Asia in Transition 6

Grace V. S. Chin
Kathrina Mohd Daud *Editors*

The Southeast Asian Woman Writes Back

Gender, Identity and Nation in the Literatures of Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines

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Preface

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, almost a century after Western colonial powers and their empires were being dismantled, the globe, it has been argued, has become flat (non-hierarchical, decentralised) and transnational (Friedman 2005). Arjun Appadurai's (1996) paradigm of global cultural flows of people, media, technology, capital and ideologies has incontestably replaced the spatial divisions of West and East, North and South with their unequal binaries of superior, civilised, advanced West/inferior, barbaric, undeveloped East. The essays in this pioneering collection, *The Southeast Asian Woman Writes Back: Gender, Identity, and Nation in the literatures of Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines*, coming out of a post-postcolonial intellectual era, nonetheless underscore that transnational and global flows have not eliminated the ways in which state apparatuses, entrenched patriarchal social values, traditional belief and kinship systems, and globalised, often predatory, institutions of capital accumulation within and outside the nation-state continue to maintain firm national borders that manage the ongoing historical subordination of groups categorised through gender, racial and ethnic, language, religious and other identities deemed marginal and minoritarian. Such a study can only emerge out of Southeast Asia in the intersection of bounded national interests and global flows. As the editors, Grace V. S. Chin and Kathrina Mohd Daud, note in their introductory chapter, the catalyst to their valuable research originated while working in Universiti Brunei Darussalam, where "'gender' and 'feminism' were terms that so vexed the ingrained, male-oriented academic orthodoxies that they were not accepted as academic discourse until 2010 when, under new directives from the top, gender was finally formalised as part of the syllabi in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences" (8). That is, this very local moment illuminated that "gender is subject to local discourses and understandings of women and the feminine, inasmuch as it is affected by the globalising tropes of human rights and civil liberties".

This collection enacts a double move: towards examination of global/transnational Anglophone writing and Southeast Asian non-Anglophone literary worlds, meshing together a discourse universe that is broad, sweeping and still chiefly unknown in contemporary world literature studies. This opening double

move takes on a challenge seldom undertaken in academic publishing, and the editors, scholars and publisher are to be congratulated on their endeavour. The decision to foreground research that examines Southeast Asian women's Anglophone and indigenous and national language writings also opens the collection to studies of women's representations of national imaginaries in media other than writing, for example, to such representation in the *wayang*, cinema and more.

The questions the editors posed to their contributors and thence to the readers of this volume are particularly pertinent in the twenty-first century. How "Southeast Asian women writers and artists explore and engage the images of womanhood, or symbols of the feminine, in the narration of nationhood" (3) is not merely a literary matter, although recuperating forgotten or neglected women's writing is in itself a momentous goal. These imaginaries interrogate, subvert and create alternative narratives of the nation, offering their contemporaries and newer generations critical ways of negotiating individual subjects within prescribed communal and state concepts of social being. What is "female citizenship", and how do/are these women's texts published for small local markets reproduce and/or shaped by globalised concepts of gender?

The collection, as the editors boldly declare, also "address(es) the geopolitical implications of place and identity" (4), in the incorporation of concerns rising out of the increasingly urgent pressures of migration, diaspora, globalisation and transnationalism. The "literary nation", as the editors coined the phrase, is like the quintessential nature of literariness, elusive, allusive, indeterminable and in the play of *différance* and signifiers, thereby deferring meaning. That is, the nation, as these women writers critique and reimagine the community in their works, is not merely a postcolonial but a postmodern construction, so radically political as to be anti-systemic, anti-authoritarian and post-patriarchal.

A lamentable lacuna in this collection is studies that examine LGBTQ representations and sensibilities. This very absence, however, proffers a testimony to the persistent power of state authority that still regulates in the phallocentric logos of the father, when LGBTQ voices can incur expulsion, exile and even mob- or state-mandated execution. This erasure is partly recompensed by the collection's openness to research on women's literary imaginations inscribed through multiple genres and media platforms: e.g. prose narrative and poetic forms and the eminent modernistic genre of the cinema.

The seven chapters cover five Southeast Asian countries, with the Philippines, Brunei, Singapore and Malaysia being partially culturally Anglophone (Malaysia after more than half a century of governmental national language policies requiring Bahasa Malaysia education instruction). The chapters offer original and rare scholarship on women's writing hardly known outside of their original language audience. A major strength in the collection is the new work on Indonesia and Brunei and the inclusion of women's writing in Malay and Indonesian. A second strength is the inclusion of such "local" literature (the local being inevitably a consequence of writing in a language offering little access outside of the specific language community) in a careful and stringent engagement with feminist work.

A third strength is the reach and surprising expansion of the theories that undergird the individual studies; the epistemology that unpacks the textual investigations is interdisciplinary, cognisant of Western theorists, sociologists and historians, yet also drawing on substantial readings and generously acknowledging work in the national languages by researchers and academics whose audience up to now has been restricted to their circumscribed readers.

Grace V. S. Chin and Kathrina Mohd Daud are to be lauded for their double roles as co-editors of this splendid collection and as scholars whose chapters on contemporary Indonesian and Bruneian women's literature form a solid segment of the collection. The full value of this volume lies in its spectrum of studies that separately examine single nations' women's writing but together, in the convergence of multiple theoretical, interdisciplinary directions, ramps their power of inquiry and analyses to an nth degree. The thetic purpose underlying these converging studies is a testament to the editors' discerning investigative eye, evidence of how successful scholarly production rises from patient, steady mentoring, to result in the volume's syncretic unity.

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Our journey would have been incomplete without the anonymous reviews and comments of other eminent and dedicated scholars in the field. We offer our heartfelt thanks to these scholars for being so generous with their time and energy.

And lastly, Grace V. S. Chin is indebted to the University of Philippines Diliman and Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines, as well as the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) in Leiden, the Netherlands, for generously allowing her access to their archives and for kindly permitting her the use of their resources during her visit.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Grace V. S. Chin and Kathrina Mohd Daud

1.1 The Southeast Asian Woman Writes Back

The study of postcolonial fiction works produced by Southeast Asian women remains under-researched as a site of investigation into the representational politics of gender, identity and nation in Southeast Asian societies on several fronts. Very often, research into Southeast Asian literary and cultural productions excludes gender as a point of inquiry;[1] or else, the analysis is restricted to literary productions in individual countries.[2] Another issue is that the more popularly known publications on the subject are usually premised on anthropological, sociological, political and historical perspectives and explorations. Then, there is the added concern that Southeast Asia as a region has often been excluded from postcolonial theorising on gender and nation; in the past, research centred mainly on the Caribbean, Africa and South Asia. Our volume thus aims to address these imbalances by using a literary trajectory to expand on current debates and discussions on gender, identity

[1]Race and ethnicity are often at the forefront of numerous edited volumes and monographs on Southeast Asian literature, including Salmon (1981), Suryadinata (1993), Wong (2002), Lo (2004), Lim (2008), Goh et al. (2009), Goh (2011), Groppe (2013), and Tan (2013).

[2]As many literary works are produced in the national language or native/mother tongue, they pose a serious challenge to international scholars who either rely on translated writings or have the ability to read in the local language(s) in order to access these literatures. Consequently, the analysis of gender in literature is often confined to studies of individual countries, or produced as book chapters and journal articles. Monograph examples include Nor Faridah and Quayum (2003), Arimbi (2009), Galam (2009), Pison (2010), and Hellwig (2012).

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and nation in the following countries: Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Prominent feminist scholars have established how nation-building and nationalism have conventionally been dominated by men, and the symbolic exclusion of women from these projects underscores the absence of female perspectives and voices in the building of the state even if they are nominally involved as symbols and icons of the nation[3] (Enloe 1989; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989; McClintock 1991; Yuval-Davis 1997, 2003). These studies contend that the nation has been built on (and reflects) a masculinist self-identity, and that the engendering of the nation is premised on the "sanctioned institutionalization of gender difference" (McClintock 1993, 61) through which heteronormative gender binaries and disparities are produced as a norm. Even prevailing, popular conceptions of the nation have been invented by male thinkers; among them are Renan (1990), Anderson (1983), Gellner (1983) and Hobsbawm (1990).

Since the late 1980s and 1990s, third world feminists and women writers have helped develop this legacy by including women in the national and social imaginaries through invigorating scholarship and sociocultural productions that include literature and the media (Jayawardena 1986; Mohanty et al. 1991; Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Yuval-Davis 1997; Ray 2000; Boehmer 2005). Their aims ranged from resisting and challenging the misrepresentations and biases of "white", Western, "first world" feminists who spoke for their "third world" sisters, to the recovery of subaltern gendered voices and perspectives that do not neatly fit into or which challenge the official, heteronormative and masculinist narratives of the nation. In fact, third world feminist goals and agendas share striking similarities with the objectives of postcolonial literary undertakings in that they both carry highly politicised language and meanings and are often imbued with political purpose that is aimed at protest, dissent and insurrection against the hegemonic systems of power and domination, be they in the form of patriarchy, the colonial empire or the neo-colonising politics of the modern nation-state.

In general, postcolonial writers and critics from Africa, the Caribbean, Middle East and Asia have engaged in acts, strategies and projects of—in the immortal words of Ashcroft et al. (1989)—"writing back" to the imperialist centre, using words to oppose, disrupt and dismantle entrenched race hierarchies and self/other binaries of ruling ideologies as well as to explore, rediscover, and reclaim native, cultural identities, languages, perspectives and voices in the postcolonial era. As a rich repository of alternative ideas, memories and worldviews, the "new" narratives emerging from the former colonies were seen as a celebration of difference, plurality, multi-vocality and heterogeneity—dimensions that challenged the

[3]These studies repeatedly highlight the ambivalent position of women as gendered citizens. As Yuval-Davis (2003) notes: "On the one hand, … they often symbolize the collectivity, unity, honour and the raison d'etre of specific national and ethnic projects, like going to war. On the other hand, however, they are often excluded from the collective 'we' of the body politic, and retain an object rather than a subject position. In this sense the construction of womanhood has a property of Otherness" (19).

homogenising and totalitarising hierarchies, discourses and ideologies of colonial governments. This literary battle would later be waged against the neo-colonial regimes of independent nation-states whose authoritative discourses are insidiously couched within the positivist narratives of independence, state sovereignty, economic development and social progress. More overtly, state power and surveillance are validated by the need for national security and social harmony.

Under the revised social and political order of postcolonial governments, the works and contributions of writers and artists continue to be significant in their articulation of alternative visions and versions of the nation, which function as "counter-narratives of [the] nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual—[and] disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities" (Bhabha 1990, 300). As Simon Gikandi once wrote, "To write is to claim a text of one's own; textuality is an instrument of territorial possession" that is "crucial to our discovery of selfhood" (cited in Boehmer 2005, 94). Literature can thus be claimed as a symbolic space for the political representation, expression and participation of marginalised collectivities (including people of colour, women and LGBTQ groups) as concerned citizens and "imagined communities" of the nation, all of whom have been displaced or excluded by the nation-state under the sign of "negativity, as corporeal and unclean, or as impossibly idealised" (Boehmer 2005, 94).

Using postcoloniality as the site of investigation, criticism, provocation and contestation, the essays in this volume tap into the empowering discourse of "writing back" through the analysis of fiction produced by Southeast Asian women writers and artists. The essays seek to discover the varied ways in which Southeast Asian women writers and artists explore and engage the images of womanhood, or symbols of the feminine, in the narration of nationhood through literature—both "national" and unofficial categories. More critically, they consider how gendered perspectives and voices constitute a political act of claiming a "feminised" textual territory within the male-dominated narrative space of the nation, producing in the process counter-texts that espouse the expressions and representations of the marginalised "imagined community" of the female other.

Our volume thus addresses the following questions: How are women and the feminine represented in the fiction of Southeast Asian women? In what ways do they help tell a story of the nation? What kind of commentary does gender offer on the historical, patriarchal relations between colonial and postcolonial discourses? How does gender engage the sociopolitical and cultural discourses and narratives of the nation-state, and what kind of gendered meanings, negotiations and articulations are produced through the intersections of race, religion, culture, and class? What are the critical ways in which Southeast Asian women writers have been received, constructed or identified by the nation-state and for what purpose? How do these writers respond to or engage state-sanctioned assumptions of female citizenship and productivity within the nation space? And to what extent have national literatures been affected by globalised views on gender and identity?

While our volume engages the concerns shared by other postcolonial imaginaries, it is the historicised, and localised, origin of the feminine that is the major

strength here. Postcolonial and gender studies have long acknowledged the importance of understanding how intersectional identifiers impact constructions of race, class, gender and sexuality; these identifiers can never be dealt with in the general, but must be considered in their very particular contexts. This is especially true in a region like Southeast Asia, home to some of the most diverse populations, languages, cultures and religions in the world. By positioning our volume in Southeast Asia, we also address the geopolitical implications of place and identity in the literature examined here, as they are central to our understanding of the gender formations, ideologies and discourses that inform the writing and interpretation of the texts.

Southeast Asia, notably the location of some of the world's most enduring displays of authoritarian state power since the 1960s, boasts several of the most well-known autocratic (male) figures—among them Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, Sukarno and Suharto of Indonesia, Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia and the Sultan of Brunei—and systems of governance in modern political history (Pye 1985; Day 2002). Pye (1985) contends that these male figures of authority are rooted in and validated by cultural discourses of power and appropriated through paternalistic–patriarchal forms of leadership in the nation space. Known as national "fathers", these iconic Southeast Asian leaders based the administration of their countries on cultural and familial systems of kinship and relations; in short, they are the "fathers" who govern and take care of their "children", the obedient, submissive citizenry.

Although the "fathers" of Southeast Asia were sometimes succeeded by daughters and wives in state politics, we have to bear in mind that these women did not succeed merely on the strength of their own individual merits. In fact, much of the support they were given was based on their relationship with previously known male politicians and leaders. The Philippines, for instance, is the only Southeast Asian nation to boast of having two women as heads of state: Corazon Aquino—incidentally the first female president in Southeast Asia—and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. However, their political rise to power was also bolstered by the collective nostalgia surrounding the national memories of iconic male figures in Filipino political history. Aquino's popularity hinged on the memory of her assassinated husband, the hero-martyr of the Marcos regime, Senator Benigno Aquino, Jr., while Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo was associated with her father, the former President Diosdado Macapagal, also affectionately known as the "Champion of the Common Man". Even Indonesia's first female president, Megawati Sukarnoputri, could not claim political victory as entirely her own as it was owed in part to her father's memory and legacy as Indonesia's first president.

Studies on the implications of these political "fathers" and their patriarchal–authoritarian governments on the identities, status and roles of women in Southeast Asia reveal the myriad ways in which women and their bodies are the object of and subject to patriarchal state surveillance, control and discipline. Ong and Peletz (1995) argue that the patriarchal "control of female bodies by the state or communal groups is in fact a recurring and striking theme in postcolonial nation states" (6), especially since the female body is often viewed as the symbol of the "endangered or dangerous" (7) body politic of the nation, one that must be protected and

defended at all costs. The need to protect the feminine is demonstrated by the often used metaphor of the "motherland", which not only invokes emotional attachments and familial sentiments but also taps into the collective imaginaries of culture, society and nation as they come together in their shared vision of women as mother-nation, responsible for producing soldier sons and nurturing daughters who would guard and perpetuate the family's and the nation's shared genealogical future.

To maintain the patriarchal, heteronormative frameworks and hierarchies in place, the Southeast Asian state has deployed strategies to rein in potential gender unruliness that include codifying female submission and silence as desirable qualities through national propaganda and policies. We should point out too that the state-mandated inscriptions of women's proper behaviour and code of conduct have been reinforced by the cultural discourses of honour and shame, which are very much in practice in the Southeast Asian context. The collusion between state and cultural productions of femininities reveals that gender is deeply enmeshed in the construction and production of meanings that inform identity systems, processes and practices, including conceptions of masculinity and femininity (involving roles and spaces for men and women that are deemed suitable for the nation) as well as the tropes of belonging through the concept of "good" and "bad" citizen.

The nationally, and culturally, interpellated femininities are, unsurprisingly, reflected in the dominant state ideologies of family and the related domestic discourses of wifehood and motherhood, many of which are prominently centred in the narratives of the nation as symbols of social cohesion and gender complementarity. As a thematic subject, the tension between women's role in the public (as career or working women) and in private (as wives and mothers) has been persistently explored in literature across Southeast Asia, reflecting a common interest and concern in the issue. In the past, we have seen how certain Southeast Asian governments discipline the female body and sexuality through nationalist rhetoric and discourses that include reproductive health and birth rates[4] (whether too high or too low), marriage and family, children and education, citizenship and migrant labour, especially domestic helpers.[5] While the marginalisation and subordination of the female body and sexuality are constructed and normalised through insidious strategies and legislation made in the name of national security and social unity, the inordinate amount of attention on women suggests an underlying masculine disquiet and ambivalence that permeate the state's preoccupation with normative gender and sexual identities, roles and relations.

Since the late 1980s, there has been a shift in postcolonial and gender studies as theorists, scholars and critics move beyond deterministic race, gender and sexual binaries to consider the ambivalence, complexities and contradictions engendered

[4]Heng and Devan (1995) provide an incisive analysis of Singapore's eugenicist interest, seen in the government's interventionist strategies on race and gender through the control of women's bodies and reproduction rates.

[5]Refer to Kaur (2007) for an example of how the governments of Singapore and Malaysia, the two main employers in the region, police domestic workers.

by the flux and transformations of late capitalism, globalisation and large-scale labour migrations and transnational movements in developing third world nations. How these shifts and changes affect the interrelations between gender, race and nation in the new world order is currently a subject of much interest, seen in the proliferation of works that relate gender to migration, diaspora, globalisation, and transnationalism.[6] Despite the proliferation of new fields and subjects of study, the underpinning fascination with entrenched networks of power relations and operations still remains. And even though our world has evolved with the globalising politics of human rights and liberalism, some things have endured, including the subordination of women within the paternalistic–patriarchal contexts of Southeast Asia. As the work in this volume shows, gender biases and binaries continue to impact women in ways that literature both evokes and subverts. By interrogating these representations, we also examine the work/place of women's literature in the building of the Southeast Asian nation.

1.2 Gender, Identity and Nation in Southeast Asia

In the study of Southeast Asian nations and identities, gender was a relative latecomer when it entered the discourse in the 1990s. Edited volumes that involved a regional focus on nation and the related discourses of state power and politics include Stivens' *Why gender matters in Southeast Asian politics* (1991), Ong and Peletz's *Bewitching women, pious men: Gender and body politics in Southeast Asia* (1995), Sen and Stivens' *Gender and power in affluent Asia*[7] (1998), and Blackburn and Ting's *Women in Southeast Asian nationalist movements: A biographical approach* (2013), while a country-centric focus (both edited volumes and single-authored monographs) can be found in works such as Lyons' *A state of ambivalence: The feminist movement in Singapore* (2004), Blackburn's *Women and the state in modern Indonesia* (2004), Tadiar's *Fantasy-production: Sexual economies and other Philippine consequences for the new world order* (2004) and *Things fall away: Philippine historical experience and the makings of globalization* (2009), O'Shaughnessy's *Gender, state and social power in contemporary Indonesia: Divorce and marriage law* (2009) and Bennett and Davies' *Sex and sexualities in contemporary Indonesia: Sexual politics, health, diversity and representations* (2015).

Scores of scholars have also produced thought-provoking articles and book chapters on the subject, including Aguilar's "Women in politics in the Philippines" (1990), Heng and Devan's "State fatherhood: The politics of nationalism, sexuality, and race in Singapore" (1995), Tadiar's "Domestic bodies of the Philippines"

[6]Published research on this topic includes Sarker and Niyogi De (2003) and Tadiar (2004, 2009).

[7]We include the volume here because, with the exception of one chapter on China, all the other chapters examine Southeast Asian contexts.

(1997), Suryakusuma's "The state and sexuality in New Order Indonesia" (1998), Wolfe's "Javanese factory daughters: Gender, the state, and industrial capitalism" (1998), Chan's "The status of women in a patriarchal state: The case of Singapore" (2000), Wieringa's "The birth of the New Order state in Indonesia: Sexual politics and nationalism" (2003), Chin's "Expressions of self-censorship: Ambivalence and difference in Malaysian and Singaporean Chinese women's prose writings in English" (2005/2006) and Peletz's "Gender, sexuality, and the state in Southeast Asia" (2012).

For all the promising inroads made in the field, the use of gender as a political approach to the analysis of Southeast Asian nationhood and identity is still by and large fragmentary and underdeveloped. The bibliographic list above shows just how lopsided the exploration of gender is in the region, with some countries attracting much coverage, while others (like Brunei) have received hardly any attention, thereby revealing endemic and underlying biases working through the gaps and inconsistencies in the field. Here, we briefly examine just how pervasive these biases are, why they exist and what they reveal in terms of the possibilities for future research into gender, identity and nation in Southeast Asia.

In her analysis about the extent to which gender has been mainstreamed in the study of Southeast Asian politics since early 1990s, Blackburn (2009) points out that the efforts made in the field have been "disappointing" (67) by summing up thus:

> The single-authored works on Southeast Asian politics present an uneven picture. Few give any prominence to gender, and some treat it as quite irrelevant, without ever explaining why. … What is particularly disappointing is that, to judge from these works, most authors writing about Southeast Asian politics do not read the feminist literature in the field. The fact that they have not sought out this literature shows they have not accepted its relevance to their work. It is as if most political scientists categorize books about Southeast Asian women as a specialised field for women's eyes only; men are absolved from consulting such works. … Somehow writing about more than half the Southeast Asian population is regarded as a marginalized area, whereas we are all expected to read books that are exclusively about men and which never acknowledge that their study is gendered. (67–68)

Blackburn's observation foregrounds the challenges faced by scholars working on gender and nation or politics as well as by the subjects of these studies, not only because of the peripheral manner in which this topic has been received by scholars, but also—and perhaps more crucially—by the patriarchal academic institutions of which they form a part. Perceived as a "characteristic reserved for women" (Sawer 2004, cited in Blackburn 2009, 67), gender has essentially become a woman's problem, conceived as separate from men (who do not see themselves as "gendered") and all things masculine.

The gendered schism in academic discourse raises several red flags, for even as it reveals the limitations of academic freedom in practice, it also exposes the entrenched systems of normalisation and interpellation underlining the production of patriarchal hegemonies and hierarchies that create our sociopolitical reality and life. When women's (and other minority) identities are excluded by virtue of their (visible) bodies and sexuality, then "gender" as a woman's problem is

complicated by the added burden of its normalised invisibility within the patriarchal nation. If scholars and critics on Southeast Asian politics remain blind to gender and "continue to write as though women are not present at all" (Blackburn 2009, 68), then the future for the study of women and the feminine in the field beyond sociological and anthropological documentation certainly does not look promising.

While the pattern of subordinating gender as a discipline indicates the prevailing influence of patriarchal viewpoints and concerns within localised academic spaces, it is also worthwhile noting that in the Southeast Asian context, the terms "gender" and, in particular, "feminism" have remained heavily contested due in part to their perceived link to westernisation[8] rather than as localised productions of lived, gendered realities and practices. Furthermore, there is also resistance from among women, including female academics, who refuse to be associated with "feminism" or, if they are, downplay it for fear of being stereotyped as "man-haters."[9] In Universiti Brunei Darussalam, for example, "gender" and "feminism" were terms that so vexed the ingrained, male-oriented academic orthodoxies that they were not accepted as academic discourse until 2010 when, under new directives from the top, gender was finally formalised as part of the syllabi in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. We offer this glimpse into the phallocentric workings of a local, higher institution in a Southeast Asian country as an instructive example of how gender is subject to local discourses and understandings of women and the feminine, inasmuch as it is affected by the globalising tropes of human rights and civil liberties.

Nevertheless, there have been changes and improvements in Southeast Asian women's positions and identities, thanks to the tireless efforts of feminist activists, both local and international, passionate scholars, thinkers, critics and volunteers, as well as dedicated women's movements and non-governmental organisations (NGOs); all have done much to advance women's lives and rights across the region. As the above-mentioned studies on gender and the Southeast Asian nation show, the diverse explorations of women from different angles (race, class, religion, culture, society, politics) and disciplines (sociology, geography, history and so on), and how they mediate their identities as citizens, career women, wives, mothers, or as successful individuals carving a place for themselves in male-dominated territories, are a reflection of just how far women have progressed in the region. However, there is still much work to be done, as the contestations surrounding women's bodies and sexuality continue to rage in both public and private domains in local and global contexts.

These contestations are often vocalised by the state through the binaric polemics of Asia versus the West, conservatism versus liberalism, censorship versus freedom, localisation versus globalisation, and national versus transnational. But as we

[8]See Walby (1996, 251–2) for her discussion of the criticism (that feminism is Western in origin) levelled by third world feminists against first world feminism.

[9]This global phenomenon, seen not only in Third World countries but also in developed nations like the UK and the USA, attests to the pervasive and insidious "othering" of feminists through misleading stereotypes and discourses in popular, patriarchal imaginaries.

move forward into the literary nation, a deterritorialised space that women writers, artists and creators can claim for themselves and other disenfranchised identities, we are also reminded that these state-mandated binaries often function as ideological boundaries separating "us" from "them". In the realm of the imaginary, the fictive text, the constructed self/other divide can be questioned, reformulated or dissolved in the negotiation of gender, identity and nation as the sites of political representation and expression. However these terms are defined by the contributors in this volume, one thing is clear: the productions of gender, identity and nation are mainly based on the contextual specificities and contingencies of history, culture, society and politics and informed by the everyday experiences, relations and practices in the material, social spaces of the Southeast Asian nation.

1.3 The Literary Nation

Modern conceptions of the nation have always involved the politics of (self) representation, with the links between nation, narration and narrativity being the focal point of interest among scholars, critics and thinkers. Anderson's seminal theory (1983) argues that the nation is an imagined political community; Gellner (1983) perceives the nation as a story, a fiction through which ideologies and discourses are constructed, produced and transmitted; Hobsbawm (1990) maintains that the nation is an "invention" of the elite or the middle class; Bhabha (1990) extends the analogy of nation and narration to consider the ambivalence of representation and expression. In all these arguments, the production of the nation as "text", imagined and written into being, stands at the forefront. Such a conception of the nation begs the question: How is gender part of this story?

In narrating the nation into existence, the hegemonic discourses produced by the state also inform its subjects of their identity and historicity, in terms of who they are (gender, sexuality, race, class), where they come from (lineage, culture) and whether they belong (or not) to the nation-state; these discourses crystallise the subject's sense of identity and belonging, both of which are critical to the conditions of citizenship. Narratives are thus crucial to the regulation and production of gender identities, norms and practices in any given society, since they carry meanings, ideas and imagery that—broadly speaking—reflect, inscribe and perpetuate hegemonic concepts of masculinity and femininity through the popular imaginary and culture. Significantly, narratives are imbricated in the social and cultural processes and productions of gender and sexual categorisations and hierarchies that constitute our lived reality. Simply put, the story of the nation is one that defines who we are as subjects and citizens. It informs not just our identity and place of belonging, but also our birthright, origins and inheritance.

And yet, if the story of the nation is a necessary fiction, how can we possibly trust its "truth"? As a text whose words are inherently unreliable, the nation and its narrative "truth" are subject to fickle powers that can be easily manipulated and that are infinitely malleable. In like manner, its figurations of normative gender and

sexual identities cannot be taken as a given; they must be questioned, challenged, critiqued and deconstructed. Ultimately, the nation-as-text posits the site of inquiry that is—to borrow Derrida's argument—endlessly deconstructive, open to viewpoints and voices that have been left out or ignored by the state.

The authors/creators and readers/audience, as well as scholars and critics who respond through criticism and interpretation, all have a role to play in deconstructing the fabric of the nation's fiction through subversive literary acts and texts, both of which constitute alternative spaces of perception and representation that intervene and disrupt the official narratives of the nation. As concerned citizens and as individuated subjects, they raise questions that challenge the monologic, homogenising narratives of the patriarchal nation that point to the issue of representation: Who is writing/speaking? For whom do they write/speak? And as for the subjects they write/speak of, in what ways do their representations open up new narratives and perspectives?

Although these questions have been pursued and critiqued through previous research published on literature and the Southeast Asian nation/state/politics (Thumboo 1988; Lim 1988, 1993, 1994; Koh 1989; Morse 1991; Tope 1998; Kee 2000; Leong 2000; Hau 2000, 2004; Lo 2004; Chin 2005/2006, 2006, 2016; Galam 2009; Pison 2010), we hope to expand on this legacy by employing gender as our framework. As the contributors in this volume demonstrate, the literary nation constitutes an ideological and symbolic site/space of dialogue and negotiation inasmuch as it is a space of intervention, interrogation, delimitation and experimentation. The political acts of writing and reading offer not only differing and differentiating perceptions of, and responses to, the myriad ways in which women are imagined and represented, but they can also be optimistically viewed as a process of deterritorialising masculinist positions and spaces with their articulations of feminist possibilities and difference based on the revisions and refigurations of women in literature.

Since most essays in this volume engage a historicist approach in the interrogation and critique of gender politics in literature, we also consider how the historical, sociocultural and political situatedness of the texts offer instructive insights for the temporal and spatial understandings of gender and its operations, since "the historicity of texts and the textuality of history" (Montrose 1989, 23) are intertwined in constant dialogue and negotiation, be they in the forms of compliance, protest, resistance, subversion or ambivalence.

1.4 The Chapters

This volume features research that has partially been published elsewhere as well as new research on postcolonial literary works produced by Southeast Asian women writers and artists in the following countries: Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines. Unfortunately, we are unable to include the literatures of neighbouring countries like Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam,

Myanmar and East Timor. This is not because they are less significant, but because the obstacles posed by untranslated texts and the lack of scholarship in English have dampened our efforts in this direction.

Given the volume's focus on subversion, resistance and marginality, it is also worth acknowledging that the concerns raised here have largely been heteronormative. This is not a deliberate exclusion by any means, but it is suggestive of how the production of female sexuality in literature, even when subversive or contestant, continues to be dominated and policed by heteronormative concerns. This is perhaps indicative of regional cultures and religions in which LGBTQ concerns are for the most part still taboo.[10] In some countries too, homosexuality is illegal.[11]

As it is impossible to exhaustively cover all angles of the research field in this volume, we hope that other scholars will take up this important work and develop it further. What we do offer, however, is a sampling of essays that demonstrates how women's literature is imbricated in the processes of construction, production, dissemination and circulation of gendered meanings, imagery and symbolism in the act of narrating the nation.

Furthermore, the chapters in this volume reflect a yearning to understand the historical, sociopolitical and cultural processes that have shaped women's identities, roles and positions in national/transnational spaces. They show how the historicity of gender, and its multiple and contested meanings, are constructed and perpetuated within the discursive specificities of temporal and spatial contexts that traverse both the colonial past and the postcolonial present. In differing ways too, each chapter considers how gender is articulated and represented in literature or through literary projects and activities. Be it through the lenses of local/national or diasporic/transnational writers and artists, or the thematic subjects and key imagery presented by the narratives and texts, or the reconstructive and deconstructive acts of interpretation by the contributors, each chapter offers an instructive glimpse into the inextricable ways in which literature, gender, identity and nation are linked. In using "text", we refer not only to the written word, but also to the visuality that constitutes much of our global modernity, thanks to the widespread consumption of new media. Hence, our volume covers a spectrum of genres and media, ranging from conventional forms that include the novel, short story and poetry to performance and the more recent phenomenon, the cinema.

In keeping with the theme of our volume, the order in which the chapters have been arranged reveals the contributors' shared concerns, including the overarching engagements with official narratives of the nation, the material productions of literature, as well as the transnational and hybridised identity of the postcolonial female citizen. The first few chapters trace these nuances by paying attention to

[10]It should also be noted that independent cinema and new media in the region have managed to carve out a niche for LGBTQ narratives. Indeed, what scholarship has been done on queer Southeast Asia in recent years, and it has been significant, has mostly been dominated by cinema and new media studies. See Ng (1999), Berry et al. (2003), and Murtagh (2013).

[11]It is illegal to be homosexual in four Southeast Asian countries: Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei and Myanmar. Refer to Mosbergen (2015) for details.

early female writers in the nation-state and how the official gatekeepers of national narratives have dealt with them. In so doing, these chapters interrogate both the originary mechanisms by which national narratives have been constructed and masculinised, and the way that potentially threatening feminine voices have been regulated.

Our volume begins after these introductory remarks with Amanda Solomon Amorao's "Writing Against Patriarchal Philippine Nationalism: Angela Manalang Gloria's 'Revolt from Hymen'" in Chap. 2, which examines these issues by interrogating the 1940 Commonwealth Literary Awards in the Philippines as a site for institutionalising a patriarchal, "modern" vision of the nation through the validation of carefully chosen Anglophone Filipino literature. In the chapter, Amorao discusses how Angela Manalang Gloria's poetry, the first such volume written in English by a Filipina, was an early rejection and critique of the ideologies of "modernity" and masculinity put forward by the Awards. As a result, Gloria's poetry was subsequently censored for "immoral eroticism" (21) and penalised for successfully articulating an alternative to nationally prescribed roles for Filipinas.

Kathrina Mohd Daud's Chap. 3, "Articulating Female Citizenship in Norsiah Gapar's *Pengabdian*" covers a different kind of early female writer; the kind that was endorsed by the state. Here, Kathrina considers the way in which citizenship is gendered in Norsiah's seminal novel, *Pengabdian* (Submission), which remains to date the only local female-authored text to be included in the national curriculum. The chapter argues that female citizenship in the novel is constructed in response to national anxieties, articulated implicitly by the values espoused in the national ideology of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB; Malay Islamic Monarchy).

Both these chapters spend some time in teasing out the instances of material production for each of these texts. The circumstances surrounding the production, publication and distribution of Gloria's volume of poetry and Norsiah's curriculum-friendly text serve as an eerie paratext to the themes addressed in the bodies of the texts. In courting state sanction and acknowledgement, these early women writers were forced to inscribe themselves, and their work, within—even if in resistance to—the discourse of these constructed narratives of patriarchal statehood. As national literary production matured and proliferated, and as they were increasingly influenced more overtly by globalising, transnational forces, women writers worked to actively deconstruct and critique discourses of citizenship already in place and were no longer entirely dependent on these pathways to be heard. This work is the subject of the subsequent chapters.

In Chap. 4, Alicia Izharuddin's "The New Malay Woman: The Rise of the Modern Female Subject and Transnational Encounters in Postcolonial Malay Literature" moves deeper into this arena, situating the new Malay woman as a historical and cultural product of the 1960s, arising out of a deep-seated refusal by female Malaysian writers to accept the representations of Malay women produced by their male counterparts who dominated the state-supported literary arena. This chapter places the new Malay woman in historical context emerging out of a concerted effort to elevate her status and emphasises her transnational origins

through an intertextual reading of Hamsiah Hamid's short stories against the work of Anis Sabirin and Salmi Manja.

In the next chapter, "Women and the Authoritarian State: The Southeast Asian Experience", Lily Rose Tope compares four texts—two from Singapore (Catherine Lim's "The Paper Women" and Denyse Tessensohn's "Marginalized Citizenships") and two from the Philippines (Ninotchka Rosca's "Our Apostle Paul" and Merlinda Bobis' "Fish-hair Woman")—and discusses how they take on the "courageous mission" of "disclosing [the state's] shortcomings and failures" (79). Tope soberly reminds us of the very real consequences this literary mode of resistance, this work of the "conscience", has in authoritarian regimes and shows how Singaporean and Filipina writers have used shifting female subjectivities to highlight nations in crisis.

Grace V. S. Chin's "State *Ibuism* and One Happy Family: Polygamy and the 'Good' Woman in Contemporary Indonesian Narratives" foregrounds the discussion of these female subjectivities in flux in Chap. 6, which considers the representation of polygamy in Titis Basino's prose fiction and Nina Dinata's film, *Berbagi Suami* (Love for Share). By choosing narratives from different and contested points in national history, Chin draws forth an engaging exploration of how the state ideologies of *Ibuism* (motherhood) and *Keluarga Sakinah* (peaceful, harmonious family) contributed to the authoritarian–patriarchal discourse of the nation "as a united and inclusive family" (91) by regulating female sexuality and personhood within the domestic space, and how Basino's and Dinata's narratives have resisted these regulatory mechanisms through the critique and negotiation of polygamy.

Resistance to national discourse also takes the form of re-writing originary myths about the nation. Meghan Downes' "Women Writing *Wayang* in Post-Reform Indonesia: A Comparative Study of Fictional Interventions in Mythology and National History" offers one such study in Chap. 7. Here, Downes examines the work of three contemporary Indonesian writers, Laksmi Pamuntjak, Leila Chudori and Ayu Utami, to argue how their use of traditional *wayang* epics functions as a site of counter-discourse to intervene in narratives about the nation. Downes posits that by appropriating *wayang* epics and their gendered representations, these contemporary writers draw on prevailing cultural authority to argue for new femininities and masculinities.

The volume closes with Chap. 8, Grace V. S. Chin's "Counter-Narratives of the Nation: Writing the Modern Brunei Malay Woman". In this chapter, Chin examines how young Bruneian female students at a local university imagine and perceive modern Brunei Malay femininity through English-language creative writing. The creative space, she contends, is a symbolic one through which culturally different ideas of gender identity and agency are mediated and that English is important to the imagining of modern womanhood. Drawing on the intersections of race, gender and language, she also shows how these counter-narratives challenge or resist essentialised notions of Malay femininity and identity endorsed by the nation-state.

Before we end, we would like to bring forth one more point, that is, even though these chapters grapple with the central and necessary gendered questions of nation-building raised earlier, and while they resist state discourses on the female

body and sexuality, we also find that they seldom culminate in a rejection of the nation-state itself. Instead, the chapters insist that the national discourses should account for themselves and answer to the critiques levelled at them. Much of what the scholars have done in identifying under-studied women writers and writings, arguing for alternative readings and approaches to gender and nation, and most significantly, insisting that these texts should be seen as a significant part of national literature and heritage, is important work indeed, and we hope that this collection will be one for future scholars to build on.

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Chapter 2
Writing Against Patriarchal Philippine Nationalism: Angela Manalang Gloria's "Revolt from Hymen"

Amanda Solomon Amorao

2.1 Introduction

Following the end of the Spanish-American War, the imposition of an entirely English language school system in the Philippines in 1901 was considered proof of the good intentions of the United States of America (henceforth, the USA or US) towards the islands and the seriousness of its promise to grant eventual independence. After having acquired the Philippines (along with Puerto Rico, Guam and Cuba) in the Treaty of Paris for $20 million, social welfare projects such as universal public education "proved" how exceptional US expansion was in comparison with the ways of old world exploitative colonialism. These projects were offered as evidence of the USA's commitment to benevolently assimilating its "little brown brothers" into the realm of progress marked by the adoption of capitalist markets and democratic political structures as well as literacy in Western languages.[1] For example, at the end of 333 years of Spanish rule in the islands, only 2% of the Filipino population could claim the ability to speak Spanish. In contrast, 47% of the population claimed to be able to speak English and 55.6% claimed to be able to read and write in it by 1918 (Bolton and Bautista 2008, 4). The imposition of English, however, was not merely in the service of US exceptionalism for the uplift of the benighted natives. As historian Renato Constantino powerfully argues in his seminal essay "The Miseducation of the Filipino" (1987), "the molding of men's minds is the best means of conquest. Education, therefore, serves as a weapon in wars of colonial conquest" (45). Constantino goes on to quote General Arthur

[1]Howard Taft, first governor general of the Philippines and later president of the US, coined the phrase "little brown brother William" to metaphorically signal the benevolent relationship between the US and the Philippines, a "special" relationship that continues to this day (Miller 1982).

