was tortured and killed by rebels in East Timor leaving Yosef as the only remaining son in his family.

Yosef's ally, the wind, is also his enemy. The wind represents an infinite and resurgent violence, and a continuance of life and of death. Yosef could read the signs that the wind brought him, supposedly informing him of danger. On the other hand, the wind could give him away; carrying his scent the wind could reveal his whereabouts to the enemy. Most importantly, Maria Pinto's arrival is heralded by a sudden wind that carries with it supernatural sounds, numbing those who witness it. Ultimately it is the wind that carries Yosef to his release (in death) from his personal torture.

Yosef experiences a deep depression following his personal encounter with Maria Pinto in the hut. He is released from duty and returns home. After a period of rehabilitation he is reassigned, but as a sharp shooter rather than a soldier. He is not returned to East Timor but sent to a city to carry out the murder of a rebel commander.

The Indonesian government initially expected their invasion of East Timor to last a matter of weeks. However, the East Timorese were largely united in a front against invasion and guerrilla troops fought the Indonesian military with ferocity. For decades Indonesia continued to send troops to East Timor with losses of “2000 of a total armed force of between 15,000 and 30,000”. (Silove 2000, p. 68) The number of deaths of East Timorese at the hands of the Indonesian military in the 24 year period of the occupation amounted to approximately one third of the total East Timorese population. (Dunn 2003, p. 379)

As the initial campaign on East Timor was particularly brutal, Indonesian officers who were concerned about the brutality and the numbers of rapes and murders committed by their fellow soldiers felt powerless to stop them. (Dunn 2003, p. 247) There were also casualties in the Indonesian army. News of this reached Jakarta, worrying the family members of Indonesian soldiers. (Dunn 2003, p. 253)

Young men not dissimilar to the fictional Yosef were sent to fight a bloody war, both suffering and inflicting torture and death. They were sent into a conflict that was condoned beyond the borders of Indonesia. Lawless suspects the United States gave the Indonesian government support in invading East Timor, and says that Australia took a stance of “non-interference”. (1976, pp. 959-163)

Yosef confides his stories of East Timor and his belief in Maria Pinto to the woman beside him on the train. He sees this as a confession of sorts and considers the idea that maybe he is preparing himself for death. The woman is disinterested until she gains a vague

interest as Yosef continues his story and she takes a good look at his face, seeing the battle scars and disheartened look in his eyes. His life is alien to her and she cannot seem to fathom the depth of his experiences. Yosef reveals that he is now unfit for the war zone and has been reassigned. He also discusses his love for a girl whose parents have rejected him.

The woman simplifies the nature of Yosef's problems, thinking of the situation as a love triangle in which the soldier was caught between Maria Pinto and his lover. Her basic understanding of Yosef indicates a lack of knowledge of the brutality of the war in East Timor. At the end of their train journey the two travellers part company and once more become strangers. A month later Yosef goes on to carry out his new military mission, which is to assassinate a terrorist leader. From the top floor of a building opposite, he could see his target, he aimed and fired achieving his goal. His target was a young woman and Yosef believes her to be the woman he had travelled with, the one to whom he had confessed. It seems unlikely that this is the same woman given her sympathy for Yosef and her lack of understanding of the root of his trauma.

After Yosef completes his mission the wind blows again and he sees Maria Pinto who holds out her hand to him. He reaches for her hand and feels himself floating seeing the earth beneath him. This is Yosef's release from the torture of his life as it has become since his time in the war in East Timor. It is as if Maria Pinto, the supreme commander of a ghostly troop, has brought Yosef to his death.

Yosef does not express any understanding of the war, but is traumatised by the deaths he has witnessed and the events surrounding those deaths. Apart from his still grieving mother, Yosef is alone when he returns. His superstitions heighten his fear and awe of Maria Pinto and ultimately lead him to his own death. Dunn says of the effects on the soldiers that

“From the outset it was apparent that Fretilin’s guerrilla-type tactics, its surprise attacks and ambushes, sapped the strength and morale of the Indonesian forces, many of whom appear to have had only a confused understanding of what the war was about.” (2003, p. 264)

The trauma caused by the East Timor conflict was most deeply felt by the Fretilin<sup>11</sup> and the civilian population of East Timor where the casualties numbered one hundred times those of the Indonesian troops. However, that is not say that the effect on Indonesian troops was not significant, particularly for those suffering ‘shellshock’ or those concerned by the horrific actions of their fellow soldiers against East Timorese civilians and members of the Fretilin.

The social consequences for Yosef are not what he expected. He had believed that joining the Indonesian military would offer him an advantage over his fellow villagers. He had thought that it would gain him respect in society. He did not foresee the rejection by his lovers’ parents, nor the grief his mother experienced at the loss of his brother who had also joined the armed forces. His distress cannot be understood by his fellow Indonesians. If the woman on the train to whom he ‘confessed’ is a marker, in his trauma he is alienated from the general population whose understanding of the conflict was informed only by the propaganda released to the media by the Indonesian government.

The invasion was not as quick as the Indonesians had expected, nor was it met by the East Timorese without force. As a result the morale of soldiers was weakened

“not only by logistics problems, but also by the very high casualty rate, the fact that the Falintil units seldom took prisoners, and the lack of public recognition by the government in Jakarta and the Indonesian people (from whom the Timor operation was being carefully concealed) that they had been fighting a war for the Republic.” (Dunn 2003, p. 267)

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<sup>11</sup> Fretilin (Frente Revolucionária do Timor-Leste, Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor) was the political organization which headed Falintil (Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor Leste, Armed Forces of East Timor), the armed wing of the organization. (King 2003, p. 749)

The general view was that the Indonesian government was the „true’ authority and that the East Timorese, and Fretilin in particular, were anarchists wanting to install a communist government. The Indonesian government had assumed a cultural authority over the East Timorese. Fretilin were labelled rebels, whilst fighting for the freedom of their country. To Indonesians they represented a threat to the unity of the nation, despite the fact that East Timor had not been a party to the unified Republic of Indonesia prior to the invasion of 1975.

### **A Legacy of Trauma**

The people of Aceh, a region of Indonesia fundamentally Muslim and rich in natural resources (particularly liquid natural gas) fought against the Indonesian military in the Free Aceh separatist movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka or GAM). Aspinall (2007) says of the causes of the conflict that:

“Three factors were key: the legacy of previous generations of conflict; the institutionalization, celebration, and territorialization of Acehese identity via "special region" arrangements; and the emergence of a nationalist counterelite that radically reinterpreted official discourse on identity. These factors provided the context in which primary commodities became consequential for conflict.” (p. 968)

This means that the particular circumstances in Aceh provided the setting for the conflict. These circumstances included the formation of GAM in the 1970’s along with the development of Aceh’s Arun natural gas fields. Aspinall says that the

“Acehese grievances about natural resource exploitation only arose and became politically consequential for violence as part of a wider discourse of deprivation that positioned the Acehese as victims of the Indonesian state.”

The war between the Acehese rebels, led by Hasan de Tiro (who initiated the opposition to the exploitation of Aceh’s resources by overseas oil companies in collaboration

with the central Indonesian government) and the Indonesian military lasted from 1976 until 2005 when Aceh was granted special autonomy in a peace agreement with the Indonesian government. After decades of violence at the hands of the Indonesian military the people of Aceh are left with a legacy of trauma much like that of East Timor. They now struggle into the new realm of special autonomy. During the war, members of the Indonesian military regularly patrolled villages throughout Aceh. Often acting without evidence they murdered and raped inhabitants suspected of aiding GAM rebels led by Hasan de Tiro. In 1990 *Operasi Jaring Merah* was implemented by the New Order government to put an end to the Free Aceh Movement.

Aspinall says of this conflict in Aceh and those that preceded it that:

“In the 1990s, the theme par excellence was human rights abuses. Each layer of grievance built on top of that which preceded it, such that Acehnese identity became one founded in suffering at Indonesian hands. It was an identity of victimhood, albeit not a silently reproachful and helpless victimhood, but one that stressed Acehnese resistance and heroism.”

*Jaring-jaring Merah* (The Red Net) (Rosa 2008) follows the delusions of Inong (Acehnese for woman), a once pretty young girl who had been engaged to be married. The story begins with a poetic expression through which Inong metaphorically describes the psychological effects of her grief and trauma.