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MacArthur on the necessity for a large appropriation in order to construct and maintain schools throughout the islands: "This appropriation is recommended primarily and exclusively as an adjunct to military operations calculated to pacify the people and to procure and expedite the restoration of tranquillity throughout the archipelago" (1987, 45). From the moment of its introduction in the Philippines, English thus proved to be a contradictory force saturated by issues of colonial power and civilisational development. As the language became established and a Philippine literature in English emerged, debates over the role of the coloniser's language in the nascent and yet-to-be-sovereign Philippine nation furthermore became couched in significantly gendered and sexualised terms.

This chapter focuses on the moment of the 1940 Philippine Commonwealth Literary Awards in order to investigate how Philippine writing in English was used to institutionalise a particular vision of the nation that both validated a continuing neo-colonial relationship with the USA despite formal recognition of independence after World War II and assigned specific gender roles to the subjects within that nation. Mandated by the 1934 Tydings–McDuffie Act, the period of the Philippine Commonwealth was meant to be a ten-year transitional phase preceding US acknowledgment of Philippine sovereignty. The Commonwealth, however, was ultimately an ambiguous and contradictory political formation, for it was at the moment of official separation from the USA that political, economic, cultural and social policies actually ensured US hegemony over the islands under the guise of independence. Such a contradiction was made possible because of the purposeful way in which Philippine Commonwealth statesmen, writers, and literary/cultural critics embraced the colonial narrative of the "little brown brother" and reformulated it for their own means. The development and celebration of Philippine literature in English would show that the archipelago's political leaders had evolved from "little brown brothers" into equals with their former colonisers; however, this rhetorical move and cultivation of English writing reinforced a patriarchal vision of the nation in which Filipino women (or Filipinas) had little to no role to play in the public political arena and were thus restricted to the domestic space of home and family as dutiful wives and mothers.

I argue that the cultural agenda institutionalised by the Commonwealth government and the embrace of Philippine writing in English, exemplified by the 1940 Literary Awards, had a two-fold repercussion on the formulation of Filipino nationalism during the period and beyond. First, the cultivation of cultural nationalism during this time (which had as its goal the representation of the emergent nation as politically and culturally sophisticated enough for sovereignty) operated to obfuscate the continuing material dependence of the islands on the USA. Second, such state-sponsored literary projects that were meant to represent a supposedly authentic and knowable Filipino people actually called into being patriarchal and monolithic prescriptions for those very people. Namely, that men in the yet-to-be-recognised nation could only assume control of that nation if and when they had mastered English and the US lessons of civilisation, while the marker of modernity in regards to women was defined by the performance of a patriotic motherhood. Ultimately, I argue that the outcome of the Literary Awards

in the poetry category demonstrates the pitfalls of a dominant nationalism that enforced normative conceptions of gender and sexuality as necessary to positing the Philippines as sovereign and politically modern.

During the Awards, R. Zulueta da Costa's submission *Like the Molave*, a stirring plea to the spirit of national hero Jose Rizal to enervate the current generation of Filipinos to fight for autonomy, won first place. In contrast, the very first volume of poetry written in English by a Filipina, Angela Manalang Gloria, was censored for its supposed immoral eroticism. I offer a reading of the milieu of the Literary Awards, the invocation of Rizal in da Costa's work, and the derision of Gloria's poetry in order to highlight the contradictions between the use of the English language and the formulation of Philippine nationalism during the Commonwealth. In this period, English writing in the Philippines not only constituted and was constituted by a patriarchal nationalism but it was also the medium through which alternate conceptions of the Filipina and her nation could be articulated.

While the introduction of English by the USA was clearly intended as a technology of colonial control, it also allowed Filipinas (particularly those in the bourgeois classes) access to education that had previously been denied to them under Spanish rule. Such access also enabled the entry of Filipinas into the public sphere in ways unthinkable just a few years earlier, as evidenced by debates over female suffrage in the lead up to sovereignty. Moreover, presented with this new language and relatively equal learning opportunities, Filipinas were able to compete and, in some cases, even surpass their male counterparts in the mastery of literacy and written expression (Manlapaz 2003, 12). For example, "Dead Stars" (1925) authored by Paz Marquez Benitez was the first short story to be published in English by either a male or female in the Philippines (Manlapaz 1994, xiii). Like Benitez, Gloria has been characterised as a literary matriarch in the field of Philippine writing in English (Alegre and Fernandez 1984; Manlapaz 1994; Lumbera and Lumbera 1997; Abad and Hidalgo 2003; Banzon-Mooney 2003). This chapter's analysis of Gloria's poetry in relation to the Literary Awards is meant to highlight through an in-depth case study how gender norms, literary production and nation formation were complexly entwined during the Commonwealth period with powerful material consequences.

Gloria's poetry, while iterated in the coloniser's language, can be read as critiquing the promises of modernity and sovereignty that mastery of English is supposed to evidence. At the same time, in exploring the internal world of her female speakers, her texts demonstrate a rejection of the national role prescribed for Filipinas. Her poetry, with its themes of indeterminacy and paradox, criticises the restriction of the Filipina to the roles of wife and mother by celebrating non-reproductive sexuality and indicting the violence of the institution of marriage. In the section that follows, I closely read the context and texts of the Literary Awards by considering how da Costa articulates the ideal masculine national subject necessary to the success of the Commonwealth under President Manuel L. Quezon (who held office from 1935 to 1944). I then offer, in contrast, a consideration of Gloria's life and writing in order to show how her focus on the affective world of a Filipina during this period demonstrates that which escapes representation and control by the patriarchal narratives of the Philippine nation that emerged in this period.

2.2 "A Red-Blooded Literature": Patriarchal Narratives of Development

> Moonlight, stardust, sunset, flowers, etc., or, on the other hand, the pseudo-sophistication of clever people—these are the literary preoccupations of the perfectly indifferent or the perfectly imbecile. The Filipino writer must grow up. He must be discontented with merely sniffing odorous flowers of emotion on the way. His words must not only be winged but barbed with a large passion and tipped with fire. He must write of virile people winning victories towards freedom, or of emaciated human beings enfeebled by an anti-human civilisation.
>
> In short, he must write a red-blooded literature.
>
> (S.P. Lopez, *Literature and Society*, 1940, 176)

By the late 1920s, the material factors that had motivated the USA to acquire the Philippines and other former Spanish colonies had subsided, but the prevailing narrative of the Philippines as the culturally underdeveloped other of the USA persisted. It is this tension between the material and the cultural that defined the particular patriarchal character of the vision of the Philippine nation that arose during the Commonwealth. In contrast to the industrial boom of the late 1890s that had necessitated the pursuit of raw material and new markets, the growth of the US economy had slowed and free trade with the Philippines began to threaten domestic agriculture as Philippine products entered tariff-free. Moreover, domestic labour began to resent the influx of and competition with Filipino labour that entered the country exempt from anti-Asian immigration quotas. The domestic agitation for independence thus was a strange conglomeration of the remnants of the old diehard anti-imperialists of the Spanish-American War, prominent Filipino nationalists such as Manuel L. Quezon and Sergio Osmena, and US business interests, labour and union organisations. By 1934, Quezon had successfully lobbied US Congress to pass the Tydings–McDuffie Act or TM (Cullinane 1989). While the ten-year timeline to independence was touted as a victory for the aspiring Filipino politician and his party, the statutes of the TM that particularly concerned the indefinite presence of US military bases in the islands, the immediate exclusion of Filipino immigration into the USA and the imposition of tariffs on Philippine products seriously called into question the quality of self-government and economic development that the islands would enjoy in the future. Nevertheless, the ambitious Quezon, former revolutionary against the Spanish, returned to Manila from Washington DC and was quickly elected president of the newly established Philippine Commonwealth.

Given ten years to prepare the nation for independence, Quezon was faced with two seemingly disparate but entwined tasks. On the one hand, he sought to maintain an informal connection with the USA especially in the face of certain Japanese aggression; on the other, he had to assert Philippine autonomy despite the archipelago's military and economic dependence on the USA. The cultivation of culture, particularly English literature, became central to Quezon's attempts to ensure simultaneously these informal ties while demonstrating that the islands had

progressed to full political maturity and sovereignty. Cultural accomplishments obscured the reality of material dependence on the USA that had been enacted through the establishment of the Subic and Clark Naval Bases, the dependence of the Philippine military on US advisors and the proliferation of preferred trade status agreements. The process of symbolising development and progress despite the Philippines' material dependence on the USA can be seen operating in Quezon's institutionalisation of the Commonwealth Literary Awards on 25 March 1939, which had as its goal the recognition of outstanding writing not only in native Philippine dialects, but also in Spanish and English. Quezon tasked the League of Filipino Writers with administration over the awards.[2]

If the original imposition of English on the islands had as its goal the uplift of the Philippine people, then the Literary Awards would prove how that had been accomplished and how ready the archipelago was to take its place as a sovereign nation on the world stage. Discussions spurred by the Awards over the role of English in the new nation prove how debates over the development of Philippine writing in English shaped and were shaped by dominant narratives of national development. To discuss the maturity of Philippine writing in English and how it counted as "worthy" literature was also to discuss the maturity of the Philippine nation and whether or not it counted as an equal to its former colonisers. In both cases, the arguments over what was the best of Philippine literature in English and the concerns over Philippine modernity and sovereignty were steeped in patriarchal terms that took as the ultimate goal of cultural and political development to be embodied by an Anglo-Saxon masculinist formation of Western capitalism, democracy and martial individualism.

This striving to achieve a measure of cultural excellence embodied by Anglo-Saxon tradition is demonstrated in the volume *Literature Under the Commonwealth*, the League's collection of various papers dealing with "the ideas, hopes, and anxieties surrounding" the Awards (Quezon et al. 1940, v). According to the volume's editors, the Awards were significant because in order for the Philippines to take its place alongside the great Western nations, literature and art must be developed just as much as the nation's economic or political policies: "To deserve the distinction conferred by culture and civilization, we must and can create, having the will, the favourable condition essential to the natural growth of literature that is both our testimony to posterity of our present cultural achievement and the insurance of the perpetuation of that achievement to enable the next generation to benefit from it and find a convenient point of departure for further progress" (Quezon et al. 1940, viii). If such a literature could come to maturation in the islands, then the result would be "the development of a literature that belongs by every external mark to the great universal body of Anglo-Saxon culture, and yet belongs also by internal evidence to the tradition of Filipino culture and

[2]Founded on 26 February 1939 and composed of politically conscious writers dedicated to facilitating the state's cultivation of letters as mandated by the 1935 Philippine Constitution, the League was an obvious choice to realise Quezon's cultural agenda.

civilization" (Romulo 1940, 16). Clearly, the "external" is the vehicle of the English language while the "internal" implies an abstract and essential sense of Filipino culture, tradition and character. The use of the English language (the external) to express Filipino tradition and culture (the internal) is seemingly straightforward and unproblematic. Furthermore, such literature can be aesthetically judged to be just as sophisticated as that of the USA and England, thereby suggesting that the "internal" of Filipino culture is just as developed as that of Anglo-Saxon nations.

The overarching purpose of the contest was thus succinctly expressed by the League: "To encourage creative works that record or interpret the contemporary scene, or that deal with the social and economic problems of the individual and of society over and above those that are merely concerned with fantasy, mysticism or vain speculation" (cited in Quezon et al. 1940, 62). The Awards were therefore premised on two significant intertwined assumptions: first, that English is an innocuous linguistic tool capable of conveying Philippine reality without in any way influencing said reality and, second, that there exists a priori and objectively a Philippine reality that can simply be "recorded" or "interpreted." However, it is in the institutional recognition of what the texts "record" or "interpret" as reality that such a reality is discursively called into being. The texts that won the Commonwealth Awards were the texts that dominant Filipino nationalism deemed "realistic," therefore institutionally legitimating those representations of Filipino society and subtly excluding all other representations from the realm of the authentic. In this way, the use of English—that supposed external mark which allies Filipino literature with Anglo-Saxon culture—is actually what enables the Commonwealth Literary Awards to bring that internal Filipino world and the Philippine nation into being. In awarding first place in poetry to da Costa's *Like the Molave*, the Awards validated a historicist and developmental narrative of the Filipino and the Philippines that excluded a critical consideration of the Filipina and her role in the nation.

When S.P. Lopez, eminent journalist and vice-president of the League, penned the introduction to da Costa's retrospective collection of poems twelve years after *Like the Molave* won first prize at the inaugural Awards, he called da Costa "a legitimate inheritor of the best and sturdiest poetic tradition in American letters, and *Like the Molave* is an earnest of his intellectual affiliation and artistic communion" (Lopez 1952, 9). In his introduction, Lopez paradoxically not only links da Costa to the "tradition in American letters" but also establishes *Like the Molave's* nationalist pedigree: "For *Like the Molave* is essentially a patriotic statement of Filipinism. Few artists have tackled such a theme without succumbing to either of two temptations which are fatal to art: sentimentality which, in the Filipino poet, is a congenital weakness; and declamation which becomes more blatantly histrionic still with every accession of the patriotic fire" (1952, 9). This characterisation of da Costa's work suggests (a) that the Filipino is prone (implicitly by virtue of his race) to a dangerous sentimentality that overcomes rationality and intellectualism, and that (b) only by somehow developing beyond such sentimentality can the Filipino writer become the "legitimate inheritor" of "American tradition." Subtly, it also suggests that cultivating oneself in the "tradition in American letters" leads to this

evolution into reason and progress. This understanding of US literature implies that it (as epitomised by Walt Whitman for Lopez) is essentially an intellectual and rational project "marked by challenge and affirmation on behalf of the common man and the soil whence comes his nourishment and strength" (Lopez 1952, 7). In contrast, Filipino literature (in English) is predisposed to overemotional dramatics —whether histrionic patriotism or indulgent romanticism. Such descriptions of Filipino and US literature rehearse the colonial binary of the irrational native (or "little brown brother") and the enlightened Westerner, which had justified US takeover of the islands in the first place.

For Lopez, da Costa's poetry transcends these Filipino tendencies in two ways. First, he used his poetry to reflect on history and society. Second, da Costa wrote poetry that "exults the common man" (Lopez 1952, 11). Lopez addresses the potential objections that poetry, particularly poetry in English, could never apply to the common masses: "The language of our age and generation is the language of inquiry and protest, of affirmation and challenge… and the language of our poetry must approximate as closely as possible the speech of the common people, not so much in manner as in the matter thereof" (1952, 12). In this way, Lopez suggests that there is an essential "matter" in the speech of common people that can be uncomplicatedly conveyed through the accidents (in the Aristotelian sense) of languages. To further emphasise his point, Lopez compared da Costa's work to Jose Rizal's Spanish-language novels *Noli Me Tangere* (1887) and *El Filibusterismo* (1891), which mythically inspired revolutionary hero Andres Bonifacio to establish his anti-Spanish peasant forces: "our poet wields a broadsword in one hand, and a scalpel in the other—the broadsword against those who would speak ill and unjustly of our people, the scalpel to cut up the festering sores that afflict the nation" (1952, 10). The comparison between Rizal and da Costa is fitting since *Like the Molave* begins with a plea to the spirit of Rizal to return to the islands to enervate the sinews "[g]rown flaccid with dependence, smug with ease / Under another's wing" (da Costa 1952, 17, lines 5–7). Like Rizal, da Costa uses the coloniser's language to inspire a decolonising patriotism; such a decolonising agenda, however, is instantiated on a patriarchal national order.

The phrase "like the Molave" is taken from a speech by Quezon himself that calls for the Filipino people to be strong and resilient as they build the nation. The central image of the speech is that of the molave tree—a native tree known for the solidity of its wood. By embracing the image of the tree and by invoking its hardness, da Costa suggests that during the Spanish and US colonial periods, the Filipino subject has become too soft and emasculated and is thus incapable of self-rule. He also calls on Rizal's spirit to make the Filipino "Like the molave [tree], firm, resilient, staunch, / Rising on the hillside, unafraid, / Strong in its own fibre" (da Costa 1952, 17, lines 22–24). This call on Rizal can be read as a criticism of Philippine subordination under US rule, but it only does so through the use of phallic imagery that engenders a masculine martial resistance and nationalism as the only response to such a subordination. The invocation of Rizal further establishes the patriarchal nature of Commonwealth Philippine nationalism when one considers

Rizal's own discussion of the role of women in the nation during the early stages of the revolution against the Spanish.

In his *Noli Me Tangere*, Rizal presents his most famous depiction of the Filipina and her position in the nation as a passive victim of Spanish colonialism. Maria Clara, the main character's love interest, is the bastard daughter of a corrupt Spanish friar who eventually takes her own life. Though generally laudatory of Rizal's novels as offering models of nationalism for Philippine citizens, Lopez himself in other essays of the period criticises the figure of Maria Clara: "In the regime upon which this nation has but recently entered, we shall need a type of Filipino woman as unlike that of Maria Clara as possible—energetic, enterprising, progressive, and with a mind of her own" (Lopez 1940, 41). Instead, Lopez cites Rizal's letter to the women of Malolos as putting forth the proper model for the Filipina to follow if she is to participate in modernisation and sovereignty of the nation. While Rizal's letter does provide a rival paradigm for Filipina womanhood and acknowledges that Filipinas have a role in the struggle against Spain, that role is still firmly circumscribed by their positions as mothers, daughters and wives.

About twenty-eight miles from Manila in the province of Bulacan, Malolos was a pivotal area of anti-Spanish sentiment. In 1888, twenty upper-class women of the town petitioned Governor-General Valeriano Weyler for permission to open a night school where the ladies could learn Spanish. The signatories of the now famous letter were all women related by blood, marriage or affinity and ranged in age; all however were "born and raised in upper-middle-class circumstances that allowed them to lead leisurely lives" (Tiongson 2004, 139). However, the women were greatly influenced and politicised by their male kinsmen's participation in the anti-friar struggle. One of those kinsmen, Marcelo H. Del Pilar, who was also agitating for colonial reform abroad asked Rizal to write the women a letter to encourage their endeavours. Rizal wrote his letter in Tagalog to the women and sent it to Del Pilar on 22 February 1889.[3] Rizal begins by alluding to the passivity of his character, Maria Clara, by admitting that when he wrote *Noli Me Tangere*, he had asked himself "whether bravery was a common thing in the young women of our people" (Rizal, n.d., 15).[4] However, now that he has heard of the women of Malolos and their letter, he realises finally women's importance in the anti-friar movement, that they are not only capable of resisting the friar-curate's control but also of providing the example for their children to do the same: "No longer does the

[3]For the original Tagalog version with English translation, see *A Letter to the Young Women of Malolos* by Jose Rizal (publisher and date uncertain). Interestingly, this special edition was dedicated to "The Youth of the Commonwealth" and the editor points out in the preface the contemporary "growing political consciousness of our women" as well as how the reader will "readily see the bearing Rizal's ideas nearly half a century ago still have on current conditions." I quote this English version particularly for this reason and provide the original Tagalog in the notes in order to highlight how the editor translates Rizal's letter into English perhaps according to an agenda that makes it speak more fully to this contemporary "growing political consciousness" of the Filipina woman.

[4]"Nang akin sulatin ang *Noli Me Tangere*, tinanong kong laon kung dalaga'y karaniwan kaya diyan sa ating bayan."

Filipina stand with her head bowed nor does she spend her time on her knees, because she is quickened by hope in the future; no longer will the mother contribute to keeping her daughter in darkness and bring her up in contempt and moral annihilation" (Rizal, n.d., 16).[5] It is the role of the Filipina then to teach her children to reject subservience and the "darkness" of religious superstition. However, the actions that such a lesson inspires are different depending on the gender of the Filipino mother's child. Mothers who are no longer slaves to the friar-curate and Catholicism must teach their daughters that "the will of God is different from that of the priest; that religiousness does not consist of long periods spent on your knees, nor in endless prayers, big rosarios, and grimy scapularies, *but in a spotless conduct, firm intention and upright judgment*" (Rizal, n.d., 16).[6]

Rizal's letter attempts to empower the women to resist corrupt religiosity and empty superstition. He encourages them to think critically about Catholic lowland folk practises and how such practises have a role in the suppression and control of the Philippines; ultimately, he urges them to become rational beings rather than obedient subjects. However, while the letter was significant in the continued politicisation of the women of Malolos, the logic of the letter still circumscribes very clear gender differentiations for the Filipino and Filipina in the nascent conceptualisation of the Philippine nation. In the logic of the letter, if the Filipina were to use her rational capacities it would ultimately lead her and her daughters to realise that the highest expression of such a rational capacity would still be the maintenance of stringent gender ideals. While no longer subservient to the friar-curate, the Filipina would still necessarily adhere to a rigorous feminine morality that equates the value of the Filipina's participation in the nation with the maintenance of her "spotless conduct." Rizal's original Tagalog phrase "malinis na loob" carries with it a much more critical moral connotation; translated literally it conveys the idea of "the cleanliness of one's inner being." It is not simply that the Filipina must act with decorum but that she literally must maintain her essential purity primarily by functioning in the roles of wife and mother. This becomes clear as Rizal delineates what a Filipina's duty is in regards to her sons.

While the Filipina must ensure that she and her daughters do not fall prey to superstition and servility, she must also cultivate a nationally heroic masculinity within her sons: "It is the mothers who are responsible for the present servitude of our compatriots, owing to the unlimited trustfulness of their loving hearts, to their ardent desire to elevate their sons. Maturity is the fruit of infancy and the infant is formed on the lap of its mother. The mother who can only teach her child how to kneel and kiss hands must not expect sons with blood other than that of vile slaves.

[5]"Ang babaing Tagalog ay di na payuko at luhod; buhay na ang pag-asa sa pànahong sasapìt; wala na ang inang katulong sa pagbulag sa anak, na palalakhin sa alipusta at pag-ayop."

[6]"Napagkilala din ninyo na ang utos ng Dios ay iba sa utos ng Pari, na ang kabanalan ay hindi ang matagal na luhod, mahabang dasal, malaking kuintas, libaging kalman, *kundi ang mabuting asal, malinis na loob at matuid na isip*" (italics mine).

A tree that grows in the mud is insubstantial and good only for firewood" (Rizal, n. d., 18).[7] Rizal calls on the Filipina to practise a nationally important motherhood—to set aside individual aspirations for social mobility and raise sons capable of fighting for and developing the nation. This letter thus not only conceptualises an idea of a unified Filipino people worth acting for, but also interpolates very specific roles within that unity for mothers, sons and daughters, roles for the Filipino that is distinct from but of course imbricated with the Filipina's.

Rizal's metaphor of the tree and firewood clearly resonates with Quezon and da Costa's later comparison of the Filipino people to the molave. The role of women in Rizal's letter, and by extension in Lopez's injunction to the Filipina to embrace this role rather than the paradigm of Maria Clara, is to enable the heroic nationalism of their sons, a heroic nationalism that by the time of the Commonwealth is exemplified by da Costa's poem and other pieces of "red-blooded literature" celebrated by the Literary Awards. While both Rizal at the end of Spanish rule and Lopez towards the end of official US control recognised the changing perceptions of the Filipina and her role in the formation of the nation, they both maintained that such a role was necessarily circumscribed by the precondition of biological motherhood, marriage and the maintenance of proper female sexual conduct and morality. To participate in the heroic struggle for a modern and sovereign Philippine nation, the Filipina must and can only be a mother. It is therefore no wonder that Angela Manalang Gloria's volume of poetry in English was censored during the Commonwealth Literary Awards because of its celebration of the feminine erotic and blatant rejection of marriage.

2.3 "Revolt from Hymen": Filipina Political and Poetic Alternatives

> Forgive me if I talk of nothing but roses.
> But Love has stirred the dry twigs in the desolate
> gardens of my being, has sighed for an altar of
> roses – and I could not but hear.
>
> (Angela Manalang Gloria, 1927, 34, "Forgive Me")[8]

[7]"Gawa ng mga ina ang kalugamian ngayon ng ating mga kababayan, sa lubos na paniniwala ng kanilang masintahing pusu, at sa malaking pagkaibig na ang kanilang anak ay mapakagaling. Ang kagulanga'y bunga ng pagkabata, at ang pagkabata'y nasa kandungang ng ina. Ang inang walang maituru kundi ang lumuhod at humalik ng kamay, huag mag antay ng anak na iba sa dungo or alipustang alipin. Kahoy na laki sa burak daluro o pagatpat o pangatong lamang".

[8]All citations of Gloria's poetry are from the 1993 volume edited by Edna Zapanta Manlapaz. Unless the entire poem is reproduced, I cite her poems according to lines.

In a 1983 interview with historian Doreen G. Fernandez, Angela Manalang Gloria talked about her poetry submission to the Commonwealth Literary Awards and recounted why she believed she did not win: "Mr. Walter Robb, the American among the judges, told me: 'I voted for you. The others did not because there were several poems in the book that they considered 'questionable.' … But the most objectionable to them, he said, the main reason the others did not approve the book for the prize was the poem 'Revolt From Hymen'" (cited in Alegre and Fernandez 1984, 45). Gloria suggests that what the judges found questionable about these poems was their supposed moral content or lack thereof. Given the patriarchal tradition of nationalist literature embodied by Rizal, Lopez and da Costa, it becomes clearer that Gloria's poetry was not so much immoral as powerfully at odds with the purpose of the Awards to demonstrate the progress of the Philippines. Lopez's derision of sentimentality and call for "red-blooded literature" rendered women's writing such as Gloria's talk of roses as the romantic and underdeveloped other of the masculinist and patriotic modernist. However, rather than argue over the morality or artistic value of Gloria's work, I want to consider how the labelling of such poems as "questionable" functioned to silence the critical potential of Gloria's poems to illuminate the contradictions and impossibilities of the vision of the Philippine nation animating the Literary Awards. Ultimately, while Commonwealth nationalists embraced the English language to prove patriarchal narratives of progress, decolonisation and sovereignty, Gloria's poetry suggests how relying on such patriarchal narratives makes impossible personal liberation for all subjects within the nation.

With their focus on the internal realm of the speaker and their themes of indeterminacy and paradox, Gloria's poems challenge any attempt to know the Filipina and discipline her within the political and cultural agendas of Quezon's Commonwealth. In bringing the complex private world of her feminine speakers to the foreground, Gloria imagines alternate representations of the Filipina and her nation that resist the patriarchal forces animating the Awards and that had deeply affected her own life. Born on 2 August 1907 in the village of Guagua, in the province of Pamapanga, the possibilities and path of Gloria's life were shaped by the transitions between Spanish colonialism, US benevolent assimilation and Quezon's commonwealth.[9] Angela, the third child of ten, was educated in Manila

[9]Angela's father was Felipe Manalang, a son of a poor family of Chinese mestizos. In the early years of the Filipino American War, Manalang took advantage of opportunities afforded by participation in the American colonial government to better his class status, eventually holding local office and establishing his own lucrative businesses that included a construction company that profited from the American development of Philippine infrastructure. In this way, Manalang became part of the growing middle class that resulted from native participation in American colonial endeavours. Realising the value of mastery of the English language, at least to his own social mobility, Manalang dedicated himself to sending his children including his daughters to the best schools possible. All autobiographical information concerning Gloria comes from Manlapaz's work, *Angela Manalang Gloria: A Literary Biography* (1993). Manlapaz is almost single-handedly responsible for "re-discovering" Gloria in the 1990s and editing and publishing Gloria's poetry once again. Without her careful and critical research, my own investigation of Gloria in relationship to the formation of the Commonwealth, Philippine nationalism and Filipino writing in English would not have been possible.

and went on to attend the University of the Philippines (henceforth UP) as a law student, though she would eventually choose to complete a degree in English. At the UP, Gloria became part of the first generation of Philippine writers in English as she studied and mastered the language alongside her male colleagues. Manlapaz (1994) asserts that despite the education system's colonial connections, the new system of instruction still "served as an equalising factor" in that both sexes were learning English with no previous training or exposure, and all were beginning to attend the new institutions at the same time (xxi). Women thus began to receive an education and professional training that not only allowed them to compete with men in educational spaces like the UP but also to define themselves beyond the private sphere of the home and family.

This increase of women leaving the home to take on professional roles and even leaving the country to continue their education in the USA resulted in debates over what a woman's proper role in society was, especially as the Philippines moved closer and closer to sovereignty. For example, when Gloria graduated from the UP in 1929, she was offered a Barbour scholarship to pursue graduate studies in the USA. Gloria, however, turned down the scholarship and instead chose to remain in the Philippines and marry Celedonio Gloria, a lawyer and fellow writer. Gloria expressed her personal conflict shaped by the changing discourse on gender in the period as she described her decision to marry rather than leave the country: "my wedding date had already been set for two weeks after graduation, so *wala na, tapos.*[10] My husband said, either you go or we go on with the wedding. I remembered what happened to Mercedes (Gloria)—when she went abroad, she forgot her fiancé here. So I gave up the Barbour Scholarship, and I think it turned out okay" (cited in Manlapaz 1993, 54–55). After her wedding though, Gloria served as the literary editor of prominent Manila magazines and newspapers until a bout of tuberculosis forced her to retreat to the province of Albay for rest and recuperation.

For Gloria and her husband, her role as wife and mother in the Philippines is incompatible with a decision to study abroad.[11] Eviota's critical study of gender in the Philippines under the advent of industrialisation succinctly states what was at stake in this period:

> What distinguished these years in terms of gender relations was the entry of wealthy and middle-class women into the public sphere. American education and cultural practise had definite effects on the sexual and social behaviour of women, particularly among the propertied and middle classes. Along with capitalist relations, liberal ideas and attitudes had changed the manners, dress, and way of thinking of men but especially of women, above all in Manila and other urban areas (Eviota 1992, 73).

Eviota (1992) further claims that during this time, there was also a shift in the ways in which normative conceptions of gender were enforced: "What emerged

[10]No more, finished.

[11]Gloria's decision in this regard is striking, when considering her characterisation of marriage in her poem "Revolt from Hymen." It would seem that both Gloria's poetry and her life choices were defined by paradox.

during this period was the regulation of sexuality and of morality by means of colonially directed collective action and of state intervention rather than of an obtrusive ecclesiastical authority" (73).

During the 1935 constitutional convention in Manila, for example, debate raged over whether or not women should be allowed the vote in the new Commonwealth and future nation. In her study of female political power in the Philippines, Roces (2002) points out that the majority of the delegates were adamantly opposed to female suffrage. The debates that took place centred on constructing "the Filipino woman" and delineating her relationship to the nation. The justification for such opposition is epitomised in a letter written by Perfecto E. Laguio, author of the 1932 book *Our Modern Women: A National Problem*, to the Philippine Assembly:

> The leader of the women in this [suffrage] movement aims to be on equal footing with men, to have the same right and responsibilities. If these are obtained, the Filipino woman will no longer experience the same high regard that Filipino men have for her. She will be lowering herself from the shrine where she is 'lord of all she surveys' only to be placed on the level of men among whom the spirit of honor and valor are no longer to be found. She will undergo suffering to lose the potency of all that men have conferred on her over many centuries and the splendor that goes hand in hand with her history will completely fade from her womb… (Laguio, cited in Roces 2002, 175–176).

In Laguio's letter, if women were to ever stray from their roles as mothers by participating too much in the public sphere as professionals and fully enfranchised members of the nation, then their authority and influence over their children would cease. Motherhood becomes a paradox in that it is significant to the survival of the nation because, while proper mothering produces proper heroic male subjects, it also restricts women to the home and family thereby keeping them from direct participation in the nation through voting, politics or labour outside the domestic. The cohesiveness of the nation becomes dependent on women to the extent that women are not allowed to participate directly in it. Lastly, Laguio's letter suggests that if a woman were to cease to be a mother, to cease to use her womb, she would cease to have any power whatsoever in society. The same perhaps could be said of the logic in Rizal's letter to the women of Malolos. Ultimately, in Quezon's Commonwealth, the independence of the nation, which is predicated on the formation of the heroic male individual as suggested by both da Costa and Rizal, is dependent on maintaining the woman's place in the private sphere.

These struggles over patriarchal gender norms and their implications in nation-building were not only expressed on the political stage but also in recurring themes identifiable in the body of women's writings in English emerging at the time. As debates over governmental frameworks and universal suffrage were taking shape, the first generation of Filipina students to go through the system established by the USA mastered the language and began to publish.[12] For example, Benitez's "Dead Stars" appeared in the *Philippine Herald* in 1925 and revolves around a love triangle

[12]For some excellent overviews of the development of writing in English in the Philippines, see: Bernad (1961); Lumbera and Lumbera (1997); Abad (1998); Abad and Hidalgo (2003); Bolton and Bautista (2008).

between three characters that could be read as a metaphor for the relationship between the Philippines, Spain and the USA.[13] In the story, the main character Alfredo is torn between his duty to fulfil his promise to marry Esperanza and his blossoming attraction to a new arrival in his town, Julia. Ultimately, he marries Esperanza and is resigned to a passionless marriage, but towards the end of his life, a chance encounter with Julia makes him realise that even the love he once felt for her has died and become cold. If each is read as representing the potential promises offered by Spain (Esperanza) or the USA (Julia), then both are empty and ultimately unsatisfying. In a subtle way, Benitez implies that neither colonial lover with their promises of civilisation and governance will ever fulfil the aspirations of either the nation or her people. Trinidad Tarrosa Subido's poem "Muted Cry," which appeared in the late 1930s and is reproduced in Manlapaz's *Song of Ourselves* (1994), more directly criticises the false promises of the USA and indicts the imperialistic purposes behind the introduction of English into the islands when her poetic speaker laments: "They took away the language of my blood, / giving me one 'more widely understood.' / More widely understood! Now Lips can never / Never with the Soul-in-me commune" (xvii, lines 1–4). Subido's poem ironically uses the language of the coloniser to powerfully counter Lopez and the League of Filipino Writers' claim that English could capture the essence of the Filipino. The poems in Gloria's oeuvre distinguish themselves within the period's field of literary production by Filipinas such as Benitez and Subido by offering an extended and rich consideration of the entwined nature of gender and nation-building across multiple texts.

Gloria's work, particularly that submitted for consideration during the Commonwealth Literary Awards, powerfully provides complex portraits of the consequences that patriarchal nation-building has on the life possibilities, emotional world and individual subjectivity of her female figures. While prominent nationalists such as Quezon, Lopez, da Costa and Laguio have prescribed the position of the Filipina within their vision of a modern Philippine nation, Gloria's "talk of nothing but roses" actually offers an incisive political critique of the impact that such a patriarchal national narrative has on Filipinas. As Banzon-Mooney (2003) points out, "a revaluation of Manalang Gloria's poetry is only possible after 1940, when critical institutions became less white, less male. Only in recent years has it become possible to see through Manalang Gloria's metaphors of love and realise that they are possibly metaphors for an equally intricate and bloody relationship that is American colonisation of the Philippines" (7). Gloria's volume presented to the judges at the Awards touches on almost every important stage of growth in a Filipina's life and thus offers a starting point for considering how an educated woman of the upper middle class negotiated with the constraints and new freedoms resulting from the

[13]Such use of romantic tropes to make political commentary is an extension of the allegorical "sedition" plays that were performed publically to criticise the takeover of the islands by the USA following the the Spanish-American War. Such plays include Juan Abad's 1902 *Tanikalang Ginto* (Golden Chain) and Aurelio Tolentino's 1903 *Kahapon, Ngayo at Bukas* (Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow). For an excellent consideration of the gendered tropes in sedition plays and their relationship to US colonial governance, see Rafael (2000).

formation of the Commonwealth and the about to emerge "independent" Philippine nation. While Gloria herself claimed in her 1983 interview with Fernandez to be "conservative" and a "prude" who never intended to cause a scandal, I argue that the indeterminacy, paradoxes and affective landscape defining her work can be read as directly confronting the patriarchal nationalism that came to the foreground during the Commonwealth (cited in Alegre and Fernandez 1984, 45).

In a short poem from 1940 entitled "Words," Gloria writes:

I never meant the words I said,
And never mean the words I write,
So trouble not your honest head
But come and kiss me goodnight.

The words I said break, with the thunder
Of billows surging into spray:
Unfathomed depths withhold the wonder
Of all the words I never say. (104)

Gloria's poem gestures to the indeterminacy of meaning and how such indeterminacy in the realm of culture and language can be just as powerful as the ocean breaking. The first two lines suggest that the reader will never truly be able to apprehend the meaning behind the speaker's words. The words said or written (the signifiers) and the meaning meant (the signified) will never coincide; these two simple lines thus express Derrida's concept of *différance* (1976), and rather than lament over the impossibility of pure signification, the speaker comforts her loved one and celebrates the ambiguity of meaning. The poem's theme thus powerfully contrasts the certainty with which the League of Filipino Writers treat English language and literature's capacity to faithfully represent the reality and people of the island.

Gloria's poems thus seek to define the poetic speaker beyond home and family without resorting to some essential, a priori essence, and by revelling in the ambiguity of signifiers. Any attempt to grasp the knowability of the speaker's words is always in tension with that which constantly escapes representation. The female characters of Gloria's poems who revel in adulterous affairs and who reject and expose the violence of the institution of marriage thus escape the totalising power of the grand narratives of Rizal, da Costa, Lopez or Quezon. These characters reveal the limit of such nationalism as well as how such nationalism is grounded in the control of these seemingly unruly feminine elements of Filipino society. If the motivation implicit in the Commonwealth's celebration of literary and cultural achievement is to prove Philippine development according to a narrative of the grown "little brown brother" and his dutiful wife, then Gloria's poetry refuses obedient participation in this neo-colonial fantasy of the nation.

Gloria's texts that explore female sexuality do so primarily through the use of paradox, again troubling an assumption of the easily knowable nature of the Filipino people that can be conveyed in its national literature. In a 1935 poem

entitled "Mountain Pool," Gloria's speaker pairs two seemingly opposite constructions of the Filipina woman:

> You who would hereafter
> Understand my name,
> Learn that mountain water
> Can ripple over flame.
>
> For though I loved so purely,
> I know supreme desire
> My heart a pool demurely
> Holding heaven's fire. (75)

In order to understand the speaker, she exhorts the reader to recognise the unproblematic existence of two opposites: purity and desire, emblematised, respectively, by water and fire. The first stanza sets the seemingly contradictory coexistence of water and fire in a naturalised setting of a mountain stream. The suggestion then becomes that the attempt to divorce the two, purity and desire/water and fire, would be unnatural. In stanza two, the poem moves from that which can be observed in nature to a focus on the speaker herself and her own personal experience of the existence of such opposite moral forces within her own life. While capable of loving purely—and by extension, of chaste devotion, of motherly duty—she is also capable of "desire." This however is not a morally corrupting desire but is described as "heaven's fire," alluding to the tongues of fire which descended upon Jesus' disciples during Pentecost as they were sent out into the world on their proselytising mission. She locates such heavenly desire within the "pool" of her heart thus continuing the imagery of natural bodies of water begun in the first stanza. Poems such as "Soledad," "To Don Juan," "To an Idolater," "Heloise to Ableard" and "Song of Awakening" would add further complexity to this depiction of the tension between purity and desire. In these poems, therefore, Gloria depicts the impossibility of perfectly adhering to motherly duty and raising heroic martial sons; rather, she complicates the desire for freedom of personal and sexual expression, neither vilifying it nor trumpeting it as the ultimate goal.

Gloria's play with ambiguity and indeterminacy, especially in regards to sexuality, thus allows her to avoid making moral judgments or proposing her own normative prescriptions concerning Filipina subjectivity. For example, "Heloise to Abelard" invokes the figure of the medieval couple that, despite engaging in their own torrid love affair, still became eminent figures within the Catholic Church. The speaker takes on the voice of Heloise: "That I have loved you is beyond denial. / That I have sinned thereby is not so plain: / Call me, O Joy, and though your voice be phial / Of Hemlock, I would drink of it again" (107, lines 1–4). Though censured by society for her actions, the speaker cannot admit that her love for Abelard is morally wrong. These lines follow the logic of Heloise's own letters to Abelard who argues that despite engaging in apparently sinful action, her intentions were never to do moral wrong. Heloise thus puts forth a doctrine of intention that

distinguishes between external action and internal moral character. In the case of Gloria's poem and invocation of Heloise's historical situation and writings, it is suggested that the internal moral character of a woman cannot be judged or determined by her actions that seem to transgress social and religious expectations.

The supposed impossibility of knowing the moral character of the speaker as defined by this tension between internal and external can be read as challenging the essential purpose of the Literary Awards. The implicit and explicit premise by which Quezon, Lopez and the League operated was that the externally imposed language of English could and would depict the internal Philippine character and cultural achievements to the rest of the world. Gloria's poems, however, constantly highlight that words are indeterminate. For Heloise, her words and actions can never completely convey her moral character to those who would judge her. Furthermore, the speaker states in the last lines that even if her evaluation of her moral actions is erroneous, she has no regrets concerning those actions and embraces the consequences: "If this is sin, then never will I be shriven / Who, drunk with hell, now dare the curse of heaven!" (107, lines 13–14). It could be argued that the invocation of Abelard and Heloise, the gesture to the practise of confession and penance as well as the allusion to the fires of the Holy Spirit in the poem "Mountain Pool" could reference more exactly the gender norms that defined Philippine society under the influence of Spanish Catholicism rather than during the transition to sovereignty. Other poems, however, directly take on the various ways that women have been interpolated in the Commonwealth period.

"Arabesque Dream," an early poem bearing the date of 1926, is addressed to "Araceli," a friend and fellow boarder at the speaker's college dorm. The first stanza reads:

Araceli,
What mocking spirit
Leads your gay footsteps hither,
Makes you smile so archly
While you stand beneath my doorway?
Hence!
You spoil my arabesque dream
With your sheen of ballroom glitter
With your staccato laughter.
A ball tonight?
My frivolous creature,
You lightly warble in sun-golden phrases,
Little thinking how fragile
My arabesque dream is;
Little sensing how fatal
Your chatter to me. (30, lines 1–16)

The first stanza juxtaposes the speaker's "arabesque dream" to Araceli's "ballroom glitter." While the poem can be read as a college girl's ruminations on a life mostly lived in poetic revelry while classmates and friends socialise, considering the context of 1926 can open up further possibilities of the poem's meaning. Beginning in 1908, the US colonial government instituted the Manila Carnival which, as Roces (2002) observes, is based on pre-existing Filipino traditions, developed under Spanish Catholicism, of honouring beautiful women as either queens (*reynas*) or princesses of the queen's court (*zagalas*) in religious processions celebrating holy days or festivals. In many ways that have yet to be further explored, the carnival paralleled the projects of world's fairs that took place domestically in the USA beginning at the *fin de siècle*. While domestic world's fairs such as the St. Louis Exposition of 1904 with its infamous "Philippine Reservation" were meant to showcase the grandeur and exotic nature of new US conquests, the Manila Carnival was meant to awe and delight Manileños with the advantages and grandeur of US occupation.

As McCoy (2000) describes,

> Located at the heart of Manila, the sprawling Carnival enclosure held elaborate displays of provincial products such as rope or coconut. The two week-whirl of spectacle, society, and sport culminated in the crowning of the queen and her court at an elaborate formal ball. With the Philippines on parade, elite actors gained a stage to project images of nation and society before a mass audience. (324)

The Manila Carnival was thus an avenue for the public participation of Filipinas based on the perception of their physical and inner beauty. As Roces (2002) highlights, the Tagalog word for beautiful, *maganda*, also connotes "what society considers good and virtuous"; thus, the queen of the Manila Carnival is perceived to be "a woman who exudes the virtues of her gender" (172). Gloria's poem indicts the spectacular celebration of women's virtue, revealing how potentially empty such valourisation of female beauty and virtue can be. The second stanza expresses annoyance at Araceli's interruption and continues juxtaposing the speaker's inner world with Araceli's participation in the carnival: "My world is a floral sphere / Of moonbleached cobwebs / And dew-kissed camias, / Born on the wings of a gentle zephyr. / Your world is a whirling sphere / Of painted masks in a tipsy pattern, / And metallic whispers and velvet swishes / Of revolving figurines / Within a revolving sphere" (30, lines 21–29). Gloria creates her own personal and lyrical realm of dreams as the true realm of beauty, criticising the gendered performance of beauty at the ball that Araceli has just attended. The real world for the speaker is the world of her own room where she has the power to imbue the objects in her domain, the cobwebs or the camias, with her own meanings. This poem sets up a dichotomy between the private and public as well as the internal and external but not in order to valourise a particular role for women. The speaker rejects the public crowning of the Filipina as beauty queen and emblem of female virtue; she is happy to retreat to a private space that is all her own, a space that is not populated by members of her family such as parents, husband and/or children, by whom she is necessarily defined in the dominant national narratives of the Awards.

Though Gloria's detractors singled out "Revolt from Hymen" as morally inappropriate and thus ineligible for consideration for the Commonwealth Literary Award in English poetry, I contend that her volume as a whole, defined by themes of indeterminacy, paradox and personal subjectivity, calls into question the patriarchal underpinnings of the cultural agenda of Quezon's Commonwealth. Gloria does, however, make her most obvious critiques of the Filipina's restricted roles as wife and mother in "Revolt from Hymen":

O to be free at last, to sleep at last
As infants sleep within the wombs of rest!
To stir and stirring find no blackness vast
With passion weighted down upon the breast,
To turn the face this way and that and feel
No kisses festering on it like sores,
To be alone at last, broken the seal
That marks the flesh no better than a whore's! (144)

The poem's opening lines invert the expectations that Rizal and Lopez have of the Filipina mother. Rather than embrace her duty to raise strong and courageous children, the speaker actually desires to be a child herself, equating infancy with freedom and marriage with slavery. Here, the speaker's revolt against the potential violence and constrictions of marriage becomes incompatible with the vision of Rizal's revolution against the Spanish and da Costa's critique of emasculation under US rule. For Gloria's speaker, duty to nation cannot override duty to self. Moreover, the fact of marriage in no way sanctifies the sexual labour that the speaker is required to perform. She sees her duty to her husband as akin to prostitution and desires to be alone much in the same way that the speaker of "Arabesque Dream" seeks solace in her own poetic world.

Gloria's "Revolt from Hymen" acknowledges the complications and contradictions of any power available to the Filipina through the positions of wife, mother, daughter and lover. The poem exposes how dominant Filipino nationalism imagines a Philippines premised on dutiful mothers and daughters, heroic husbands and sons that results in the violent constriction of Filipina life to marriage and the domestic. Gloria's oeuvre counters how Filipino writing in English can be used to call a knowable nation and its subjects into being; it challenges the transparency of language and the claims to modernity that it enables. Through the play in meaning, Gloria's words can also invite us to imagine an alternative vision of the Philippines in which Filipinas are not relegated to a separate sphere of motherhood and family, while English is neither completely hegemonic nor an entirely resistant force but is productively and simultaneously both.

2.4 Conclusion

Angela Manalang Gloria's poems are clearly shaped by and, as I have argued, a response to the social, political and historical conditions in the Philippines during the Commonwealth period. The Commonwealth years were ostensibly a time of impending self-determination; however, persisting neo-colonial economic and military ties to the USA seriously undermined and continue to undermine the sovereignty of the nation. Quezon's cultural agenda, particularly the cultivation of Philippine writing in English, served as a linguistic alibi. Celebration of the achievements in English by poets such as da Costa was offered as proof of the archipelago's development and parity with its former colonisers, obscuring economic underdevelopment and the persisting role of the islands in US plans for control of the Asia-Pacific region. More specifically, the Awards ostensibly proved that the Philippines had matured into a society of capable martial masculine patriots and devoted moral mothers. In this vision of the Philippines, its people had specific gendered and sexualised roles to play to ensure the country's competitiveness internationally. In her poems, Gloria calls into question such powerful narratives of Philippine nationalism and pushes back against the constriction of Filipinas into the roles of dutiful mothers and wives.

More than seventy years after the Awards, the neo-colonial repercussions of the Commonwealth period are apparent. The underdevelopment of the Philippine economy and its vulnerability to foreign capital has created conditions under which the Filipina has become her country's most valuable commodity. Labouring as caregivers, nurses, entertainers, domestic helpers and so on, women constitute the majority of overseas Filipino workers or OFWs. The country's economy depends on the billions of pesos remitted by these OFWs and to ensure the continued out-migration of its women, the current government has adopted and proliferated a new nationalist narrative regarding the Filipina. According to Rodriguez (2010), these women have become the *bagong bayani*, the new national heroes who journey out into the world to support financially the homeland and families they have left behind. For Rizal and Laguio, patriotic motherhood was expressed by the Filipinas' devotion in the domestic space to her children. In contrast, patriotic motherhood is now seemingly expressed through transnational mothering—loving one's children so much that the Filipina will go abroad and sacrifice her body to earn enough to ensure her family's survival at home.

While female OFW labour abroad is necessary for the maintenance of the economy at home, the absence of these women from the domestic space has simultaneously instigated debates over the role of women that echo the concerns over sexual impropriety and female morality that defined the censorship of Gloria's poetry. Parallel to Gloria's deployment of poetry to explore complex Filipina subjectivity, OFWs are also turning to cultural forms in their diasporic locations as powerful strategies of resistance and survival (Rodriguez 2010). These diasporic cultural productions also wrestle with the complex entanglement of language, nation-building and gender norms that this chapter has attempted to demonstrate

within Gloria's poetry and milieu. While Gloria deserves attention as a founding mother of Philippine writing in English, the significance of her life and work extends beyond the scandal she caused at the 1940 Literary Awards, particularly in our contemporary moment as the role of the Filipina is once again undergoing further redefinition under the forces of globalised capitalism.

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Chapter 3
Articulating Female Citizenship in Norsiah Gapar's *Pengabdian*

Kathrina Mohd Daud

3.1 Introduction: Existing Articulations of Bruneian Femininity

Despite burgeoning anxieties over how the introduction of the 2013 Syariah penal code will affect the status of women and women's rights in Brunei Darussalam (henceforth Brunei), international bodies which have taken it upon themselves to assess gender equity in Brunei have largely acknowledged that while "the law does not contain specific provisions prohibiting discrimination based on race, sex, disability, language, or social status" (US Department of State 2010), women are "not discriminated against in access to employment and business" and are granted rights similar to those of their male counterparts in areas such as health, divorce and custody. In official statements, Brunei has declared itself committed to the "positive development and continued progress of women", acknowledging that "gender equality and women's empowerment, besides being basic human rights, are important ends in themselves and crucial for the advancement of women" (United Nations 2008, 4). Officials have also pointed out that the Brunei Constitution is "gender-free" (United Nations 2008, 4), and in 2015, the World Economic Forum ranked girls' education in Brunei amongst the best in the world (Azlan 2015).

Understanding the role and status of women in Brunei beyond official reports, anecdotal evidence and generalised, piecemeal statements made to the media on occasions such as International Women's Day is almost impossible. The diversity of ethnicities, socio-economic pressures and religious influences means that the experiences of women with regard to how they perceive their role and status within the nation is too varied to make any sort of substantive claim about women in Brunei (see also Chin's Chap. 8 in this volume). King (2008) points out that there

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have been "virtually no sociological analyses of Brunei" (31) to draw on, apart from very early American anthropological studies which are of minimal use when considering contemporary female society. The lack of substantive study on Bruneian female society is clearly a key concern of women's agencies and advocates in Brunei, which state the need to conduct research on women's development and collect sex-disaggregated data as paramount (United Nations 2008, 13).

Nevertheless, there is a revealing statement in the Beijing report which hints at the domestic emphasis placed by the nation on female roles. In the report, one of the main aims of the Department of Community Development, which resides under the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports and is "the focal agency for women's affairs in Brunei Darussalam" (United Nations 2008, 10), is "to encourage the participation of women in national development without compromising the stability of their marriage/family life" (10). In a similar vein, one of the official national commitments in increasing the participation of women in executive positions (currently at 20%, below the nationally required 30%, although women make up 59% of the national workforce) endorses the "strengthening of the family institution" (13) as one of the measures to be taken in order to move forward. Additionally, two of the eight priority areas outlined in the National Plan of Action on Women under the Special Committee on Women, National Council on Social Issues are "Women and the Family Institution" and "Work Life Balance" (Thien 2015). Thus, while the government calls on women to fulfil a "crucial" (Thien 2015) participatory role in national development, their domestic responsibilities are viewed as correspondingly important and in need of preservation. The then Deputy Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Hajah Adina Othman, pointed out, however, that men also have an important domestic role to play, and committed to providing more opportunities for "working men and women to balance their responsibilities at home and at work" (Thien 2015). There is certainly recognition by the government that in order for the family institution to flourish alongside national development, policies for both male and female workers must be adjusted and instituted. This emphasis on the domestic is familiar in gender studies in the region—Blackwood (1995) notes that "to promote the unity and stability of the state, and to encourage development, postcolonial state ideologies and practices actively encourage women to situate themselves in the home" (126), creating gendered identities for Southeast Asian citizens. In Indonesia and Malaysia, as in Brunei, this encouragement is bolstered by mainstream Islamic discourses (126). It is worth noting that Bruneian culture does not valorise any historical female figures of national significance in the same way as it does male mythic figures that include Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien, who is known as a poet and the "Architect of Modern Brunei", or Awang Alak Betatar, credited with being the first Muslim Sultan of Brunei.

Other than these male-centric national statements and examples, which may reflect aspirational rather than lived values, there is little comprehensive scholarly literature on the role and status of women in Brunei. While one can draw on similarities between Malay communities in neighbouring Malay-Muslim majority countries Malaysia and Indonesia, there are also significant cultural differences

arising out of historical and sociopolitical developments, which render such comparisons inadequate and misrepresentative.

Where historical accounts fail, one turns to literature to work towards understanding and to a limited extent reclaiming female absences from the national narrative. To borrow from Sears (1996) on accounts of the feminine in Indonesian literature—when speaking of "Bruneian women" is an impossibility, we seek out representations of the feminine, hoping that these stories might open new sites of articulation. As Tiwon in Sears (1996) observes:

> By articulation I mean the instance of giving voice, whether orally, in writing, or in print, to ideas and experiences, which, until they are voiced, especially in this age of competitive articulation, must remain private and thus, non-existent as far as human society is concerned… Articulation is also a function of the processes involved in the formation and transmission of cognitive and experiential schemata. Thus, it is not a static object, frozen within its own absoluteness. Rather, it has a specific history that enables us to talk about a 'history of articulation' (48).

In this case, in the absence of sociological, ethnological or anthropological studies of femaleness in Brunei, we turn to fiction as a recorded articulation of female experience. While obviously not to be taken as historical fact or sociological study, female writings about the female experience can shed some light onto how contemporary concerns are perceived. It is impossible to consider any one writer fully representative; however, in the absence of a robust and diverse body of fiction, we must work with what exists. In this case, the work of Norsiah Gapar, who is widely recognised as the premier writer of contemporary women's issues in Bruneian literature, is important because while there may be many female narratives and many narratives about the feminine in existence, passed down orally and through the family, it is the aim of this chapter to look at representations of the feminine which have garnered official national support and endorsement.

The aim of this chapter is to consider the construction of female citizenship in Norsiah Gapar's *Pengabdian* (Submission). In examining articulations of the feminine in Bruneian literature, I draw on the notion that "definitions of womanhood are consciously forged through state ideologies" (Heng and Devan 1995, 126) in service of a postcolonial national agenda that is always embedded in the discourse of development and nation-building. Indeed, Heng and Devan note that this discourse of development in postcolonial nations is embedded in the generation of narratives of national crisis, in which citizens are drawn into line by the repeated focus on "the fragility of the new nation, its ostensible vulnerability to every kind of exigency" (1995, 196). In order to bolster state stability and encourage culpable populations then, governments generate narratives of crisis which can be ostensibly mitigated by support and adherence to a variety of gendered citizenship roles, manifested through a variety of state policies, including reproductive control. Ong and Peletz (1995) note that the ideological concepts of family, gender and race have often become the nexus of patriarchal, political culture in postcolonial societies, inasmuch as state disciplinary interventions in the form of regulatory health, educational and welfare programmes seek to regulate the population through constructions of family and subsequently gendered citizenship roles (6). In particular,

postcolonial feminist scholars have noted that "postcolonial states actively create (or reconstruct) and promote formulations of gender compatible with the perceived needs of development" (Blackwood 1995, 126). This chapter actively works to consider the extent to which specific constructions of gender have been formulated in response to perceived needs of the state by creating "gendered" citizenships.

3.2 Needs of the State: National Ideology and Narrative Threats

A small sovereign state in the South China Sea, Brunei is located on the island of Borneo and is ethnically fairly diverse, with 66.6% of the population identifying as Malay, 15% Chinese, 6% Bornean ethnic groups, and 12% as Indian, Eurasian and other. Islam is the official religion, with 67% of the population identifying as Muslim, 13% as Buddhist, 10% as Protestant Christian and Roman Catholic, and 10% as other (including Hinduism, Chinese folk religions and so on). Despite the plurality of its population, the government has implemented the homogenising ideology of the MIB to regulate its diverse citizenry. The three components of race, governance and religion make up the national ideology of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB), translated as Malay Islamic monarchy. The state ideology of MIB is one in which "three components are deemed essential to the construction of national identity and culture: (1) Malay values, traditions and language, (2) the teachings of Islam and (3) a monarchical government with the Sultan as head of the State" (Chin and Kathrina 2015, 4).

While some local historians insist that the teachings of MIB are rooted in the history of the Sultanate, and that the concept itself was established by the first Muslim monarch of Brunei, Awang Alak Betatar (Muhammad Hadi bin Muhammad Melayong 2016) in the fourteenth century, the first official articulation of MIB as a national philosophy was in 1984 when Brunei declared its independence (Naimah 2002, 142). Six years after that, on the occasion of the current monarch's 44th birthday, the philosophy was elucidated upon officially for the first time (Naimah 2002, 141). Naimah (2002) argues that the introduction of MIB as a national unifying ideology was an "instrument of legitimacy for the Sultan's rule by marrying the conservatism of Islamic values with that of Malay culture and the traditional unifying role of the monarchy" (141). Any change to any aspect of these three values is thus a direct threat to the continuing rule of the monarch. Thus, MIB "forms the basis for national unity and development" (143), and any progress made is with continuous recourse to this ideology. Subsequent work has been carried out by the government ministries to propagate MIB, in particular the Ministries of Education and Religious Affairs and with emphasis on students. In order to ensure that the ideology is widespread, it has been included in the national curriculum as a subject.

I contend in this chapter that this national articulation of Bruneian identity implicitly establishes that which is under perceived threat—race, culture, religion

and governance—and whose purity and authority need to be guarded carefully against corruption, contamination and change. Working from Naimah's contention about legitimacy, I posit that the introduction and upholding of MIB both legitimises the rule of the monarch and re-categorizes anything which poses a threat to this legitimacy as a threat to national identity. Government statements to the media have made clear that some of these threats arise out of the impress of foreign (Western) values and national race relations. This neatly embeds the monarchy within the construct of national identity, and forces any national progress to form around its existence as a given by continuously checking progress against the values espoused by MIB. Thus, any policy or polity which poses a threat to this legitimacy is used to create a narrative of crisis (Heng and Devan 1995, 196). The primacy of the Malay culture, Islamic faith and monarchic governance are held as bastions of national identity. Understanding this gives insight into the construction of state policies, the propagation of cultural stereotypes, and the undermining of other value systems which hold potential, and alternative, appeal.

While generally peaceful, with fewer of the racial tensions that are apparent in neighbouring Malay majority states of Malaysia and Indonesia, it would be disingenuous not to acknowledge the state policies which restrict the full participation of the Bruneian Chinese in the everyday life of the kingdom. While it is difficult to attain a comprehensive number, estimates calculate that 50–90% of Bruneian Chinese do not have citizenship, and are "stateless" despite being second or third generation residents (Loo 2009, 151) in Brunei. With Malayness being privileged, particularly in relation to state policies on land-owning, education and health, and the clear "strong emotional bond" (Loo 2009, 148) between the monarchy, Islam and Malay ethnicity, the only clear way for "stateless" Bruneian Chinese residents to participate in national life is to assimilate into the prescribed MIB identity, which then brings with it the privileges of Malayness. This status quo, in which Bruneian Chinese residents are effectively an underclass to the dominant Malays, threatens the stability of the nation (Naimah 2002, 145). Despite this, there have been no significant policy changes to allow for greater participation in the nation. Effectively, government policies work to regulate the presence and power of the Bruneian Chinese, who are perceived as a threat to the MIB ideology and hence the legitimacy of the monarchy.

In terms of governance, Brunei is one of seven absolute monarchies remaining in the world, with the Sultan functioning as head of state. Low (2012) identifies this mode of paternalistic-patriarchal governance as "father leadership" (255), and notes that it has been the work of the national ideology to foster a sense of the country as being an extension of the family unit. In particular, low argues that the notion of the monarch as father has been established through existing cultural practice, bolstered by religious ideology, and through a steady emphasis on a personal relationship with subjects that is highlighted by the press. Moreover, this "high task and high touch" (2012, 258) emphasis has had the effect of establishing the monarch as a reassuring and comforting presence to the people, thereby enabling economic growth and national progress. In essence, low makes the case that the "appealing" nature of father leadership enables political stability by fostering a reluctance to

complain or critique on the part of the populace (2012, 259), a vital move in a nation in which legitimacy is derived neither from election nor popular participation, but through a values system (Naimah 2002, 136). Indeed, Naimah (2002) notes that the success of this national narrative of father leadership has been such that "economic development and modernity, [and] the spread of literacy, has resulted in intensifying feelings of loyalty towards the Bruneian nation and the Sultan, while simultaneously consolidating the institute of the monarchy" (145). Given that "father leadership" depends on an ideological value system bolstered by the traditions and values of the Malay culture and Islamic faith, foreign (Western) values are clearly to be guarded against.

Nevertheless, globalisation and the need for economic diversification away from oil, which constitutes 90% of Brunei's exports (Naimah 2002, 14), means that the National Vision 2035 has centred around the development of human resources, identified as the "well-educated and highly-skilled people" (Brunei Vision 2035). One of Brunei's strongest driving strategies for progress has been the upskilling and educational development of its citizenry. A prominent part of this strategy has been the sending of students abroad, primarily to the United Kingdom (henceforth the UK), to further their studies. The national anxieties about both the need for education abroad and the resistance to imported values which would threaten state power, particularly those surrounding the family structure, gender, and governance, will be familiar to postcolonial nation-states in the region—the local returning intelligentsia from the West were, for example, crucial drivers of the independence efforts and nation-building in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Brunei's independence in 1984 from its status as a British protectorate did not sever its ideological ties with the British. Since the 1970s, a steady influx of Bruneian students has been educated in the UK, ranging from secondary school to postgraduate study. Currently there are over 2000 Bruneian students in the UK, and a few hundred in Australia, North America, Canada and New Zealand. The majority of these students are on generous government scholarships which cover tuition fees and a living stipend, which require them to return to Brunei after the completion of their undergraduate or graduate degrees and work for the government, informally known as "being bonded to the government", a clause which is a commonplace accompaniment to most government scholarships in the region.

This financial support belies a national anxiety over the influence of Western ideals and ideology. Scholarship students who go abroad at as young as 16 years old, and sometimes remain for over a decade in their host country, during arguably the most transformational years of their young adult lives are required to undergo a civic course before leaving Brunei. There are regular injunctions from the government for students "not to forget about where they come from" (Rabiatul 2012), both during the pre-departure briefings and interviews, and in media content. While there are no official figures, there is certainly a proportion of students who do not honour their government bonds. Given the national vision for a highly educated population, the reality is that with a population of approximately 400,000 people, even a small attrition rate can have significant effects on the national vision for a highly educated population. It is therefore understandable that the anxiety over

losing citizens both physically and/or ideologically to an attractive Western culture is repeatedly addressed in the insistence on cultural and national loyalty. Thus a national narrative about the dangers of Western culture and values to Bruneian identity is created as a vanguard against these "foreign" threats to the legitimacy of the monarchy.

This narrative anxiety is aptly expressed in an interview with Hajah Sariani Haji Ishak, an officer at the National Language and Literature Bureau (DBP), who remarked, "The funny thing is those people who have only been living abroad for several years and they pretend they can't speak Malay or that they don't eat traditional food. Hopefully these kind of people recall their roots" (Rabiatul 2012). The gendered nature of these anxieties is often difficult to gauge except anecdotally. However, Brunei's citizenship clauses are highly suggestive of the manner in which the state constructs and regulates desirable gendered citizens, since non-Bruneian women who marry Bruneian men are able to register for citizenship on the basis of marriage, whereas non-Bruneian men who marry Bruneian women are not afforded the same opportunity (Brunei Nationality Act 2002). Given the common perception, religious and cultural in origin, and at present reinforced by the state, that women tend to cleave unto their husband's citizenships, this clause effectively discourages women from marrying non-Bruneians. In this way, the government not only prevents the loss of both a citizen and a human resource unit, but also prevents the infusion of "foreign" elements through women, also considered a weaker vessel (Ong and Peletz 1995). By implication then, "foreign elements" that enter the country are acceptable as they are seen to be under the control and purview of Bruneian husbands while the same cannot be said about Bruneian wives and their potentially "uncontrollable" foreign husbands. The gender imbalances encoded at cultural, social and state levels point to subtle albeit widespread patriarchal perception that women are "weaker" (since they are subordinate to male authority in the home and elsewhere) and therefore cannot be trusted with the guardianship of MIB values.

It is within the context of these national anxieties surrounding Western values, racial tensions and the continuation of patriarchal power enacted at the domestic and state level, that Norsiah Gapar's *Pengabdian* is located.

3.3 Norsiah Gapar: National Writer, National Anxieties

Norsiah Abd Gapar is best known as Brunei's premier woman writer. Not only is she the first and only female Bruneian to date who has won a SEA Write Award, but Norsiah's debut novel, *Pengabdian* is also a staple of the national Malay literature curriculum, and is the only female-authored novel by a Bruneian of which that can be said. Published in 1987, *Pengabdian* was the winner of the novel-writing competition organised by the National Language and Literature Bureau to commemorate Brunei's independence in 1983. It was followed by a young adult novel, *Janji Kepada Inah* (A Promise to Inah) in 2007, and most

recently by the anthology of short stories *Tsunami di Hatinya* (Tsunami in her Heart) in 2009.

Educated in the UK, Norsiah spent several years in Southampton, Surrey and London between 1972 and 1997, and returned to Brunei with a B.Sc. in Biochemistry and an M.Sc. in Clinical Chemistry. Norsiah writes almost exclusively about Malay-Muslim women, and her works are generally regarded as women's fiction as they tackle "taboo" subjects such as abortion and divorce in ways which draw heavily on modern Malay melodrama, and on her own personal experiences in the local hospital. A significant theme in her work is the return of Western-educated Malay-Muslim women to Brunei and the way in which their time abroad has changed them, particularly with regard to their personal faith and practice of Islam, as well as their perspective about contributions to national development. In an interview with Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf (2011), Norsiah claims for her characters an oppositional position to the "stereotyping of Western educated women as those who would forget their religion and tradition" (119). In this, of course, she echoes the national narrative about the threat of Western values, ostensibly in defence of Western educated women. She does this, however, by imbricating them within the discourse of prescribed feminine behaviour and in doing so, gendering their citizenship. By modelling how Bruneian women subvert local expectations and stereotypes about the negative effects of Western education, Norsiah's texts tacitly work within the ideological framework of rejecting Western values and upholding local cultural and religious ones.

This is made clear through the widespread national endorsement of her texts and its inclusion in the Malay literature curriculum. Norsiah's depictions of Malay-Muslim femininity are considered aligned to the national narratives about appropriate and approved female roles and spaces and their relationship with nation-building. In creating "model" female characters, Norsiah promotes a prescriptive femininity where national development is concerned; in short, a gendered citizen.

In the next section, I examine and interrogate Norsiah's construction and articulation of the Malay-Muslim female citizen in *Pengabdian*, particularly in response to national anxieties about race, religion and patriarchal governance. I consider how citizenship is gendered by exploring the ways in which the main figure of Siti Nur is used to articulate the domestication of Western education, and the resolution of race relations.

3.4 Siti Nur: Educated Abroad, Local at Heart

Pengabdian follows the life and career of a Bruneian Dr. Siti Nur, who returns to Brunei after having finished medical school in England. The novel follows her struggles to create a better future for herself, her family and Brunei—extolled as a respected doctor and a model of Bruneian womanhood, Siti Nur is a moral compass for her younger siblings, her love interests, fellow Chinese doctor Sam and Malay

policeman Shukri, and even her patients. The novel also follows Sam as he converts to Islam, and the opposition he faces from his Chinese parents.

Siti Nur is the epitome of desirable, successful femininity; a paragon of Bruneian female citizenship.The reader is repeatedly told how rare she is, how fine she is to have kept her essential values rooted in Islam even after all the time she has spent in the hedonistic, decadent West. Siti Nur's success is professional, domestic, and religious—she is soft-spoken and strong, and able to take on the mantle of propagating the values which her parents abdicate to her younger siblings, which include taming and teaching her wild child sister Hannah and her brother Zul who impregnates his girlfriend Marinah without initially intending to marry her.

Professionally, Siti Nur is a respected doctor—one of the few Bruneian Malay doctors in a national hospital full of Indian expatriate and local Chinese doctors. In a meeting in which all the doctors and medical officers come together, Siti Nur listens to the complaints of the other doctors about being overworked and "smiles while passing"[1] (13), remembering all the times she had been warned that being a doctor was hard work. She was determined to become one anyway because she "knows that there are not enough local doctors. Also, she felt that medicine was a way of dedicating her time and energies for the people who needed it. To this day, through all the obstacles and hardships, she has never regretted her choice" (13). Her profession is framed as a philanthropic choice, understood through the lens of national need, echoing the government hope that women will be productive contributors to the state. Additionally, an incident at a departmental meeting neatly aligns this state-endorsed ideology with divine purpose.

During this meeting, the expatriate Dr. Jones suggests that treatment be stopped for a local child that Siti Nur is treating for Thalassemia Beta B, on the basis that if Junaidah were treated and lived to adulthood, married and had children, the abnormal genes would be passed on. Sam, who also works at the national hospital, appears taken by this argument and says to Siti Nur that "our country needs people who are physically and mentally healthy. If one disease were to spread, our community would be under threat. And think of the cost of treatment! It would destroy the economy" (16). Siti Nur is horrified by this response and retorts:

> Sam, why are you thinking about money? Is money more important that the life of a human? …How can you be willing to sacrifice a child for the sake of future generations? Think about it! Or maybe people like you really believe that this world is only for normal people." Siti Nur went on, turning to Sam, "In this life, Sam, only Allah knows the fate of His servants. Allah is the most powerful. We leave it all to Him (17).

In this speech, Siti Nur rejects the idea that national development—the "future generations"—should be achieved at any cost, which Sam argues for as a secular notion. She invokes Allah as a higher power than nation and argues that national development comes second to religious obedience. One can read this argument as a protection of every single citizen of the MIB state against the destructive impulses of the foreigner Dr. Jones and the suspect motives of the (at this point) marginalised

[1]All translations from the text are author's own.

Sam, both of whom represent the harmful "foreign elements" that MIB guards against. Additionally, Siti Nur's justification for this protection is a recourse to piety, neatly embodying the tripartite identity of Malayness, Islamic faith and a devotion to national development.

More deeply embedded in Siti Nur's statement is the national imperative which asks government scholars to use foreign-attained knowledge in service of the national values of MIB. In her argument with Sam, Siti Nur rejects the (Western) secular argument for national development through financial security, saying that this value is antithetical to MIB, which aligns nationalism with religious obedience. Thus, Siti Nur embodies the perfect result of the Bruneian scholar returned, able to use the tools and knowledge of the West for national needs, guided by national values.

A sacrificial component underlies this professional success; however, at one point, Siti Nur is compared to a candle that sacrifices itself to give light to others. To unpack this metaphor is to understand the sinister suggestion put forth by the text that the nature of Siti Nur's achievements is self-destructive. It suggests that utility is linked to value in the state and hints at utility being a finite resource. Indeed, the nature of her sacrifice is symbolised in her death. Soon after she reconciles with the now-Muslim Sam, who has taken the name Faisal, Siti Nur succumbs to terminal cancer. While on her deathbed, she works on a book called "Children and Illnesses" which is dedicated to Brunei's children. When she dies, the publication of this book is arranged by Faisal, and the proceeds donated to the national fund for orphans. Faisal also creates a charitable organisation called "Yayasan Siti Nur" (The Siti Nur Foundation) which aims to help "the less fortunate" (159) in Brunei. The nature of these legacies—to the future generation and the healing of the unfortunate—signifies that Siti Nur's very existence has been to secure the development of the country; that her very identity as a gendered citizen is to symbolically "birth" the nation. Her legacy continues on beyond her physical demise, with the state using her in death as it did in life. The problematic undertone to this is that despite her obedience, Siti Nur cannot exist as the country develops—it is built on her blood and flesh and bone. She must give up her very self if the country is to go forward. This is made clear in the final chapter—as Siti Nur dwindles to a meagre 40 kilograms, and the cancer eating away at her until she cannot move except to be carried by Faisal, Brunei takes its final strides towards independence. Siti Nur takes her final breath at the very end of the day that independence is officially declared, the 23rd of February, at midnight.

It is worth pointing out here that Malayness in the professional context is framed in *Pengabdian* as minority, as Siti Nur is one of the few Malay doctors working in the hospital, even though clearly Malays are the dominant race in Brunei. Her colleagues consist of expatriates and Chinese doctors (additionally, her patients are mostly underprivileged Malays). This certainly reflects the national anxiety about the infiltrating presence of Western elements into Brunei, as well as successful Chinese, in the social and economic context of a Brunei on the verge of independence. This racial anxiety becomes more significant in the parsing of Siti Nur's romantic relationships.

3.5 Race Relations: Marriage as Control and Conversion

Siti Nur rejects an eminently suitable Malay Muslim suitor, the police inspector Shukri, in favour of fellow doctor, the Chinese Christian/atheist Sam. Shukri's love for Siti Nur stems from a love of Brunei—he recalls with gratitude the time she made him a local fish delicacy that he loves and that he could not find in any of the Malay restaurants in England at the time. This act of kindness, and Siti Nur's "behaviour as a Malay woman, so rooted in her religious values" (81), has Shukri falling in love with her and asking her permission to court her appropriately by sending a contingent to approach her family. Siti Nur's desirability as a woman is coded in her acceptability as an emblem of Brunei and Malay-Muslimness, particularly in contrast to the hedonistic English landscape, is foregrounded.

Shukri's love for Siti Nur is very properly intertwined with an appropriate love of home and is carried out in traditionally correct and religiously sanctioned ways. Why then does Siti Nur refuse this relationship given her relative admiration for Shukri as a man and the fact that Sam is not a viable suitor at this point in time?

Sam occupies several overlapping states of marginality in the Bruneian context. He is a Chinese Christian/atheist—born a Christian, he embraces atheism during his time in England before he converts to Islam in Brunei. His family is indifferent to the notion of state loyalty—his father, Peter, is actively working towards gathering land for economic gain and considers Malays lazy and stupid. In the context of the propagation of Malay-Muslim domesticity, a union with him would clearly be undesirable and, indeed, impossible for the pious Siti Nur.

And yet she ends up choosing him. This choice can be read through the lens of national service. By marrying Sam, but only on her own terms—Sam converts to Islam and becomes disillusioned by the selfishness of the Chinese community in comparison to the feckless, lazy but community-minded Malays—Siti Nur does not simply propagate the values of MIB, she allows for a discursive space that *expands* those values as appropriative. In becoming Faisal, Sam brings the entrepreneurial, hardworking nature of the Chinese, and allows it to be governed by the Malay values of community and selflessness. The marriage between Siti Nur and Sam is not just a marriage of the ostensible best values of each ethnic community, but a ruthless purging of its perceived weakest points. This purging and marriage is symbolically performed through the event which causes Sam to sever ties with the Chinese community. Notably, this occurs after the burglary in which his father, Peter, is gravely injured and requires a blood transfusion, and when Sam reaches out to his father's Chinese friends for blood donations, he finds them unresponsive. In contrast, Siti Nur's father manages to corral friends and family into donating blood; Sam's father is literally saved by the influx of Malay blood into his veins. In fact, such is the impact of Sam's conversion and the behaviour of the Malay community after Peter's attack, that at the close of the novel, Peter and his wife also convert to Islam and respectively take the names Ismail and Aishah. Thus, Siti Nur's union with Faisal has a knock-on effect which converts opponents to the state into patriotic, obedient and pious citizens.

The truth of this union as national service through propagation can be read through their symbolic professions—Shukri, as a member of the police force, is tasked with defending the nation, whereas Sam, as a medical doctor, heals the racial and religious rifts which divide the Chinese community from the Malay one, by assimilating the former into the latter. Brunei, taking its first steps towards independence, upholds its values and invites others to recognise the superiority of those values by forsaking their previous communities.

This is symbolised in the culminating celebrations of Brunei's independence. Siti Nur is at this point too sick to attend the official celebrations. Faisal goes without her while she watches the event on television: "Faisal left dressed in black Malay garb. Oh, how handsome her husband was! How lucky she felt to be able to claim him, if only for a short time. She looked for his face on the television screen" (155). The implications of this are clear—Faisal, now converted to Islam and claimed by Malayness, is the future of Brunei.

Siti Nur's success in claiming him for Brunei is inextricably tied to the end of her usefulness. In death, she becomes a martyr to the cause and is transformed into an icon and a legacy of femininity and the Bruneian values that men will sacrifice themselves for. Symbolically, Siti Nur must die so that Faisal and Brunei can live; this suggests an unease with the power and success that she has achieved. Thus, her sacrifice is necessary as Brunei claims independence. This unease is further articulated in the fact that because of her terminal illness, Siti Nur is unable to consummate her marriage with Faisal and dies, presumably, a virgin.

It is possible to read this enforced chastity as a subversive resistance to state demands on Siti Nur's reproductive identity. Postcolonial scholars of gender and state have often drawn on Foucault's notion of "bio-power", or "the state management of the population to secure its control, welfare and productivity" (Ong 1995, 161), when discussing state welfare and policies that surround childbearing. Siti Nur's chastity and barrenness thus refuse the national injunctions to domesticity as well as state participation; this is emphasised if we read her death as a commentary on the impossibility of living up to the state ideals of female citizenship. Despite being the "ideal" female citizen, complicit in the work of the state to propagate religious and cultural values, as well as working productively for the government, Siti Nur still dies.

3.6 Conclusion

In *Pengabdian*, Norsiah has ostensibly constructed the ideal Muslim-Malay female citizen, whose every act is one which contributes towards national development. Siti Nur is professionally successful, spiritually faithful and personally sacrificial—she has no desires beyond those which will propel the nation forward. It is useful to note at this juncture that her citizenship is active and public; the domestic sphere is a space of religious and personal duty which must be shouldered, but which does not offer personal fulfilment in the way that her work and legacy do.

This construction of the public space and national contribution as being at least on par with the domestic sphere hearkens forward to the national imperative "to encourage the participation of women in national development without compromising the stability of their marriage/family life" (United Nations 2008, 10) mentioned earlier. The religious duty connoted by the preservation and nurturing of the domestic sphere is carefully given its due weight, but it is made clear that the ideal female citizen is also an active participant in affairs of the state. Moreover, the ideal female citizen also functions as a kind of moral compass for the state, calling the state to account for decisions which would compromise its own moral and religious ideologies for the sake of development.