“Life is in tatters. Fragments without meaning ... I can only feel anger. No, not towards the moon that follows me, nor towards the cluster of stars that lurk poignantly within my pores. But because I live wounded. Just like that life.” (2008, p. 203)<sup>12</sup>

Inong wanders on foot from her home in Seurueke to Bukit Tangkurak (Hill of Skulls) in search of the bodies, or at least the remnants, of her family and her fiancé. During this journey she encounters two wild dogs. Unafraid of the dogs, Inong then informs the reader of

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<sup>12</sup> “Hidup adalah cabikan luka. Serpihan tanpa makna ... Ya, sebab aku hanya bisa memendam amarah. Bukan, bukan pada rembulan yang mengikutiku saat ini atau pada gugusan bintang yang mengintai pedih dalam liang-liang diri. Tetapi karena aku tinggal sebatas luka. Seperti juga hidup itu.” (2008, p. 203)

the terrors she has witnessed. Without giving dates (she may be unable to, or it may not be important to her in her poor mental and emotional state) Inong says:

“...I saw from three to seven bodies a day floating by in the river near my house. I also saw Yunus Burong with his throat severed and his head displayed to the villagers. I saw people on a yellow truck shot. Their red blood spurted everywhere. I saw Rohani, my neighbour, stripped naked and pack-raped, before her home and her husband were burned. I saw the moment Geuchik Harun was tied to a tree and shot repeatedly. I saw it all! Yes, all of it. Also when they butchered...my family, without reason.” (2008, p. 204)<sup>13</sup>

Inong is declaring not only the cause of her grief and trauma but also (perhaps unwittingly) that she is a witness to the crimes committed by Indonesian troops. As within this description, there is throughout the story the occasional use of an Acehnese word, rather than Indonesian. These uses of Acehnese terms, along with the names of the characters, are the tangible elements of *Jaring-jaring Merah* that aid in identifying Aceh as the region in which the story takes place.

Some hours later, after Inong has been digging in the red earth for the bones of her family, she is discovered by three men who return her to her home. Her disturbed mental and emotional state is brought to the forefront when on hearing the men comment on her insanity she thinks:

“They’re crazy if they think I’m crazy. Don’t they know I’m not singing alone? I sing with the moon, the clouds and night sky. I sing with the wind, the owls and the wild howling dogs. I sing with the shadows of Father, Mother, Ma’e and Agam. We sing, and we dance the *Bungong Jeumpa*. Then I smile shyly, when

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<sup>13</sup> “...aku melihat tiga sampai tujuh mayat sehari mengambang di sungai dekat rumahku. Aku juga pernah melihat Yunus Burong ditebas lehernya dan kepalanya dipertontonkan pada penduduk desa. Aku melihat orang-orang ditembak di atas sebuah truk kuning. Darah mereka muncrat ke mana-mana. Aku melihat tetanggaku Rohani ditelanjangi, diperkosa beramai-ramai, sebelum rumah dan suaminya dibakar. Aku melihat saat Geuchik Harun diikat pada sebuah pohon dan ditembak berulang kali. Aku melihat semua itu! Ya, semuanya. Juga saat mereka membantai... Keluargaku, tanpa alasan.” (2008, p. 204)

Hamzah who has proposed to me, passes by my house on his bike. A long time ago. Yes, a long time....” (2008, p. 206)<sup>14</sup>

On her return home Inong’s well-being is seen to by Cut Dini, a Muslim who works for a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). Cut Dini is also a mosque activist who had attended college in Jakarta before returning to Aceh. Other than Cut Dini, there is no-one to care for Inong. She guides Inong into completing necessary daily activities such as bathing and eating. She also reads her passages from the Qu’ran.

NGOs working in Aceh faced ongoing scrutiny from the Indonesian government throughout the Free Aceh movement. Since the beginning of *Reformasi* organisations such as Koalisi NGO Hak Asasi Manusia Aceh (Aceh Coalition of Human Rights NGOs) and Forum Peduli HAM Aceh (Aceh Human Rights Concern Forum) have been “established with the aim of documenting human rights violations in Aceh” (Sulistiyanto 2001, p. 444) However, formal restrictions on their activities were put in place in May 2005 prohibiting their involvement with separatist rebel factions, only months before an agreement was reached between the government and Acehnese.

Inong’s emotional trauma is not relieved by Cut Dini’s presence although her behaviour is to some extent pacified. Since first meeting Cut Dini, Inong has believed herself to be a bird. Much as Cut Dini’s presence pacifies Inong, this belief allows her an escape, not only from reality, but from danger.

As Cut Dini cares for Inong, two men in uniform arrive at her house. With the pretence of having concern for Inong’s well-being they offer five hundred thousand rupiah to

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<sup>14</sup> “Mereka gila karena mengira aku gila. Tak tahuka mereka bahwa aku tak menyanyi sendiri? Aku bernanyi bersama bulan, awan dan udara malam. Bersama desir angin, burung hantu dan lolong anjing hutan. Bersama bayangan Ayah, Mak, Ma’e dan Agam. Kami menyanyi, kami menari *Bungong Jeumpa*. Lalu aku tersenyum malu, saat Hamzah yang telah meminangku, melintas di depan rumah dengan sepedanya. Dahulu. Ya, dahulu....” (2008, p. 206)

help care for Inong. However, the offer is conditional. Inong (or Cut Dini as her guardian) must sign and declare that she will not speak of the atrocities of murder, rape and property violation committed against her or her family. Neither Inong nor Cut Dini agrees to the bribe. The men leave, frightened away by Inong's erratic behaviour.

Inong describes how her father, mother, brother and sister were accused by the military of conspiring with and abetting the GPK<sup>15</sup>, they were said to be members. Despite the family's insistence that they were not, they were murdered along with Inong's fiancé Hamzah and the village chief, both of whom had spoken in defence of Inong's family. The family was not given a trial; they were beaten, raped and murdered to be made an example of:

“Look at them. You're the same as the Mane people... working with the GPK!”  
his voice again.

“We're not GPK!” it was Mae's voice. “I am just an ordinary person!”

Release them. You have the wrong people!” My God, it was Hamzah's voice!

“Take away the man who said that!” (Rosa 2008, pp. 212-213)<sup>16</sup>

Helvy Tiana Rosa has extracted one of the innumerable stories of rape, murder, mutilation and destruction that occurred at the hands of the Indonesian military and more particularly Kopassus (Indonesian Special Forces). Non-government Organisations have taken reports of many of these occurrences and have pushed for investigations into human rights abuses. Many victims will not come forward: either they are too fearful of retribution should they be identified as witnesses or they accepted money in return for their silence. As Sulistiyanto says:

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<sup>15</sup> GPK is the abbreviated term for Gerombolan Pengacau Keamanan (Gang of Security Disturbers) used by the Indonesian government, identifying GAM as rebels who pose a threat to national unity and security, rather than using GAM which identifies them as from the Free Aceh Movement.

<sup>16</sup> “Ayo Lihat mereka. Kalian sama dengan warga Mane... bekerjasama dengan GPK!” suaranya lagi.

“Kami bukan GPK! Suara Ma'e. “*Ulon hana teupheu sapheu!*”

“Lepaskan mereka. Kalian salah sasaran!” Ya Allah, itu suara Kamzah!

“Angkut orang yang bicara itu!”” (Rosa 2008, pp. 212-213)

“If the Acehnese complained about the behaviour of the military and police personnel, they would be accused of supporting the Free Aceh Movement and this often led to arrest and, in several cases, torture, disappearances and killing” (2001, p. 445)

The legacy for Inong is the unending trauma. She frightens away the men in uniform through her screams and violent reaction. Finally she lies down. She refers to *Jaring Merah*:

“I lay back. Floundering. Bleeding in the net.” (2008, p. 215)

## **Conclusion**

The response by the populations of outlying regions to the nationalism and unity promoted by the New Order government indicates a strong resistance to the continued Java-centric governance. The characters of *Bau*, *Jaring-jaring Merah* and *Kuda Terbang Maria Pinto* exhibit various aspects of resistance to the dominance of the Indonesian government. In *Bau* Father Janoko experiences illness but is unchanged at the end of the story. He recognises the problems of Kalimantan in relation to the national government but his delusional state renders his report of these problems not useful. Resolution is not achieved and the message is that the problems are of a complex nature involving clashes of religion and ethnicity, national unity in a country of ethnic diversity, loss of belonging and political interference. While ill, Father Janoko is willing to take a controversial stance in his approach to analysing the conflict discussing the idea of biology being at the root of ethnic violence. On his recovery he cannot make sense of it. However the question is whether it is possible to retain the fundamental elements of diverse ethnicities when those groups are forced together under the umbrella of ‘one nation’, on land which was formerly occupied by only one of those ethnic groups. The control exerted by the government over both groups reduces their sense of belonging and control over their destinies.

*Jaring-jaring Merah* presents Cut Dini, an NGO worker trying to work effectively within the scope of government and military restrictions to help those affected by the war in Aceh. The victim, Inong, is suffering emotional trauma and cannot take care of herself without Cut Dini's help. Inong may seem helpless and destroyed but this conclusion may be premature. Inong seems to be in the early stages of her trauma, yet she remains spirited in her aggression to the men in uniform as they attempt to bribe her for her silence on the rapes and murders she has witnessed. She may have lost sight of her former self, her identity prior to the crimes against her and her family, but her spirit remains. This may represent the spirit of the traumatised Acehnese. The spirit of the people remains in the face of adversity.