Nevertheless, there are small fissures which suggest the problematising of this construction—Siti Nur's sacrificial death on the eve of Brunei's independence and her reproductive nullness as Faisal strides forward towards Brunei's future suggest that the text itself resists the easy analysis of Siti Nur as the ideal female citizen and indeed refuses the demands of the state on female subjectivity. The professional success, piety and domestic roles that women are expected to juggle as good, gendered citizens, the text suggests, are an impossibility at best; at worst, a thankless task. Like the candle, she is compared to Siti Nur is extinguished once her usefulness is ended.

It is apparent that the construction of the ideal female citizen is in response to national anxieties about racial tensions, imported values, and the sustaining of the patriarchal family unit. As such, the ideal female citizen needs to be a productive and expert participant in the national workforce, imbued with religious and cultural values, with a yearning for the domestic sphere. The impossibility of living up to this state mandated gendering of citizenship is alluded to through the death of Siti Nur, suggesting that this tripartite identity itself is continually unbalanced, a continuous negotiation, an impossible ideal.

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Chapter 4
The New Malay Woman: The Rise of the Modern Female Subject and Transnational Encounters in Postcolonial Malay Literature

Alicia Izharuddin

4.1 New Stirrings: Women's Short Story Writing in 1960s Malaya

Writing on the typology of female fiction characters in her essay *Jenis Perwatakan Wanita* (Types of Female Characters, 1969), the Malay novelist and poet Anis Sabirin is a rare female voice that is unreservedly critical of canonical works of modern Malay fiction by male novelists. The particular focus of her critique is the misogyny in the representation of women by male writers and their preoccupation with sexual violence and the trope of female prostitution as a shorthand for urban decay, moral decline and feminine helplessness. Implicit in her critique is the gendered problem of modernity when it falls to male hands to construct Otherness and the destruction of the female form who lacks interiority (Anis 1969). This chapter aims to be a critical rejoinder of sorts to the gendered anxiety of postcolonial modernity in modern Malay literature in the 1960s suggested in Anis Sabirin's essay to which I will revisit below. It examines the inner world of modern Malay womanhood and the transnational encounters that construct her in 1960s Malaya[1] in the short stories of Hamsiah Hamid entitled *Tandus* (Desolation, 1964) and *Timor dan Barat* (East and West, 1964). This chapter is as much about women's travel and mobility across cultural borders, both geographical and metaphorical as it is about the emergence of the new woman of Malaya. The central argument of this chapter is that the literary output in the 1960s saw the emergence of the modern new Malay woman whose rise can be attributed not only to higher education, but also to the

[1]Malaya is known today as Peninsular or West Malaysia. On 16 September 1963, Malaya joined with Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak to form Malaysia. On 9 August 1965, Singapore left Malaysia and became an independent nation.

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perks of urban life, transnationality and changing social attitudes. Although the transnational mobility described in Hamsiah Hamid's short stories suggests liberation from the gendered rhetoric of the nation, the new woman as the bearer of national culture is still structured within the constraints of a racialised, gendered and sexualised hierarchy. Central to the representation of the new Malay woman discussed in this chapter is the modernist sensibility that constructs a woman's interiority or *kejiwaan*. The emergence of a woman's *kejiwaan* in Malay fiction of the 1960s signals a departure from the domestically constrained female characters of the preceding generation of women writers. Through the deployment of a more strident narrative voice, the *kejiwaan* of the new woman offers readers a critique of the patriarchal underbelly of modernity and its attempts to undermine women's participation in the public sphere and their contributions to a fledgling nation.

Hamsiah Hamid is not as well-known as her contemporaries, which include Salmi Manja, Rayuan Sukma, Wan Cik Abdullah and Khalidah Adibah Amin. Also writing under the name of Hamsiah binti Abdul Hamid, she was born in Tambun, Perak, on 1 September 1938. She finished schooling in Malay vernacular and English schools, and left for the Kirkby Malayan Teaching College in Liverpool, England, in 1957 to be trained as a teacher, graduating with a teaching diploma in 1961. After gaining experience as a school teacher in an English-medium school, Hamsiah became a research assistant at *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* (the Institute of Language and Literature or DBP) in Kuala Lumpur in 1963. Having started composing short stories and essays while she was at Kirkby in 1959, her works have, since the 1960s, been sporadically published. She edited a collection of translated short stories, *Stories from Australia* (1974), and wrote on classical Malay literature (*Hikayat Panji Semarang*, or The Tale of Prince Semarang, 2004). As a writer who became active in the early years of post-independence, Hamsiah belongs to the generation of female writers who benefited from postcolonial policies and the attendant increase of opportunities for women in Malaya. Her short stories establish a woman's perspective on the nuances of independence and the intimacy of postcolonial tensions against the backdrop of a new modernity and cosmopolitan Malaya. Her short stories stand out because of their striking representations of middle-class life in post-independence Malaya by a female writer, offering an uncommon insight into the transnational experiences of Malayans in the 1960s. They portray cultural connections and clashes between the Occidental binary oppositions of "East" and "West" from the gendered, racialised and classed perspective of a Malayan observer. These texts are set against Anis Sabirin's feminist criticism of gender and sexuality in Malay society and literary output in her collection of essays, *Peranan Wanita Baru* (The Role of the New Woman, 1969), and the exuberantly modern voice of Salmi Manja in her debut novel, *Hari Mana Bulan Mana* (Which Day Which Month, 1960). Published at the beginning and end of the 1960s, respectively, *Hari Mana Bulan Mana* and *Peranan Wanita Baru* demonstrate a significant confidence in the self-representation of female writers and their concerns about women's status and rights in Malaya. Both these texts are read intertextually and serve as the socio-literary background contemporaneous to the short stories discussed in this chapter.

Malay fiction came into being in the 1920s through the efforts of Malay-educated teachers and journalists who contributed to the growth of Malay language newspapers and magazines (Ungku Maimunah 1986). The first ever short story in Malay, *Kecelakaan Pemalas* (The Evils of Sloth) by Nur Ibrahim was published on 4 February 1920 in a magazine for teachers, *Pengasoh* (Educator). Short stories by Malay women writers first emerged in 1934 with the publication of *Kesedihan Perkahwinan Paksa* (Grief of a Forced Marriage) by Hafsah and *Waktu Isyak Menangkap Pencuri* (At Night to Catch a Thief) by Siti Nurmah in *Pengasoh*. The first novel by a woman, *Cinta Budiman* (Sensible Love) by Rafiah Yusof was published in 1941. The delayed arrival of Malay women's fiction has been explained by Ungku Maimunah (1986, 156) as the consequence of the belated access to education for women and girls during the post-war years and in post-independence Malaya, as well as the initial lack of institutional support to nurture and promote women writers who were hindered by domestic responsibilities and the restrictive social attitudes of Malay-Muslim society (Campbell 2004). In Malaya between the 1940s and 1950s, most women's writings were published in two monthly magazines, *Hiboran* (Entertainment, 1946–1958) and *Mutiara* (Pearl, 1946–1962). Both magazines were founded and edited by the political activist and novelist Harun Aminurrashid who was known as a keen supporter of women's writings (Rosnah 2003). Under his direction, *Hiboran* printed an edition in 1949 that exclusively featured female writers. But despite the significant rise in women writers in the early 1960s, male writers continued to dominate the literary arena. Of the seventy novelists who produced 210 novels between the years 1960 and 1970, only six were women (Ungku Maimunah 1994). The rise in female novelists in the 1960s can be attributed to increased literacy rates, the growth of public libraries and the institutional push for literature, seen then as a tool for the development of national identity. Founded in 1956, the National Institute of Language and Literature sponsored novel-writing competitions in 1958, 1962 and 1967 and awarded female authors such as Adibah Amin with a handsome advance (Dewan Sastera, 1979).

The short stories discussed in this chapter were published in the first anthology of Malay women's short stories called *Wanita* (Woman, 1964) edited by Asmah Haji Omar. In her introduction, Asmah describes this collection as an exercise in elevating the literary appreciation and consciousness of a newly formed society. She states further that the author of the short story may be situated in society, but that the author cannot replicate "society" in its entirety in her work. The author's *naluri keakuan* (individualistic impulses) constructs the world they observe in their literary projections, making the world a subjective and experiential creation (Asmah 1964, 3). She notes that short stories have a unique advantage over novels and essays for the Malay reader. The brevity and experiential quality of the short story allows the reader to appreciate the aesthetic and affective exploration of a subject matter and the authorial voice. These qualities mirror a modernist disposition of psychological interiority and its projection through the feminine subject. As Katz (2000) comments, the feminine subject is central to modernism because of her contradictory nature at the cusp of social change: she represents hermetic inwardness yet instability. Her instability is an ambivalent reaction to the modern woman's

transition from the domestic private sphere to the public sphere as consumer, activist and worker (Katz 2000, 6).

Tensions between self and the foreign Other cultivated through transnational connections at an early phase of Malaya's political independence made for a significantly relevant thematic fodder during a period when Malay literature was redefined as a national project (Hooker 2000; Rosnah 2003; Campbell 2004). Critics have argued for (Hooker 2000) and against (Sweeney 1989) the usefulness of Malay literature in depicting a realistic portrait of Malay political and social life, suggesting the perception of the transparent character of Malay literature as a mirror, distorted or otherwise. The purpose of this chapter builds upon these two approaches by proposing a new way of critically reading modern Malay literature through a particular kind of female character who explores both her interior and exterior worlds. It offers an explication of the postcolonial modern experience through the eyes of female citizens of a new nation. What remains striking in the texts examined here is the minimal religious influence that runs parallel to the construction and expectations of a new Malay woman. Indeed, while the construction of the new Malay woman rests on a certain moral safeguarding through her maintenance of modesty and propriety with the opposite sex, Islam is marginalised in the new woman's life world. The period of Islamisation in Malaysia would arrive later in the 1980s and 1990s and strongly influence the thematic preoccupations and narrative style of Malay fiction writing by women in the 2000s (Norhayati 2015).

The next section is a discussion of the emergence of the modern female subject in modern Malay fiction produced in the 1960s, focusing on the meaningfulness of the term modernity for the "new woman" in postcolonial Malaya. It focuses on the portrayal of the new woman by women writers of the period and argues it is a critique of Western modernity. This is then followed by an analysis of *Tandus* and *Timor dan Barat* to foreground a discussion on the construction of the new woman through her romantic interiority and transnational encounters.

4.2 The Rise of the Modern Female Subject in Modern Malay Literature in the 1960s

Extant literature in both Malay and English makes it clear that there appears to be a divide between male and female fiction writers in their depiction of women. Under the penmanship of Malay male writers, female characters are depicted as the playthings and subordinates of men. Women writers of modern Malay fiction writing, on the other hand, were confined to the vague notion of "women's issues" or issues pertaining to domestic life, wifely fidelity and the dire repercussions of marital failure for women (Ungku Maimunah 1986, 161). For Rosnah (2003), there was a gradual shift in the focus of women's novels between the 1930s and the 1970s, from the instrumental importance of education for women, to the life

experiences and the *kejiwaan* of women. This is a rather extensive span of time that elides the many transformative historical moments for women, such as women's participation in nationalist struggle, the rise in women's employment, and the increased recognition of women's contributions in the public sphere. In her rather reductive assessment of the portrayal of women by Malay fiction writers, Ungku Maimunah (1994) states that female characters can be neatly divided into "positive" and "negative" representations. While the "positive" or "negative" portrayals of women are not explicitly defined, one is led to assume that they comprise of binary oppositions of faithful and self-abnegating women on one hand and openly sexual and morally ambiguous women in the context of a modernising new nation on the other. Sequestered within the "positive" and "negative", I would argue, are elements of the modern female subject: independent, highly-educated, urban and urbane, modern, aspirational, outspoken and worldly. The new woman in modern Malay literature is not passive and docile as the archetypal tragic woman in fiction by female novelists in the 1940s and 1950s (Rosnah 2003). She has experienced Western culture and lifestyles directly or remotely and is confident about the moral compatibility of Western and indigenous values. The modern female subject appropriates the possibilities of modernity for her own ends in a world that is shrinking and increasingly interconnected. Innovative narrative techniques found in the fiction of Malay women writers of the period, such as the literary autobiography and stream of consciousness foreground the female voice onto the page and into the public sphere.

While prominent, mainly male, writers were producing didactic fiction in the service of national development and elevating the status of the Malay language in the 1960s, female writers seized the new opportunities opened up to them to explore the limits of femininity and complex psychological and social narratives. But it is misguided to suggest that the narrative direction taken by women writers of the period qua women was an inward and exclusively domestic one in contrast to the outward projection of narratives concerning the nation by male writers. The 1960 novel *Hari Mana Bulan Mana* is a ground-breaking example of the expansion of a woman's personal world and its relationship with other women in the public sphere. Sal, the lead character of *Hari Mana Bulan Mana*, is a newspaper reporter in Singapore prior to its separation from Malaya and epitomises the new woman (Campbell 2004) who uses her role as a working woman in journalism to bring public attention the plight of female victims of abuse and their abject poverty. She mirrors the new woman in Anis Sabirin's essay; Sal is the sole woman in the newspaper corporation where she works and rises above the sexism of her male colleagues to be a colleague and worker of equal worth. Although not explicitly feminist, Sal's consciousness about the status of women in modern Malaya also opens her eyes to the oppression suffered by her feminist activist friend, Zamilah.

The texts discussed in this chapter are a reflection of a rapidly changing society. Processes of modernisation were underway with the introduction of the First Malayan Economic Plan (1956–1960) and Second Malayan Economic Plan (1961–1965). However, class-based and communal conflict in 1964 and 1969 indicates the

cracks in a new nation. Despair and dissatisfaction arising from the yawning economic gap between the majority of poor Malays in the village and the minority of wealthier Malays in the urban centres are visible in modern Malay fiction of the period. Moral distinctions were also made between the westernised Malay and the hapless rural Malay. Affluent, westernised Malays are portrayed as out of touch with the vast majority of the nation's people (*rakyat*). Remote from modernity, rural Malays who worked the land suffered from community conflict and the cruel hand of nature's onslaughts (Hooker 2000). Such scenes were captured in the heady days of postcolonial Malay literature which were buoyed by a nationalist fervour to restore the prestige of the Malay language and social realist aspirations to raise Malay consciousness through the medium of modern literature. Although women novelists and short story writers of the period have been unfairly stereotyped as chroniclers of romance, marriage and domestic life, their literary output turned to the challenges of modernity such as career ambitions and women's participation in formal politics. Malay women writers of the 1960s were writing about modern aspirations of the new nation on their own terms. Such aspirations reflected the rise of women workers and their migration into cities. The participation of women in the labour force increased from 31% in 1957 to 37% in 1970, with majority of the working women between their early 20s and early 30s and a substantial rise of Malay women workers in particular (Hirschman and Aghajanian 1980).

The meaning of the "modern" woman is problematised here to highlight the Eurocentric baggage of the word "modernity". Modernity has been associated with the linear narrative of progress that mirrors the development of ideas and industrialisation in Western Europe. It follows a culturally specific historical and intellectual trajectory with origins in the Enlightenment. At the same time, modernity is embodied (Appadurai 1996) and a sensorial experience (Berman 1983), albeit a socially uneven one. In studies on British and American culture between 1890s and 1910s, the "new woman" demonstrates a number of similarities with the new woman identified in modern Malay fiction of the 1960s.

> Defined by her commitment to various types of independence, the stereotypical American New Woman was college educated and believed in women's right to work in professions traditionally reserved for men; she often sought a public role in occupations that would putatively improve society (Rich 2009, 1).

That the new woman only emerged in Malaya in the 1960s is not an indication of a delayed modernity in which the Eurocentric historicism of "first in the West, and then elsewhere" is reproduced (Chakrabarty 2009, 6). Instead, the new woman of Malaya is a social phenomenon and literary construct of non-Western modernities. The notion of "multiple modernities" is adopted here to examine the ways in which modernising societies undergo "structural differentiation" in which arenas such as family life, modern education and mass communication, for example, are defined and organised differently (Eisenstadt 2000). The new Malay woman's embodiment of modernity is a critique of Eurocentric historicism which constructs passive ex-colonial subjects whose modernity is a pale fabrication of the West.

In the fiction by Malay women writers, there is an embrace of certain institutions of modernity—mass education, urbanisation and female participation in the public sphere for instance. However, there is also a moral suspicion about the dangers of "westernisation" that underpin many aspects of modernity. The revival of Malay nationalism in the 1960s found expression in the literary arena, primarily through institutional efforts to elevate the status of the Malay language and culture. Several novels of this period would become the "canon" of modern Malay literature and develop a discursive space for the reflection of the meaning of progress for a new nation. However, women writers were excluded, formally and otherwise, from the canon by their male peers, literary scholars and historians despite their significant contributions. Women members of *Angkatan Sasterawan* or ASAS 50 (Generation of Writers, a national association for Malayan writers), Kamariah Saadon and Jahlelawati, have been forgotten by scholars of modern Malay literature. The contributions of another group, *Angkatan Sastrawanis* (League of Women Writers), have also been buried as a footnote in the history of Malay literature (Campbell 2004). Thus, to argue that women in Malaya were de facto emancipated during this period would be an overstatement.

Tensions that oscillated between postcolonial optimism and anxiety vis-à-vis modernity were deeply felt in the booming literary scene in 1960s Malaya. Having gained political independence in 1957, Malaya entered a rich cultural decade of the 1960s defined by the consumption of Western popular culture and the adoption of Western aesthetics in local literature, film-making, popular music and fashion. However, the moral landscape of postcolonial cosmopolitanism is typically refracted through a sexualised representation of women's bodies in modern Malay literature during this period. Anis Sabirin's critique of modern Malay novels by male writers in *Jenis Perwatakan Wanita* (1969) links the anxiety of Western-style individualism and materialism with the degradation of women. The scene for sexualised modernity is set in *Jenis Perwatakan Wanita* in the night clubs, massage parlours and BB Park, a shopping arcade in Kuala Lumpur. Anis Sabirin comments on the rise of the erotic novel in the Malay fiction scene, comprising of both high and lowbrow books by male novelists such as Shahnon Ahmad, A. Samad Said, Alias Ali and Malungun. Women in the writings of these men, Anis (1969) argues, both destroy and are destructive to themselves and others. Her focus on these "destructive" women falls witheringly on the popular character of the urban prostitute found in high and lowbrow literature. Anis is just as critical of the "good" village girl idealised in modern Malay literature. For Anis, the symbolic innocence of the village girl belies an ignorance "untested" by experience and worldliness (1969, 133–134). In her essay *Peranan Wanita Baru*, Anis argues that women are caught in contradictory roles in modern society. While they are no longer expected to be stay-at-home wives and mothers, they are expected to be just as educated and career-oriented as men (1969, 7–8). The new woman, however, embraces the dilemmas of modern life. Intelligent and employable in male-dominated professions, she is also desirable on her own terms and has sexual agency. She does not tolerate being treated as a second-class citizen and demands to be given the same opportunities as men.

The following sections seek to unpack the gendered modernity of the new Malay woman through the semi-autobiographical writing of the romantic self and her construction through transnational and Occidental encounters. Here, semi-autobiographical writing, author and protagonists are yoked together under the construction of the new woman. In *Tandus*, the protagonist is the fictionalised stand-in of the author, while in *Timor dan Barat*, the author as new woman is undermined by the rhetoric of the nation and hierarchies of domination. A number of questions are raised, such as, how did the new woman see the world beyond her shores? How did the new woman compare herself to the Western woman whose emancipated ways she is thought to emulate? In what ways does the representation of the new Malay woman offer readers a glimpse into the modern self which was created through growing female emancipation in the early postcolonial years?

4.3 Longing and Transnational Encounters in *Tandus*

Tandus was first published in the news magazine *Berita Minggu* (Weekly News) on 14 April 1963 and is told from the narrator's perspective, Hashimah, on her return as a student from Kirkby Teaching College in North Yorkshire, England, in the early 1960s. Like many returning young Malayan students of Kirkby, she is a product of an imperial cross-cultural exchange aimed at developing and guiding younger Malayans into modernity. An important Malayan outpost, the Kirkby Teaching College was established north-east of Liverpool in 1951 to address the declining number of teachers during the post-war and early years of the Malayan Emergency from 1948 to early 1950s (Milner 1952) and to train Malayans who would, in turn, educate the first generation of independent citizens. Tunku Abdul Rahman (who became the first Prime Minister of Malaya/Malaysia in 1957) visited the college in 1956 to announce the date of independence (Bunnell 2007, 1). By the time the college closed in 1962, 2000 Malayan teachers and teacher trainers had passed through Kirkby.

The narrative is told in the present tense, but Hashimah's past in England and present in Malaya often overlap, forming a palimpsest of the self. Her story begins in the air, on an airplane flying towards Kuala Lumpur. High above the clouds, she identifies with excitement the geographical landmarks of her home country—Penang, Muda River and the Straits of Malacca—as the airplane flies southbound across the peninsular. Her perspective is akin to a map-reader whose privileged vantage point had hitherto belonged to the elite and colonial class. Upon arrival, Hashimah is greeted by her parents and when asked about her life in England she recounts it to be idyllic and exotic. In her memories, England is a faraway land of generosity, hospitality, and full of romantic promise, for here is where she meets Mardan, her lover and fellow Kirkby alumnus. She, however, refrains from mentioning Mardan to her family, indicating a fear of parental disapproval and salacious rumours that can damage her moral reputation. She despairs that she will not see Mardan again even though she implores him to write to her when they part in the

airport upon their return to Malaya together. As a returnee from England, Hashimah is privy to the cultural and behavioural differences between the White English communities in their native soil and those in the Malayan colony: the English people she meets in Liverpool are "unkempt" (*selekeh*)[2] but generous and warm, in stark contrast to the English in Malaya who are mainly well dressed but "arrogant" (*sombong*) (Hamsiah 1964a).

Despite their ethnic differences and cultural remoteness, Hashimah and her family are portrayed as similar to her adopted English families in their generosity and comportment in spite of their modest background. Life abroad as an imperial subject is portrayed as comfortable and engaged, if facilitated by imperial institutions. During her education in England, Christmas parties organised by the British Council bring Malayan teachers in training and local families together for the purpose of social interaction and integration. Time goes by and she begins teaching in her own hometown. A much anticipated letter from Mardan arrives bearing the devastating message that he is leaving her, causing her much heartbreak and she resolves to swear off romantic relations with men. The final section of the story shows Hashimah in a local university retelling her tale to a male friend, Azman, who has thinly veiled feelings for her. She goes as far as to say that she now hates men, much to Azman's disappointment. Hashimah's decision to remain single runs contrary to the typical resolution of a woman's narrative arc through marriage (Rosnah 2003). In fact, ambivalence about marriage is a recurring theme in the literary output of Malay women writers during the period. Hashimah's reluctance to marry chimes with the rejection of inequality in marriage experienced by Malay-Muslim women in Salmi Manja's *Hari Mana Bulan Mana* who have no recourse to justice when their marriage is suspended by husbands and when they become victims of domestic violence. Hashimah's resolute refusal to be dependent on men resonates with Anis Sabirin's trenchant message about women's worth, "Can a person with self-worth allow themselves to be the playthings of men?" (1969). However, Anis Sabirin nonetheless welcomes the institution of marriage on the condition that men and women are equal partners, while women can be wage earners like their husbands.

The transnational in *Tandus* can be regarded as an implicit critique of Malay women's subordination within the rhetoric of the nation. Women have played a marginal role in "official" Malaysian history, as auxiliaries to men's dominance in postcolonial politics and nation-building. Their marginality has been attributed throughout the postcolonial world to the gendered construction of the nation as feminine and the circumscription of women's citizenship to the domestic sphere as wives and mothers. However, the image of the new woman defies the nationalist rhetoric of femininity via the socially and geographically mobile Malay woman. In other words, transnationalism offers a personally meaningful and enriching liberation for the Malay woman. Hamsiah's narration invites us as a witness to the feelings of the narrator's longing for her male lover, juxtaposed with the narrator's

[2]All translations from *Tandus* and *Timor dan Barat* are the author's own.

nostalgic yearnings for England, its culinary culture, and its climate of social independence. In England, there are romantic possibilities, unlike in her homeland, where social and familial pressure for a suitable marital partner runs high. *Tandus* shows the easy convergence between middle-class Malay life and westernised influences. The dialogue is peppered with English words for pronouns and culturally distinct terms ["*Jangan lupakan I, ya? Tulis-lah surat bila you ada masa*[3]"], reflective of the urban Malayan middle-class vernacular prevalent to this day and the "uneasy transition between colonial and indigenous worlds" (Hooker 2000, 264). However, *Tandus* is also a critique of unbridled emotions brought about by unrequited love that can sabotage women's personal lives and careers.

The reader is introduced to the main protagonist as she re-enters her society after spending time in a foreign country and is meant to identify with her anxieties, revelations, despair and personal transformation. This process is conveyed through a semi-autobiographical technique, similar to a number of short stories and novels written by Malay women in the post-independence period. Through semi-autobiography, the narrative weaves between constructed reality (fiction) and what appears as narrated reality (autobiographical elements). Hooker (2000) proposes that autobiographical elements serve as "tags" of realism, but I would suggest further that such a narrative device also has modernist elements of escapism and interiority of the romantic self. Hamsiah Hamid's fictional double, Hashimah, is similar to the fictional double of Salmi Manja's protagonist, Sal, in her 1960 debut novel *Hari Mana Bulan Mana*. Like Hashimah, Sal is a young and independent-minded Malay woman who faces the challenges of life in a new modernity. As a semi-autobiographical novel featuring characters that closely mirror the author and her then-fiancé, the novelist A. Samad Said, *Hari Mana Bulan Mana* reveals a glimpse into the author's social world, particularly of her urban female friends and their engagement with women's rights in a seemingly more egalitarian modern society. But as Sal discovers, the rhetoric of women's rights expounded in lectures and forums do not translate into women's lived experiences. Christine Campbell posits that Sal in *Hari Mana Bulan Mana* is an innovative literary construction of a heroine with "far greater psychological depth than was customary in earlier novels" (2004, 114).

The first-person narrator and self in *Tandus* and *Hari Mana Bulan Mana* represent the arrival of the modern female subject in post-independence Malay literature. In *Tandus*, however, the semi-autobiographical new woman is constructed through the theme of romance: both the new woman's embrace and rejection of it. Through the writing of the romantic self, Hamsiah interrogates what makes a new woman modern. There is perhaps an anxiety that independence and emancipation may make a woman unwomanly, as argued by Rich (2009) in her study of the pervasive formula of romance in the depiction of the new woman in British and American fiction. Romance in *Tandus* is facilitated by Hashimah's overseas voyage, after which her subjectivity as a new woman is formed. The female traveller in

[3]"Don't forget me, okay? Write to me when you have the time" (Hamsiah 1964a, 89).

Tandus rewrites the traditional cultural script of *merantau* or travel, an activity closely associated with young Malay men who leave their village for the city for economic opportunities before starting a family (Wang 1985). But her voyage is a tale of a transnational encounter through imperialism and that the new Malay woman's encounter with modernity is sutured with the afterglow of colonialism. As an unmarried woman, Hashimah leaves the domestic realm of her family for a journey halfway across the world for the purpose of education and social mobility. In the process, the horizons of her inner world expand through her contemplation on the local mores of her former colonial masters and her decision to remain a single woman after a painful heartbreak. Thwarted romance notwithstanding, Hashimah's adventure becomes a counter-narrative to traditional male and female roles in Malay society, signalling an early turning point for Malayan women's growing independence from the family, men and national roots.

4.4 Interracial Romance and Occidentalism in *Timor dan Barat*

In *Timor dan Barat*, the figure of the ideal Malay woman is constructed at the nexus of ethnic, religious and national differences. The contradictory position of the Malay woman in modernity is brought into sharp relief within the postcolonial hierarchy of race, gender and sexuality. More pertinently, when shot through a cultural lens, the Malay woman as imagined through the eyes and mind of the Malay man and white European woman undermines the construction and emancipatory potential of the new woman as author. In the short story, Zulkifli and Lim, two young men in England, are planning their shoestring pan-European holiday to discover and learn about the diversity of cultures and peoples of the European continent. However, Zulkifli, who is a Muslim Malay, already has some knowledge and prejudices about British culture as he recalls his visits to dance halls with bewilderment and nausea. Rather than dancing with the local women, he prefers to stare into his glass of beer despite the moral irony that alcohol is prohibited in Islam. The ostensibly loose moral disposition of women who display their bodies as they dance in public spaces disgusts him. But a chance meeting with one European woman eliminates his moral prejudices. On the day of his departure to Italy, Zulkifli meets Marie Schubert, a young German woman who is hitchhiking with his group of backpackers. Marie is the picture of style in her long tight trousers and oversized woollen jumper. Her hair is cut short with a "quail's tail" (100). Upon introduction, Marie scrutinises Zulkifli's body in a long downward glance and he reciprocates her gaze. He contrasts Marie's ethnicity and willingness to join a mixed-gender backpacking group with an imaginary Malay woman, whom he believes would not have the privilege to go on such an adventure; in his mind, a Malay parent would be outraged by the idea of a young Malay woman hitchhiking across Europe.

Zulkifli and Marie's friendship rapidly develops during their journey to Florence, Italy. When they arrive in Florence, the narrative focuses on their budding romance although Marie is hesitant about pursuing a relationship with Zulkifli for

reasons she will reveal in the story's denouement. Both are drawn to each other despite Marie's ambivalence. During a moment of intimacy, Zulkifli becomes distracted by the mental image of a young Malay woman, effectively replacing Marie, an object of potential desire, with the object of moral propriety.[4] Marie then expects a kiss and an embrace from him, at which point Zulkifli bolts off in embarrassment. Dejected, she packs and leaves a goodbye note to Zulkifli: "Goodbye Zul! I am leaving for Venice!" (104). In the nick of time, he realises her absence and runs after her, demanding an explanation for her sudden flight. Having failed to identify shared similarities, Marie reveals that their national, religious and ethnic differences form an irreconcilable barrier to forming a romantic relationship.[5] Their cultural and religious subjectivities are constructed as polar opposites, unable to cross-colonial taboos.

As per the title, *Timor dan Barat* plays with the theme of binary oppositions to critique the moral laxity of Western femininity. The story up-ends Orientalist notions of civility; it is the "West", personified by Marie, which represents decadence and excess in contrast to the reserved civility of the "East". She is disappointed in Zulkifli when he refuses to pursue her and express his interest in a romantic, let alone sexual, relationship. She reflects admiringly on Zulkifli's handsomeness and vigour, but regards his lack of courage to articulate his masculine heterosexuality in more direct terms as a deficiency. Nonetheless, his Otherness and mystique compel her to search for the "truth" of his difference which leads to a discovery of a moral superiority in his person. The absent Malay woman who reoccurs in Zulkifli's thoughts (fantasy?) is a mirage, serving as a foil for the more progressive qualities of womanhood. Both the bodies of Marie and the imaginary Malay woman are inscribed with the anxieties of Malay men concerning morality, modernity and desire. It is interesting, however, that the imaginary Malay woman is conjured both in Zulkifli's and Marie's minds as she reveals an ambiguity at the heart of the narrative. In this story, the Malay woman is a ghost, a mystery and fantasy only because she comes to life via the patriarchal and Orientalist assumptions of Malay femininity. A patriarchal and Orientalist construction of Malay femininity notwithstanding, the imaginary Malay woman becomes both reminder and phantasm, for Zul and Marie, respectively, of Malay culture and a nation faraway. As she obsessively compares his cultural Otherness to German culture, Marie also considers the Otherness of the Malay woman: Why aren't German men like Zul? But that question is abandoned when she asks herself, what about Malay women?.

Marie's encounter with Zulkifli causes her to deeply introspect her identity and its relation to her racial Other for the first time. For much of the short story, Zulkifli is portrayed with more flattering qualities than either Marie or the imaginary Malay

[4]"A polite young Malay woman. Not like the woman next to him" (Hamsiah 1964b, 105).

[5]"Aku malu-lah Zul – malu kapada-mu.Aku ingat bangsa-mu sa-rupa dengan bangsa-ku.Apa yang aku biasa harap^{2}kan dari kawan^{2} sa-bangsa dengan-ku, aku ingat boleh ku-peroleh dari-mu. Sekarang aku faham. Kita berlainan bangsa.Sunggoh berbedza kebudayaan kita" (I'm shy Zul – shy of you. I didn't realise how different we are. What I expect from friends in my culture, I thought I could expect of you. But now I understand how different we are.) (Hamsiah 1964b, 105).

woman. Through her eyes and because of her limited knowledge about him, Zulkifli's polite mannerisms strike Marie as peculiar and intriguing. But as she reflects further on one sleepless night, she begins to appreciate his moral superiority. She remembers that as a Muslim he does not consume pork and his strict religious observance inspires in her the moral self-reflection that is lacking in her society. Although their romance is not meant to be, Marie is grateful to have met Zulkifli or at least someone who hails from his part of the world. His origins are remote and exotic to her but he has left a powerful impression on her heart. The story ends with Marie's tears of moral self-consciousness (*insaf*) and despair that racial supremacy and imperialism would conspire to separate two young people who might otherwise fall in love.[6]

For all the trailblazing adventures of the semi-autobiographical writer in *Tandus*, the figure of the imaginary Malay woman in the minds of Zul and Marie, however, compels a counter-intuitive reverting of the author as new woman back to the nation and culture. Zul's rejection of Marie is attributed to the psychic haunting of the imaginary Malay woman who represents a return to native customs and soil. Within the rhetoric of the nation, "[w]omen are often required to carry the 'burden of representation', as they are constructed as the symbolic bearers of the collectivity's identity and honour, both personally and collectively" (Yuval-Davis 1998, 29). But more than just simply perpetuating the one-dimensional Malay woman as nation and bearer of culture, the author is in fact explicating the contradictory gendered ideology of the nation. As Elleke Boehmer argues, "progressive, self-assertive women appear caught in a dilemma, in that the ideology that promises self-expression, liberation and transformation… is characterised by their simultaneous marginalisation" (2009, 6). Thus, Hamsiah writes with an Occidentalist perspective of the world that suggests the superiority of Malay culture while embracing the possibility of transnational intimacy if not for the irreconcilable cultural and religious differences that separate Zulkifli and Marie. Occidentalism is derived from, and a dialectic inflection of, Orientalism whereby the "West" is the essentialised Other to the "East". While Orientalists "promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them")" (Said 1978, 43), the Occidentalist reproduced the undifferentiated individuality and rationality of the West (Carrier 1995, 5). By creating an Occidentalist construction of the European woman in Marie, Hamsiah her sense of self and her Malay ethnicity by "dramatizing the difference between what is closer [her] and what is far away" (Said 1978, 55). The irreconcilable cultural differences between the Malay and Western woman are similarly established in *Peranan Wanita Baru*. White Western sex symbols such as Brigitte Bardot, Christine Keeler and Ursula Andress are namechecked by Anis as women who are desired by Malay men but represent unrealistic standards of beauty and sexuality for Malay women. Rather than dismissing female sexuality, she argues

[6]"Suasana yang sunyi sepi itu hanya di-pechahi oleh sedu sedan Marie. Menangis dia kerana insaf. Dia orang Barat, dan Zul orang Timor" (The quiet was broken only by Marie's sobs of repentance. She was from the West, and Zul the East.) (Hamsiah 1964b, 106).

that sexual agency on par with that of a liberated Western woman is one of the many facets of the new Malay woman, along with that of being a successful worker, mother and wife (1969). Although absent in *Timor dan Barat*, the new woman lurks within the Occidentalist framing of the European woman and the imaginings of the affluent, cosmopolitan Malay man. The new woman is thus a creation of "alterity", a counter-discourse of Occidentalism. However, as Partha Chatterjee remarks on nationalist Occidentalism, a new patriarchy is created in the image of the elite indigenous male self and "false essentialisms" are formed through the spiritual-material, male–female dichotomies of the subaltern elite (1989, 631). Notwithstanding the trap of false essentialisms, indigenous frameworks of the new postcolonial self have nonetheless used these strategies that "transcended mere binarism and had emancipatory potentials" (Findley 1998, 18).

4.5 Conclusion

The limitations of national belonging placed on women require us to think about the emancipatory possibilities that may be found in transnational identities. As Virginia Woolf famously stated: "… as a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world" (2001, 206–207). Regardless of their provenance, women's experiences of transnationalism and mobility across borders are shaped by their classed and racialised subjectivity. Travel literature by unescorted women during the imperial era has consistently placed emphasis on the cross-cultural encounter between the traveller and the people she meets on her travels (Faridah 2014). Upper middle-class white women explorers travelling between the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century consciously asserted their essential difference from the non-white women they had met (Blanton 2002; Lewis 2004). Non-white women who travelled during the period before the age of mass tourism and democratisation of women and colonial subjects, foregrounded the novel combination of race and privilege in unfamiliar geographies (Mason 1990; Gunning 2001). Both types of women travellers, however, negotiate precarious constructions of identity particular to their cultural and ethnic origins.

This chapter concerns the literary accounts of a woman's consciousness at the dawn of postcolonial modernity. It makes an attempt to remap the discourse on modern Malay fiction by women and criticism via an intertextual analysis of the emergence of the "new Malay woman" in 1960s Malaya. The short stories by Hamsiah Abdul Hamid serve as a vantage point for examining the inner voice of the new Malay woman as she feels and reflects on love and foreign cultures. They are read intertextually with Anis Sabirin's essays in *Peranan Wanita Baru* and Salmi Manja's *Hari Mana Bulan Mana* to further tease out the construction of the new woman in modern Malay literature. This figure is different from her literary predecessors and that of the Western new woman of the early twentieth century. She has a tertiary education and career that give her the license to enter the public sphere with confidence alongside men. Unlike women in Malay novels before the 1960s,

the new woman is free to choose her romantic partner and equally free to remain single if she so pleases. She is comfortable with westernised lifestyle and culture, communicates in English but appreciates her cultural heritage and is inextricably bound to "tradition" (Anis 1969, 9). However, even in the age of "emancipation" of the 1960s, women were not only subordinate to men but must endure sexual double standards in both the private and public sphere (Hooker 2000). Although Hamsiah makes a mutually exclusive distinction between the "East" and "West" in her short stories, the purpose of this chapter is to peer beyond the binary and identify the overlapping traces of Malay and "Western" culture that make the construction of the new Malay woman possible in the first place.

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Chapter 5
Women and the Authoritarian State: The Southeast Asian Experience

Lily Rose Tope

5.1 Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia

Post-independence life in most Southeast Asian countries was a time of frenetic nation-building. Reeling from long years of colonial subjugation and a devastating world war, these nations began to work at a sustainable and stable nationhood. But the young states were challenged by age-old problems of poverty and social iniquity as well as the effects of colonial manipulation of social structures such as race, class and religion.

Conflicts were not advantageous to nation-building. In the last half of the twentieth century, Southeast Asia experienced a seemingly common rise of strong men who eventually controlled national interest. Authoritarian rule became the means to foster national development, a political phenomenon that bound Southeast Asian nations in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Authoritarian rule could be oppressive. The state could exercise its power to halt unrest. But it could also be regarded as benign. Modern democracies with a parliament or a congress would debate the adjective "authoritarian." However benign or extreme the rule, the flow of power is clear. Consequently, nationalism often took an anti-state stance in the quest for genuine nationhood.

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Authoritarianism is a system of government where individual rights are subordinated to the desires of the state. It bases its legitimacy on a figure of authority. But it is not the same as totalitarianism. The latter suggests complete control and the absence of civil rights; the former suggests regimentation but allows a modicum of freedom as long as it does not interfere with the political processes and preferences. Nonetheless, the citizens must obey the state, even if they are unwilling, for the state has means such as propaganda and the police to subdue the citizens (Neher and Marlay 1995).

In Southeast Asia, authoritarianism seems to be culturally understood and sometimes even accepted. There is a perception that in some instances, authoritarianism has been helpful in providing social and political order that promoted civility. I use the term "benign" to describe this kind of authoritarianism because the degree and frequency of state coercion are low. A good example here is Singapore. Relatively speaking, the Singapore state under the ruling party of the PAP (People's Action Party) has not experienced overt resistance from the citizens, whose rice bowls are full. Under Lee Kuan Yew's leadership as Prime Minister (1965–1990), the government provided social and educational opportunities and the country's economy has also surged in the past few decades. Currently, Singapore is the richest country in Southeast Asia. Although the state has the Internal Security Act which allows the arrest of anyone considered a threat to national security, the use of this act since independence has not been extreme. However, Lee's repressive administration has created a culture of fear in which self-censorship has become common. Using the discourse of state security as the citizens' security, the Singapore state would remind the citizens not to endanger hard-earned national gain.

In contrast, the Philippine state, representing coercive authoritarianism, experienced widespread resistance, both covert and overt. Under Ferdinand Marcos' government (1965–1986), the state took a strong grip on its citizens and did not give them the social and economic opportunities that would have made authoritarian rule more acceptable. Marcos gave substantial power to the military, jailed his opponents, confiscated private property and turned them into state property; he also robbed the national treasury, leaving the Filipinos poor, powerless and with little opportunity for social mobility.

In the early stages of nation-building, many Southeast Asian states considered themselves unstable as new democracies facing overwhelming challenges. Authoritarianism was a means to an end as it enabled the construction of a strong nation that was self-sufficient and no longer vulnerable to external and internal threats. Authoritarian rule technically ended in the Philippines when Marcos was ousted in 1986. Democratic freedoms have since been restored in the Philippines but the moral fibre of society has been destroyed by twenty years of dictatorship. Singapore continues to function under the Lee Kuan Yew paradigm in that it still hesitates to grant more rights than is necessary to its citizens; instead, the state concentrates on keeping its citizens free from want by creating a prosperous society.

5.2 Women, Nation, Nationalism

The discourse of authoritarianism is deemed a masculine one and the absence of a female discourse in nation-building seems to suggest that women have not participated in the construction of nation. Although women participated in the fight for independence and in the establishment of the nation-state, they have not been accorded due recognition for their efforts. According to Ward (1983), "generally the importance of women's contribution has been dismissed in a few sentences as historians itemise what they consider to be important events, events which have been evaluated in male terms" (2). Hence when women press for the redress of grievances, they are told: *not yet, not now*. Furthermore, women who participated in the nationalist campaigns have, since independence, been relegated to the private domain and silenced:

> Because women have been so marginal in the consciousness of those who have researched events, their significance has remained hidden within historical records, waiting for the understanding of someone who wants to know what women did, what they thought, and how they were affected by the upheavals of the past century. Although women's history clearly reveals the importance of the powerless in contributing to the success of those who became peaceful, this contribution has at times been deliberately downplayed and not just simply undervalued (Ward 1983, 2).

Even if women are allowed to participate in politics and nation-building, their "female" attributes are highlighted rather than their competency. Lepinard (2006) describes a (French) perception of women in a political role:

> At a time of political crisis, women were presented as the cure of all evils: their increased presence would modernize the political system, renew the political elite as well as the style of politics, bring more humanity and finally enlarge and achieve true democracy. Women's specificity, such as their presumed proximity to "everyday" concerns, their ability to listen and understand people's problems and their lack of personal ambitions, were also used to support the argument that a democracy inclusive of women would function differently and pursue alternative agendas (31).

While this may be taken as a positive appraisal of women, no male in a political role who has the same attributes is cited as having positive male qualities.

This attitude to history is echoed in the citizenship accorded to women in the new nation-states. In the new nation-states, there is, according to Yuval-Davis (1998), one characteristic which specifies women's citizenship and "that is its dualistic nature. On the one hand, women are always included, at least, to some extent, in the general body of citizens of the state and its social, political and legal policies; on the other, there is always, at least to a certain extent, a separate body of legislation which relates to them specifically as women, such as age retirement or qualifications for public office" (27). This othering has made it easy for women to be excluded from political and economic life.

Feminism through civil society and the media has sought to change attitudes towards women and has allowed women "opportunity spaces that can be used to alter the existing pattern of gender relations" (Waylen, cited in Wilford 1998, 12).

Suffice it to say here that feminism has informed much of the achievements accomplished by women in modern times. The feminist issue is a crucial concern for nationalism because women and their participation in nation formation are also constructed by dominant discourses that include nationalism. In the language of nationalism, women are given metaphorical status (e.g. the motherland) and yet in reality they are just that, idealised and totemic. As Boehmer (1992) observes, "the idealized woman figure can take on massive, grand even continent wide proportions… but despite the bright myths of motherhood, women make up the greater part of Africa's illiterate, oppressed and poor" (23). That women have been portrayed as objects and men the subjects of national aspiration (Boehmer 1992) suggests women's passive secondary role in the construction of the nation. They are relegated to the sphere of the personal and the family; they are to act as a support system rather than a pro-active force.

Sylvester (1993) points out the efforts of women to make the personal political. They expose the family as the site of politics or make whatever public life which is available to them personally political. Boehmer (1992) also suggests that the monologic, patriarchal narratives of the state should be countered with multi-vocal ones which, I add, should be grounded within the contexts and cultures of women's communities. There are also those who do not want to give up on the partnership between nationalism and feminism, citing past and present successful cooperation (Herr 2003). Increasingly, women are starting to break the barriers, leaving their silent, and silenced, spaces, and using their narratives to resist and challenge patriarchal exclusions. It is this desire for inclusion that has made women conscious of institutions and policies that everyone takes as beneficial but which are actually detrimental to them.

One of the more seemingly innocuous institutions of post-independent life is the state. There are many definitions and readings of the concept of the state but let me use a general one as a working definition. The state is a political institution through which various mechanisms determine the political life of a citizen. I emphasise the mechanical and utilitarian aspect of the state as it is most crucial to my analysis here.

The state in Southeast Asian post-independent life has generally been the logical result of colonial departure. It is supposed to embody the aspirations of a nation now articulated legally, and imbued with the power to concretise these aspirations. It is in fact the result of the patriotic and collective energies of the people who long for national belonging as well as community protection from external threats.

Later, the nationalism now embodied by the state would undergo a horrendous transformation. The nationalism which has sustained the good anti-colonial fight would suddenly pounce on its own people. Achebe (1995) points out the people's surprise and dismay when they realise that independence has resurrected the monsters of oppression and exploitation. Said (1988) observes that frequently, the bourgeoisie would replace the coloniser and that the colonial instruments would become class based. Twenty years earlier, Frantz Fanon (1965) warned against the bourgeoisie's rise to power, stating that there were pitfalls that would endanger nations on a nationalistic march to independence. The bourgeoisie would form the

state to which people would transfer its allegiance, thinking the bond between nation and state intact and mutually beneficial.

For most newly independent nations, independence is just the beginning, not the end of the long and treacherous search for genuine nationhood. The fledgling state has to be strengthened and efficiently managed by a group of leaders on whom political power is conferred and to whom the caretaker's task is assigned. However, the ascendancy of this group, whether through election or other means, has also created a wedge between itself and the less powerful groups; it is now the ruler of the less powerful group, also the ruled. The former accrues the privilege of the state, consigning to itself a position beyond and above community/nation. I suggest that these developments in post-independence political life have created a tension between state and nation. Ideally, the narratives of state and nation should be one and the same, or at least complementary. Succeeding political engagements in post-independence years have, however, revealed schisms in the supposedly united narratives, unmasking a forking of national direction.

The assumption, of course, is that the state, also the institution of politics and governance, is the culmination of an evolved nation [the community created by a "specific solidarity and specific group feeling" (Heidt 1987, 122)]. For many postcolonial countries, statehood has been attained without the benefit of a gradual evolution and may have been an inchoate element in a society just vacated by colonial order. In Malaya (known as Malaysia after independence in 1957), statehood lies in the dispersed racial desires of a people with different origins. In the Philippines, it is founded on deep social stratification and class divide. The colonial structures familiar to colonised societies may have been partially destabilised, creating an expectation of their termination. While independence might have been a moment of triumph, it was also a moment of crisis, for it had meant the demolition of a centre that had held things together for decades or centuries. The fledgling state has to create a new centre to which the nation can cleave for self-validation (Tope 1998).

In order to rebuild its centre, the state requires universal powers. However, given the multicultural quality of most of the subject countries, it is difficult to arrive at a centre by general consensus. The more practical and logical approach, though not necessarily just, would be to privilege a dominant group or point of view. The flashpoint between state and nation can be found in historical moments when the desires of both are in contention. Even if the state is controlled by only a ruling minority, there is no doubt about the outcome. Consequently, the desire of the nation (the community) is thwarted, and its resentment towards the state corrodes the delicate link between the ruler and the ruled. The situation also grants opportunities for state abuse of power, against which the community members have meagre defence. In such a case, the relationship between state and nation tends to be adversarial. Homi Bhabha (1995) calls this "the split between the continuist, accumulative, temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious recursive strategy of the performative" (297).

The hegemonic activities of the state consequently brought about suspicion and hostility towards nationalism. There is more cognisance and concern regarding its

Janus-like transformations. Interchanging state and nation here, Gikandi (1992) indicts what the "nation" has become: "The divinity of nation has collapsed, the nation is not the manifestation of a common interest but a repressor of desires" (380).

State nationalism, which is a euphemism for authoritarian state desires, has become a strong force in the life of two Southeast Asian nation-states: Singapore and the Philippines. One of the mandatory undertakings of the emergent nation is to build an economy which would assure it of self-sufficiency and self-respect, if it is to be accepted as an upstanding member of the community of nations. Political independence evidently does not guarantee freedom from external pressure the way a strong economic blueprint does. For countries in the initial stage of nation-building, a sound economy ensures substantial implementation of national welfare and defence policies.

Established nations provide models for economic structures and planning, following the democratic system's policy of anchoring its development strategies on ownership and control by nationals or the totalitarian system's utilisation of ownership and control by the state. Either way, nationalism underscores economic self-sufficiency with a "view to control the economic destiny of newly, independent states, and secondly, to vie with developed countries on which the new states formerly used to depend" (Chavan 1973, 428).

5.3 Singapore and Economic Nationalism

Singapore seems to be the most successful example of a strong state development through economic means. In 1965, with its limited resources and unprepared professional sector, its leaders felt that a fast-track development plan was vital to its survival. What Singapore has become in its four decades of independence has been largely considered a miracle. Its per capita income is one of the highest in the world, exceeding even those of European economies. As a whole, Singapore's economic policies have produced high growth, low inflation, a very healthy balance of payments without recourse to external borrowings as well as substantial gains in living standards. It enjoys a status that ranks it with major international economic players.

Singapore's success can be attributed to government participation in economic development. Lim (1988) explains that the government promoted economic growth by creating a favourable and depoliticised labour situation, by providing skilled manpower through education, excellent infrastructure and tax incentives. Most importantly, it participated directly in the economy, establishing wholly owned and partly owned industrial and commercial ventures.

Singapore's economic strategies have been the state's resounding response to the uncertainties of post-independence life. State presence takes the form of aggressive economic programmes which permeate all aspects of national life. The state operates on the pragmatic premise that a sound economy must be built first, after

which all citizen privileges will follow. The state is not very tolerant of dissent, since this creates fissures in the laboriously built economic wall. In the early decades of nation-building, Singapore neglected the other significant aspects of nationhood such as culture and the arts as these were seen as higher needs that could only be met after a certain level of affluence and ethnic coexistence has been reached. Denyse Tessensohn's short story "Kumari" (1998) dramatises the effects of this neglect by showing that the state sometimes forgets there are citizens other than the productive ones.

As economic success and competitiveness have become a national *raison d'etre* and an essential ingredient of the national fibre, the government has from time to time reminded the citizens of their responsibility to maintain Singapore's success. Economic nationalism has evolved into a binding ideology with the capacity to rally a multiracial, capitalist, and technology-oriented nation into a formidable force of nation-builders. Catherine Lim's story, "The Paper Women" (1993) demonstrates how mothers are drawn into the utilitarian aspects of nation-building by virtue of their wombs.

No evolution preceded Singaporean statehood. Statehood was foisted on an unprepared, still dispersed nation. Singapore in 1965 did not have a national identity. The state preceded the development of nation, became the first major symbol of identity, and has since set out to create others. The state was imposed on an inchoate nation whose varied races led lives that were relatively independent of each other. Thus, it is the state that has nursed the young republic into the robust entity that it is now. What is believed to be typically "Singaporean" is state-induced, formed not so much by interracial encounters as by the various national campaigns sponsored by the government as well as guided by the civic curriculum.

5.4 The Philippines: Repression During Martial Law

The Philippines is not so fortunate. Although its nationhood began on an optimistic note, the country had by the end of the Marcos years become virtually bankrupt with a negative growth rate. Nationalist economists trace the problem of the Philippines to its neocolonial status. Neocolonialism, as defined by Alejandro Lichauco (1973), is the "process by which, through techniques other than war and outright colonization, subjects its victims to influence and domination so overwhelming as to reduce in fact and effect to the status of virtual colonies while permitting them to retain the ceremonial vestments of independence" (9). Politically, neo-colonial governments are subservient to a foreign power or to the nationals of a foreign country. The military establishment becomes an adjunct of imperial power, dependent upon the latter for its needs. Social and cultural values must synchronise with the goals of the superior power, making the educational system a key factor in the neo-colonialist project. Economically, it creates a relationship of dependency between superior and inferior nation, while maintaining a

semblance of mutually beneficial trade relations; the superior nation introduces measures which would allow its profits to accumulate while stifling the growth of indigenous industries which would threaten its interests.

The United States wields its influence in absentia. Its interests are represented by an elite class whose wealth and influence allows its members to dominate centres of power. Neocolonialism in the Philippines therefore acquires a class face. While the masses do not directly feel its foreign influence, they feel the burden of exploitation by local capitalists. Class tension is underpinned by neocolonial desires and, as a result, anti-colonial resistance in post-independence Philippines has always included the elite as a critical target. As the elite dominate the centres of power, the state follows its desires. In the agonistic encounters of class interest, the state often abandons the nation and uses its police powers to suppress resistance. In Merlinda Bobis' story, "Fish-Hair Woman" (2014) the state turns its guns against its own in the war in the countryside. The victims are peasants caught in the pernicious grip of countryside militarisation.

In the 1970s, despite industrialisation after independence, despite an annual rise in GNP, the quality of life in the Philippines deteriorated and many families, especially those in the rural areas, lived below the "food threshold" (*Philippines: Repression and resistance* 1981, 64). Unemployment was so high that skilled labour and professionals joined the overseas labour market.

The situation prompted the solidification of a culture of dissent. Opposition rose from the sectoral groups, especially from the universities where issues could be discussed openly. The streets became a venue of dissent. The period before 1972 is crucial because the Philippines experienced a resurgence of nationalism directed not only at the foreigner but also against the elite who, as capitalists and politicians, were perceived to have allowed the culture of exploitation and corruption. The Marcos regime, in particular, was held accountable for the worsening of poverty and human rights violation in the country.

The period gave birth to a form of resistance called pressure politics—the parliament of the streets—which coincided with the development of student activism. The violence with which the forces of the state confronted the students and other street parliamentarians formed such vivid moments in the history of the post-independence period that it has become a staple topic in the nation's various art forms. Ninotchka Rosca's story "Our Apostle Paul" (1983) narrates the choice of one such activist who turns his back on priesthood so that he may serve the people in another way.

The state looms large in the lives of the Filipinos and the Singaporeans. While the citizen believes in the necessity of a state, s/he is no longer sure if it works in her/his interest and these doubts and contentions emerge from the four short stories by women from Singapore and the Philippines.

Female citizens, as mentioned at the beginning, are not as privileged as male citizens. The women writers reveal not only the insidious oppressive conduct of the state, they also include empowered characters, both male and female, who articulate by word or deed their resistance to state desires. Women characters are specially given attention:

> In the past, literature has reflected the predominant view of women as inferior through the images of them presented in various literary works many of which were written by men. These images are often presented in the form of a binary opposition, woman as the virginal maiden or sainted mother who is placed on a pedestal, upheld for her purity, piety and submissiveness. She is everything spiritual and good, to be loved, worshipped and admired. Conversely, she is femme fatale, sex object, whore. She may be coveted or lusted over, but never respected, representing what is dark, material and evil. These two stereotypes have shaped the portrayal of women in literature. Many women characters, especially those in men's works, are seldom allowed to be complex or unique, to grow or develop, to act freely rather than be acted upon. (Kintanar 2001, 7)

Through their choice of themes and characters, the women writers included here deny this description of women's depictions. In fact, they are involved in the courageous mission of engaging the state, disclosing its shortcomings and failures, using literature to articulate what would cause others their freedom and their lives. By using fiction, they shift the site of contestation to the personal and the individual, with whom other readers can identify. The stories are metaphors of the citizen, struggling to find national and personal meaning in her/his contest with the state.

5.5 Marginalised Citizenships

Kumari, the titular character of Tessensohn's short story, is a plain girl who works at an NTUC supermarket in Telok Blangah, living a life with no expectations. She is described as someone with "poor grades at school, close to missing the marriage boat by being without a decent dowry and plain to look at" (232). Her life changes when an old man asks her to help a group of old ladies living in her block. The old ladies eke out a small living selling discarded clothes. Kumari finds herself helping this aged community by giving them illegal discounts. She is discovered, brought to the police but is saved by the community she has helped.

The story interestingly focuses on two marginalised sectors in Singapore, the academically challenged (who are at the bottom rung of the country's meritocratic ladder of economic achievement) and the aged (also at the bottom rung of the social ladder due to their lack of productivity). Kumari, who represents the former, is neglected and conveniently pushed to the level of menials where quality of life has a low hard ceiling. Her marital future is dim because she has been judged not only according to her lack of looks but also according to her lack of financial prospects. Education is wealth in capitalistic Singapore and here where wealth in education is literal, Kumari is read as someone whose lot is to be a non-entity.

The aged represents an unexpected experience of poverty in a nation whose GNP is the highest in Southeast Asia. Bereft of state care, the aged seem to have been forgotten perhaps because they have outlived their usefulness. Many Singaporean families now look at their aged as a burden so much so that the state at one point has to enact a law that prohibits the abandonment of old relatives. One can infer that

the old people in the story have no relatives, and have been abandoned not only by their families but also by the state.

Kumari becomes the accidental heroine who steals from the NTUC supermarket to support her old friends. However, as the NTUC is a trade union cooperative in which the state has a stake, Kumari in effect steals from the state. The story thus posits an interesting proposition: can a citizen steal from the state something that s/he thinks is due her/him? It can be said that the things Kumari steals are necessities that the state should provide to its citizens: "Toothpaste, can of sardines, tin of condensed milk, single bar of soap, packet of cream crackers and box of tea leaves" (234), basic things really. As the old citizens have expended their energies in the service of the state during their more productive years, the story suggests that they should be treated better by the state.

The sad plight of the aged is in a way an offshoot of the state's economic priorities. The state seems to view its citizens in a pragmatic way. The story reveals what happens when one loses one's marketability. The aged, revered in traditional Asian societies, have become a burden in modern Singapore. The corporate outlook of the state privileges the young and productive, marginalising those who are no longer useful. The citizen absorbs this state outlook and applies it to the family domain.

Tessensohn creates an unlikely heroine in Kumari, she who is neither intelligent nor rich enough to be socially acceptable. Subverting the corporate paradigm, Kumari achieves a measure of fame and acceptance because she has a heart that is sympathetic rather than pragmatic. She does not feel guilty about the "theft," nor does she think of a story when she is caught. Kumari's act can be read as criminal in the legal sense but the story gives her moral ascendancy over the state that has failed to provide for its aged citizens. Her act of theft, which is not even defiant, is described by Kumari as something good. Her heroism consists of helping others and her gentle subversion exposes the state's shortcomings.

In the face of a jail term, Kumari is silent. The old folks whom she has been helping go to their Member of Parliament to seek help. An old man threatens to cut his wrist if help is denied. The state however does not see the desperation in Kumari's act or in the old man's threat. It sees instead a good opportunity for publicity. The contrast between Kumari and the state highlights the former's heroism, citizenship and femaleness. Kumari is the ordinary Jane who helps the hidden poor, thereby shaming the state in the process.

5.6 Borrowed Wombs

Catherine Lim's "The Paper Women" engages the Singaporean state more directly. While the state is absent in the lives of the old people in "Kumari," it is very much present in the ordinary (productive) citizen's quotidian life. The narrator in this story is an educated Singaporean Chinese woman, a female executive, married with a son. She has to undergo sterilisation so that her son can enter Singapore's best

kindergarten. When her son fails to get in, the only way for him to do so is for the narrator to present proof of sterilisation. This is in line with the state's desire to control its population numbers. In the past, high birth rates were viewed as a problem by the state since Singapore's population growth could not be supported by its limited resources. When its campaigns failed to lower the rates, the government came up with a solution that also hit Singaporeans where it hurt most: children's education. As expected, parents scramble to give their children the best education. In "The Paper Women," a pair of ovaries is a small price to pay for a son's future.

The Singapore that is described in "The Paper Women" has just embarked on one of its projects to control population growth through the use of eugenics or social engineering. Used in the name of efficiency and maximisation of talent to promote economic development, social engineering requires citizens' cooperation and sacrifice to achieve economic goals. The story refers to the "Two is Enough" campaign of the 1970s which encouraged women to have less children; however, the campaign was so successful that the government had to reverse it in the 1980s. "Have Three More, if you can afford it" became the state battle cry.

The narrator's ovaries are indeed used as currency to ensure the son's bright future. However, it is not only the family who benefits from the sale of her ovaries as the state also benefits by co-opting woman's reproductive system to produce the energy that is required to propel the state to greater economic heights. For now, the narrator's womb must limit itself because Singapore with its limited resources must make sure there is plenty enough for everybody. Sterilisation is a compliance with state desires, a citizen's contribution to the advancement of the state, and therefore a patriotic act.

This is especially significant in light of the Singaporean woman's high level of education and earning power. As she acquires more societal power through involvement in commercial (economic) activity (Pribble 2005), she also becomes highly empowered. Yet her economic achievements are seen only as an advantage to the state and play right into the state's economic agenda. State presence is therefore invasive in the Singaporean woman's economic and reproductive functions.

But the narrator's problems do not end here. Unable to save her marriage, she goes through a divorce. After remarriage, she desires to have another child. Unfortunately, the womb cannot reverse itself and in the end, the narrator is in the doctor's office seeking fertility for her sterilised womb. Ironically, Singapore would reverse its population policies a few years later. Incentives such as slots in the best schools would be given to those who have a third child. Ultimately, the womb becomes a casualty of state desires.

The state's invasion of the womb emphasises the issue of female reproductive rights. The state exercises its patriarchal right to determine the use of female bodies for economic purposes. The female subjectivity represented here—an educated Chinese woman who is also a career woman and mother of a son—is the canon encouraged by the state because she is not only economically productive, she is also

reproductively successful in producing a son (which for the Chinese is the fulfilment of Confucian desire), also a woman's most important contribution to the nation's future. She has clear economic power but she is powerless in terms of gender. Her body and womb—these are her currency to good citizenship. It is she who sacrifices, not her husband, so that the nation's future is secured.

The issue of reproductive health is paramount in the feminist agenda. In many cultures, women's bodies are considered receptacles, baby machines and the site of male legitimacy. But as shown in "Paper Women," it is not only the males who invade women's bodies but also the state. The womb becomes a mode of production by which the state economy benefits. Moreover, the story engages the state by disclosing another of its coercive strategies. By its utilitarian attitude towards female citizens, by manoeuvring reproduction, the state denies the female citizen choice and freedom in the use of her body. Singaporean women must do their "national service" by producing good future citizens. Disclosing all these, Lim reveals oppressive state desire. This is a courageous, not a cautious, act.

Lim also uses other female subjectivities—women from other countries in the region—to act as parallels to the narrator's story. The narrator meets a young Thai prostitute who needs reconstruction so she can secure a Virginity Certificate. These were the decades that saw the boom of sex tourism in Thailand. As an "R & R" destination for American soldiers fighting in Vietnam, and constructed in tourist brochures as warm and exotic, Thailand created a female subjectivity in the prostitute. The Thai girl's sexuality is used for tourism from which a big percentage of Thailand's GNP comes.

As a stakeholder in the tourism industry, she is valued in terms of her youth and special skills that thrill the male gaze. Her body and subjectivity are commercially sexual, her worth gauged by the rarity of her offerings. In the story, the Thai girl must be perennially young; she must be a perennial virgin, and her virginity is assured by a medical procedure she must undergo repeatedly.

The narrator also meets a pregnant Filipino maid who is seeking an abortion so she can have a Certificate of Non-Pregnancy, a requirement to work in Singapore. In the 1970s and 1980s, Singapore's high wage earners could afford to import foreign domestic labour so that their women could work and be even more productive. The presence of foreign maids in Singapore households has become common. In Southeast Asia, poorer countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia are the main sources of imported domestic labour. These are countries with high poverty levels and low employment opportunities. Women cross the seas because they have to feed their families. In the story, the Filipino maid has to abort her baby in order to feed the rest of her family. Motherhood gives way to economic necessity. The Filipino maid's womb is denied so that she can continue working as a migrant worker and sending remittances that can help save not only her family but also the Philippine economy.

The women, divergent in terms of class and nationalities, recognise their similarities, especially in what their nation-states have done to their bodies. Commodified in aid of economic development, the three women find themselves

being used for state ends, their sexuality reduced to "mere pieces of paper signed by men" (61). Inadvertently too, they discover a gendered solidarity in their shared experiences and womanhood.

5.7 Ideological Choices

For many Filipinos, the word "repression" is a reminder of the country's darkest hour, the Martial Law period (1972–1981) under Marcos. His instrumentalist notion of statehood meant a curtailment of human rights which allowed him undeterred plunder of national wealth. The legislature and the judiciary were under his control while the police and the military were virtually his private army. Often the only source of help was the church. The Roman Catholic Church has played an ambiguous role in Philippine history. It used to be seen as a symbol of colonisation. At other times, it was a refuge and a last resort.

Ninotchka Rosca's "Our Apostle Paul" is set in Martial Law Philippines. The state is not overtly present in the story but it is a hovering menace throughout. The characters are male, two seminarians who must soon choose which paths to take. The narrator and Rene are good friends and school rivals. Important events lead the two friends to separate paths. His mother's suffering due to an illness and his accession to euthanasia drive Rene out of the seminary. The narrator's sister's drug addiction, unwanted pregnancy and suicide do not matter in the narrator's decision to enter priesthood.

Rosca does not use female characters in the story; instead, she uses men of religion who are supposed to embody the least masculine traits such as empathy, compassion and vocation. These traits are also regarded within the purview of nurturance and can therefore be considered "feminine." Martial Law is militaristic and masculine but the discourse of service and sacrifice is feminine. The story juxtaposes the two in the following ways: first, there is the external contention between Rene's desire to serve the people and Martial Law's suppression of this kind of service. Second, even within the church, there is the contention between being "priestly" on the one hand, which is a euphemism here for indifference and distance, and being socially involved on the other, which demands an awareness of human suffering and being engaged in its alleviation.

Here are two responses to suffering brought about not only by the human condition but also by political vicissitudes. Rosca locates the political contention in the trope of religious service. Who must one serve, God or man, the church or the poor? The narrator enters priesthood to serve God and the church. Rene enters his own priesthood by working with the poor and defending them against the forces of the state. The narrator is a bit contemptuous of Rene and cannot understand why the latter chose a difficult and violent life over a life of peace and learning in the seminary. While the narrator worries about the mud that dirties his cassock, Rene braves the mud and gets forty-eight bullets in his body. The church however, like the state, does not appreciate the sacrifice of men like Rene who must die so that

others may live. The disengaged church is represented by the narrator who watches suffering from the sidelines.

However, Rosca chooses the priesthood to contend with the state because the church is the remaining bastion of integrity and humanity in Martial Law Philippines While not perfect, priests have often been seen as spokespersons of truth and justice. Inevitably, they are visited by the ideological questions that confront the ordinary citizen. In some instances, the church itself engages the state but its power is regarded as moral rather than political. Rene finds both moral and political meaning outside the church, especially in his struggle against an oppressive state and gives the word "religion" a different definition.

This can be seen when Rene, who has seen suffering, seeks to address it by joining the revolution as all legal recourse has been blocked by Martial Law. As the narrator and Rene discuss good and evil, life and death, it is obvious that Rene's view of evil is social and material, while that of the narrator is religious. Rene, whose definition of religion is to serve the poor, is privileged in the story because like Kumari, he subverts a state that is not only unresponsive to the needs of its citizens, but also oppresses them. Rene practices what Rowe (2005) calls the "'politics of relation,' a deep reflection about the selves we are creating as a function of where we place our bodies and with whom we build our affective ties" (16). Although Rowe refers to gender relations, one can equally apply it to ideological relations. Rene chooses to locate his body and affective ties not in the safe enclave of the church but in the dangerous streets, expressing love not for one but for many. It is this "feminine" trait that is celebrated in the story. When the narrator goes to the wake of Rene, he is amazed that the people there are not grieving; instead, they are celebrating a life well lived.

5.8 Myth as Resistance

Using widespread dissent as an excuse and in the guise of restoring order, Marcos put the Philippines under military rule and took control of media, industries, and all civic institutions. For many Filipinos today, the word "repression" is a reminder of the Martial Law excesses and the cruel way in which Martial Law policies were implemented. Marcos' regime is remembered as one of corruption, violence and fear. Marcos and his wife Imelda enjoyed the absolute power Martial Law entailed and led an entitled lifestyle using the nation's coffers. The Philippines did not experience the rise of a middle class; economic opportunities were generally absent. While a few families acquired wealth, there was widespread poverty and displacement. Social iniquity became a trademark of the Marcos regime.

Even if Marcos jailed and 'silenced' his opponents, dissent did not die; it simply went underground. Because of Martial Law, the ranks of the New People's Army (NPA) swelled. As the Marcos regime took over agricultural and even ancestral lands for its infrastructure projects, thousands of peasants and indigenous groups were dispossessed, and resulted in rising restlessness in the countryside. Since

people had no venue to voice their grievances, the NPA, the revolutionary arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines, became an attractive alternative.

Consequently, a legacy of the Martial Law period is the militarisation of the countryside. Since insurgency is often the result of neglect and poverty, the poorest places in the Philippines became the hotbeds of dissent. Instead of addressing the social problems that fuelled dissent, instead of instituting reforms, the state response to social restlessness was militarisation. To the state, insurgency was a problem of peace and order, not of social injustice.

It was not uncommon for peasants to find themselves caught in the crossfire between the military and the rebels. The military did not trust the peasants and its campaign to win the hearts of the people failed. Moreover, the military was known for its abusive behaviour. They made arrests based on suspicion rather than fact; they also stole, tortured and raped. In the militarised countryside, the state is represented by the soldier who was supposed to defend the people against insurgents. But the soldier, unable to distinguish between an insurgent and an ordinary villager (since many villagers joined the revolutionary movement and were farmers by day, guerrillas by night), often turned on the villagers, harassing families and pillaging homes, raping the women and killing the men.

For women in the countryside, militarisation was a millstone that threatened their lives and gender. It is a phenomenon "that snatches the life of a loved one; an instrument of abduction; a tool for suppressing legitimate organisations, an agency that destroys valuable properties; dominant and arrogant men displaying their bravado during barrio (village) fiestas; and an institution that brings trauma and psychological problems to innocent civilians. For some women, militarisation is an enemy that must be defeated in the name of peace" (Ocaciones 2007, 21).

Merlinda Bobis engages the state and military presence in the countryside not through a gun but through myth-making, narrativising the plight of rural Filipinos in the militarised zones not by being factual but by weaving her own myth as a weapon against military abuses. Her story "Fish-Hair Woman" tells of a woman whose extraordinary long hair is used by the villagers to fish out their dead from the river. Like a net, the woman's hair would spread across the breadth of the river to catch floating corpses, not only of rebels but also of ordinary people caught in the crossfire. She does not show any emotion, but every time she fishes out a body, her hair grows a few inches.

The woman's hair is an interesting metaphor of memory. As she catches the dead with her hair, it can only contain memories of pain, seen in the red strands of hair amid the black. "You see, Mamay, history hurts my hair, did you know that? Remembering is always a bleeding out of memory, like pulling thread from a vein in the heart, a coagulation so fine, miles of it stretching upwards to the scalp, then sprouting these into the longest strand of hair" (29). The military incursions into the countryside are often unrecorded, a part of history that remains unchronicled because the state is complicit. Thus, the woman's hair is the chronicle of suffering that cannot be printed or articulated, the record of death seen only in its growth and the red colour that glows within.

The woman is a nation figure, a mother catching her dead children with her hair. She identifies with a nationality, with the coconut, the fruit of life that is endemic to Filipino culture. “I am a Filipina; tiny and dark as a coconut husk but what red fires glint in my head” (29).

She is also an object of desire. The military sergeant, Ramon, makes a pass at her. But more than anything else, he wants to see her pain, to torture her with the knowledge that he can see her pain. He gets his wish when he kills the woman’s lover and forces her to catch his body with her hair. The sergeant represents the male aggression of the state as well as the authoritarian impulse of the Philippine state. According to Cynthia Enloe, “states are built as a masculine institution and exhibit masculine activities” (cited in Weiringa 2003, 1). When the woman rejects the sergeant’s advances she rejects not only his male sexuality but also the state and this renders her as an “other.” Refusing to cooperate with the state, the woman is punished when the state takes away her right to happiness.

The writer makes full use of myth in the story. The woman bears resemblance to many female characters in Philippine folklore but the writer injects her own folk narrative by giving her character a unique feature. Instead of being ashamed of her unique hair, the woman uses it to help others reclaim their dead. Forest nymph combined with *mater dolorosa* (the Catholic figure of Our Lady of Sorrows), this mythical woman is a powerful image of the female nation. She saves even in death and allows the dead to be buried and remembered. Interestingly, the monster in the forest is no fierce animal but the soldier, who represents the state. Instead of giving life, it takes life. The war in the village is no longer between the soldiers and the rebels, but between the people and the state. The woman is witness to this because it is she who fishes the dead from the river. Her myth subverts the legitimacy of the authoritarian state.

5.9 Conclusion

All four short stories by Southeast Asian women writers engage a state that is not responsive—and is even destructive—to its citizens. These women writers are committed participants in nations that are in crisis, whether it is benign Singapore or violent Philippines. They write back to their authoritarian states by disclosing the different facets of authoritarian rule, including behaviour control, economic disabilities, legal persecution, coercion and violence. They also reveal female subjectivities in crisis—as mothers, wives, employees, foreign workers, activists, myth-makers—all finding ways to lead meaningful lives within a state that intends to co-opt them. Ward (1983) states that the high points of women’s participation in the state are also moments of exceptional political crises. In their articulation of female subjectivities, the women writers reveal, contest and subvert the strangulation—benign or forceful—that accompany authoritarianism.

These women write from the *conciencia*, which for Lourdes Casal (1980) means both consciousness and conscience. Southeast Asian women writers who engage

the state "invoke changes in the *conciencia* in the human view of the world and of humanness itself, and also in the set and hierarchy of prevailing values" (Casal 1980, 184). By performing their art, these women writers write a different history of their countries, their works evoking their women's history of the nation in the time of authoritarian rule.

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Chapter 6
State *Ibuism* and One Happy Family: Polygamy and the "Good" Woman in Contemporary Indonesian Narratives

Grace V. S. Chin

6.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the construction of the modern Indonesian woman's gender and sexual identities as "good" mothers and wives in the national imaginary by interrogating the intertwined discourses of polygamy, marriage and family in selected contemporary narratives. In Indonesia, the family structure is inherently patriarchal and hierarchical in nature, one which exhorts wives to stay at home while husbands are seen as breadwinners and whose roles are non-domestic. This structure is further upheld as the national ideal by multiple state ideologies that promote images of marital and familial bliss, including "*Keluarga Sakinah*" (harmonious family) and "*Keluarga Maslahah*" (virtuous and prosperous family). Not only do these ideologies play a vital role in reifying women's subordinate status in the domestic space at the national level but they also perpetuate the vision of the nation as a united and inclusive family, or "one happy family," in line with the *Pancasila*[1] principle of national harmony. At the same time, female marginalisation is endorsed by the state ideology of *Ibuism* (motherhood), which encourages women to stay at home and conform to the ideal, subordinate roles of wife and mother.

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[1]Established by President Sukarno since the birth of Indonesia as a nation-state in 1945, *Pancasila* contains five principles that form the state ideology: (1) nationalism, (2) internationalism or humanitarianism, (3) representative government or consent, (4) social prosperity or justice, and (5) belief in God (Bertrand 2004, 31–32).

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As a social practice, polygamy is woven into the phallocentric discourses of family and nation. It can thus be used as a key signifier to query the gender-based power hierarchies produced by the family and state as well as the role it plays in the wider national imaginary. There is a close correlation between the discursive tropes of the family and those of the nation in Indonesia as both are inherently phallocentric constructs premised on ideologies that perpetuate male superiority and authority. By exploring polygamy and its effects on women, the narratives directly tap into the gendered inequities and imbalances that reflect the wider male-oriented power structures and networks operating at interrelated cultural, socioeconomic and political levels. In other words, polygamy involves the imagining of Indonesia as a nation; furthermore, this imagination is heavily drawn along gendered lines.

Three fictional narratives situated at different points of contemporary Indonesian history are used to compare and contrast the representations of polygamy: two prose publications by Titis Basino,[2] namely her short story *Dia* (Her 1963; trans. by Lamoureux 2001), and novel *Aku Supiyah Istri Hardhian* (I'm Supiyah, Hardhian's Wife 1998), and Nia Dinata's award-winning film *Berbagi Suami* (Love for Share 2006), which relates the stories of three women and their polygamous marriages. All the narratives specifically represent polygamy as polygyny, whereby a man can have two or more wives, and is considered the most common form of polygamy in patriarchal societies.[3] Despite their different forms, these narratives share a common ground in reaching out to women[4] through the themes of infidelity, deception, marriage and family with their portrayal of wives who silently struggle to cope in their unhappy marriages, mentally and emotionally. What interests me most is the manner in which these narratives ideologically and imaginatively situate their female characters as gendered subjects in the nation space as they negotiate their identities, roles and positions as "good" wives and mothers, and as individuals in polygamous relationships.

At the same time, I consider the relevance of the texts' differing time frames and settings to my analysis of Indonesian femininities within the framework of the

[2]With the emergence of the young generation of women writers like Ayu Utami and Dewi Lestari and their *sastrawangi* (fragrant literature) after the *Reformasi* movement, veteran writers like Basino have largely been ignored or "forgotten" (Arimbi 2009, 14) by Indonesia's contemporary literary scene.

[3]Polygamy also includes polyandry, in which a woman can have more than one husband. In Indonesia, polygyny is commonly practised as Muslim men are permitted by the Koran to marry up to four wives.