*Makam Keempat* presents rather the destruction of the spirit. The narrator and his wife continue their daily routines but their spirit is depleted by their grief. They have no sense of agency as they try to come to terms with their loss. The hangover of public and political discrimination against Chinese-Indonesians from the New Order period into the early stages of *Reformasi* meant an avenue for justice was not available. Since the May 1998 riots in which Chinese-Indonesians were targeted many groups have evolved in reaction to the discrimination. Largely these were made up of Chinese-Indonesian youth, however some are comprised of indigenous Indonesians who also reacted to the racism. For example, Suryadinata describes "a group of mainly indigenous Indonesian women led by a University of Indonesia professor, Saporinah Sadli,...called Komisi Nasional Anti-Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan (Indonesian commission on violence against women)..." (2001, p. 515) which called for the crimes against Chinese women to be held to account within the context of "crime against Indonesian women in general". That is to say that Chinese-Indonesians should not be reduced to second-class citizens, therefore crimes against them should be regarded as crimes against Indonesians.

*Kuda Terbang Maria Pinto* reveals an aspect of Indonesian conflict that is not readily addressed: the experiences of Indonesian soldiers. The soldiers often come from disadvantaged backgrounds, fighting wars of which they have little knowledge. They seek improved lives and respect from their fellow countrymen. However, the military improves little and their operations can cause grief and distress for soldiers and their families. The overarching theme in all of these stories is repression. This repression is of minority ethnicities, such as the Chinese, the Dayaks and transmigrant Madurese and of separatist regions, Aceh and East Timor. The national unity so strived for also has its pitfalls.

### **Chapter 3: The New Order to *Reformasi*, a Contrast of Eras**

#### **Laksmi Pamuntjak's *The Diary of R.S.: Musings on Art***

Since 1998 and the change in governance of Indonesia brought about by the resignation of President Suharto, Indonesian women have found themselves grappling with the intersections between their state-prescribed roles and the newfound freedoms of *Reformasi*. Women's rights have continued to evolve, but in a new context. The social and religious values reinforced during Suharto's rule, using the role of women as "a basis of the authoritarian power of the New Order" (Robinson 2000, p. 139) were confronted by women activists amid the early uncertainty of *Reformasi*. However, Adamson says of women's rights:

"the concern continues to be that, while democratic reform might occur in the government, social values concerning women's roles in conjunction with increasing expressions of Islamic faith threaten to become increasingly restrictive." (2007, p. 6)

Since the beginning of Indonesia's move into *Reformasi's* early democracy, women's groups have, perhaps inadvertently, embraced some elements of Western feminist ideals:

middle class expectations of education, professional ambitions and a growing number of women's groups fighting for the rights of women. As Robinson says, under the New Order, groups that were marginalised include not only gays and lesbians but also unmarried and working women. (2002, p. 3) Although the rights of women in Indonesia do not altogether correlate to those of women in much of the Western world, it seems that middle class Indonesian women have similar ambitions in relation to opportunities and roles. The elements that provide the basis for the historical context for the analysis of Laksmi Pamuntjak's 2006 *The Diary of R.S.: Musings on Art* include the patriarchal Indonesian state and religions, middle class women's expectations in a new era of governance and the ways they combine.

A compilation of short stories, *The Diary of R.S.: Musings on Art* leads the reader through a series of mostly realist tales, in which the author uses a fulcrum of art. She displays a semblance of the ideals of *Lekra* through socio-political criticism within her work, which combines both art and literature. The author announces human emotion and thought derived from experience as that which drives action: love, betrayal, politics, and religion. These human elements give substance for artists, writers and scholars, with politics, theories and religion parts of an evolving and fluid cycle encompassing human thought.

Interestingly, the author has chosen to write these stories in English, broadening the possibilities of a Western readership. Many of the stories incorporate an element of political statement. At the same time, the book reads almost as an invitation to examination in Western literary scholarship. English is the language of the text; the choice of European art as the fulcrum for most of the stories and the incorporation of feminist and political elements are indications that Western scholarship is a welcome possibility. These aspects of the book do not diminish the Indonesian-ness of the stories. Rather, the two stories chosen for analysis in this thesis illuminate Indonesian socio-political issues, engaging with divorce and sole-

parenting, polygamy, pornography and religion as seen through the eyes of the aging wife of a polygamist (*The Diary of R.S.*) and the young daughter of a divorcee (*Sophie Between the Lines*).

There is an aesthetic appeal that allows for the anthology to be read and enjoyed without exploring the depth of meaning. However, this aesthetic appeal is subjective; there are strong cultural and historical influences within the text. The aim of this chapter is to gain understanding of the socio-political issues Laksmi Pamuntjak has captured within the stories and how they illuminate the contrasts between the New Order and *Reformasi*. The author's approach of incorporating art and English as key components of her stories is aesthetically appealing but this approach also allows for a critique of a culture increasingly affected by globalisation.

Laksmi Pamuntjak has used a variety of formats for her *Musings on Art*: the short story, the critique, the play, some prose. Writing mostly from the female perspective the author seems to invite an examination from the perspective of *l'écriture* feminine: that is, gendered women's writing. Unlike the other stories in the collection the first and third of the eight stories are not focussed around a printed work of known European art; however art remains a focal point in both stories. The author's use of English, European art and variations in themes, settings and methods, creating a thread throughout the texts, is identifiable as the intent by the author to exhibit several points: her ability to engage with literature and art (culture) on a global level; and the female perspective of culture alongside, and integrated with, the essence of human (most often female) nature. The author reaches inside the human psyche, as well as externally, with the effect being a depth of human nature in the characters. As a whole, the anthology presents two strong themes: global engagement and feminist representations. Historical and cultural meaning is evident not only in the stories themselves but in the author's approach. Pamuntjak writes of this anthology:

“Although this collection is mainly a work of fiction and its story and characters are imaginary, I am indebted to a wide range of sources, inspirations and historical events” (2006, p. 244)

The title story *The Diary of R.S.* is about the experiences of a polygamist’s secret second wife during the New Order, reflected on from the temporal perspective of the *Reformasi* era. R.S. lived her life largely hidden from the scrutiny of her community. This story contrasts with the story *Sophie Between the Lines*, which depicts a divorced woman in the *Reformasi* era, but who grew up during the New Order, striving outwardly to shake the shame placed upon her by the community and her family. She has had two boyfriends since her divorce and yet resists the humiliation of being shamed in public in a different way to R.S.. She searches, through her career, for a path towards a semblance of independence and dignity.

Both R.S. and Sophie’s mother contest the traditional roles observed in Indonesian literature prior to *Reformasi* by Hatley (2002)

“An ideal construction of woman as refined and modest, dependent and subordinate wife or daughter was contrasted with a demonic Other. Autonomous womanly power outside male control, threatening the very basis of social order, was portrayed in terms of a dangerously tempting or hideously terrifying female figure. Later in Islamic states an understanding of women’s God-given roles as wives and mothers reinforced this picture.” (p. 132)

Neither R.S. nor Sophie’s mother represent a threat to male dominance. Neither is in a position to emasculate or dominate men.

### **The New Order Woman’s Reflections in *Reformasi***

*The Diary of R.S.* is a story inspired by Gina Berriault’s *Diary of K.W.*; a short story in diary form “of an old woman trying to make sense of her past” (p. 244). *The Diary of R.S.* is set in Jakarta, and the protagonist of the story is the focus of an artist. She was a still life

model for her artist lover. The diarist is now a translator and mother of an adult son. The story revolves around the life of the protagonist in her small community. She reflects on prominent aspects of her life, mostly within the context of her visits to the local beauty salon, of which she has been a patron for many years. It culminates in the importance of her relationship with her son.

During Indonesia's New Order era, hegemonic gender ideologies required Indonesian women to fulfil their roles as wives with obedience, fulfilling their husbands' "emotional, material and physical needs". (O'Shaughnessy 2009, p. 115) Further, women in Indonesia are subject to polygamy, which is legal provided that the laws regulating the practice are adhered to by the husband. This refers to both Islamic religious laws and the laws of the state, which dictate that a man wishing to take on any wife subsequent to his first must request the permission of his first wife. (O'Shaughnessy 2009, p. 68)

R.S. describes the beginnings of her affair with the man who would become her husband and the father of her son. They eventually marry, but R.S. is his secret second wife. It is assumed that his first wife was unaware of the marriage between him and R.S.. As a result of this secret R.S. did not enjoy the comforts of having a live-in husband. The effects of this marriage were far-reaching and included her becoming melancholy. R.S. recognised the impact of her husband on her state of mind. When her husband complained that R.S. had a depressive nature, she regarded her melancholy as being as a result of his dominance of her. R.S. was relegated to a second-rate position and hidden. Her reaction to becoming pregnant was to conceal herself from public view so as to avoid humiliation and becoming the subject of gossip. Because of the secrecy surrounding their marriage R.S. found it difficult to explain her son's existence. R.S. seems to regret the situation of her marriage and the effect this has had on her son, who is known in the story as „B'. The absence of a father puzzles B as he grows up and his questions to R.S. regarding his paternity are met with false answers. R.S.

lies to B that his father was an artist who was murdered as a communist associate. R.S. considers this lie a “double murder”, for although she knows that an artist was murdered it was not her late husband. She found it difficult to explain to her son who his father was:

“...and I told him he was an artist who died a political prisoner, somebody whose freedom was wrested from him for a crime he might not have committed.” (2006, p. 19)

In this R.S. combined truth and fiction in order to attempt some semblance of reasonable explanation. The truths are that B’s father was indeed an artist and an artist (although not his father) had died a political prisoner without fair trial. However, R.S. justifies her lie:

“I realised (though not quite immediately) that what I told my son was akin to a double murder, of a memory that was not even ours, of courting a stigma that was not our due. But is that not what history is – a collective guilt?” (2006, p. 19)

The first date referred to in *The Diary of R.S.* is 1964 (2006, p. 17) in reference to the political nature of their ideals and their affiliation with *Lekra*. Founded in August 1950, *Lekra* was a leftist cultural organisation initiated by a group of artists whose ideals promoted interaction with politics. *Lekra* became Indonesia’s “largest cultural organisation” (Heinschke 1996, p. 166) Heinschke says of the early days of *Lekra* that

“In accordance with the official communist guidelines for literary policy, writers were sworn to a program of literary aesthetics amalgamating realism and romanticism as a means of enhancing the people’s revolutionary enthusiasm and will to fight.” (1996, p. 148)

Although this refers to writers and literary policy, the manifesto of *Lekra* was more successful in recruiting artists than writers. (Cribb 2004, p. 242) From 1965 to 1966 the military became increasingly aware of *Lekra* as an affiliate of the Sukarno government. Sukarno and those associated with *Lekra* were assumed to have communist ideals and were targeted by the military.

R.S. and the artist were young, artistic and had leanings towards a communist ideal. They were realists who revelled in the meaning of their work. R.S. recalls the heady days of their involvement with political movements in conjunction with her own passions for art, political issues and for her lover, the artist. At that time he was regularly painting nudes of R.S.. It was through flattery that the artist secured her love. He painted her on many occasions, as only an artist would paint an object of beauty and in a simple declaration secured her love: “„Beautiful,’ he said, just that, one word, and he had it, my love, had it so completely.” (2006, p. 22) In that moment the appearance of R.S. is that of a dependant woman.

In 1971 the artist was asked to sit on the Jakarta Arts Council. R.S. says that it was then “still the vibrant, forward-looking one seen through Ali Sadikin’s lens, and not the shit it has become today.” (2006, p. 18) Established on June 17, 1969 the Jakarta Arts Council was founded by artists with responsibilities and functions being to build a partnership with the Governor of Jakarta, “formulating policies for supporting the activities and development of the arts in the capital region” (DKJ 2010) Ali Sadikin was governor of Jakarta from 1967 until 1977. According to Heinschke “the first decade of the New Order, the idea of the autonomy of art was the unchallenged basis for all art production considered legitimate.” (1996, p. 145) This meant that art was not considered as affecting or affected by politics, religion or social influences. It was simply “art for art’s sake” and existed as an entity standing alone; thus it was in opposition to the stand *Lekra* had taken.

For R.S., the implications of revealing her marriage were considerable. Her husband may have had to face legal action with the possibility of a jail term for failing to follow the proper legal avenues (requesting his first wife for permission to marry again) for practising polygamy. It was not until her son was 3 years old that R.S. ventured into public, going to the salon she had frequented before her pregnancy. R.S. and her husband stopped seeing

each other not long after, when her son started primary school. The salon is the location of her analysis of her life in the context of her community. It is here that she recognises stereotypes in other patrons and in herself, and finds cause for reflection on her own life.

Referring to those with whom she interacts by initial only, R.S. evaluates each of them by the feelings she has about the judgements she assumes they impose on her. R.S. identifies on some level with Mrs. T. Rumours of bruises on T's body and her timid demeanour lead R.S. and the others to assume that the wife of an army general is a victim of domestic violence. They do not report their concerns or discuss the issue with T. Although R.S. was not a victim of domestic violence herself, she identifies with the burden of Mrs. T's secrecy.

During the New Order, which coincides with most of R.S.'s diary reflections, women did not have an avenue for justice in relation to domestic violence. Domestic violence was regarded as a private matter between husband and wife. Women of the *Reformasi* era have sought to highlight domestic violence as a judicial matter, bringing it into the public sphere. Oey-Gardiner says that:

“Violence against women...has become a rallying point for women. The impetus for this came from the May 1998 riots, in which Indonesian women of Chinese descent were the targets of widespread sexual abuse and gang rape. This led to the establishment of the National Commission on Violence against Women...” (2002, p. 110)

Another patron of the salon, Mrs. X, represents the privileged wife who, along with her children, enjoys her husband living with her and above all the respect of the community. R.S. not only envies Mrs. X's life but also resents Mrs. X's judgement of her. R.S. attributes the lifestyle of the first wife onto Mrs. X, resenting the privileges but also assuming certain favours are her own as the second, and hidden, wife:

“Imagining the impeccable order that must be his other cosmos, one which renders necessary my own sweet chaos: the monogrammed napkins and the manicured lawns as opposed to my soiled tablecloths and chipped plates, but ones which hid the wondrous little universe of acrylic, charcoals, watercolours, oil pastels, drawing pens and pencils, a fistful of brushes and cutesy cutoffs that was his first, real wife.” (2006, p. 13)

As a way of critiquing New Order practices, the author critiques polygamy, first by situating the second wife of a polygamist (R.S.) in the New Order and second by having the wife analyse her life as the second wife from the temporal perspective of *Reformasi*. The diary moves suddenly (almost disjointedly) from the regular entries to the recollection of a dream in which R.S. is challenging an Imam on the patriarchal domination of religion in respect to marriage. The debate about polygamy has been reignited in Indonesia in the *Reformasi* period, although it is not practiced with regularity. Wichelen (2009) says of the polygamy debate in Indonesia that post-Suharto a loosening on the restrictions on polygamy have allowed a shift in perceptions of the practice. In opposition to polygyny R.S. discusses (in her dream) polyandry. She attempts to justify to the Imam the idea that women could have many husbands, choosing the husband with the best gene pool to be the father of her children. Polyandry, says R.S., is a course that could well be justified. (2006, p. 31)

Regarding the ideal of marriage, again in her dream, R.S. says:

“The truth is, I don’t know whether equality is possible, or whether equality works for everyone, for I knew far too many women for whom, by dint of their nature and their upbringing, happiness was to be found in a relationship of near-equality with a man she respected and admired.” (2006, p. 32)

The Imam describes three alternatives for the relationships of a man. In the first he describes that in which the husband’s genes were not considered sufficiently good to produce an acceptable offspring and so he instructs his wife to “couple” with a man of “higher birth” so as to produce “a progeny of felicitous qualities”. He refers to this as *Istibdha*. (2006, p. 27) The second alternative is one in which, on the death of his own father, a man may inherit his wives; this he calls *al-maqhtu*. Merit is given to the man who accommodates his father’s

aging wives (which may include the man's own biological mother). In the third alternative a woman could take more than one husband and "proudly declare herself the wife of several, yet choosing only one to be the father of her children." This, he told her, was the so-called *al-rahthun* marriage, i.e. polyandry. (2006, p. 31) In this option the reference "so-called" assumes a non-occurrence, that is, it is called polyandry but is virtually unknown in reality. The answer R.S. gives to this is that women could save men a lifetime of responsibility (which they would have avoided anyway) by "fucking" (2006, p. 31) as many men as possible. This retort does not gel with the Indonesian man's ideal of masculinity and manhood. Wichelen quotes anthropologist Richard Howard:

"A rich and powerful man may exude a kind of sexual power and virility and may have sexual relationships with many women, but his identity as a 'normal male' is only achieved within the structure of the family unit" (2009, p. 180)

Thus one can assume it is the very responsibility of the family which provides the opportunity for a man to feel and be regarded as such, which R.S.'s alternative would have men deprived of.

The discussion between R.S. and the Imam in her dream continues but turns to the question of equality between man and woman.