[4]The narratives of Basino and Dinata speak primarily to women readers and audiences. In an interview, Basino claims that she writes in order to give voice to women who have been silenced: "Since [women] cannot scream I let those people know how women feel when they are deceived through infidelity. There are many men who have extramarital affairs but their wives just cannot get angry or say no. I write so that those people can read" (cited in Arimbi 2009, 89). Similarly, Dinata believes that her film appeals to women like herself, "the daughters of a polygamous father that want to prevent this from happening in their own marriage" (Tehrani 2007). By catering to the female gaze, Dinata both challenges and subverts the established "heterosexual male gaze" (Tatyzo 2011, 29) in Indonesian cinematic tradition.

family and nation, and whether changes to the state's prescriptions of ideal womanhood, if any, can be found (please refer also to Downes' Chap. 7 in this volume). While Basino's narratives were mostly published during the repressive decades of the New Order administration (1965–1998), Dinata's film locates itself firmly in the post-New Order era, a time when democratic freedoms flourished.[5] These temporal distinctions are reflected in their respective representations of gender and sexual identities and relations. According to Arimbi (2009), Basino's exploration of heteronormative binary relations in the modern, nuclear family (rather than the traditional extended family) was influenced by the New Order government's family planning programme at the time (87). In contrast, Dinata's distinctively liberal films in the new millennium reflect the more open political space following the 1998 *Reformasi* (reformation) movement, and have been recognised for their bold tackling of controversial themes, including polygamy and homosexuality; the latter can be seen not only in *Berbagi Suami* but also in her 2003 film *Arisan*, incidentally known as the first Indonesian film to feature gay characters and themes.

As social and cultural texts, *Dia*, *Aku Supiyah Istri Hardhian* and *Berbagi Suami* are an invaluable resource for understanding certain facets of contemporary Indonesian reality in that they explore the ongoing articulation and contestation of ideas, viewpoints, and acts in the transformative spaces of an increasingly modernised and globalised society. By mediating "reality" and imaginative interpretation to express distinctive viewpoints and meanings, these narratives provide us a means of critiquing the interrelated meanings of polygamy, gender and nation through their representations of women and family. My analysis will show how such meanings and representations mutually inform and engage each other in the ideological formation of identities and subjects in the national imaginary. Furthermore, I argue that the textual explorations of the female subjective state, articulated by acts of agency, desire and freedom, both resist and deconstruct the discourse of "nation" as a united and inclusive family in Indonesia. The following section discusses how polygamy—through the gendered tropes of marriage, family and nation—contributes to the ideological construction and circulation of knowledges and images in which female powerlessness and inferiority are embedded.

6.2 Polygamy and the "Good" Woman: *Ibuism* and One Happy Family

Polygamy as a social practice has a long history of dissent in Indonesia. One of the earliest recorded protestations can be found in the writings of Raden Adjeng Kartini, an iconic figure in Indonesia's national narrative, when she angrily denounced polygamy as a "curse" and a "cruel wrong" in feudal Java:

[5]For background information on Basino and Dinata as well as an analysis of their works, see Arimbi (2009) and Tatyzo (2011) respectively.

> I feel so much for the cause of woman, I am touched by her fate; …I am swept violently forward in opposition to those customs and conventions which are the curse of women and children! …Fate allows that cruel wrong which is called polygamy to stalk abroad in the land (1920, 53–54).

Kartini's criticisms emerged at a time when the practice was already deeply rooted in the religious and ideological foundations of Javanese beliefs and traditions. Long established before the arrival of Islam in Java in the sixteenth century, polygamy was a common practice among the elite and wealthy Hindu and Javanese circles (Blackburn 2004). For the Chinese too, polygamy was a cultural tradition upheld by Confucianism to ensure the perpetuity of the patrilineal line; it allowed the husband to take numerous secondary wives until a son is born (McNabb 2013). Similar to the Javanese situation, the practice was considered normal among the Chinese elite who had sufficient wealth to maintain a joint-family household.

A member of the *priyayi* or aristocracy herself, Kartini has rightly been hailed as a woman with a vision beyond her times. Progressive-minded, and extremely critical of the gendered barriers that she'd experienced, she not only fought for women's rights to education and employment, but also attacked the institutions held dear by the *priyayi*, including polygamy and arranged marriage. In the end however, the traditions of her day proved too powerful and she eventually entered a polygamous marriage despite being bitterly opposed to it.[6] Although Kartini has since been recognised as Indonesia's first modern feminist and is annually celebrated on Kartini Day (April 21st), one also wonders, to what extent have women's gender and sexual identities, positions, and access to freedom and agency improved since her time?

Until today, heated debates and contestations on women's rights and polygamy continue to rage in both public and private spaces (Brenner 2006; Nurmila 2008, 2009; van Wichelen 2009; Nurmila and Bennett 2015). A contentious political issue, polygamy reflects, to an extent, some of the divisive forces at work in the Indonesian nation space since its independence in 1945. Although widely perceived by Indonesian Muslims as an essential part of *Syariah* or Islamic law, polygamy has nonetheless been opposed by women's organisations and feminists, both secular and Muslim. These groups not only highlighted the negative mental, emotional and financial consequences for women and children (Nurmila 2008, 2009) but also championed for the greater protection of women's rights under the marriage law. While their efforts to reform marriage customs did not yield much result during President Sukarno's government,[7] significant inroads were made under President

[6]For a deeper insight into Kartini's emotional response to her impending marriage, read Coté's excellent work, *Kartini: The complete writings* (2014), particularly the section "Letters 1903," the year she got married. Kartini was not the only dissenting female voice in her family; her sisters too called for the abolition of the practice, particularly Soematri who, in a letter to the Welfare Commission, had observed its "depressing effect" on women and children (Coté 2008, 272–74).

[7]Sukarno was a known womaniser and practitioner of polygamy while Suharto was said to have frowned on the practice. The difference in their attitudes is reflected in their respective governments' treatment of polygamy. While it thrived under Sukarno's administration, polygamy came

Suharto's New Order administration when the 1974 Marriage Law was legislated despite vocal protests from Muslim parties (Robinson 2000; Nurmila 2009).

The 1974 Marriage Law is a secular law that aims to unify the Indonesian marriage law regardless of religion. All ethnic groups, whether non-Muslim or Muslim, are subjected to it and are encouraged to follow Article 2(1) which states that "a marriage is legitimate, if it has been performed according to the laws of the respective religions and beliefs of the parties concerned." Additionally, Article 2(2) stipulates that the marriage must be registered for it to be legal. Under this law then, "polygamy is legal [but] the law discourages and restricts its practice" as it "requires court intervention" (Nurmila 2008, 31) as well as the permission of the first wife. As representatives of the state, civil servants had to first obtain approval from their superiors before they could engage in polygamy or divorce their spouses.[8]

To an extent, the 1974 Marriage Law helped advance the rights of Indonesian women by imposing limitations on polygamy, establishing a minimum age for marriage, allowing women to initiate divorce proceedings, and protecting them from being coerced into marriages against their will. Despite these achievements, the legal system has not always succeeded in protecting women's rights in polygamous marriages. According to Kurnia (2009), most polygamous marriages in Indonesia are practised illegally through two types of "secret" marriages: *kawin siri* or *kawin diam-diam*. *Kawin siri* is "legal under Islamic Sharia law, but illegal under state law" while *kawin diam-diam* refers to a situation when a man obtains a fake identity card to in order to marry another woman in a different town; such marriages are "possible because Indonesia keeps no national data on marriage" (Kurnia 2009). The prevalence of such marriages reveals how the patriarchal system allows men to get away with illegal practices of polygamy while women are left in a vulnerable position as they are not entitled to legal protection when their marriages fall apart. In other words, men are the ones with the power to "decide the form of polygamy and take advantage of polygamy" (Kurnia 2009).

Moreover, while political reforms like the 1974 Marriage Law appear to be an "act of a secular, modernizing regime" (Robinson 2000, 147), the system clearly privileges male authority in its recognition of the traditional patriarchal family structure, with "the husband as the head of the family and the wife as the keeper of the household" (Robinson 2000, 147). Upheld as the national model for the "separate-but-equal" (Sullivan 1991, 74) positions and spaces for men and women, the Indonesian family—built on gender difference and inequality—also regulates

(Footnote 7 continued)

under intense scrutiny during Suharto's governance when the practice was restricted through the 1974 Marriage Law. For an overview of Indonesian women and marriage traditions from early 1900s to the 1960s, please refer to Nurmila (2009, 46–52).

[8]For details of the 1974 Marriage Law, please refer to Robinson (2000), Blackburn (2004), Nurmila (2008). For its implications on the practice of polygamy as well as its consequences for civil servants, read Nurmila (2009, 45–64). Suryakusuma (1996) provides a fascinating analysis of the effects of the marriage reforms on male civil servants and their wives, including the manner in which their sexual life is regulated by the government.

women through the discursive forces of "housewifization" (Suryakusuma 1996, 101): the wife "plays a dominant role in household affairs. Having given his wife the money to run the household, the husband rarely interferes" (cited in Sullivan 1991, 75–76) as he fulfils the role of provider and protector. As a result, any power ascribed to the housewife is effectively limited since she is "circumscribed by her association with domestic life" (Sullivan 1991, 76).

Normative femininities are further constructed by male assumptions of woman's nature, also known as "*kodrat wanita*" in the discourse of Indonesian femininity. *Kodrat*, which means "natural destiny" or "woman's biologically ordained role" (Arnez and Dewojati 2010, 8), underscores the gendered workings of the New Order state as it normalises women's subordinate status in the nation space through the ideology of State *Ibuism*.[9] Coined by Suryakusuma (1996), State *Ibuism*—premised on the honorific *Ibu*, or mother[10]—politicises motherhood (and by that extension, womanhood) by distilling it to woman's biological functions. An essentialist discourse that espouses the principles of *Panca Dharma Wanita* (Five Responsibilities of Women), State *Ibuism* "defines women as appendages and companions to their husbands, as procreators of the nation, as mothers and educators of children, as housekeepers, and as members of Indonesian society—in that order" (Suryakusuma 1996, 101).

Officially endorsed by the government and supported by major women's groups, the responsibilities or duties set out in state *Ibuism* were incorporated into government-sponsored programmes, including the PKK (*Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga*) or Family Welfare Development, and disseminated across all sections of Indonesian society, reaching women even in the rural areas (Hull 1996). Media images of desirable feminine virtues and qualities were also promoted through events like cooking contests while TV shows that promote "good womanly behaviour" (Wieringa 2015, 203) stressed the greater importance of marriage and a husband's career. The state's discursive regulation of femininities as "good" women—associated with selfless service to men, children, family, society and the nation—invariably limits their rights, potential and agency as citizens and as individuals.[11] State *Ibuism* thus carries serious implications for women as it implicitly sanctions their continued political disenfranchisement and marginalisation in the nation space.

At the same time, women's constructed identities and status as subordinated helpmates in the nation space are reinforced by male-oriented notions of the family, a powerful and revered institution in Indonesia. Patriarchal and hierarchical in structure, the Indonesian family has been heavily featured by the New Order

[9]Additionally, the concept of *Kodrat Wanita* is insidiously "justified as indigenous, 'traditional,' 'our Indonesian way'—as opposed to alien, excessively Western-influenced conceptions of female equality and independence" (Hatley 1997, 99) in order to keep women toeing the line in both family and national discourses.

[10]Depending on social or cultural contexts, *Ibu* can be broadly used to denote a variety of women's roles in Indonesia.

[11]For an invigorating discussion of Indonesian women's political engagement with the state over their rights as citizens, refer to Blackburn (2004, 84–110).

government as the cornerstone of *Pancasila*, which promulgates the vision of "unity in one nation" (Bertrand 2004, 31) throughout the archipelago of 17,500 islands, where 260 million people of diverse ethnicities, cultures, religions and languages reside. On the surface, the *Pancasila* principle of national unity promotes social harmony and cohesion amongst its diverse cultures and ethnic groups, but in reality, the state sought to represent "the nation as a family [by] portraying those who espoused alternative discourses as challenging the idea of an inclusive Indonesian family to which all… belonged" (Lloyd and Smith 2001, 11). The construction of Indonesia as a nation is thus premised on a homogeneous idea of nationhood that Lloyd and Smith call "inclusive unity" (2001, 3). This idea is further perpetuated through the national slogan, *Bhinekka Tunggal Ika*, or "Unity in Diversity," which has been employed by Suharto's government to control the potentially explosive regional, ethnic and religious differences among its people.

However, the national image and rhetoric of Indonesia as a united and inclusive family is a heavily contested one, considering the disparities in cultures and identities, and the resulting ideological conflicts and challenges which include, broadly speaking, "the role of Islam in political institutions, the relative importance of the central and regional governments, [and] the access and representations of ethnic groups in the state's institutions" (Bertrand 2004, 3). Kingsbury (2005) argues that "it was always a rhetorical, if not actual, tenet of faith" (136) that national unity could be achieved; in short, the united and inclusive nation is an imaginary and elusive vision. To sustain this image of unity, the government has, in the past, employed repressive measures and military violence to subjugate rebellious regions that included Aceh, Kalimantan, and East Timor. Since Suharto's resignation in 1998, the leaders of the post-New Order period have adopted a more democratic approach in governing Indonesia, but the challenges that presented themselves at the inception of the nation-state are still present.

Given that the national imaginary and indeed, the national consciousness, have been nurtured on masculinist views and representations of the "united and inclusive family" for decades, it is hardly surprising to find that it is the patriarchal model that has become the premise of such representations. As Robinson (2000) perceives, the "gendered model of political authority [has] its origins in an imagined tradition of a patriarchal family" while political leadership is based on "the 'natural authority' of the father" (141). The nation was thus promoted as a natural extension of family and kinship relations, and their political leaders represented as the father figures of the country: Sukarno is still recognised as the country's "founding father" (he is also fondly known as *Bapak* or "father") while Suharto was the self-styled "father of development" during the 1980s. The patriarchal-paternalistic family model on which the imagining of the nation is based is however incomplete without women playing their ordained role as gendered Other. As part of the natural order of things, women, as symbols of caring, virtuous and motherly nurturers, were charged with the task of protecting the integrity and unity of the family and the nation by State *Ibuism*; their duties included giving birth to and educating future generations of loyal, patriotic citizens for the state.

Following the sociopolitical upheavals of *Reformasi*, the post-New Order state ushered in an era of democratisation and with it, greater freedoms for the civil society. Heated contestations on gender and sexuality (and the role of Islam) proliferated in the public, social spaces, among them the issues of polygamy and women's rights. This time however, anti-polygamy movements faced a backlash when pro-polygamy supporters entered the arena, including well-known public male figures such as the country's vice-president, Hamzah Haz (who served from 2001 to 2004), and the entrepreneur Puspo Wardoyo, whose polygamy awards and campaigns sparked an outcry from feminist groups, both secular and Muslim (van Wichelen 2009). At the same time, the hegemonic forces of globalisation and rapid socioeconomic and technological developments also altered the shape of social communication and communities and, along with them, gender and sexual identities and relations. The state's anxiety over the negative influences of liberalism and globalisation on the cherished ideological foundations and traditions of the nation resulted in renewed attention on the family and women's identities as mothers and wives through the concept of *Keluarga Sakinah*; only this time, women are expected to be both "obedient and pious" with biology and religion "recruited to impress upon women the duty to maintain harmony at home" (Wieringa 2015, 97).

Based on Islamic morality, *Keluarga Sakinah* endorses messages and imagery of family harmony and happiness—represented by the family ideal consisting of the father, the caring mother (usually depicted wearing a headscarf), and at least one boy and one girl. Under this new guise, the same old tropes are repeated: the `natural' authority of men as breadwinners and heads of their families, and the "separate-but-equal" positions of men and women as the much-touted model of familial—and gender—harmony (Wieringa 2015, 97–98). In this manner, the feminine duties and virtues espoused by *kodrat* and State *Ibuism* are given prominence once more by thepaternalistic-patriarchal articulations of *Keluarga Sakinah*.

Although *Keluarga Sakinah* promotes sexual monogamy and the integrity of the family nucleus, the post-New Order state has not challenged polygamous practices either. To the dismay and anger of many women's groups, the government of Megawati Sukarnoputri, the country's first female President from 2001 to 2004, gave tacit support to the practice when the fact of Hamzah Haz's polygamous marriages was made public knowledge (Davies and Bennett 2015, 6). The public visibility of pro-polygamy sentiments and practices further contributed to the subversion of sexual monogamy as an ideal in the lived, social spaces. In fact, polygamous husbands have taken advantage of the concept of *Keluarga Sakinah* by emphasising woman's *kodrat* and submissive piety to persuade their wives to remain in polygamous marriages. Hence women are advised not to take their cheating or polygamous husbands to task as the fault lies with the "other" woman; besides, the onus is on the wife to maintain family happiness, peace and order (Wieringa 2015).

For decades then, the Indonesian national imaginary has revolved around the phallocentric doctrines and representations of women as secondary citizens and gendered Other; not only do they collude in reproducing and sustaining the idea of the nation as "one happy family" but they also endorse women's "natural" place in

this order. The dominant, nationalised, and naturalised, images of women as dutiful, obedient housewives and mothers would have had profound effects on the perceptions and imagination of the citizenry; such representations regulate the norms of socially-acceptable gender identities, roles and behaviour, and define gendered spaces and subject-positions in both the private and public spheres.[12] After all, "symbols of nationalism are not gender neutral but in enforcing a national norm, they implicitly or explicitly construct a set of gendered norms" (Sharp 1996, 97). Such an insidious construction, authorised at the highest political levels, would have indirectly reinforced the polemical structures of domination that underline gender relations and positions in both social and cultural arenas as well. The question of how these gendered norms and discourses are imagined and explored through literary representations of polygamy is the subject of my analysis below.

6.3 Woman and Polygamy in Contemporary Indonesian Narratives

This section examines how the patriarchal state discourse of "one happy family"—considered the basis of national culture and reflective of the *Pancasila* principle of inclusive unity—underscores the imagining of Indonesia as a nation in the following narratives: *Dia*[13] and *Aku Supiyah Istri Hardhian* (henceforth *Supiyah*) by Titis Basino and Nia Dinata's *Berbagi Suami*. Each story is told from the female protagonist's viewpoint and voice, and explores the effects of polygamy on her life. In my readings, I consider the following questions: How is polygamy imagined and represented in contemporary Indonesian narratives? What kinds of gender and sexual identities, roles and relations are explored? To what extent do these narratives express the sociopolitical imperatives of *kodrat*, State *Ibuism* and *Keluarga Sakinah*? How are female desire, agency and freedom negotiated in these narratives? And how do these stories reflect and contribute to the changing identity formations and social processes of the nation space?

In *Dia*, Mrs. Hamid is a dutiful housewife who depends on her husband financially. Although she experiences shame and anger when her husband marries his second wife, she decides to "sacrifice" her happiness by staying with him for the sake of their children and family. In her mind though, her unnamed rival is always referred to as *her* (*dia*), the other woman whom she refuses to think about too much but whose invisible presence in her life causes her both emotional and mental

[12]The pervasiveness with which women are associated with subservience is, for instance, reflected in Indonesian cinema. According to Sen (1998), the citizen/subject is invariably assumed as male: "Agency, whether in reproducing or challenging the political and economic structures of Indonesia, is thus ascribed almost exclusively to men. In all these scenarios women play the roles of victims or, at best, survivors against great odds" (37).

[13]For my analysis, I use Lamoureux's translation of Basino's *Dia*, titled *Her: An Indonesian short story* (2001).

distress. Similarly in *Supiyah*, the titular protagonist is devoted to her husband, Hardhian, until she finds out about his secret second marriage to Fatma. Unlike Mrs. Hamid, Supiyah refuses to accept her situation and divorces Hardhian in order to marry a wealthy widower, Sofyan.

In *Berbagi Suami*, the effects of polygamy on women's lives are shown through the intersecting stories of Salma, Siti, and Ming. All three protagonists, who differ from each other in terms of age, class, education, race, culture and religion, meet as acquaintances or strangers through brief encounters in the crowded urban spaces of Jakarta. Alone in their personal experience of polygamy, each character offers a distinctive viewpoint and voice about the subject. Salma the gynaecologist represents the angry first wife who feels betrayed when she finds out about her politician husband's infidelity and secret marriages, but she eventually accepts them and even endorses polygamy on national television. Siti is reluctantly coerced into a polygamous marriage as the third wife but finds herself unexpectedly falling in love with her co-wife, Dwi; in the end, both leave their husband and home to start a new life together. While the first two narratives are told from the dominant Indonesian Muslim perspective, the third story captures the voice of the non-Muslim Chinese minority in Indonesia through the character of Ming. Ming's narrative is the counterpoint to Salma's as she represents the woman who willingly becomes Koh Abun's secret, second wife in order to have financial security. In the end, Ming is discovered and attacked by Abun's first wife, Linda, and the event leads to the disintegration of her marriage.

Among all the narratives, the family that is most closely modelled on the state vision of "inclusive unity" is that of Pak Lik's in Siti's narrative in *Berbagi Suami*. Pak Lik's masculine identity and sexual power are validated by his possession of three wives—Sri, Dwi and Siti—and several small children and infants, all who appear to live quite harmoniously under one roof and are representative of the "one happy family" on which the nation is based. Unable to curb his sexual appetites while in Aceh, he marries a fourth wife, Santi, whom he brings back to Jakarta and whose presence fuels tension in an already congested small house[14] with only two rooms: one for Pak Lik and choice of wife/wives for the night, and the other for the rest of the family. The imagery of one man ruling a house full of women and children is representative of the paternalistic-patriarchal authority upheld by the nation-state. The camera projects Pak Lik as a man whose sexual and physical needs are fulfilled or taken care of by his many wives in numerous scenes: he is depicted as lounging on the bed, waiting for his wife/wives, or he pins Siti to the wall when she resists his advances. In another scene, Siti likens him to a Sultan surrounded by his concubines: Pak Lik, with his fourth wife and current favourite, Santi, seated beside him, proudly surveys his other wives as they work—Siti who is ironing clothes and Dwi who fetches his coffee.

[14]Kurnia (2009) perceives this big family as a symbol of the "overpopulated Javanese family typical of the most overpopulated island in Indonesia" and that the film "gestures towards the issue of the lack of family planning, and the associated poverty and overpopulation."

Although the film represents Pak Lik's wives as energetic, industrious and strong, they are mostly confined to the domestic home and its many responsibilities. The co-wives, when not giving birth, have to take care of their children, or do the laundry, cooking and cleaning. Furthermore, the co-wives are expected to be sexually available[15]; this ideal also underscores the dominant Indonesian discourses on Muslim women whose "purpose is to reproduce healthy citizens and satisfy their husbands"(Blackburn et al. 2008, 12). The trope of the "good" woman is similarly raised in *Dia*, where Mrs. Hamid too takes pride in providing her husband "children, an organized household, home-cooked meals, immaculate clothes, a warm and ready welcome"; even her husband recognises her as "the proverbial good woman". For all her emotional wounds and "deteriorating health" after he marries his second wife, Mrs. Hamid continues to carry out her marital duties and fulfil her husband's desires by having "five more sons" on top of the five children they already have prior to his second marriage. As dutiful housewives and mothers who preserve family peace and unity by deferring to their husbands' authority, Pak Lik's wives and Mrs. Hamid fulfil State *Ibuism*'s prescriptions of Indonesian femininity.

In these stories too, women's dependence on men and their segregated space in the home are pronounced. This is highlighted in *Berbagi Suami*, when Pak Lik gives Sri some money just before he departs for Aceh, and asks if it is sufficient during his absence. While it is disturbing to consider how an entire household of co-wives and children is dependent on one man's ability to make ends meet,[16] the scene is also relevant for its criticism of the gender biases espoused by the model of "separate-but-equal" relations between husbands and wives. The potential vulnerability of women with limited power and agency is underscored by the co-wives' collective financial dependence on Pak Lik and their lack of mobility, bound as they are to their circumscribed identities as housewives and mothers.

Equally important is the manner in which the word "*kodrat*" keeps recurring in many of the narratives. In *Dia*, *Supiyah*, and Salma's narrative in *Berbagi Suami*, the first wives are portrayed as women who embrace their womanly destiny or *kodrat* for the sake of the children and family. This idea is best captured by Mrs. Hamid when she reflects on her marriage: "A husband has the right to practice polygamy, and this was the test of my tolerance." She also "devoutly believed that as a woman, [she] was destined to accept and protect" her marriage and family to the extent of withholding her true feelings: "I was careful to disguise my emotions and maintain the harmony in our home".

Salma the gynaecologist in *Berbagi Suami* is another case in point. As a highly-educated and financially independent woman, she has more choices compared to Mrs. Hamid and can divorce her husband if she wishes to. When

[15]It's worthwhile noting that the co-wives are also portrayed as women comfortable with their sexuality and desires, especially Sri and Dwi. Tatyzo (2011) argues that they challenge "the wife/whore binary in Indonesian cinema in which sexually active women are often presented as prostitutes, and wives' sexuality is limited to reproduction" (34).

[16]This scene also raises questions about poverty and its related social ills, although Dinata does not fully engage these issues in her film.

questioned by her son however, she explains to him that it is *kodrat* for her to accept polygamy as proof of her Islamic faith. To show her conviction, Salma even goes so far as to support her husband's political career with her public endorsement of polygamy on a televised talk show; by doing so, she toes the official line that "encourages civil servants' official wives to… [support] their husbands in their careers" (Robinson 2000, 148) as part of the national discourse of inclusive unity. By performing the roles of the "good" wife, mother and citizen, both Mrs. Hamid and Salma maintain the gendered hierarchies of family and nation through the ideological imperatives of the "one happy family".

The concept of "*kodrat wanita*" is similarly explored in *Supiyah* when the protagonist initially tries to uphold her duties "as a wife and as a mother for her two children"[17] (61). Although she tries to rationalise her pain by ascribing her suffering to "*kodrat Allah*" (68), she is also tempted by the possibility of divorce. In this sense, Supiyah is a much more rebellious character compared to Mrs. Hamid or Salma as she eventually follows the angry urgings of her heart by divorcing Hardhian at the end of the novel.

Despite the different time frames of their narratives, both Basino and Dinata observe that the double marginalisation of women as subordinated Other in the spaces of family and the nation has remained a constant, while traditional attitudes and viewpoints towards women have prevailed despite the social shifts and transformations of the past few decades. At the same time, the narratives also suggest how multiple state, social and religious discourses have colluded in the reproduction of gender-based power relations and abuses.

Berbagi Suami, for instance, highlights examples of gender inequality and injustice through its depictions of polygamous relationships. In Siti's narrative, Pak Lik's first wife, Sri, unknowingly contracts a venereal disease from him and has to seek treatment at a clinic. Sri's story reflects lower class women's lack of access to education on health and family planning (Kurnia 2009); since they have no control over their bodies or lack access to fertility control and treatment, women are prone to being infected with venereal diseases. Moreover, the film calls to attention the manner in which women are reduced to sexual objects and playthings; all the co-wives are at the beck and call of Pak Lik and, in Siti's case, marital rape is alluded to as she does not have the right to say "no" to sex.

Illegal practices of polygamy through *kawin siri* and *kawin diam-diam* are similarly explored in all the narratives in *Berbagi Suami*[18] as well as in *Supiyah*, when Hardhian marries Fatma without Supiyah's permission. But it is Ming's story in *Berbagi Suami* which shows the failure of the Indonesian legal system to protect women's rights in such secret marriages. Koh Abun, who has to migrate to America with his first wife, leaves Ming behind with a thick packet of money as a form of compensation. While the scene demonstrates the commodified female body as the object of men's sexual pleasure, it is Ming's silent passivity—in stark contrast to

[17]All translations for *Supiyah* are my own.

[18]See Kurnia (2009) and Imanjaya (2009) for their readings of the secret marriages in the film.

her usual vivacity—that underlines the susceptibility of her situation. By voicing the powerlessness of women who are treated and viewed as secondary subjects, the narratives thus show how the repressive, authoritarian discourses of State *Ibuism* and *kodrat* contribute to the systematic "ideological devaluing of women and the feminine" (Robinson 2000, 145) in Indonesian society.

6.4 Changing Identities: Agency, Resistance, Autonomy

In the past few decades, gender identities and relations have slowly been changing shape in Indonesia due to the forces of globalisation and modernisation, the increased awareness of gender equality and civil rights among men and women, as well as to the determined efforts of women's movements and NGO groups in their fight for women's rights and issues, including greater protection for women at work and for women subjected to violence (Robinson 2000; Blackburn 2004). Feminists and activists have also demanded that the state recognise women's contributions to the economy, society, education and politics (Robinson 2000, 2004). In addition, contemporary Indonesian women have access to different kinds of media representations of women other than the stereotyped images of mothers and wives (Sen 1998); these ongoing shifts in femininities, seen also in the rise of educated young women and affluent career women in public, social spaces, go a long way in redefining women's traditional identity, role and place in the home and society.

Although *Dia*, *Supiyah* and *Berbagi Suami* capture women's marginalisation and devaluation, they also reflect ongoing social shifts and identity transformations in the nation space by visualising women's struggle for power and autonomy, seen in the smaller or less visible acts of resistance that go against the grain of the dominant national trope of the united and inclusive patriarchal family. Such acts of resistance not only reveal the agentic possibilities possessed by women, but also the myriad ways in which they are negotiated, with some acts taking place within prescribed boundaries, while others pose as challenges, both covert and overt. Above all, they reveal that the female protagonists are not entirely helpless, subservient or passive, but are individuals who attempt to take charge of their own well-being and happiness as they mediate different roles and identities.

In *Dia*, Mrs. Hamid finds a new lease of life when she joins a woman's club and is soon elevated to the rank of vice-chairperson. Her active social life brings her out of her "terrible loneliness" and she begins to feel "like a new woman." Mrs. Hamid's new social role is thus an empowering one for it moves her out of the confining limits of domesticity through a different identity as "vice-chairperson" of an organisation. Through her newfound social freedom, Mrs. Hamid becomes more accepting of her polygamous marriage. While her subtle assertions of agency remain within the discursive boundaries of social and religious acceptability, they nonetheless undermine her husband's assumption of her subservience and passivity, traits that he has taken for granted. Not only is he "surprised" and "unnerved" by her sudden displays of affection, but he is clearly uncertain of what to make of these

changes. Considering that Mr. Hamid's reason for a second wife was justified by blaming his first wife for not being the "involved and interesting woman" that he "fell in love with," his reaction is both comical and ironic to say the least.

The antithesis to Mrs. Hamid and her limited agency, the protagonist in *Supiyah* is an independent woman, both financially and intellectually. A respected university lecturer, Supiyah has always had access to mobility, visualised by her possession of a car and freedom of movement in the city. Due to her academic and career achievements, she also has economic and social status. Although she shares Mrs. Hamid's desire to remain a good wife and mother by taking comfort in her children, religion and work, Supiyah is unable to move past her husband's infidelity or her own bitter feelings of betrayal and humiliation. Driven by an unspoken desire to hurt Hardhian and equally flattered by Sofyan's attentions, she decides to go on dates with the latter (although she withholds physical intimacy and uses it as proof of her moral superiority to Hardhian). Supiyah's rejection of the normative identities and roles imposed by *kodrat* and *Ibuism* correspondingly engages the negotiation of an alternative—and subversive—identity as a desirable "single" woman being wooed by another man.

It is also worth noting that, of all the female characters examined here, Supiyah is the one whose conflicted mental and subjective states are the most realistically explored and portrayed. She goes through the whole gamut of emotional responses when she discovers Hardhian's betrayal, from suspicious uncertainty and paranoia to jealous rage and bitter humiliation. As an intellectual too, she recognises how she has been unfairly subjected to a man's world and begins to question the status quo: "Why can man love more than one woman? Why can't I as a woman have a right to happiness by loving more than one man?" (92). These provocative questions should also be considered an implicit criticism of the gender bias encoded in the marriage law that allows polygyny, but not polyandry: "If only there is a law that permits a woman two husbands, I would have done it" (135). By acknowledging her desire for two men, Supiyah stands out as an unconventional woman "who dares to construct a world comparable to a man's where she can practice polyandry" (Arimbi 2009, 123). However, her subversive desire is contained as this construct remains in the imaginary realm, since polyandry is an immoral practice that is forbidden by Islam (Arimbi 2009, 123). By divorcing Hardhian and marrying Sofyan, Supiyah makes the choice of preserving her self-worth and integrity albeit at the cost of losing the man she loves.

As for the three protagonists in *Berbagi Suami*, each too negotiates desire and agency as wives and as individuals in different ways. Among them, Salma—as a gynaecologist with her own clinic—is the most successful in terms of education, occupation and financial standing. According to Tatyzo (2011), Salma's independence as a career woman is "contrary to the ideal of the devout Muslim wife in mainstream Indonesian imagery" (33). Although she accepts polygamy as a man's right, she also undermines Pak Haji's authority in small but powerful ways. One example is her openly dismissive attitude towards him at the dinner table and her

decision not to join him to go to Aceh and help the victims of the 2004 tsunami; instead she decides to join her son (who also dislikes his father) on a separate mission. By snubbing her husband's authority, Salma not only conveys her lack of respect for him, but also rejects the role of a "good" wife in the private domain. Her acts of resistance thus occur at a private, personal level that is at odds with her public face of conformity.

In Ming's narrative, an admirer named Firman actively encourages her to fulfil her aspirations as a film actress. Firman, whom Ming is attracted to despite being married to Abun, offers her a path to eventual independence should she decide to pursue her acting career. Like Supiyah and Salma, Ming refuses to conform to the role of the wife staying at home and is represented instead as an active, sexy and independent young woman who freely roams about the city, attending acting classes and meeting Firman whenever her husband is not around. When not playing the role of wife to Abun, Ming appears to be leading a single life; in this way, she "negotiates two identities, that of single young woman and secret second wife" (Kurnia 2009).

However, the biggest act of resistance is contained in the second narrative where in an interesting twist, Siti falls in love with her co-wife, Dwi; their relationship develops to the extent that they, with Dwi's children in tow, run away together at the end of the narrative. Their acts of transgression—falling in love with each other, and abandoning their husband—resonate with significant meanings. While Siti's and Dwi's escape can be seen as a metaphor for their liberation from patriarchal dominion, the film's exploration of female sexuality and solidarity through the emerging lesbian relationship is nevertheless a bold statement of women's agency and autonomy, seen in Siti's and Dwi's acts of taking control of their bodies and destinies. Furthermore, the narrative's ending suggests an alternative family structure through the lesbian-led family, another powerful image that challenges the phallocentric, heteronormative tropes of "one happy family" and male sexual potency encoded at cultural, social and national levels.

More importantly, *Berbagi Suami* considers how men too can contribute to the dismantling of entrenched hegemonic discourses by exploring their changing attitudes towards polygamy, seen when the film pits the viewpoints of young, educated and liberal-minded men like Nadim and Firman against those of the older men like Pak Haji and Koh Abun. Salma's acts of resistance are supported by Nadim who condemns his father's practice of polygamy; he displays his anger to an extent where he is seen as a disrespectful son. In an ironic reversal, a dying Pak Haji finally acquiesces to his son's thinking when he advises Nadim to marry only one wife. Firman too questions Ming's status as a second wife when she can be independent on her own. By depicting the ongoing shifts in the perceptions and attitudes among young Muslim men, the film emphasises not only men's equally significant role in altering the shape of future gender identities, relations and positions, but also the need for differing definitions and representations of masculinity and femininity to take place in the national imaginary.

6.5 Conclusion

Although Basino and Dinata belong to different generations and their narratives were published/produced in different sociopolitical contexts and times, both women share a common ground in their criticism of polygamy as a patriarchal privilege and practice. By continuing the tradition of feminist protest that began with Kartini more than a century ago, Basino and Dinata not only stress the negative impact of polygamy on women who struggle emotionally to carry on their duties as "good" wives and mothers, but they also emphasise the gender disparities and biases embedded within the discourses and ideologies of family and nation, underscored by the repressive tenets of *kodrat*, *State Ibuism* and *Keluarga Sakinah*. At the same time, their narratives also reveal tensions and fractures in the polygamous relationships that speak of women's discontent with patriarchal control and dominance, as well as their refusal to be helpless victims of polygamy and patriarchal authority.

In varying degrees then, all the narratives explore women's negotiations of power, agency, desire and freedom through acts of resistance, both covert and overt. The characters, Supiyah and Siti in particular, represent some of the most compelling articulations of women's desire for self-empowerment and autonomy. Supiyah harbours insidious thoughts of polyandry and in the end divorces her polygamous husband to marry a man she's been dating for only a few weeks. Both Siti and Dwi betray their husband when they fall in love with each other and flee their marital home. Through the representations of strong protagonists who break the mould of traditional femininities prescribed by *kodrat* and *Ibuism*, Basino and Dinata convey an affirming vision of female sexuality, agency and independence. However, although Basino is a veteran writer whose subversive explorations of infidelity and polygamy since the 1960s place her as a woman beyond her times, it is Dinata who pushes the boundaries to interrogate sexual identities and binaries; in this, she clearly belongs to the new wave of Indonesian film directors who "deal with issues relating to gender and sexuality that previously would not have found public space" (Baird 2009, 1). By boldly tackling previously taboo subjects like homosexuality and particularly, women's sexuality, *Berbagi Suami* should be seen as the positive result of the democratisation processes of the post-New Order state. Another notable difference is Dinata's inclusion of men as active participants in the debate on polygamy for the system to evolve and change.

As social texts of their times, the narratives invariably reflect the throes and transformations of a nation in constant flux, and the ensuing changes in gender identities, roles and relations. By giving voice to these changes, Basino's and Dinata's stories counter the state's "fixed" rhetoric and regulated imagining of the nation as "one happy family" with the vision of a nation space that is vibrant, dynamic, and transformative, where minority voices and identities struggle for political expression and representation, and where "Other" gendered identities and relations are continuously being formed and are able to emerge from, or escape, the

regulated dominant discourse of the nation. These emerging voices and imaginings not only challenge the patriarchal-paternalistic ideologies and discourses of Indonesia, but also reflect the ongoing democratic transformations in post-New Order Indonesia.

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Chapter 7
Women Writing *Wayang* in Post-reform Indonesia: A Comparative Study of Fictional Interventions in Mythology and National History

Meghan Downes

7.1 Introduction

The epic Hindu-Javanese mythologies portrayed in *wayang* (shadow puppetry) performances have long been a source of narrative, stylistic and thematic material for Indonesian authors. Stories, characters and motifs from the *wayang* canon have been used for various purposes, including evading censorship and critiquing government ideologies, as has been well-documented in scholarly work on prominent male authors of the 1980s and 1990s, including Yusuf Bilyarta Mangunwijaya and Putu Wijaya. This chapter examines how female authors have engaged with *wayang* mythology in the post-reform era. Women writers are increasingly visible in the national literary landscape, yet little academic attention has been given to these authors' complex engagement with *wayang*. Instead, the primary focus has been on how they have dealt with themes of sexuality or religion. While these are undoubtedly important topics, we lose a great deal of complexity by focusing on such issues in isolation. I propose to widen the conversation to include traditional mythologies and *wayang* motifs as an alternative source of cultural authority for female authors in Indonesia.

I compare the work of three authors: Laksmi Pamuntjak's *Amba* (2012), Leila Chudori's *Pulang* (Homecoming 2012) and Ayu Utami's *Seri Bilangan Fu* (The Fu Numeral series, 2008–2013). These writers adapt and subvert various elements of ancient *wayang* tales in their fiction to craft a sense of place, intervene in official national histories and challenge social norms. Laksmi Pamuntjak's *Amba* was short-listed for the 2013 Khatulistiwa literary award, a prestigious Indonesian literary prize. *Amba* is a tragic love story set during the 1965–66 anti-communist mass killings, which marked the rise of Indonesia's thirty-year authoritarian New Order regime. Told via flashbacks, we meet young lovers Amba and Bhisma whose affair

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is cut short by political turmoil, mass violence and exile. The eventual winner of the 2013 Khatulistiwa award was Leila Chudori's novel *Pulang*, a family saga of exile and homecoming, set during historical events in Paris and Indonesia, including the 1965 violence, and the fall of the New Order regime in 1998. *Pulang* describes these events and their ongoing repercussions through the story of exiled Dimas Suryo and his daughter Lintang Utara. Ayu Utami's *Bilangan Fu* series (of which the eponymous first book won the 2008 Khatulistiwa prize) also revisits histories of political violence in Indonesia: *Bilangan Fu* explores the impacts of militarism and authoritarianism on a rural Javanese village, and its sequel *Manjali dan Cakrabirawa* (2010) tells the story of Marja, a contemporary young Jakartan woman learning for the first time the tragic realities behind the official narratives about 1965 that she learnt in school history textbooks. All three authors revisit the violent events of 1965–66, yet another common element is the way these authors combine their reimaginings of history with reworkings of local regional mythology, most notably the Hindu-Javanese *wayang* epics. Pamuntjak draws her characters and narrative structure from an ancient Hindu-Javanese *wayang* story featuring Bhisma and Amba. In *Pulang*, Chudori regularly uses *wayang* metaphors to describe her characters' experiences, and Utami's *Bilangan Fu* series engages deeply with *wayang* philosophies and aesthetics.

Wayang is an ancient performance genre which is still regularly and actively consumed by millions of Indonesians today, particularly in Java and Bali. There are many regional variations, but its most recognisable form involves leather shadow-puppets operated behind a screen by a skilled *dalang* (puppet-master). Although *wayang* storylines are primarily drawn from the ancient Hindu epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, *wayang* performances also provide significant scope for improvisation and "*pasemon*" or allegories to contemporary political events (Keeler 1987). *Wayang* is a broader cultural force than purely performance genre; its features have been appropriated and adapted in comics, television and novels and it remains an important medium in the dissemination of views on and critiques of contemporary Indonesian culture, politics and society. As a literary motif, and indeed a "text" in its own right, *wayang* offers a familiar yet dynamic framework of characters and themes which can then be manipulated in highly varied and complex ways as authors adapt certain narrative, stylistic and thematic elements of *wayang* into their writing. During the 1980s and 1990s, at the height of the New Order regime, prominent male authors in Indonesia, including Yudhistira Ardi Noegraha, Seno Gumira Ajidarma, Y.B. Mangunwijaya and Putu Wijaya, frequently drew on *wayang* motifs to evade censorship and challenge dominant government constructions of history, tradition and culture. This literary phenomenon has been carefully traced by several scholars including Allen (2000) and Clark (2001). In more recent scholarship, however, the topic of *wayang* has been somewhat neglected. This chapter fills a significant gap in studies of contemporary Indonesian literature, by examining how female authors have engaged with *wayang* mythology in the post-reform era.

I begin with a brief but important background of the sociopolitical and literary context of post-reform Indonesia; focusing in particular on how contemporary

representations of gender in Indonesian fiction, media and public debate have shifted since the New Order period (please refer also to Chin's Chap. 6 in this volume). I also explain how the New Order regime's hegemonic gender ideologies, which espoused strong militarised masculinity and demure domestic femininity, were closely linked with the government's official constructions of national history, particularly with regard to the 1965–66 anti-communist violence. Then, I turn to the texts themselves and closely examine the ways in which the authors use *wayang* mythology to engage with these dominant narratives of gender and nation. These *wayang* writings are complex projects of "canonical counter discourse" where *wayang* is both a tool of and a target for social critiques. I draw this phrase from the work of Tiffin (1987) on postcolonial literatures, and my analysis is also informed by theories of intertextuality (Barthes 1981; Kristeva 1986). As I will demonstrate, these three authors engage with *wayang* mythology in diverse ways and on different levels, from thematic and aesthetic homages, through to deeper ideological critiques of the gendered norms of the *wayang* canon. The sociopolitical critiques running through the novels also vary: while all three authors challenge some aspects of gender stereotypes and official histories, other aspects continue to be remain unquestioned, particularly with regard to female beauty, male wisdom and the political justification of anti-communist violence. By comparing their use of *wayang* mythology in these texts, this chapter demonstrates how each author contests or reinforces prevailing notions of feminine and masculine identity in contemporary Indonesia, and how such representations are deeply entwined with narratives of history and nation. Ultimately, a deeper understanding of this literary phenomenon is a useful vantage point from which we can identify competing discourses around gender and national history in contemporary Indonesia.

7.2 Diversity of Female Voices in Post-reform Indonesia

Since the collapse of President Suharto's authoritarian New Order regime in 1998, women writers have been increasingly visible in the national literary landscape. The "*reformasi*" period, as it came to be known, was characterised by a systematic process of deregulation across all kinds of media; hundreds of independent broadcasters and publishers appeared, and a whole range of regulations, authorities and social norms were challenged (Hill and Sen 2005). Previously hegemonic ideals of state secularism, Java-centrism, male dominance and official military histories were all called into question, as has been documented in many scholarly accounts (Heryanto 2008, 2014). Voices that had previously been suppressed under the New Order regime emerged, including those advocating regional autonomy, and a more prominent social and political role for Islam. Significantly for this chapter, the first decade of the twenty-first century also saw an increasingly diverse range of ideal gender roles being championed in the deregulated Indonesian mediascape, and arguments around gender, sex and sexuality claimed a central position in public debates over pornography, polygamy, Islamic law, abortion and sexuality (Lindsay

2010; Rinaldo 2011; Bennett and Davies 2014). This is not an unexpected development, for throughout the history of Indonesia, gender has been a crucial terrain upon which the representations of national identity are built and contested. Links between gender and the nation state have been studied in a range of global contexts, and feminist scholars have pointed out that women are often seen as the embodiment of national or community identity. Therefore, in times of social upheaval, as noted by Yuval-Davis (1993) and Moghadam (1994), women's bodies and behaviour often become a focus of attention, and generate tensions and debates around women's "proper" role in society. In Indonesia, gender roles have historically been shaped by a complex combination of existing local gender norms, Dutch colonial ideologies, the nationalist struggle, the authoritarian New Order regime and images from the global mediascape (Sears 1995; Brenner 1998; Hatley 2002; Blackwood 2005). Because the texts in this chapter are concerned with the 1965–66 inception of the New Order regime, it is important to take a brief look at the gender legacies of that particular era.

In contrast to the puritan nuclear families promoted by Dutch colonialism, the nationalist struggle leading up to Indonesian independence in 1945 promoted and celebrated militarised revolutionary roles for both men and women (Sunindyo 1998). During the 1950s–60s, the Sukarno government's "guided democracy," under the growing political influence of socialism, supported ideologies of gender equality, labour reform, and education for all. The Indonesian Women's Movement (*Gerakan Wanita Indonesia*, known as "Gerwani"), which eventually became affiliated with the steadily growing Indonesian Communist Party (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, known as "PKI"), campaigned for rural Indonesian women's labour rights and political involvement alongside everyday needs like child-care facilities, small-scale credit cooperatives and healthcare (Blackburn 2004). Such campaigns, however, were relatively short-lived. Following the violent anti-communist mass killings of 1965–66, Suharto's new military regime systematically demonised the image of militarised revolutionary women and active female sexuality (Wieringa 1998, 2002, 2011). The new government fabricated and circulated graphic stories about how members of Gerwani danced partially naked around the mutilated bodies of military generals, brandishing knives and severed penises; these stories were later immortalised in propaganda films and national history museums as a warning about what can happen when women stray from their appropriate role as demure housewives and mothers (Blackburn 2004, 157). For men, meanwhile, hyper-masculine militarism and strong patriarchal order were valorised as the gender ideal. In official government representations, this extreme gender division was to continue for much of the next thirty years. There is a substantial body of scholarship on the role of this hegemonic construction of gender in New Order Indonesia (Suryakusuma 1988; Sears 1995; Sen and Stivens 2002; Blackburn 2004). Of course ideal representations did not always match reality and practice; yet in public discourse, particularly in national film and literature, the image of a "natural" gender binary was upheld, orienting (submissive) women to subordinate, supportive roles and (military) men to leadership positions in both public and

private domains. Here, ideal masculine and feminine types are two sides of the same coin: diametrically opposed and mutually reinforcing.

The euphoria as Suharto stepped down in 1998 brought a sense that everything was open to question, including gender ideologies. In terms of media representation, numerous female novelists and filmmakers have emerged; this shift in who does the work of representation is significant and reflects structural changes within the creative industries (Sulistyani 2010). In previous decades, the role of the serious author ("*sastrawan*") had been primarily occupied by male authors writing within relatively elite and secular frameworks; there were very few female writers and their subject matter was often narrowly confined to themes of love and family. But in the increasingly diverse post-reform mediascape, it is no longer an exception for women to be narrating their own stories in Indonesia and writing about topics other than being a mother and housewife. Rather, it is increasingly the norm, with female authors outnumbering their male counterparts in a range of different literary genres, as evidenced in the primarily female shortlist for the Khatulistiwa awards. The growing influence of female authors in Indonesia has garnered significant academic attention among scholars of Indonesian literature, particularly the so-called *sastrawangi* (literally, "fragrant literature") phenomenon, a phrase describing the post-1998 boom in literature written by young female authors tackling topics and themes previously deemed taboo.[1] Their narratives often contained explicit sex scenes and unprecedentedly candid representations of female sexuality and desire, and they were, on the one hand widely hailed as a step towards women's emancipation from stereotypical gender roles, and on the other hand accused of flooding the market with vulgar, sensationalist content.[2] The term *sastrawangi* was widely adopted by the media during the early 2000s but the authors themselves, including Ayu Utami, Djenar Maesa Ayu and Dewi Lestari, objected to the categorisation as derogatory and disempowering as it focused on the authors' looks and femininity rather than their literary work (Tiojakin 2010). Notably, the descriptor *sastrawangi* has now disappeared, replaced by more varied ideas of female authorship, the image of which has since expanded to include a wider range of writers, from young teenage "tomboy" girls writing about adolescent experience (Sutedja-Liem 2007) to Islamic feminists and proselytisers writing about piety and religious experience (Hellwig 2011). In the post-reform context, scholarly attention has, as I have noted earlier, been primarily focused on how female authors deal with themes of sexuality and religion while their complex engagement with *wayang* mythologies has largely been overlooked. As I will demonstrate below, *wayang* can function for a range of purposes: it is used as a way to add local flavour to stories, as a productive intertextual site for questioning "traditional" gender roles, and as a safe avenue for exploring potentially controversial topics.

[1]See the special issue of *Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs*, vol. 41, no. 2 (2007) for an extended discussion of the *sastrawangi* phenomenon.

[2]The debates around Ayu Utami's first novel, *Saman* (2008), are highly illustrative. Compare, for example, opposing scholarly accounts by Hatley (1999) and Bandel (2005, 2006).

7.3 Mythology, History and Intertextuality

Scholars of literature, both within Indonesia and beyond, have long highlighted the role of mythology as a vehicle for engaging with contemporary political situations, particularly in postcolonial contexts.[3] Elsewhere, I have characterised the 1980s *wayang* novels of Indonesian male authors like Mangunwijaya and Putu Wijaya as postcolonial projects of "canonical counter-discourse" (Downes 2012), a term drawn from Tiffin (1987) on postcolonial literature and one that has also been used by Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) with reference to postcolonial drama. This is a process where writers "unveil" and "dismantle" the basic assumptions of a specific canonical text by developing a "counter" text that preserves many identifying signifiers of the original while altering, often allegorically, its structures of power. For, although it also offers opportunity for subversive critique, *wayang* has frequently been used to serve elite political purposes. Early Javanese rulers saw conceptualisations of the state in the Hindu epics as a way to strengthen their power and transmit ideals of order and hierarchy from court to village (McVey 1986). Later, Dutch colonisers foregrounded *wayang*'s mystical value in an attempt to obscure the political potential of improvised *pasemon* among the masses (Sears 1996). Modern political leaders have characterised *wayang* as a fixed set of moral codes, and both the Sukarno and Suharto governments used *wayang* performances to spread government propaganda and to symbolically link government figures to "righteous" leaders from *wayang* tales (Pausacker 2004). Suharto, in particular, actively funded and controlled *wayang* performances and *dalang* training and gained a monopoly on political messages disseminated through *wayang* performance mediums (van Groenendael 1985). As such, *wayang* is a complex canonical text—not necessarily a colonial text in the sense that Tiffin identifies, but rather a medium or genre that has been utilised by a whole series of rulers and colonisers, both internal and external. When contemporary authors engage *wayang* characters, narratives and themes in their literary work, therefore, they are setting up a dialogue not just with the ancient *wayang* texts but also with the various ways that *wayang* stories have been understood, performed and manipulated throughout the region's history. Theories of intertextuality (Barthes 1981; Kristeva 1986) are useful here, particularly when looking at how contemporary authors seek to "write back" against long-established gendered meanings and representations within the *wayang* canon. In the case of the texts under review in this chapter, *wayang* is not just a tool of critique but also a subject of critique, as the authors attempt to forge new possibilities of narrative, space and voice for female characters within male-dominated mythological frameworks, while also intervening in glorified

[3]Engagement with mythology is an important postcolonial project throughout the world for, as Salman Rushdie points out, "redescribing a world is the necessary first step towards changing it" (cited in Carey-Abrioux 1998, 66). Acts of redescription are also vital in feminist political projects, such as the reinterpretation of fairy tales to expose the normative gender messages contained within them (Zipes 2014).

military histories. *Wayang* mythologies, or at least the versions of these stories that have been most dominant during the past century, feature epic tales of knightly heroism, with female characters in the sidelines, to be rescued or won as prizes. There are of course some key exceptions; several tales include female warriors and notions of gender fluidity that stand in stark contrast to the "military male/demure female" dichotomy. As I will demonstrate in the following section, Pamuntjak, Chudori and Utami's intertextual engagements with *wayang* mythology sometimes critique the gendered norms of *wayang* mythology, and at other times draw on *wayang* gender representations as a potentially empowering source of alternative models of masculinity and femininity.

Mythological texts such as *wayang* can also serve as a useful entry point for authors seeking to engage with highly mythologised national histories. Challenges to official representations of history were particularly contentious during the first decade of the twenty-first century in Indonesia. In particular, long-submerged histories of political violence, such as the 1965–66 anti-communist mass killings (the foundation of the New Order regime), have drawn increased public attention. Then little-known army General Suharto came to power on the pretext of crushing an alleged coup in which six army generals were kidnapped and killed. The details of this event remain unclear, but the coup was attributed to a group within the Indonesian communist party (PKI). In the months that followed, the Sukarno government was overthrown and more than a million Indonesians with supposed links to the PKI or leftist political agendas were killed, tortured and incarcerated, leaving the nation profoundly traumatised (Cribb 1991; Roosa 2006; Kammen and McGregor 2014). Subsequent government versions of this history, including the famous propaganda film *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* (The Treason of the Indonesian Communist Party), gave a detailed account of the alleged coup, portraying the Indonesian communist party as evil and bloodthirsty and the military as saviours preventing the country from descending into chaos (McGregor 2007). The massacres are completely absent from this version. The government's "master narrative" of 1965 and the ominous silence surrounding the mass killings became a key strategy of the New Order's authoritarianism, where fear was kept alive through periodic communist witch-hunts (Heryanto 2006). This master narrative remains powerful even in the post-reform era. However, from the very beginning of the reform period, an undercurrent of alternative memories and voices began to appear in a range of discursive spaces (van Klinken 2001). During the past decade, victims have increasingly and openly discussed their traumatic experiences, and "new" local, ethnic, auto-biographical and social accounts have emerged to challenge the military version of history. In addition, artists, film-makers and authors who grew up with the New Order version of history have attempted to reimagine and reconstruct past events; this is where the texts I examine in this chapter come in. It can be useful here to conceptualise official narratives of national history as another kind of mythological text, featuring specific characters, tropes and moral lessons. As such, *Amba, Pulang* and the *Bilangan Fu* series demonstrate an intertextual engagement with two canons of mythology: *wayang* stories and official national histories. In the sections below, I turn to these novels and investigate the following:

firstly, how each author conceives of and engages with *wayang*; secondly, how they represent ideal gender types; and thirdly, how they represent histories of violence. I then conclude by reflecting on the complex links between history, mythology and gender, both within these texts and beyond.

7.4 *Wayang* Mythology and Histories of Violence in *Amba*, *Pulang* and the *Bilangan Fu* Series

Pamuntjak, Chudori and Utami all engage with *wayang* stories, characters and themes, but on different levels and in different ways as part of their broader attempts to reimagine Indonesian history. Laksmi Pamuntjak's *Amba* describes in detail the complex political landscape of the Indonesian countryside during the 1960s: here, accounts of violence perpetrated by capitalist factory owners, communist collectives and religious groups are given equal weight, countering dominant government narratives of solely communist cruelty against innocent parties. When working at a hospital in Kediri in the lead-up to the mass killings, Amba witnesses people from all sides of politics injured and dying. "It did not matter who was right or wrong," she reflects, "the concrete outcome was many victims" (188).[4] In its detailed descriptions of complex political tensions, *Amba* captures the fear and confusion gripping Central and East Java in the lead-up to the mass killings, but does not lay the blame for such tensions solely at the feet of communist-affiliated groups.

Amba and Bhisma's doomed romance is framed by the story of the *wayang* characters that share their names, and Amba makes sense of the chaos around her through Javanese myths and legends, including the *Mahabharata*. The *Mahabharata* is a cycle of stories centred on the knightly adventures of the Pandawa and Korawa clans, who spiral inevitably towards a final epic battle, the *Bharatayudha*. Echoing such a narrative, the violence gripping Kediri in East Java is framed as a somewhat inevitable continuation of ancient battles in the region. When Amba begins work at the hospital in Kediri, "she suddenly felt brave and important, imagining herself as a *wayang* character entering an empty screen, entering an epic with an unknown ending." She meets Bhisma in the garden behind the hospital, in an otherworldly scene filled with rain and lightning. Later, after losing Bhisma, her life-consuming quest to find out what happened to him is framed in epic terms, lending a sense of inevitability to their fate, and indeed the fate of Indonesia as the violence explodes around them.

In *Amba*, Pamuntjak also uses *wayang* mythology to critique gender norms by reflecting on the limited female roles available in *wayang* stories. The young Amba, for example, reflects that "the *wayang* plays about the *ksatria*'s [knights'] wives made her furious." She cannot understand "what was so beautiful" about Dewi Madrim, "satisfied with being the second choice," or Banowati, who "loved Arjuna

[4]Note: All translations are the author's own.

but allowed herself to be married off" to the wanton Duryudana. "She enjoyed *wayang* stories but at the same time, she secretly laughed at them. She would never become the poor pitiable Amba" (86). Later, however, she indeed finds herself enacting the very *wayang* story that provides her name; yet, importantly, she plays a much more active role than Amba from the original tale, a princess kidnapped by Bhisma and then rejected by her former fiancé Salwa as well as Bhisma himself. Pamuntjak's Amba, in contrast, actively seeks out the dangerous affair that is to impact the rest of her life. Ultimately, Amba and Bhisma are represented as victims of fateful circumstance, and the untimely demise of their relationship can be read as representative of lost and stifled potential in Indonesia, brought about by the chaos of mass killings, imprisonments and exiles. Pamuntjak's intertextual engagement with *wayang* in this novel is primarily thematic, as she brings to life an epic tale of fate, destiny and inevitable violence. She plays with *wayang* narratives when she recasts the story of Amba and Bhisma to make Amba a more active protagonist, and she also casts doubt on the black and white nature of good and evil in her portrayal of complex political tensions.

Similarly in Leila Chudori's *Pulang*, the exiled Dimas is not an evil bloodthirsty communist as per official government narratives; rather, he and his friends had a vague interest in leftist ideas and were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Chudori explores the ongoing repercussions of the New Order's state terrorism by showing how Dimas' friends and family, including his daughter, born long after 1965, are persecuted for their alleged "communist sympathies." Even after starting a new life and opening an Indonesian restaurant in Paris, Dimas and his friends still receive ominous visits from government intelligence officers. When Dimas' daughter Lintang attends an Indonesian embassy cultural event, she faces open hostility and hears people muttering that she is from an "unclean environment," the preferred New Order metaphor for having communists in the family. The central concern in *Pulang* is how the impacts of the 1965–66 violence spread across continents and through generations.

Throughout *Pulang*, Chudori uses *wayang* references to craft a sense of connection back to Indonesia for the exiles living in Paris. And, at key moments in his life, Dimas is compared to different *wayang* characters: in Indonesia before his 1965 exile, his reluctance to support any of the competing ideologies is likened to Wibisono's divided loyalties in the *Ramayana* (31). The *Ramayana* follows the quest of Rama to recover his beloved fiancée Sinta after she is kidnapped and held captive by evil King Rahwana. Rahwana's brother Wibisono finds himself torn between family loyalty and his sympathy for Rama's more noble cause; in *Pulang*, Dimas is portrayed as a similarly conflicted character. He is also compared to several *Mahabharata* characters: when his lover Surti leaves him to marry his best friend Hananto, Dimas feels like Bima longing after the beautiful Drupadi who always chooses the handsome Pandawa knight, Arjuna (65). In Paris, Dimas is linked most closely to Ekalaya, a character rejected by his teacher Resi Dorna, just like Dimas is constantly rejected by his beloved homeland of Indonesia (206). Meanwhile, it is primarily through Dimas' daughter, Lintang that Chudori attempts to challenge social norms and gender roles. As I will demonstrate below, Lintang,

who has a deep interest in both *wayang* and Indonesian history, is represented as a strong, intelligent, independent young woman who actively enjoys sex and is not defined by a desire to be a housewife or mother. Ultimately, Chudori's *Pulang* features fairly straightforward engagement with *wayang* mythology, with references to stories and characters used to create a sense of place, and to symbolise "Indonesia," the nation that Lintang has never visited, but to which she feels a deep connection.

Ayu Utami's intertextual dialogue with *wayang* mythology is comparatively far more complex. Set around the end of the New Order regime, Utami's *Bilangan Fu* series does not attempt to recreate scenes from 1965; rather, she focuses on three young Indonesians (Marja, Yuda and Parang Jati) attempting to make sense of their nation's history. In the second book of the series, *Manjali dan Cakrabirawa*, Marja and Parang Jati are involved in an archaeological project in East Java, uncovering a lost temple linked to the mythical Calon Arang, an evil widow witch character in Balinese and Javanese mythology. Marja learns there is another side to the Calon Arang story where the widow and her daughter are the victims, but because the story is told from the perspective of King Airlangga, the man who wronged them, their voices are never heard. Marja's mythological discoveries are interwoven with discoveries about the more recent past, as she meets an old woman who had been a member of the communist party in 1965. This woman's tale of imprisonment, torture and the loss of her family lead Marja to reassess her own assumptions about Indonesia's past. The woman, Murni, and her husband Sarwengi were both imprisoned in 1965. Sarwengi was killed and Murni held prisoner and tortured for ten years, the details of which are described explicitly in the novel. While *Manjali dan Cakrabirawa* has a contemporary rather than historical setting, its representations of historical violence are perhaps the most intimate and confronting of the three novels under review.

Similarly, Utami's work displays the deepest intertextual engagement with *wayang* mythology. The *Bilangan Fu* series features a complex love triangle between the three main characters, and in *Manjali dan Cakrabirawa*, Marja's sexual desire for both Yuda and Parang Jati is framed mythologically with references to the *Ramayana* story, which Utami twists to make central female character Sinta the subject rather than the object of desire. Typically presented as Rama's quest to recover his kidnapped fiancée from evil King Rahwana, Sinta's starring moment in the story is when she is rescued after twelve years imprisonment, and must prove that she remains "pure" by walking through fire. Marja, however, recalls watching the *Ramayana* as a girl, and muses that "twelve years is a long time. Could love have grown between Sinta and Rahwana during that time? Did Rahwana really not touch Sinta? And, if Rahwana indeed did not give into desire and force himself on her, surely Sinta herself in the end might crave the touch of such a chivalrous king?" In the same way that she shifts the narrative perspective of the Calon Arang widow witch story, here Utami again reframes a mythological tale to demonstrate how stories can be read from alternative perspectives. Such reframing is also central to her deconstruction of both dominant sexual norms and official government histories. Utami's intertextual engagement with *wayang*

mythologies and with official myths of national history emphasises the importance of taking into account different narrative perspectives in order to gain a more critical and nuanced understanding of both history and mythology and their gendered messages.

7.5 Passionate Women and Sensitive Men: Contesting Dominant Gender Stereotypes?

Turning in more detail to gender representations across these novels, an initial reading suggests that the ideal gender types being represented in these texts contrast starkly with both the demure, submissive femininity and the militarised masculinity of the New Order era. As I explained earlier, these ideal gender types are intricately linked in a mutually reinforcing dichotomy, which is why in this section I examine both idealised female and male representations. Sex and sexuality are always a key part of how ideal female figures are represented in the mediascape. As I noted in the background section, the legitimacy of female sexual desire in Indonesian film and fiction shifted drastically during the first decade of the twenty-first century, with sexually active female characters no longer facing inevitable "punishment" within narrative arcs. This shift is reflected in the sexually confident protagonists of these three texts. In *Pulang*, while out for dinner in Paris with her boyfriend Nara to celebrate the submission of her research proposal, Lintang smiles "with gleaming eyes" and suggests "how about we just forget this dinner? We can take a bottle of wine to my apartment" (281). He agrees, and "for three burning hours… Nara succeeded in making Lintang forgets all about [her stress]… They turned the music on full blast so that their neighbours, separated only by thin walls, would be undisturbed by the rhythmic noises of their love-making" (282). Here Lintang is the primary instigator of their sexual liaison. In *Amba* too, the central heroine yearns for the "fiery passion" she has heard about in stories and is concerned that her pious and protective fiancé Salwa "does not seem to notice the signs of her arousal" (146). In the eponymous first book of the *Bilangan Fu* series, Yuda describes his girlfriend Marja as "strong as a horse," going on to note that: "I never met a woman more capable of entertaining herself than Marja. And if I take a step back from my ego, I'm pretty sure that this extends to sex. I do not satisfy her. She uses me to satisfy herself" (410). Later, when browsing books from the shelves at Parang Jati's father's house, Marja reads aloud, "Parthenogenesis or reproduction without sex… Hmm… Some animals live without having sex at all… Ouch, fortunately we are not lice or plankton" (292). Marja's interest in sex and her forwardness in fulfilling her desires are presented in a highly positive light. In one scene, Yuda describes how "I held her against the wall and she circled her legs around my waist, her arms around my neck. I admired her strength. That strength made me feel safe" (188). While in the New Order era there were plenty of explicit accounts of sex, the narrative logic of the era, and the censorship guidelines in place, meant that within the narrative

arc, sexually active females were ultimately punished for their behaviour, sometimes even with death (Heider 1991; Sen 1993). The fact that none of the sexually active female figures in these texts face such catastrophic consequences for pursuing their desires is a significant departure from earlier narrative conventions (see also Chin's Chap. 8 in this volume).

The ideal masculine figure represented in these texts is also very different to the New Order era archetype. In *Pulang*, Lintang's boyfriend Nara is gentle, artistic and domestically inclined, cooking for her while she works on a research proposal for university (253). Bhisma, the central male character in *Amba*, is depicted as tender and thoughtful, and vehemently opposed to force or violence. As a doctor, he saves and protects people rather than harming them. In later descriptions of his character by the people who knew him in the Buru prison camps, Bhisma is described as an "ageing knight" who "wore an aura of care and responsibility" (58). In the *Bilangan Fu* series, this ideal type of gentle and caring male figure is contrasted very explicitly against militarised masculinity. Parang Jati, a sensitive and spiritual young man, with "eyes like an angel," uses the metaphor of mountain climbing to criticise militarised masculinity:

> Part of men's greediness is to want to conquer nature by raping it. Just like their attitude towards women, really. They hit, drill, and install ropes, all so they can defeat the cliff. And when they reach the top, with all that damage behind them, how ignorantly they believe themselves triumphant… We know the ways of military and intelligence: attack, destroy, rape… But a true climber must enter a dialogue with the cliff-face; if we damage the cliff, how are we any different from thugs? …Thieves and soldiers rape. But true knights and gentlemen treat sex as a dialogical relationship (79–81).

Here, notions of ideal masculinity are drawn from the world of *wayang* mythology. Reflecting on what he learns from Parang Jati, narrator Yuda later admits that while in the past he "did not really care about *wayang* shadow puppetry," as he looks back and writes the story, "I find now, to my surprise, that I really admire the iconography of Javanese shadow puppets" as well as the noble, knightly qualities espoused in *wayang* philosophy (86). He particularly likes that the depictions of knights' and warriors' bodies "closely resemble the physique of a mountain climber. Lean and strong, not huge and burly," which he notes is "very different to the ideal male body in mass culture icons from America. Superman, Batman, Sylvester "Rambo" Stallone, Mr. Universe Arnold Schwarzenegger" (86-8). Yuda goes on to reflect that:

> Islam has influenced their design in just the right amount. Perfect. Indeed, I prefer Javanese *wayang* to shadow puppets from Bali or elsewhere in mainland Southeast Asia… Precisely because of the influence of Islam. In appropriate and fitting levels. Islam prohibits the depiction of humans and animals, so in response artists have made the puppets highly stylised (88).

For Yuda, this abstraction allows Javanese *wayang* to "accommodate a wider philosophy." He describes being "struck by how the negotiation between Islam and Javanese tradition can create such a precious and superior form" (89). Ultimately, Yuda concludes that ideal masculinity is not the macho masculinity of US

superheroes, nor the militarised masculinity of the Indonesian armed forces, nor the fanatical religious masculinity espoused by fundamentalists; rather it is a balanced and critical combination of different aspects of these various masculinities, represented for him by the knight figures from Javanese *wayang* mythology. In this case, Utami draws on *wayang* in a positive, rather than a critical, way as an alternative model for contemporary Indonesian masculinities.

The passionate, forthright women and the gentle, sensitive men that are idealised in the work of all three authors represent a clear break from previously dominant ideal gender archetypes. Yet in these novels, masculinity and femininity remain in a highly dichotomous relationship, and several powerful stereotypes remain unchallenged. While I have already demonstrated the ways in which the three texts challenge existing gender roles and legitimise female desire, other aspects of previous archetypes remain more resilient. *Amba*, *Pulang* and the *Bilangan Fu* series all in their own way reproduce ideals of feminine beauty and fundamental gender differences. Marja in *Bilangan Fu*, for instance, is described as having "a slim waist, a rock-hard abdomen and firm supple breasts," and for much of the book she has no narrative voice herself, and is instead represented solely through the eyes of Yuda (38). In the second book of the series, *Manjali dan Cakrabirawa*, Marja takes over the narration but is "taught" by Parang Jati who, sometimes condescendingly, educates her in Indonesian history and Javanese mythology. Amba too is consistently framed as an object of male desire, in need of protection and guidance: as a young woman she is courted by three different men who, struck by her beauty, long to "protect" her. Even as an older woman in her sixties she attracts the attention of the much younger Samuel, who takes on the role of her protector as she travels around Buru Island in search of clues about Bhisma's fate. Her relationship with Bhisma is represented in a similar way to that of Marja and Parang Jati: with his vastly wider life experience, Bhisma spends hours lecturing her on the lessons he has learned from living abroad. She, meanwhile, barely speaks during many of their interactions. When she voices concern over their safety during the outbreaks of mass violence, Bhisma reassures her that "no one could possibly want to kill someone as beautiful as you" (209). In *Pulang*, Lintang is also characterised in terms of her beauty: "Her slender nose was in perfect proportion to her delicately pointed face. Her skin was white, but not the white of Caucasian races who often have lots of brown spots. Lintang's skin was white like milk. White, fresh, but at the same time warm" (232). Excessive fixation on female beauty in these stories has wider implications for gender relations for, as Saraswati (2011) points out, the "emphasised femininity" that features in narratives of female beauty in turn supports the construction of "hegemonic masculinity," particularly in postcolonial contexts (pg 129–130). Even during what appears to be a critique of the hidden "dangers of beauty" which a young Amba articulates early on in the novel, there is no analysis of the gendered power relations at work behind this:

> Mother, Ambika and Ambalika [Amba's young twin sisters] were always given special treatment. But, Amba did not see beauty as a path to happiness. It was both a burden and a boon. It was both empowering and restraining. Just look at mother, who let everyone walk all over her because she felt she had to be nice to everyone who flattered her… Look at the

> twins, who were suddenly banned from entering the district arts competition because the teachers from other schools were worried their beauty would make the judges overlook the truly talented students. Or the youngest child of a trader from Sleman, a famed beauty, found murdered in a ditch at the edge of town, with her throat cut and her vagina torn. On the one hand, beauty gives life. On the other hand, it is damning and terrifying (80).

Here, Amba blames the abstract notion of "female beauty" for a whole range of discriminations and violence she sees occurring in her community. Absent is any discussion of the structural inequalities that have made beauty a "danger" in these cases. Ultimately, although throughout these texts the ideal female archetype is active, strong and opinionated, she is also invariably characterised as beautiful, in ways that are not necessarily empowering. In terms of *wayang* mythology, classic tropes of wise knights and beautiful princesses continue to permeate the novels, particularly *Amba* and *Pulang*, in which neither Pamuntjak nor Chudori make any serious attempt to problematize the gendered narrative perspectives of the myths and legends with which they engage.

7.6 Sex, Violence and the Limits of Alternative History

These three authors are all prominent names in the Indonesian literary landscape, and it is intriguing how similar their themes and approaches are in these recent novels. I suggest that by working at this particular thematic intersection between sexuality, violence and *wayang*, the authors are engaging with key issues of discursive power in contemporary Indonesia. Their thematic intersections are not surprising, if we take a deeper look at the links and overlaps between mythical epics, mass violence and gender representations. The links between mythical epics and narratives of mass violence are a particularly useful starting point here. Writing in the South Asian context, Nandy (2001) has long insisted that the story of partition genocide in India and Pakistan should be understood as an epic, like the *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*, which has been written in fragments, assigned specific meanings, and then passed on to subsequent generations. He argues that in India the violence is understood as "part of an epic journey towards a modern nation state" which is used to "explain away instances of enormous, unnecessary human suffering as necessary sacrifices for a larger cause" (Nandy 2001, 10). Similar epic frames have been used in the Indonesian case, with the state building a foundational national myth around the alleged communist coup, and the violence as a necessary and inevitable response to this. The sense of inevitability that permeates *Amba* exemplifies the depoliticising nature of "destiny" as a narrative theme; if fate is "inscribed in the heavens" (124) as Amba suggests, there is little use in revisiting or regretting past violence.

Secondly, while official accounts of political violence often occupied the "epic" register, alternative histories hold a forbidden yet alluring status akin to pornography. As Heryanto (2006) notes in his work on state terrorism, for much of the New Order period, "the murky history of the violence in 1965–6 and its haunting

effects on the everyday lives of millions of Indonesians" were "both as taboo and as tantalising as pornography, especially to those not personally affected by the 1965–6 killings" (24). In *Manjali dan Cakrabirawa*, Utami engages with this idea of history as a kind of haunting, ghost-like myth, that simultaneously repels and intrigues. When Parang Jati exclaims that "all our lives we have been indoctrinated to hate and fear [the communists] through history lessons," Marja agrees that "yes, and exactly for that reason, I always thought it was just a myth. Like a ghost story. Because when we are made afraid, sure we are terrified, but also at the same time do not really believe the creature truly exists… Like ghosts" (68). Another thread of the *Manjali dan Cakrabirawa* narrative is the story of soldier Musa Wanara, a friend of Yuda. Musa has an all-consuming obsession with "talismans" of the communist party, for he believes that collecting symbols of the "enemy" will increase his own power and also his sexual prowess. This perverse desire for the thing he most despises reflects the ways in which the New Order regime thrived on keeping alive the latent threat of communism, even when such a threat no longer existed.

There are also important links between the state's master narrative of history and its construction of ideal gender roles. Hatley (2008) notes that in 1965, a "concocted, aggressively sexual image" of the communist women's movement served to "demonise communism and justify the annihilation of its adherents," while in contrast, "the demure, decorous image of woman as wife and mother symbolised the social order that Suharto's New Order regime supposedly then restored to the nation" (251). Blackburn (2004) describes the military's demonisation of Gerwani as "an orgy of misogynistic vilification" (181) designed to deter any further threats to the status quo, both military, economic and religious (see also Wieringa 1998, 2011). The potential danger posed to the nation by unruly women straying from their "proper" role is a common trope recurring in a wide range of different global contexts, and certainly not limited to New Order Indonesia. Such perceived danger is often deeply linked to notions of order/chaos and purity/pollution, linkages which have been explored at length by Douglas (1966), and also more recently Ong and Peletz (1995) in their edited volume examining, in the Southeast Asian context, the ways in which transgressive gendered bodies can disrupt and destabilise existing authorities and hegemonies. Ultimately, questions of sex and gender are irrevocably bound up with questions of history and violence, and the novels under review in this chapter reflect both broader universal links between gender, violence and nation, and also the local particularities of the Indonesian experience.

The opening scene of *Amba*, which takes place in a small village on the former prison island of Buru, describes how "Waeapo has witnessed many incidents… involving death, sex, or death and sex" (17). This scene explicitly flags the important intersection of sex and violence that haunts the entire novel. In *Pulang*, Lintang describes her parents' memories of student protests in Paris 1968 as "full of the sentimentality of revolution, freedom, justice and liberty," and says that their nostalgia is definitely tied up with "the issue of sexual freedom" (363). The powerful combination of political revolution and sex acquire a kind of mythical aura, similar to epic *wayang* plays. This kind of gravity is reinforced when the sex scenes

in *Pulang* and *Amba* coincide with climactic and violent events in Indonesia's history. In *Bilangan Fu*, when reflecting on memories of his first sexual fantasy (which was about a wolf killing a sheep), Yuda admits that "sex, for me, is always connected with power, destruction and death" (517). In the sequel, *Manjali dan Cakrabirawa*, the sexual aspects of the Gerwani story are addressed explicitly, via Marja's descriptions of scenes from a history museum she visited in primary school, where "Gerwani members, wearing thin fabric that showed their nipples, sliced the flesh and the genitals of the generals, while singing [popular folk song] *Genjer-genjer*" (pg 70). In the closing scenes of the novel, a snake-shaped birthmark reveals that Musa Wanara, the soldier staunchly hostile to an imagined communist threat, is in fact Murni and Sarwengi's lost son, taken away from them while in prison. While this revelation comes to too late for either of them, there is a poetic symmetry in the intimacies between victim and perpetrator, enemy and family, that reflects broader tensions around these histories of violence in Indonesia.

Conventional history writing suffered greatly under the New Order regime, so fictional reconstructions like these can be important avenues for interrogating the past. However, like dominant gender stereotypes, the official master narrative of Indonesian history has been far reaching and remains incredibly powerful in contemporary debate, and although these authors contest some aspects of it, they still operate within its framework. Chudori and Pamuntjak's novels for example portray their lead characters as relatively apolitical, not "real" communists, just innocent victims caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. Arguably, such characterisations buy into the master narrative by implying that violence against "real" communists is perhaps still justified. Given the strong links between representations of gender, history and nation outlined above, it is worthwhile examining how these authors' challenge to the underlying New Order mythology around anti-communist violence remains, like their challenge to dominant gender stereotypes, somewhat limited.

In the increasingly tense and polarised context of Central Java in 1965 as depicted in *Pulang*, Dimas reflects on how his committed communist friend Hananto "always said I was like Wibisono, Rahwana's younger brother who fought on Rama's side. But I had no idea who was the Rama and who was the Rahwana of Indonesian politics" (31). Later he goes on to explain that "although there was a sharp demarcation between those who admired and followed the PKI and those who did not, I was a neutral zone like Switzerland, and I also often chatted with [Islamic activist] Bang Amir and his friends" (31). He asks "why must we pick a side in order to demonstrate our conviction? And, is it even possible to have one single-minded belief? Socialism, communism, capitalism, must we embrace one of these ideologies completely, without any sense of doubt? Without any critical thinking?" (43). Dimas is clearly positioned outside the political passions of the time, an innocent bystander caught up in others' ideological warfare. In contrast to the sympathetic portrayal of Dimas, the only passionate and politically committed communist figure in *Pulang* is Hananto, Dimas's former best friend who ends up stealing and marrying the love of Dimas's life, Surti. Hananto's character is single-minded and selfish, apparently unconcerned about the impact of his actions

upon others. Dimas is disgusted to discover Hananto is cheating on Surti, but Hananto "insolently" replies that "Surti is a wife, my life companion. But with Marni, I can feel the raging lust of the proletariat" (68). This negative and amoral characterisation of the only "real" communist character reinforces dominant government narratives about the inherent immorality of communism.