"...in order for true equality to take place, there couldn't be a shared land. Instead make us two separate countries of men and women: every spring they would mate freely with each other on a neutral ground and upon childbirth the women would give their male children to their male neighbours and raise the girls themselves." (2006, pp. 32-33)

The dream reads as a *Reformasi* era debate: in this time polygamy has been raised as an issue affecting the rights and equality of women but on the other side as a justifiable and righteous practice. Indonesia is a mostly Islamic country; polygamy is in line with the beliefs of Muslims and Balinese Hindus. However, during the New Order civil servants and state officials were prohibited from practicing polygamy. In 2000 President Wahid annulled the

regulation that enforced this prohibition. Rather than being an approval of the practice, the annulment was enacted to appease Muslims in favour of polygamy. (Wichelen 2009, p. 175)

Those in favour of polygamy are not only men and fundamentally Muslim women. Amongst the growing number of career women in Indonesia there are those who might otherwise miss out on the prospect of marriage or who feel they could not physically care sufficiently for their husband given the demands of a career. Some of these women see the option of polygamy as favourable. (Wichelen 2009, p. 179)

For R.S. however, polygamy was rather a matter of fulfilling her passion and love for the artist who shared her interests and desire. But ultimately she lived her life unfulfilled and subject to the demands of an absent husband. In the eyes of the law he had committed a crime. However, in the eyes of society R.S. was a woman to be scorned. In reference to the judgement R.S. supposes Mrs X imposes on her, she writes:

“Now, only after thirty years, I am finally convinced that it was because she had seen through me: someone not so different from her, a wife, no more than a wife, a mere property of men. Only less fortunate.” (2006, p. 7)

However, Mrs. X was in a position of moral favour as she is the first wife of her husband. Both in the New Order and in *Reformasi* the primary model for shame in relationships outside the norm is the woman. Referring to several cases of divorce, one which was predicated on the husband wishing to take on a second wife, O’Shaughnessy says of the New Order period:

“...reporters focussed particularly on women’s role in disgrace, either through their contribution to it or in their attempts to mitigate it. In doing so, communal order was shown to be predicated upon the level of female conformity to the state models of gender behaviour and shame.” (2009, p. 73)

O’Shaughnessy goes on to say that, “in the post-New Order press, presentations of shame and divorce continue to be referenced primarily to female behaviour.” (2009, p. 73)

Not only did R.S. experience difficulties in coming to terms with her relationship with her husband, but now also she is struggling with her son. The generation gap is profound for R.S. as she struggles to comprehend the way B lives his life and spends his money. It seems he is materialistic, as are many of his generation, and keen to display signs of wealth even when that wealth is minimal. B's lifestyle reflects the emergence of a materialistic generation brought up during the New Order but reaching maturity during early, or close to the beginning of, *Reformasi*. This is a generation increasingly exposed to Western culture and practice. B visits R.S. regularly, but more recently brings with him a man he describes as a colleague. It seems likely that they are a homosexual couple although this is not the focus of the diary entry. The focus is that R.S. sees in this colleague of B (known as "F") a trait that reminds her of her past and the feelings that were aroused in her by her husband.

R.S. was a still life model for her late husband. After his death, she reveals in her diary, she attended an exhibition of his works. One particular painting caught her attention. The painting was in her image but it was one for which she did not sit. She identified the painting as one of his later ones, analysing the style that had become more confident and refined as the artist aged. R.S. wonders whether this particular painting was a sign of him "laying her to rest". She overheard some women discussing another of his paintings, in which she was the subject, and is startled by what they observe. Defiance and a challenging demeanour are evident in her pose and her facial expression. R.S. exhibits, in the painting, a challenge to the patriarchal domination of women and the relegation of women as subjected by men. *Reformasi* sees this challenge arising in women who were raised during the New Order. Indonesian women are now challenging the role prescribed for them by Suharto's regime and are lobbying for better conditions for women in the home, workplace and as citizens of Indonesia. In the transition to democracy, says Parawansa, (2002) a

“reinvigorated Women’s Ministry has been collaborating actively with women’s organisations, religious organisations, NGOs, professional associations, political parties and other institutions with an interest in women’s affairs. A major outcome has been the National Plan of Action to empower women...” (pp. 72-73)

However, as R.S. ages and her youth escapes her along with the opportunities she had once held onto, she seems to waver in her convictions of past. In an effort to reignite in herself the passion for life and the strong emotions of her youth, she kisses B’s colleague. In doing so she alienates B and embarrasses herself. She cannot find a way to amend the situation with B who refuses to speak with her ever again. This longing for the past indicates a desire not only to relive the passion of her youth but also to assert herself (Indonesian woman) over the unsuspecting F (Indonesian man) figuratively emasculating him and alienating her own son in the process. This alienation comes not only from the genuine embarrassment about the situation but also from the transgression of social practice that R.S. exhibited.

Historical images of the birth of the New Order and a critique of polygamy are woven into R.S.’s reflections on her life. They remain a strong influence on her experiences as a mother and wife. They haunt her into old age and into the *Reformasi* era in which she reflects on the microcosm of her personal life and the macrocosm of the Indonesia in which she lived it. For R.S.’s generation little in regard to social expectations has changed in the transition to *Reformasi* era.

### **Determination and Ambiguity in the *Reformasi* Woman**

Longstanding patriarchal power structures in Indonesia have shaped the ways in which Indonesian women view their world. Their roles have been influenced by a combination of indigenous patriarchal ideals, the Suharto government’s idealistic promotion of a modest and subservient role for women (*kodrat*) as well as interpretations of Muslim

principles derived from the Qu'ran. *Reformasi* is filled with ambiguities for women's roles in Indonesia. Indonesian women have on the one hand the defined New Order model of refined, demure and responsible for the care of their husbands and children and a moral responsibility to the state. However, they also have the opportunities of career and freedom of speech as they have opened up in the era of *Reformasi*. In analysing the role of Muslim women activists in the renegotiation of the Indonesian nation-state Rinaldo (2008) maintains "that gender is a critical aspect of the construction of national identity and state policies" (p. 1782) She discusses women in the public sphere emerging as politically motivated contributors to debates on Shariah law, abortion and pornography. (p. 1781)

Laksmi Pamuntjak's *Sophie Between the Lines* represents the emergence of an alternative position for the *Reformasi* woman in the public sphere. Sophie's mother is an activist, travelling to England to highlight the problems of genetically modified food. (2006, p. 84) She is divorced but is striving to maintain independence and is an educated woman of the *Reformasi* era, but was raised during the New Order. She struggles with the demands of parenthood whilst trying to further herself and her career. She is one who recalls with guilt the expectations of mothers of pre-*Reformasi*, but who aspires to succeed in her own right. The ghosts of past expectations prevail in this story, in which Sophie's mother confuses individual fulfilment with challenging the way divorced, sole-parent women are viewed by her community.

The combination of *adat* (customary law), Muslim and State law with the government promoting the ideology of *kodrat wanita* together require women to be obedient to their husbands. However, the changes in governance of *Reformasi* combined with globalisation mean that traditional roles are being contested both in reality and in cultural representations of women, such as in literature.

*Sophie Between the Lines* illuminates both sides of the feminist story; Sophie's mother is single, independent and intelligent. Yet Sophie, observing her mother with the honest eyes of a child, sees her mother's sensibility, along with her heart lost to the charms of an English man. Sophie meets this man, Charlie Reardon, on her trip to England to attend a seminar on genetically modified food. Despite being an independent woman, Sophie's mother's values and interests almost seem to disappear with the onset of infatuation. This begs the question: can women truly set aside patriarchal traditions to achieve the ideals of feminism?

Laksmi Pamuntjak explores not only the internal feminist/traditionalist dichotomy but also the idea of an East/West fascination, looking at, as Sophie describes it "an Indonesian thing" (2006, pp. 88-89). But this is also true in the opposite direction; Sophie's mother displays what could be described as a "Western thing". She is infatuated with an older, English man whose interests only briefly intersect with her own, possibly in opposition to her own. She belittles her own abilities in comparison to Charlie's. Sophie's mother fails to recognise that, while she is striving for something outside her own country and culture, Charlie is operating within his own, within the place of his own history, learning and experience.

In this story there are several elements at work: a child, wanting, wishful, imaginative; a single mother wanting desperately to be a 'good mother' while at the same time trying to be independently successful in what remains a predominantly patriarchal society. However, is this how the English speaking world views middle class women of Indonesia, the women of a country still developing with fledgling democracy? This may be a clue to the reasons for the author writing in English. It also gives the author the opportunity to critique the effects of a "global culture" in which fluency in the English language is considered an advantage.

The ability to speak English is very important to Sophie's mother and she encourages Sophie to practice and become fluent.

“She speaks good English, I rattle on. Why is she not one of the best? ... Speaking good English doesn't mean anything, she says. But you insist I learn it well, I reply. She looks at me, frustrated: So that you become the best and speak good English at the same time. So that you can go around the world talking about important stuff in a probing, universal way.” (2006, p. 89)

However, Sophie also observes that her mother's English is not as fluent as that of her Indonesian rival at the seminar in England who dominates intelligent conversation and complains about the Westerners who wish to hear more about Indonesian problems:

“Suddenly the only thing they'll have you talk about is what is happening in Indonesia like it's different from the rest of the world...But I want to talk health, ethics, eugenics...” (2006, p. 89)

Sophie's mother is more realistic and expects that the reason they are flown to England *is* to inform the other attendees of what is happening in Indonesia. Sophie's mother exhibits individualism in a modern way. She incorporates western ideals into both her own and Sophie's lives. This is what Adamson describes as contrary to the maintenance of *rukun*, “...in which individuals suppress their individual interests for the good of the family or community...” (2007, p. 20) Sophie's mother seeks a life in which she is self-sufficient, operating outside the domestic domain, in the public sphere and in a non-traditional environment. Adamson says that this role for women is perceived by Indonesian men to threaten the “contractual relationship” in which the wife cares for the children and in return is provided with economic support. The fear is that women will no longer need husbands to provide for them.

The busy life of Sophie's mother and Sophie's own self-expression through drawing and make-believe coincide. Sophie's loneliness as an only child leads her to drawing a pappardelle (a type of pasta similar to a broad fettuccine) and scallop as „friends’, giving

them personality, likes and dislikes. Her mother's life fuels Sophie's drawings, which become an expression of how she views their life together. Sophie's mother is striving to be respected but is distracted by the men in her life. These two points are, for the purposes of the story, wholly connected. Initially the two points collide in the metaphorical, imaginative drawings by Sophie. What does it mean when Sophie draws one of her mother's boyfriends as a leg of ham with her mother's image imprinted on it? (2006, p. 70) It may be that she views this boyfriend as unclean meat and that her mother's image embedded in it is reference to her implicitness in that uncleanness. Perhaps it is a child's idea of the boyfriend being branded by her mother; that he may well be on the market again but he has already been „owned' by her mother. The point in the drawing is that the relationship impacts on Sophie causing her to feel that she is deprived of her mother's attention.

Gradually through the story, Sophie's „pappardelle and scallop friends' fade and her mother's life choices become a heavier focus. In *Sophie Between the Lines* it is the not yet mature female voice; both observing and affected by the grown woman, her mother. Sophie also feels rejected by her father, who has a new wife. Her former bedroom is being renovated in preparation for the arrival of her father and step-mother's new baby. She feels she is being replaced and that reminders of their life as a family are being disposed of.

“I look at her again and I know she is pregnant. I look at my father with hurt eyes. I know too that they will have to make something for me out of the extra room across the hall, the room nobody steps into, the room where two of our dogs had died writhing in pain, like my mother, like myself, the only difference being that we were cast out to start anew.” (p. 76)

Ultimately Sophie emerges from her imaginations into reality. She sees very clearly her mother's faults but remains forgiving:

“I decide that my mother is beautiful: she flits in and out, like a bird with no history, belonging only to herself even if her own self is never whole.” (p88)

Sophie's mother seeks to fulfil her own desire for individualism. She confuses individualism and self-determination with the need to challenge her community's disapproval of her as a divorced mother of one child. To prop up her own self-esteem and assert her worth, Sophie's mother relegates the community that rejects her to second rate and glorifies the new community which she finds through her work as an activist, in England. She has met an Englishman, Charlie Reardon. She unwittingly illuminates her own lack of confidence by denigrating her own skills in comparison to those of Charlie. She glorifies Charlie's English habits and hangs off his every movement. Sophie, however emotional, does see the practicalities of her mother's affair. Though ultimately Sophie sees through even her own mechanisms for coping with emotional troubles, after her final picture in the story (following further disappointment in her mother):

“For a while I see some peace, though once the afterglow of creation subsides, a new feeling descends. There is something inadequate, even dishonest, about painting as a vehicle of anger. I still do not see my mother, my father, Rizal, Charlie or my stepmother, or anybody that arouses deep feelings in me. All I see are knots of spaghetti, a smidgen of onyx, muck and vomit.” (p97)

The story concludes with Sophie disappointed in her mother's choices. Her mother's needs differ from Sophie's; Sophie needs her mother's attention, affection and love. She wants her mother to need her in the same way. However, her mother's needs *are* different. She wants acceptance in the adult world. Where she has been deemed inadequate in her own community, she seeks acceptance in another. What she finds is perhaps fleeting fascination, not necessarily acceptance.

She is a divorced mother of one daughter, who could represent Indonesian women being uprooted from the patriarchal domination of New Order Indonesia. During the New Order the role of women was defined, that is, it was their role to serve man, care for children

and support the community. Then through the transition from New Order into *Reformasi*, women figuratively divorced the New Order's promotion of *kodrat*.

Laksmi Pamuntjak presents a stereotype in *Sophie Between the Lines*. Sophie's mother is divorced, she longs for acceptance and is betrayed by other people but also by herself. Located within the laws of a country, the religion, and *adat* are the author's tales of modern, urban, middle class reaction to socio-political circumstances. The common prejudices that accompany the single mother may be the driving force behind choices made by Sophie's mother in this story. She allows men into her life who offer money, fame, or something out of the ordinary, which she expects will intercept the prejudices she experiences from her community. She is living a clichéd life of the divorced mother trying to climb the ladder to, if not respect, at least recognition. She may be deluded as to what individual fulfilment is, what the cost of this fulfilment will be and to what it is that it will actually fulfil her. Sophie's mother cannot find the fulfilment she seeks without it including the love and respect of a man. Initially this man is Rizal or „Uncle Rizal' as she would like Sophie to call him, a handsome but out-of-work actor. Later it is Charlie the Englishman, a man who appears to have a fascination with Indonesian women. Neither of these men can, nor do they seem to intend to, fulfil Sophie's mother's needs. She does not even appear to be aware of what those needs are herself.

With a failed marriage and another failed relationship, Sophie's mother is set to gain herself a man. Perhaps falling for Charlie Reardon is a safe way of gaining the affection she craves. Charlie is not a threat to her independent life in Indonesia, and she can fulfil her need for attention for a short period of time, and then return to Jakarta knowing he is still there. One expects, however, that once she returns she will experience uncertainty about his ability or desire to remain faithful. Certainly Sophie notices his wandering eye.

During the New Order period Indonesian women were strongly encouraged through State programs to aspire to the promoted ideal of *kodrat wanita*, a woman's role: that a woman's most important contribution to the State was to be a wife and mother. This ideal was also known as state *Ibuism*, a term coined by Julia Suryakusuma (1996). It was promoted through State run *Dharma Wanita*, a women's group for the wives of civil servants, and through public arenas such as *sinetron* (television serials and dramas). It is supported by the patriarchal religious foundation of Islam Indonesia. This was a part of Suharto's State controlled stability. (Suryakusuma 2004)

However, it is suggested by Rinaldo that this state controlled promotion of state *Ibuism* inadvertently politicised women:

“The New Order promulgated particular notions of gender and family, reliant on a construction of male and female as binary opposites, belonging to separate spheres. Nevertheless, by establishing the social category of middle-class women, the state's mobilization of women may have laid the groundwork for renewed women's movements in the 1990s and beyond.” (Rinaldo 2002)

Despite the groundwork being laid for the emergence of a new position for women, there remains some ground to cover, as presented in the story of Sophie and her mother. The story ends without resolution for the child of a single parent (Sophie) and her mother who is struggling with single parenthood and trying to please yet another man with whom she is besotted. Sophie experiences rejection and anger; she can find no words to describe her emotions at this time. This end illuminates the permanence of the struggle and the idea that Sophie and her mother will continue, Sophie fighting for the affection of her mother and her mother making herself available to a man.

Although Sophie's mother's choices are a reaction to society's condemnation of her, she fails to reach the level of satisfaction and fulfilment she sets out to achieve. She is neither the model of domestic, refined woman of Indonesia nor the “demonic Other” that

Hatley (2002, p. 132) describes as threatening male domination and societies patriarchal structure. This depiction alludes to the idea that women in Indonesia struggle not only with external pressures in the form of governance and society, but that they also struggle within themselves to achieve a full and detached independence or equality. It may be said that the effort towards total independence is farfetched and unachievable, even undesirable. However, for Sophie's mother divorce was not her choice. To become a divorced woman meant that she could either live shamed, and lonely, or take an alternative route, namely to strive for independence and respect. Ultimately she sabotages her own efforts towards independence and respect by succumbing to her desire to be loved. The rejection she experienced from her husband resulted in her attempts to reconcile this through acceptance from another man. Unfortunately Sophie's mother has a longing for love and companionship that undermines her efforts towards independence. Her boyfriends do not impress Sophie, nor do they increase her respect for her mother. Despite being intermittently spoilt with exotic food and a trip to England with her mother, Sophie struggles to have her immaterial needs met. She yearns for her mother's attention while her mother yearns for the attention of the men with whom she becomes involved. Neither is fully successful or satisfied in their efforts towards fulfilling their immaterial needs. It is difficult for them to find a balance and so they continue in their resistance to each other's needs.

So much about Sophie's mother is modern, intelligent and sophisticated. However, despite her resistance, she, like the members of her community, remains to an extent within the boundaries prescribed by *kodrat*, *adat*, religion and law. She challenges patriarchal dominance and yet succumbs to her need to be adored and cared for by a man in what seem to be inappropriate circumstances.

## Conclusion

*The Diary of R.S. and Sophie Between the Lines* contrast the differences between the woman who lived most of her adult life during the New Order and the woman who was raised in the New Order but who lives her adult life in *Reformasi*. The two women situate themselves in respect to men, not as individual and independent. The first, R.S., maintains this position as “subject” in response to the expectations of her era while the second, Sophie’s mother, maintains this position despite striving to reject it. Both struggle against patriarchal domination and while they achieve independence to some degree, they are at the same time failing to achieve it to a level they are content with and failing to achieve equality.

The development of women’s rights in Indonesia was strongly linked to the development of nationalism. Likewise women’s rights were linked to the political changes of *Reformasi*, particularly as politics and religion influenced the development of debates on anti-pornography and “*shari’a*-inspired legislation” (Adamson 2007, p. 6) Of particular note are two women’s organisations that challenged the Suharto regime and government repression. These organisations were the Indonesian Women’s Coalition (KPI) and Voice of Concerned Mother (SIP). (Oey-Gardiner 2002, p. 110)

Another aspect of Indonesia that was strongly linked to the nationalist movement was the introduction of the national language, Bahasa Indonesia, which signified a unification of an archipelago with over 300 indigenous languages. In 2010 Onishi said of the Indonesian language that it is under the threat of being replaced by English. While many languages are being relegated to second best, English is glorified and at the same time being taught poorly. This phenomenon is new to Indonesia, a sign of *Reformasi* and globalisation in cahoots with the technological boom of the internet. During the New Order, Indonesian was considered the most important language for Indonesian citizens while English was discouraged. (Onishi

2010) Although, as Onishi notes, the dilution of Bahasa Indonesia is occurring naturally, this dilution with English is a marker of the era of *Reformasi*.

As Ludwig Wittgenstein (1922, p. 74) said “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world”. Laksmi Pamuntjak, in her use of her second language, namely English, to write *The Diary of R.S.: Musings on Art* has extended her world. Pamuntjak has taken her writing offshore, outside the confines of an Indonesian readership. This could be construed as an anti-New Order statement. But it could also be read as the author embracing a cultural globalisation, exhibiting that regardless of cultural background, one can write for an extended, global readership, sharing issues with commonalities crossing cultural borders. She combines in the anthology ‘musings’ on European art, illustrations by her daughter and her imaginations of an Indonesian female still life model. The understanding of historical context is vital and as John Gibson asserts:

“And we read for life not as the indirect theorist says we must, by looking away from the literary work and towards something external to it. It is precisely by exploring the interior of the literary work, by looking directly within it – *by reading it* – that we come into contact with the life it has to show us.” (2004 p123)

Thus one might ask how these stories relate to our world. In fact the answer within this theoretical framework should be that they do not *relate* to our world so much as they are a *product* and as such they will tell us something of our world, just as the discovery of any artefact will on examination. But more than an artefact, Pamuntjak’s anthology is a probing of human nature and experience, although not real, it is realistic. Again as John Gibson states:

“Literature shows us reality, but at a level we might call *foundational* rather than *representational*, placing before us those narratives that hold in place and in doing so structure our understanding of large regions of cultural reality” (2004 p122)

The author exhibits an awareness of the nature of people, place in society and cultural background. She draws on a combination of cultures combining facets of art, society and intimate human nature to produce snapshots of lives drawn out of a culture. One gets a distinctive picture of the characters playing out their lives against backdrops of cultures and societies. The author has focussed on art, included artists and writers as characters, has critiqued art, and has written descriptive, imaginative narratives, delving into the depths of the human experience. The author challenges the New Order slogan of “art for art’s sake” and instead opts to weave politics, society, culture, art and literature together. The elements for establishing a particular framework for critique here are the focus, the settings, emotions and the values represented. The author challenges the New Order’s initial rejection of art as reflection and representation of culture and politics. In “Laugh of the Medusa” Helene Cixous instructs “Women must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing,...” (1976, p. 875)

Laksmi Pamuntjak’s *The Diary of R.S.: Musings on Art* is an anthology of various forms of literature expressing a diversity of matters such as polygamy, sexuality, divorce and feminism. The author expresses a movement towards female liberation from the directives from political, social and cultural restraints. Her stories expose a desire for equality and recognition in both a patriarchal society and as part of a global society. The construction of these stories using English achieves the possibility of exposing these themes to the global community without the need for translation.

## **Conclusion: A Socio-political Arena for Women Writers**

The stories of the *Reformasi* writers analysed in this thesis express concerns with human rights, violence and women's rights in Indonesia. They do not suggest resolution to the problems they highlight. A critique runs through the stories about the New Order government and the legacy this government has left for the people of Indonesia. Largely the concerns of the stories are for the effects of the national problems of conflict and governance. In terms of the theoretical framework for the analysis of the stories of this thesis, cultural materialism has enabled an examination through identifying historical context and using that context as the point of reference. The precise historical contexts of the stories vary, however, they all point to indicate *Reformasi* and the impact of Suharto's New Order on the lives of Indonesians during *Reformasi*. These are writers who were raised during the New Order and who see their work come to fruition during *Reformasi*. The stories of chapter 2 and of chapter 3 both address struggle: the stories of chapter 2 revolve distinctly around the violence occurring in outlying areas of the Indonesian archipelago and/or against marginalised groups. The authors exhibit concern for these people and express in their stories a sense of connection.

The stories of chapter 3 also reveal struggle in Indonesia but this struggle is an internal one, specific to women. There is a contrast between the New Order adult woman (*The Diary of R.S*) with her *Reformasi* counterpart (*Sophie Between the Lines*). The internal struggles of these women relate to external directives, from the government and from social and religious expectations.

## Resistance, Challenge and Change

Ayu Utami proposes possible reasons why in conflict, a combination of politics and ethnicity can have deadly consequences in *Bau*. Situating her story in Kalimantan at the site of conflict she delves into the idea that instinct replaces logic when triggered by a loss of place and belonging and resentment towards those who appear to be at the root of this loss. The root cause of the violent clash and subsequent loss in the Kalimantan conflict was the government program of *transmigrasi* and the subsequent mismanagement of this program. The problems with *Transmigrasi* did not diminish with the beginning of *Reformasi*. The author also critiques Suharto's autocratic method of rule by focussing on SARA (*Suku, Agama, Ras dan Antara Golongan*) as instilling racism paradoxically through the guise of unification of the nation.

In Linda Christanty's *Makam Keempat*, it is the largely silent struggle of the Chinese-Indonesian population that becomes the focus of an internal, private view of the lives of a family. Affected by Suharto's racist spotlight that targeted this group of Indonesians, this marginalised group have been subject to a number of targeted assaults on their minority population. The author enlightens her readers using realist images of a couple suffering the loss of their daughter and the process of coming to terms with her death. The author avoids the use of direct identification of the couple as Chinese-Indonesians but alludes to their ethnicity through reference to certain aspects of their lives. This sidestepping allows for an appreciation of the plight of this group without stereotyping, maintaining that they are first and foremost Indonesian. In this way the author avoids isolating them. Again Linda Christanty focuses on an area that is isolated from the general Indonesian population, in her story *Kuda Terbang Maria Pinto*. The protagonist of the story is a puppet of Suharto's military, a soldier sent to East Timor to engage in a conflict of which he would have little understanding. Again, this story is set during *Reformasi* but critiques Suharto's New Order.

In her story *Jaring-jaring Merah* Helvy Tiana Rosa expresses resistance to the government's operations to secure Aceh from those they labelled rebels. Through what was labelled as Operation Red Net (*Operasi Jaring Merah*) both New Order and *Reformasi* governments continued to direct their military to eliminating the dissenting forces in Aceh. Rather than unify the country they effectively alienated much of the Acehnese population through violence, rape, murder and torture.

All these texts try to make sense of the ethnic and religious violence that exploded soon after the lid of the New Order constraints was released. The violence was a product of repressive policies that in the end achieved the opposite of the purported intent, which was for harmony and tolerance.

Violence is not the only struggle in Indonesia. As Laksmi Pamuntjak presents in both the stories analysed in chapter 3 of this thesis, there is an ongoing struggle within women of this era and within those who lived most of their adult life in the New Order. Again, the depictions are that *Reformasi* has not brought about resolution to the conflict. *Reformasi* may offer hope to move forward but the change in governance, although vast, has not brought about instant change for women. It has brought about, however, the opportunity to bring the problems of struggle and conflict for women to light. Debate on issues such as domestic violence and polygamy are now in the foreground.

In her anthology of short stories *The Diary of R.S.: Musings on Art*, Laksmi Pamuntjak addresses a range of socio-political issues. She is not attempting to suggest a way of resolving the issues she raises. Rather she is illuminating the problems with governance, women's rights, women's status, polygamy and divorce, and showing that these problems are in a continuum; they have not been resolved either in governance or within the expectations of society. She shows that there has been a degree of change but that change is slow and

meets with resistance in government, society and within the individual. She illuminates the internal struggle for women. The author also brings the struggle of Indonesian women offshore, highlighting in English their problems and thus bringing the potential to external debate.

R.S. was born around the time of Indonesian independence, reaching adulthood around the time of the beginning of the New Order and old age in *Reformasi*. The socio-political issues she has lived through are not resolved although there has been some development. The role of this woman during the New Order was very much defined by Suharto's *kodrat wanita*. *The Diary of R.S.* sheds light on the lives of those dwelling outside the expected norms of Indonesian society. The story shows the uncertainty with which these women approach their positions in their community and their roles as mothers. Although this woman shows resistance, she experiences rejection and humiliation. Her life is marked by her marriage which was outside the realms of that which was considered righteous by the New Order government and consequently by the expectations of society, beyond the New Order and into *Reformasi*.

The legacy of *kodrat wanita* maintains a primary presence for the divorced woman of the *Reformasi* period. As Laksmi writes in *The Diary of R.S.* part of history is a 'collective guilt' and it is assumed that this guilt is a result of the expectations of both the state (*kodrat wanita*) and of society not being seen to be met. In *Sophie Between the Lines* Sophie's mother may also experience this 'collective guilt' as she grapples with leading a meaningful life at the same time as she is condemned by society. But like R.S., Sophie and her mother do not experience a resolution to their situations. The author conveys a sense that the New Order government's promotion of *kodrat wanita* was so entrenched in society that change rests more on time and resistance, than on reformation of governance. The 'collective guilt' that Laksmi refers to is perhaps built on Suharto's notion that the righteousness of Indonesian

society is partly based on the premise that women uphold good moral stances, as prescribed by *kodrat wanita*, and thus society and the nation is unified and strengthened. When women challenge *kodrat wanita* they are challenging not only Suharto's promotion of it but also its embedded-ness within society and the unity of Indonesia. The story of R.S. de-romanticises the idea of love conquering all. R.S. does not experience liberation from the norm when she marries the artist, a polygamist. In her attempt to fulfil her love she must move outside the expectations of the government and society and thus become alienated and uncertain. She is marginalised and so the results of her transgression are not freedom and independence, which she may well have thought possible at the outset. Certainly in her old age she has the benefit of reflection and so can see the impossibility of her expectations.

Sophie's mother, on the other hand, does not set out to find freedom from the expected norms but finds herself divorced and thus thrust into a position in which her morals and character are subject to criticism. Where R.S. is confined, Sophie's mother is not as she tries to operate outside society's moral domain. This is one possibility for Indonesian women seeking to reconstruct the expectations of society even in *Reformasi*. The transgression of borders stretches the boundaries. While Sophie's mother struggles to maintain a semblance of normal family life for Sophie she also operates in an alien, patriarchal domain as an independent woman.

Laksmi Pamuntjak shows that it is possible that the woman who does not conform to the expectations of the New Orders *kodrat wanita* and society is not the "demonic Other" but rather that she is not unlike other women, having similar internal and external conflicts. The suggestions are that this struggle is not finite and that a step toward resolution is dependent upon open, public and political debate. Laksmi Pamuntjak tends to defy the order of women's roles in her writing producing work that challenges the way immorality is viewed by society. She likens the woman who is seen as immoral to the woman who lives a pious

life, making clear that it is circumstance and not necessarily wicked or immoral choices and behaviour that results in a woman transgressing the borders of ‚righteousness‘. Sophie represents the next in the order of the generations, being brought up in the era of *Reformasi*. The importance of Sophie’s experience is that she is raised by a woman of the *Reformasi* who struggles with the slow change in governance and society compared to the vast changes which are happening in her own life. Sophie views, and is affected by, the conflict within her mother. However, she is representative of the next generation, which could be expected to accept more change.

The stories of chapter 2 represent the Indonesian struggle as it occurs at the outer regions of Indonesia. Figuratively this is the outward, most obvious and violent struggle of Indonesia. Laksmi Pamuntjak’s stories situated in Jakarta, figuratively the centre of Indonesia, represent Indonesia’s internalised struggles, those that deal with issues of morality, women’s rights and patriarchal domination. For Indonesians the issues vary in the relevance dependent on location, socio-demographics and ethnicity but the picture is of a holistic Indonesia challenging the accepted norms of the New Order era and the state’s dominant discourses of unification and the role of women. These Indonesian authors are concerned with exposing reality through a film of fiction. It is not the real world, but a view of one imagined from the debris of the real world.

The issues presented in the works of these women authors of *Reformasi* represent a socio-political commitment and a desire to illuminate struggles for Indonesians. The nation has reached the era now known as *Reformasi* and has presented to them freedom of speech as they have reached adulthood. The important issue for these authors is to highlight struggle and its effects and the ongoing nature of struggle in Indonesia. They say that *Reformasi*, with its freedom of speech and new methods of governance has not resolved these issues but that these issues can be openly discussed. With discussion it seems they hope to move towards

resolution of ethnic and religious violence, women's rights and issues with governance such as corruption. Violence against women is a prominent issue within the stories by Helvy Tiana Rosa, Linda Christanty and Laksmi Pamuntjak analysed in this thesis, all of whom illuminate different aspects of this problem. It is largely the legacy of trauma left for the population by Suharto and his New Order government and the complications of a population transitioning into *Reformasi* and early democracy that fills the pages of these stories written during *Reformasi*.

### **A Significant Stranger**

Wolff's (1995) notion of the „female stranger' rather than the „demonic Other' noted in earlier Indonesian literature by Hatley (2002) is evident in Indonesian women as represented by Laksmi Pamuntjak's R.S. and Sophie's mother, are almost nameless; reference to them is like a veil. They are searching for certainty. As Wolff says, „...it may be her very identity as woman which enables a radical re-vision of home and exile" (1995, p. 9) In this way they are challenging the New Order state constructions of women's role. In these stories this re-visioning is a subtle suggestion that the woman who operates outside the expectations of the government and society is none other than the Indonesian woman. Sophie's mother actually attains a position in which she is able to achieve Wolff's „female stranger' in a number of ways: she is a woman, she travels abroad and she is a divorcee. This is an Indonesian woman of the *Reformasi* in all her difference. It introduces the notion of a pluralistic Indonesian woman; she is one who while caring for her family does not want to be seen to be transgressing the expected norms of Indonesian society.

The stories analysed in chapter 2 of this thesis also present a significant stranger, but not all are female. Father Janoko in *Bau* (Utami 2007) distances himself from the clashes in Kalimantan in his role as a priest. Through his report to the church regarding the conflict he seeks an understanding of the humanity behind the violence. He does not identify with it but

rather views it as an outsider, a stranger. Linda Christanty's Yosef (*Kuda Terbang Maria Pinto*) (2004) becomes a stranger in his decision to join Indonesia's military. Fighting in East Timor effectively disconnected Yosef from his family, and fellow villagers because of his experience and resultant trauma. The object of his fascination was Maria Pinto, also a stranger. Maria Pinto, however, was a stranger as she was almost glorified as a commander of ethereal troops despite having origins as a regular East Timorese girl. In Suharto's „unified nation' Chinese-Indonesians were alienated and targeted as the other because of their ethnicity, class and perceived economic status as well as the perception that they were communist, to be feared and punished. Linda Christanty presents a story, in effect „Indonesian-ising' Chinese-Indonesians while also showing appreciation for their difference. She seems to say they are the stranger but at the same time, the Chinese-Indonesian population is also Indonesian. Cut Dini and Inong in Helvy Tiana Rosa's *Jaring-jaring Merah* also become strangers in their own country when confronted by the violence in Aceh. Inong in particular is alienated and maintains her position as stranger because of her traumatised state – a result of witnessing the murders of her family and neighbours. The characters of these stories represent „strangers' in a supposedly unified country.

In her use of the English language Laksmi Pamuntjak is displaying that she is not confined by the limits of her language and also that her boundaries are extended by her experience. Her experience is beyond the confines of Indonesia and Indonesian experience; she is a member of an increasingly globalised country, with increasing influences from the west and other cultures. She is expressing that the desire is to *not* be the „female stranger' nor to be viewed as sinful, despite the „collective guilt' Indonesian women feel in the upheavals of their country. In Sophie's mothers' travels she is also suggesting that Indonesian women are reaching outside Wolff's “domestic mission” (1995, p. 125) Interestingly, Sophie's mother does not direct Sophie on matters of feminism, although she

lives as though she does in fact have feminist ideals. However, she falls short of the equality and independence that this ideology would allow. She is still confined, to a degree, by the patriarchal structure of Indonesian society.

Sophie is already becoming the „female stranger’. Not only because of her gender but also because of her upbringing, by a divorced mother, her feelings of alienation and rejection by her father, her pursuit of the English language and her travel experience. One could expect Sophie to develop either her mother’s ideals further or revert to the dominant ideology of the New Order. Wolff says “...only ideologies and vested interests ‚fix’ meanings, and it is the job of cultural critics to destabilize those meanings.” (1995, p. 120) Laksmi Pamuntjak takes on this role of “cultural critic”, going some way towards identification of an Indonesian woman located between the pious woman and the „Other’ woman (the woman who lives outside the norms of Indonesian social practice).

Laksmi Pamuntjak’s stories also express the possibility that the boundaries defined during the New Order for with role of women are not as rigid. Her depiction of the women in the stories as essentially the same as the women who lead pious lives (lives which are seen as pious) reveals a loosening of the boundaries. For, as Wolff says, “...the less rigid the boundaries, the less threatening the transgressive act.” (1995, p. 108) With the introduction of debates on sharia law, pornography and violence against women coming into play the opportunity for women’s rights to be brought better into line with those of men could go either way. Highlighting the issues of violence and conflict brings problems with governance and government programs such as *transmigrasi* into the public arena. These writers are suggesting a departure from the idea of woman as humble, meek and acting in servitude. They are not outwardly calling for change but are nonetheless raising the debate for change. The women of these stories do not wait for resolution to occur. They are continuing the struggle of women within the socio-political system of their time.



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