Amba offers similar descriptions of how its central characters came to be targeted as communists, through misunderstandings, and bad luck of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In the tense political landscape of 1960s Indonesia, Amba "chose the middle road, chose to be silent." When pressured to "take a side," Amba's heart "whispers no," preferring to live in a more abstract word of poetry and art, where "rhymes are a world unto themselves and sides are not important" (148). Again, the politically partisan characters are represented as fanatical and somewhat dangerous. While Bhisma sympathises with the socialist cause, he is on the outlying fringe of the leftist movement. When he and Amba visit leftist artist community, Bumi Tarung, where artists are more interested in political resistance than beauty, he whispers to her that he finds "most of the paintings here very unconvincing" (230). Amba and Bhisma are firmly positioned here as committed to universal humanist art, which adds to the sense that they were "wrongly targeted" as communists. This, rather than the mass killings themselves, is presented as the story's central tragedy.

Throughout both *Amba* and *Pulang*, a kind of resigned apoliticism is evident, as though, like in a *wayang* saga, the final violent battle has been predetermined and characters' individual morality is more admirable than any kind of political conviction. Only Utami's *Manjali dan Cakrabirawa* offers a detailed and sympathetic portrait of a politically committed victim of the 1965–66 violence. Murni, the old woman that Marja and Parang Jati meet, is described as "a bright and well educated girl of that era. She wanted to advance women's rights. She wanted to help free farmers and poor labourers from suffering and exploitation. She became a member of Gerwani" (148). Here, Murni is depicted as firmly political, but in no way selfish or immoral, thus disrupting an important element of the master narrative. The gendered aspect of her political commitment is also clear, but is not framed as a dangerous threat to the state as it was in the military's demonisation of Gerwani. This, however, is a very rare example. The ongoing impact of dominant state narratives on both Indonesian fiction, and history-writing more generally, remains an important topic for further exploration. Beyond the bounds of fictional representation, many victims of the anti-communist killings are most concerned with proving that they (or their family members) were not in fact communists and were therefore wrongly persecuted, rather than arguing that the mass killing of communists constitutes an injustice in and of itself. As in the case of powerfully resilient gender stereotypes, the power of the state's master narrative of history remains difficult to fully challenge. Arguably, despite the authors' intentions of contesting official histories, the way that *wayang* mythology is used in novels like *Amba* and *Pulang* in fact serves to reinforce the state's mythologised history, by emphasising the preordained nature of fate and idealising apolitical attitudes. Utami's *Bilangan Fu* series offers the most radical critique both of dominant official histories and also

hegemonic gender roles; this further highlights the important links between these issues and perhaps even suggests that one master narrative cannot be fully challenged without contesting the other.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the work of three prominent Indonesian female authors and how they in some ways challenge and in other ways reinforce existing gender norms and master narratives of Indonesian history. Official national histories are deeply entangled with gender representations, and Chudori, Pamuntjak and Utami all use *wayang* mythologies as a vehicle to engage with these important issues. *Wayang* stories and metaphors add epic weight to the narratives and underline the sense of fate and inevitability of violent events. These authors also engage with *wayang* mythology in more critical ways, in order to challenge dominant narratives about history and gender by showing how narratives are powerful, can be manipulated, and can be read differently from different perspectives. As canonical texts, the Hindu epics are a valuable site of canonical counter-discourse, where writers deconstruct the underlying assumptions of a canonical text by altering its structures of power. Among the three authors, their extent of intertextual engagement varies. Chudori for instance mainly uses *wayang* references as a colourful motif for representing Indonesian identity. Pamuntjak meanwhile engages more thematically with *wayang* notions of fate and destiny and draws aesthetically on grand epic narrative styles. Utami's approach most strongly exemplifies a critical counter-discourse, as she reframes classic *wayang* tales from different narrative perspectives to reveal the gendered power relations underpinning these stories. Utami's retelling of the *Ramayana* from the perspective of Sinta and the Calon Arang story from the perspective of the widow and her daughter are illustrative examples of this critical engagement with mythologies.

The gender representations across these texts can be starkly contrasted with both the violent militarised masculinity and the demure domestic femininity idealised during the New Order era. Chudori, Pamuntjak and Utami's ideal gender archetypes are confident, mobile women who actively pursue their sexual desires, and gentle, sensitive men who respect the women in their lives. Similarly, the official, militarised, epic historical narratives promoted by the New Order regime have been supplanted in these novels by more fragmented, plural, personal narratives of traumatic historical experience. However, a close reading of these "new" accounts of history also reveals some of the limits in exploring alternative histories, as the representations of politically committed "communist" characters are still being created within the existing master narrative. Representations of gender in the three texts under review also continue to reinforce a range of dominant tropes around female beauty, in ways that are not necessarily empowering.

All three novels provide illustrative examples of authors using well-known mythology as a medium to voice their social and political concerns. Given

wayang's important place in the Javanese and, to a certain extent, the broader Indonesian imagination, it functions as a key site for each author's counter-discursive project. Ultimately, these projects reveal ongoing contestations and competing discourses around gender and national history in contemporary Indonesia, and the potential role of *wayang* mythology as an entry point into such debates.

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Chapter 8
Counter-Narratives of the Nation: Writing the Modern Brunei Malay Woman

Grace V. S. Chin

8.1 Introduction

In 2009, the English Literature and Drama Studies programmes at Universiti Brunei Darussalam (henceforth UBD) introduced English language creative writing modules, one of which was *Script-writing* (for drama) which I intermittently taught from 2011/2012 to 2014/2015. On average, 75–90% of the class consisted of young women aged between 19 and 22. Up to 90% of the students were from a Malay Muslim background and the majority entered the classroom as proficient English language users,[1] with many from the English literature and Drama Studies programmes, although the module also attracted its fair share of students from the other disciplines.[2] Of note here is the manner in which these young Malay female students negotiate ideas and representations of the modern Brunei Malay woman in creative writing, ideas that sometimes deviate from or resist the nationalist prescriptions of normative Malay femininities, resulting in literary articulations that act as counter-narratives of the nation. In other words, these young Malay women write back to the masculinist narratives of the nation with alternative imaginings of femininity whose modernity is intricately tied to westernisation and the use of English.

[1]Some consider English their first language, and their competency is akin to the level of native speakers.

[2]The inaugural class began in 2011/2012 with a cohort of 12 students–four from English Literature and the rest from mixed disciplines. Subsequent classes attracted more students, and, due to demand, I relaxed my initial cap of 15 students: I had 20 students for the academic year 2012/2013 and 17 students for 2014/2015. The year 2012/2013 saw an influx of Drama Studies students, nine of whom joined seven English Literature students and four others from different disciplines. The class in 2014/2015 saw different numbers again, with four from English Literature, six from Drama Studies and seven from other disciplines, including Science and Economics.

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Saxena (2014) in fact links the use of English among the urbanised Brunei Malay youths to their perception of modernity as they move away from their rural-based traditions to enter the global world that has been bought into their homes via Internet and satellite TV. I would go a step further to argue that the visuality of mass culture and new media has been made tangible within the country itself, actively experienced through the global cultural flows crossing the porous borders of the nation-state, and permeating both national and social imaginaries. These flows, according to Appadurai (1990), consist of ethnoscapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes, all of which have informed local society and altered the shape of social and cultural relations and practices as Brunei Darussalam (henceforth Brunei) opens up to the forces of modernisation and globalisation. Bruneian youths are thus drawn to the imagined world outside the ideological and geographical confines of the nation space, seen in the way they imagine, engage, negotiate and articulate Otherness—mainly in the shape of the West—in their writings.

The exploration of Otherness, or the external, is most visible through the language strategies used in the creative classroom. Many students employ Western colloquialism and slang words in creative writing, including Americanisms such as "dude", "chick", "game nerd", or Internet slang like "emo"[3]. The students' fascination with the West is also discernible in the way they engage this imagined topography in their scripts. For instance, they write about Western characters in Western settings, or about westernised Bruneian characters returned from overseas, replete with British or American accents, slang words and modern attire. Another way in which the West figures in their imagination is their exploration of liberal values that include civil rights and freedoms or feminist notions of women's rights and equality.

In Chin and Kathrina (2015), the notion of the external, or the foreign, is defined as "difference" and marks a liminal space of tension and ambivalence in the textuality of creative writing. Chin (2016) also examines how Bruneian women's creative writing constitutes an emergent minor literature based on their position of marginality in the nation space; and yet, it is through the margin that they resist state-mandated patriarchal ideologies with woman-centred narratives that hold political agency as well as collective value. Although these articles have, to some degree or another, considered creative writing as the site of tension and negotiation of ideas, meanings and worldviews of the Bruneian youth (see also Chin 2014), they have yet to fully explore the impact of modernisation and globalisation on gendered identities, roles and relations in Brunei, or how English has facilitated the notion and perception of the modern subject and identity.

This chapter returns to the analysis of creative writing as the symbolic site of negotiation and exploration of gender identity and agency by focusing on the representational politics of the modern Brunei Malay woman and how they can be

[3]See Deterding and Salbrina (2013) on the influence of American media on the language use among young Bruneians.

read as counter-narratives of the nation. Postcolonial and feminist arguments of female resistance, insurrection and agency often posit the revolutionary possibilities of women's writings as they contain imagery and voices of the gendered Other that is "by definition always and already antinational" (Heng and Devan 1995, 209). This "antinational" characteristic is reinforced by the students' creative and literary expression in English, a language medium that not only subverts the state's idealisations of Malay as the national language and therefore the language of national literature and culture, but also positions the writer and her work within the global or international arena. As such, women's creative writings in English represent symbolic sites of alternative imaginings and possibilities that may deviate, resist or subvert the patriarchal discourses of the nation-state (Chin 2016).

Two unpublished scripts set in Brunei will be analysed here: Nurul Faiqah Hazirah Hj Suani's *Hope* (2014) and Dk Nurul Hazirah Binti Pengiran Sazalee's *My Child* (2014).[4] Written by former UBD students, these scripts explore the trials of young adult Malay female protagonists through different themes: *Hope* revolves around a woman, Zara, who survives a self-inflicted abortion and suicide attempt only to find hope through the love of another man, while *My Child* explores differing realities depending on the choice made by the protagonist, Maria. In my readings, I consider the following questions: How do the students imagine gender identity, role and agency in these stories? How do they represent young Malay women in the contemporary age? And in what ways can these stories and representations of modern womanhood be considered as counter-narratives of the nation?

I reflect on these questions by drawing on the sociological concept of the modern subject whose identity construction is informed by constant flux and rapid change. Hall sums up the characteristics of the modern subject as one who mediates the shifting "values, meanings and symbols—the culture—of the worlds he/she inhabit [s]" albeit in relation to "significant others" (1992, 275); hence the modern subject is also one that is formed in "continuous dialogue" and interaction that take place between self, society and the "cultural worlds 'outside' and the identities which they offer" (1992, 276). The space of mediation between self, society and Other has been described as "liminal" or the "third space" of cultural hybridity (Bhabha 1990) but within the framework of women's creative writing and acts of narration, it constitutes a symbolic space through which the exploration of identity takes place through the internalisation of Other meanings and values, thereby "making them 'part of us'" (Hall 1992, 276). Writing then becomes the discursive site through which Otherness is engaged as essential to the articulation of cultural modernity which, in this chapter, is embodied by the figure of the modern Brunei Malay woman in creative writing.

More than that, the symbolic space of writing is important to the *process* of identity, which "is also in part *becoming through the writing*" for it is "inflected by the very language you use" (interview with Hall in Drew 1999, 208). In short, the

[4]Permissions for the use of these scripts have been obtained from the writers.

creative act of writing is intricately linked to the expressive self that is also in continuous negotiation with relational systems of difference; it produces "a version of the self" (interview with Hall in Drew 1999, 208) that also enters the narrative. This version is never finished as it is part of the identity process, one that is "always in the making" (interview with Hall in Drew 1999, 207). This is an important point to bear in mind, for the scripts examined here represent how ideas of modern Malay womanhood are being mediated by students at a specific time of their lives. Such ideas are *never finished*, only part of the students' *process of becoming*.

In writing stories about young, modern Malay women, the voices and perspectives of the students are an integral part of the Bruneian sociopolitical landscape and are reflective of changes occurring among the younger generation of Bruneians. Equally notable is the manner in which some of the writings resist essentialist ideas of Malay-ness and womanhood that have been constructed by the state as indigenous, cultural, traditional (historical) and therefore authentic. Such expressive acts are thus both empowering and enabling as they go beyond prescribed identities to claim a space and position for female agency within the fictive territory. Within the realm of the imaginary and symbolic, students imagine, explore and articulate ideas about changing gender identities and roles by negotiating both local and global meanings, worldviews and cultures, and in the process emerge with new positions, meanings and representations of the young, modern Malay woman in Bruneian society. They do so by appropriating meanings and values of the outside world and making them part of their own views and articulations of what it means to be a modern Brunei Malay woman. At the same time, the representation of the modern Brunei Malay woman invariably invokes the intersectional dynamics and discourses of gender, ethnicity and language playing out in the ongoing contestations and conversations between the nation-state and the world beyond its boundaries.

8.2 Brunei Malay Woman and the Nation-State: Changes and Challenges

Writing about gender in Brunei[5] is not an easy task due to the lack of scholarship in the field. In Chap. 3 of this book, Kathrina Mohd Daud remarks on the paucity of "substantive study" on Bruneian women, a pattern that has also been observed in my analysis of Bruneian women writers (Chin 2016, 591). This paucity can be attributed to the patriarchal conservatism of a Malay Islamic monarchy,[6] but it also

[5]See Alicia Izharuddin's Chap. 4 in this book for an analysis of the new Malay woman in twentieth century Malaya.

[6]See the Editors' Introduction for a description of Brunei's phallocentric culture, and how it is observable through the workings of local academia that had, up till 2010, excluded the study of gender from its curriculum.

likely stems from the fact that Brunei is a closely guarded space, within which all discussions related to the monarchy, race, religion and the state ideology of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB; Malay Islamic Monarchy), known as "sensitive issues", are policed and subjected to strict censorship laws.[7] Gender and sexuality have been excluded from the "sensitive" category, but they are nonetheless viewed with suspicion due to their close association with Western/global discourses of liberalism, feminism and of late, LGBTQ identities, which are illegal in Brunei. Heterosexual relations and the gender binary are not only institutionalised as the model against which normative gender identities are constructed and produced, but they also cannot be questioned. Hence, there is a degree of difference with which masculinity and Malay-ness are constructed as superior in the nation space. While the defence of Malay-ness is made visible through the valorising of Malay language and culture, the marginalisation of women is less so, since it is produced as a norm through prevailing social, cultural and religious views of heterosexual harmony, seen in male-female complementary identities and roles in the patriarchal spaces of culture and nation. Within the gender binary and divide, man is "naturally" dominant in both identity and status.

The privileging of Malay masculinity is upheld by the state ideology of MIB, a tripartite discourse that also constructs and produces meanings of race and gender at the state level. Although Brunei is rich in ethno-linguistic diversity,[8] the ethnic majority of the Malays has been prominently placed in the national narrative and is representative of the imagined community endorsed by MIB. As its acronym suggests, MIB contains three centralising principles important to the "nationalisation of Brunei Malay culture" (Fanselow 2014, 104): (1) Malay cultural traditions, values and language, (2) Islamic precepts and teachings and (3) a monarchical government that is led by the paternalistic-patriarchal figure of the Sultan (Chin and Kathrina 2015; Chin 2016). Within this framework, Islam is viewed as integral to Malay identity and culture, so much so that the notion of "Malay-ness" is intertwined, even synonymous, with being a Muslim in Brunei (Hussainmiya 2010, 69) even if these terms are not mutually exclusive.[9]

Under the 1961 Brunei Nationality Act, "Malay" as a racial category—termed *puak jati* (indigenous race)—has been widened to include other indigenous groups: the Belait, Bisaya, Brunei, Dusun, Kedayan, Murut and Tutong. Scholars who

[7]Brunei's authoritarian handling of freedom of expression was seen when the government ordered the shutdown of a local English-language daily *The Brunei Times* in November 2016. Initially removed, the daily's online archives have recently been reinstated: https://btarchive.org/. On the shutdown of the daily, read Walker (2016). For an overview of human rights in Brunei, see Human Rights Resource Centre and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (2016).

[8]Brunei supports a diverse population that consists of Malays (who are the majority at 66.6%), Chinese (15%), indigenous groups (6%) and others, mainly foreign labour (12%). See Kathrina's Chap. 3, Sect. 3.2, for more background information about Brunei.

[9]Read Hussainmiya (2010) who observes that while the Dusun and Murut have been categorised as "Malay", most of them have not converted to Islam (69–70).

examined "Malay-ness" as a concept (King 1994; Hussainmiya 2010; Fanselow 2014; de Vienne 2015) have observed how the heterogeneity of "Malays" as a group has been subjected to the homogenising and unifying imperatives of monoculturalism under the auspices of the nation-state.[10] As Malay, one should be a practising Muslim and appreciate one's own history and cultural traditions, which includes knowing how to behave like a Malay and how to speak Malay, especially since it is the revered national language and mother tongue, the beloved language of culture, (national) literature and the Malay soul. It is this accepted notion of Malay-ness that has become foundational to the state's conception of national identity and national culture, and made central to the discourse of MIB.

Furthermore, Malay-ness is powerfully associated with masculinity due to the key figure of the Sultan of Brunei, a direct descendant of an ancient dynastic rule that stretches back into the fourteenth century. As the 29th monarch to reign on the throne, the Sultan rules with a mixed hand that is both "paternalistic and personalised" (Naimah 2013) and embodies the centralising forces of MIB: Malay, Muslim, Monarch, Man. Deploying representational strategies through the local media as well as personalised involvement in development projects and tours across the country, the Sultan has developed an image that is both stern yet approachable, the powerful father figure whom his national family looks up to for guidance. Indirectly too, the Sultan's popular paternalism has bolstered parental authority in society, especially that of the father (Chin and Kathrina 2015, 105).

Ideologically then, the Brunei Malay woman is positioned as both insider and outsider within the nation space. She belongs to the dominant ethno-religious group whose essentialised identity is held up by two of the main pillars of the nation-state, the other being the monarchy; at the same time, however, she is disadvantaged by virtue of her gender and sex, and excluded from the masculinist discourses of history and politics. The exclusion of the feminine from Brunei's official history is highlighted by Teah Abdullah who, upon visiting *Pusat Sejarah Brunei* (the Brunei History Centre), was informed that "there has been no [historical] study on women in Brunei" (2013). As a gendered individual whose body is marked under the differential sign of the feminine, the Malay woman is marginalised as Other and made subordinate to man especially within the domestic space where the traditional ideologies of wifehood and motherhood are entrenched.

By and large, women's social identity and status in Brunei have improved dramatically in the past decade due to the state's commitment to women's welfare and legal rights (see Chin 2016) and its promotion of gender-equal opportunities in education and the economy, the two sectors that have also recorded an exponential increase in women's numbers (Anaman and Hartinie 2006). Women account for more than 50% of university students and graduates in the past few years (Low and Zohrah 2013, 91–92), and many thrive today as successful career women in both

[10]Read Fanselow (2014, 98–99) and de Vienne (2015, 262–267) for an interesting account of how the state implemented policies and institutions that rallied around the construction and production of MIB as a historically and culturally legitimate ideology through the historicisation of Brunei as a Malay Islamic Sultanate.

the private and government sectors. What is heartening to note is the diversity of identities and roles available to women, seen in groups like Lady Bikers Brunei, or the *hijab*-wearing all-female pilot-crew who flew the *Royal Brunei Airlines* plane to Saudi Arabia in 2016. On the flip side, however, the number of women in decision-making positions has remained low at 36%, and their lack of political representation and power is evinced by the fact that no woman has, to date, been appointed minister in the Cabinet (Quratul-Ain 2016a). Furthermore, international human rights organisations have voiced concern that Muslim women's current privileges would be reduced now that the Syariah Penal Code Order is in force.[11] There is also continued pressure from the conservative sectors of society for Malay women to embrace their ordained roles as wives and mothers, and perform their obligations as Muslimahs by behaving with modesty and observing piety.[12]

Until today, the Brunei Malay woman is subject to widespread cultural and religious views of the gendered divisions of household roles and obligations: the husband is the breadwinner of the family while the wife fulfils her domestic duties, which includes the education of children and the upkeep of family harmony.[13] There is also the Islamic understanding that career women must prioritise their family welfare over their jobs as they are duty-bound "to bring about a happy

[11]See United Nations' online report (2014) by CEDAW on Brunei, mainly its "Concluding observations" (http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/AsiaRegion/Pages/BNIndex.aspx) on how "women are disproportionately affected by punishment for 'crimes'" involving sex and rape, as well as the criminalisation of lesbians and bisexual women (http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/BRN/INT_CEDAW_NGO_BRN_18370_E.pdf). See also Musawah's (2014) analysis of Brunei's Syariah Penal Code Order 2013 for CEDAW, and how it discriminates Muslim women in areas that include male guardianship, polygamy, divorce, children's nationality, inheritance, and domestic and sexual violence. The report is also based on findings from fieldwork and interviews conducted in 2014.

[12]Given the lack of scholarship and that anecdotal accounts are unreliable, I turn to the media coverage of talks and interviews as they provide insight into the kinds of pressure placed onto women's bodies by society and the state. In her 2010 talk for instance, the former deputy minister of culture, youth and sports of Brunei, Hajah Adina Othman, recognised that the family institution has been affected by the rise of women in the workplace. She advised career women to "learn new skills such as time management as well as new caregiving skills for family members" and men to assume more family-oriented duties. In 2015, the Dean of the Syariah Law Faculty at a local Islamic university stated that Muslim women can work as long as they "maintain their family welfare" (Khai 2015). Additionally, she urged women to "practise *menutup aurat* (safeguarding their modesty) at the workplace to avoid persecution, obtain the consent of their husband [to work], [have] the ability to juggle between work and family and if the children are not doing well in their education, wives are encouraged to quit from their work" (Khai 2015). In an interview, Timothy Ong of Asia Inc Forum notes that Bruneian "society still expects women to take on a much greater burden than men. The society has ways of being negative about women who are perceived as being neglectful of the family. So, when a woman is in the office working til late at night, earning money for the family, she is generally not given as much credit as the man" (2014, 15).

[13]Based on the naturalised authority of husbands, this gendered ideology can also be seen in neighbouring Indonesia through the propagation of *Keluarga Sakinah* (peaceful, happy family). See Chap. 5 in this volume.

family and raise the most excellent children" (Khai 2015). Expected to conform to normative gender roles and stereotypes within the family institution, Malay women are very much circumscribed by the collectivist, disciplinary structures and discourses of traditional femininities.[14] Normalised by the everyday politics of public and private life, these gender biases are deeply embedded in the hegemonic discourses and practices of culture and nation, and have to be factored into my analysis of the modern Malay woman in students' writings.

Nevertheless, traditional gender roles and relations are changing with the times, and Bruneian youths are situated at a unique crossroad in Brunei's contemporary history as witness to the important shifts engendered by the global cultural flows. Due to the country's booming oil and gas industries, the social landscape has been transformed by affluence and upward class mobility. Rapid economic growth, fuelled by the state's modernisation and globalisation projects, has created a predominantly middle-class generation of urbanised Bruneians who are moving away from their rural-based traditions and identities. Saxena (2014) has linked their lifestyle changes, seen mainly in eating habits, health-related practices and language use, to the Bruneians' adoption of what they perceive as "modern" or "Western" ways. These changes are visible among the young generation whose frequent visits to trendy cafes and fast food joints as well as love of Western food like burgers, pizzas, spaghetti, macaroons and cupcakes, among others, have also led to a "decline in the consumption of traditional food" (Saxena 2014, 105). Moreover, many Bruneian youths are techno-savvy and—with the widespread use of Internet and mobile technology—have taken to the new media with ease, seen especially in the country's vibrant online culture.[15]

Like much of Southeast Asia, modernisation as a concept in Brunei is intricately linked to, even conflated with, westernisation. Hence to be modern is also to be westernised. Within this understanding then, English plays an important role in demarcating identity shifts among the Bruneians. Since achieving independence in 1984, increasing value has been placed on English as a means of accessing the latest technological and digital advancements required for the development of oil and gas as well as other economic sectors; it also serves as a communicative bridge with the international community and is essential to the fostering of trade, financial and diplomatic ties. Over the decades, the association of English with modernisation and globalisation has become intertwined with the widespread perception of upward mobility in the social imaginary. In my script-writing classroom for instance, I observed how students engage the intersections between language and social status

[14]State and social emphasis on women who have to balance both career and family is not a new phenomenon in developing Southeast Asia, since women are traditionally viewed as the guardians of family and culture.

[15]Brunei currently boasts the highest penetration of social media in the region at 69% (Quratul-Ain 2016b). See Nurdiyana and McLellan (2016) and Wood (2016) about the online language used by Bruneians on Facebook, Twitter and so on. Read also Kathrina et al. (2016, 247–8) about Brunei's blogging culture and online writing communities and how they herald new directions for the production of Bruneian literatures in Malay and English.

when they designate Western names to Malay characters so that they "sound like they have 'class'" (Chin 2014, 136). Among the Bruneians today, English has become a significant marker of class distinction due to its current status as a global language; as a result, its role and function have also undergone subtle changes in recent years:

> [N]ow it is the younger Bruneians who are setting the trends and following the modern lifestyle. They understand the modern technology better and use it more. Their ideas of global and cosmopolitan lifestyles are derived from international travel and from global media and the internet. Their use of English and the values that go with it are an integral part of this lifestyle rather than simply defining it. (Saxena 2014, 109)

Against this backdrop of changing identities and lifestyle choices, young Brunei Malay women who competently use English to express their identities, desires and agency invariably project a self-image linked to higher social status and modernity: they are "hip, modern, young" women with "an attitude" (Saxena 2014, 110). At the same time, however, the image of the young English-speaking modern Malay woman runs counter to MIB's discourse of traditional Malay Muslim femininity in two critical ways: language use, and westernised/modernised outlook and sensibilities.

In 1985, the state implemented the *Dwibahasa* or bilingual education system in which English and Malay were the mediums of instruction (Noor Azam 2012). The system was revised in 2009, when *Sistem Pendidikan Nasional Abad ke-21* (SPN21; the National Education System for the 21st Century) was ushered into place; among other things, there is heavier emphasis on the use of English at the primary level (Jones 2016). What this means, however, is that whole new generations of Bruneians have, since 1985, grown up with English and included it into their daily discourse. Bilingualism, or code-switching between Malay/Chinese/indigenous tongue and English, has saturated all levels of society and is now a common feature of Brunei's linguistic landscape (Ożóg 1996). This can be seen in the creative classroom too, as students employ bilingual code-switching and code-mixing to depict character types and capture the authenticity of local speech; in so doing, they also reveal how comfortable they are with their bilingual identities (Chin 2014).

Within the nation space, bilingualism, also termed *bahasa rojak* (mixed language), has nonetheless been frowned upon by state officials and Malay purists. From time to time, governmental posturing on how the sacred status of Malay language should be protected from the contaminating influence of *bahasa rojak* is brought into the public space of debate. The state emphasis on the separation of Malay and English as domains of language use stems from the "critical ideological distinctions between the roles, functions and positions of Malay and English, in that the former is valorised by MIB and holds emotional resonance as the beloved language of nation and culture, while the latter is considered a functional, international language that connects Brunei to the rest of the world" (Chin 2016, 593).

For students in the script-writing classroom however, English is more than just a functional or pragmatic language, for in using it to express their imagined worlds, they also engage the attendant Western ideas, imagery and values as essential to their characterisations of modern Brunei Malay femininity. As many of them are

readers of Western literature and consumers of Hollywood films and popular American/British TV shows, these influences have filtered through their consciousness as they write their scripts. In their self-analysis essays, a self-reflexive exercise submitted at the end of the semester, I have observed a common leitmotif: students like to write about the influences that enter their writing and these influences are often always derived from Western literature, movies and/or TV shows.[16]

Having said this, one should also bear in mind that the students' creative explorations of imagined Otherness do not always constitute a challenge to the status quo. More often than not, they rely on a formulaic ending in which the transgressive character is either punished or he/she conforms; either way, the integrity of MIB is preserved (Chin and Kathrina 2015). However, there are students who resist the system in their fictive world, depicting the plurality of their social milieu through polyphonic, multilingual voices (Chin 2016), and in essence claiming the textuality of English-language writing and narration as a symbolic space of belonging, through which ideas and representations of gendered Otherness can be imagined, explored, engaged and expressed. In portraying the modern Brunei Malay woman, the scripts analysed below go against the grain of MIB patriarchal monoculturalism with representations, themes and ideas that draw on Western liberalism and female freedom and agency. These representations suggest not only the ongoing negotiations among Bruneian female students about their changing social reality, but also their own place and identity—the process of becoming—through the act of creative writing.

8.3 Counter-Narratives: The Modern Brunei Malay Woman

Hope is a second chance romance that also explores, albeit briefly, the socially sensitive issues of out-of-wedlock pregnancy and attempted abortion and suicide through the transgressive female body of Zara, an orphaned young woman living with her aunt and uncle and who has a reputation for being a "party girl". Zara falls for Daniel at a party and is soon pregnant with his child. When she tells Daniel, he denies the child is his and even accuses her of having slept with someone else. He breaks up with her, saying "You should have known, a guy like me, I would never be serious especially with you. Who would ever be serious with a party girl?"

[16]As an example, one student writes: "This play, inspired in part by the idea of Western true stor[ies] such as the *Craigslist Killer* (a medical student who murdered women), *A Beautiful Mind* (a mathematician named John Nosh who suffered from Schizophrenia), the *Crime Scene Investigation* series (one episode [where] a young daughter killed her parents and older brother) and *Cinderella* in a Bruneian context". Her script, *Sofea*, is about a schizophrenic young woman, the titular Sofea, who has been confined to the house as the family's shameful secret. Treated like a servant by her grandmother and cousin, Sofea one night kills them both. The play ends with her being taken away to the mental institution.

Heartbroken and frightened, and unable to tell her aunt and uncle, Zara attempts to commit suicide by stabbing herself in the stomach, thereby losing the foetus in the process. The script flashes forward to a year later. Zara is still living with her aunt and uncle, and her best friend Arissa has come home from the UK while on a break from her studies. Meanwhile, Adam who has had a crush on Zara since their school days has gotten in touch with her via Facebook and would like to date her. Zara is at first resistant, but with Arissa's encouragement, she goes out with Adam and is soon in love. From then on, the narrative flows smoothly till the happy ending with Zara married to Adam and having a child together.

While the script's ending appears to conform to the discourse of female domestication through the trope of marriage and motherhood, what is remarkable here is the writer's refusal to punish the unruly female body and sexuality with a tragic or bad ending, as has been the convention (see also Downes' Chap. 7 in this volume). In similarly themed scripts of the past, students often follow a certain trajectory: repudiation by the family, friends and/or society, followed by a prolonged illness or accident, with death or suffering or isolation as the inevitable outcome. In *Hope,* however, this formula is overturned in favour of a happy ending, with the errant protagonist having learned her lesson and finding a second chance at love. What is interesting here is that Zara is neither disowned by her family, nor renounced by her best friend, Arissa, also the first person Zara confides in when she is pregnant. Zara is also able to move forward with her life by finding her Mr Right in Adam. Furthermore, the only punishment Zara endures is self-inflicted rather than imposed upon her by family and society.

In traditional Malay drama, tragedy befalls the transgressive subject when he/she is disloyal to parental authority that is also representative of the larger collective body, be it in the shape of parents (family) or the father figure of the Sultan (country/nation). One common narrative thread involves the unfilial child (*anak derhaka*), also known as *Nahkoda Manis* in Brunei (Chin and Kathrina 2015). The story of the titular Manis who renounces his mother and receives divine punishment is famous across the Malay Archipelago albeit under different titles. The female equivalent to Manis is the daughter who foregoes parental blessing by dating an unsuitable man and even worse, having sexual relations outside of the sanctity of marriage. The unfilial daughter not only commits a grave sin against her parents, Islam and Malay cultural traditions, but also symbolically rejects the values espoused by MIB. As "all challenges to parental authority are significantly refigured as a transgression against the state" (Chin and Kathrina 2015, 105), the unfilial daughter symbolically rebels against the national family whose ultimate parental authority is embodied by the masculinist figure of the Sultan.

Jasmine[17] is one such example of the *anak derhaka* convention. The titular Jasmine is the illegitimate daughter of Sasha who was given up for adoption as an infant. While tracking down her birth mother, Jasmine finds out how Sasha was

[17]See Chin and Kathrina (2015) for their analysis of the unfilial child and the gendered consequences in *Jasmine*.

disowned by her parents and had to endure social isolation and poverty. Suffering from an unknown disease in her later years, Sasha finally succumbs to death but not before she is reunited with her family and Jasmine, and forgiven by her parents. Of interest here are the gendered statements with regards to the unfilial child. Sasha's boyfriend, Boi, also Jasmine's father, is a drug addict and equally guilty of transgressing against his parents and society. And yet, a rehabilitated Boi is allowed to rejoin society as a respectable businessman while Sasha continues to suffer both family condemnation and social ostracism till the very end. Even Jasmine is not immune from punishment as she is illegitimate, the "fruit of a diseased body" (Chin and Kathrina 2015, 110); she is thus rejected in the final scene by her fiancé, Fendi. The message is loud and clear: not only is there no mercy for transgressive or unfilial women, but the ending also reveals how "*Jasmine* is unable to imagine an alternative or widened sphere in which the deviant female Other can be accommodated within the collective boundaries of MIB: she either submits or is expelled/rejected" (Chin and Kathrina 2015, 110).

If *Jasmine* works to contain the deviant gender and sexual elements that pose a danger to the ideological boundaries of MIB, then *Hope* is its counter-narrative. Unlike Sasha who epitomises the powerless woman who has been driven out of her home, abandoned by family, boyfriend and friends, and has to suffer life through a series of hardships, *all of which have been imposed upon her*, Zara possesses the agency to make certain choices, if not all. Although she is deserted by Daniel—whose rationale also stresses the entrenched gender biases and views towards a "party girl", Zara's act of abortion-cum-suicide is one that she decides on her own. In her monologue prior to the deed, Zara speaks of heartbreak and pain, and of being a "burden" to her aunt and uncle, but she does not speak of guilt or shame. As she admits to Arissa, her reasons are motivated by pain and selfish desire: "I tried to kill myself for a guy who didn't even love me. Just to get his attention, I lost myself, and I lost my baby". Besides, Zara's initial reluctance to date Adam is not based on her fear of what society might think of her, but rather from her fear of being hurt again. The narrative deviates from the *anak derhaka* convention in other ways too. For instance, Zara survives and remains with her uncle and aunt in their home, which suggests that they have overlooked her transgression. Meanwhile, Arissa continues to be friends with Zara and encourages her to "give yourself a chance in being happy" with Adam, saying "you learned your lesson and you are moving forward now". Adam, who knows what has happened is not repelled either, but is insistent on pursuing Zara and marries her at the end.

Departing from the MIB-compliant text in which the unfilial child and unruly female body are punished by the collective, patriarchal forces of the family, state and divine will, *Hope* operates instead on the Western trope of second chance romance whereby the female protagonist obtains her happy-ever-after following a difficult period. Zara is very different from Sasha as a character; she is a modern woman who is given some measure of agency as to what she wants from life. She believes more in love than in family duty, pursues her desires and behaves in ways that go against Islamic notions of female modesty and piety. More importantly, her premarital sexual relations and attempted suicide are viewed not as transgressions

that require divine punishment and social forms of discipline, but as bad choices in life. Zara has made mistakes and must, as Arissa tells her, learn her lesson and move forward; besides, she says, "God is not that cruel" and urges Zara to "believe in [the] miracle [of love]". Arissa too is portrayed as a liberal-minded woman who does not judge her friend's actions but is sympathetic and caring towards Zara, urging her to take a second chance at love. Ultimately it is Zara's happy ending that is the hallmark of contemporary Western romance and signifies a modern woman's right to redemption through marital fulfilment despite having had a past sexual relationship. Adam too is cast in a mould of Malay manhood that is both modern and liberal. He accepts Zara's past relationship and actions and is understanding and patient with her. As the romantic hero, he promises to "always cherish you and our family".

The script's treatment of young modern Bruneians is, notably, expressed through language use. In contrast to the older generation like Zara's aunt Hana and uncle Reza who code-switch between English, Malay and Arabic, the young generation represented by Zara, Arissa, Daniel and Adam is portrayed as Anglophone, right down to their (mostly) Western names. There's hardly any code-switching or code-mixing in their dialogue. Western terms of endearment are used—"Baby", "babe" and "sweetheart"—as are Americanisms like "he's hot!" and "find your happiness". At the same time, Internet and mobile speak is a common part of their social reality: Daniel texts his friend while at a "fancy restaurant" with Zara, Arissa promises to skype with Zara from London, while Daniel connects with Zara via Facebook. Even the eateries are contemporary: the "fancy restaurant" Daniel and Zara are in has a table draped with a white cloth and on it is a small vase with a rose. Adam and Zara have their first date at a restaurant that features a "coffee table and 2 chairs". Not surprisingly, Adam's proposal is decidedly Western in style, as he "get[s] on his knees and hold[s] her hand" with the ring in his hand.

By appropriating the Western trope of second chance romance, the writer negotiates a culturally different worldview in which the modern Brunei Malay woman has agency and is able to have a fulfilling relationship with another man despite her "tainted" past. Projecting a local yet modern female identity and sensibility based on the appropriation of Other ideas, meanings and values, the writer has in the process not only made "them 'part of us'" (Hall 1992, 276) but also emerged with different ideas, values and representations that counter the prevailing MIB discourses of control, punishment and discipline where the rebellious Malay female behaviour is concerned. Although the idealisation of gender identities, roles and relations is one that can only exist in the realm of the imaginary, it is nevertheless an important part of the writer's mediation and perception of what it means to be a modern Malay woman in Brunei.

This mediation can also be seen in *My Child*, which is focused on the theme of a woman's choice and its consequence. *My Child* is also set against the backdrop of Bruneian modernity and, much like *Hope*, relies on similar language strategies to differentiate the older and younger generations of Bruneians. The former uses mostly Malay and sometimes code-switches to English. Conversely, the younger generation uses English or bilingual speech; for the latter, English is the main code

and they switch to Malay once in a while. As in *Hope*, the liberal modernity of the young generation is articulated through their use of American slang like "crazy-ass expensive", "I'd be crushed" and "crappy comments". They also wear Western clothes such as a "pink sundress", "all-black office wear", a "grey office jacket" or "polo shirt and jeans", communicate with mobile phones and meet at a trendy outdoor café. However, *My Child* is more realistically anchored by the use of localised names, manners, colloquialism and bilingualism; the last strategy is employed more often here than in *Hope*. Additionally, *My Child*'s thematic treatment of the modern Bruneian woman is one that is more layered.

The opening scene depicts the protagonist, Maria, reflecting on the question of agency and choice: "Everyday, we make a choice in our lives. No doubt, some choices can be life-changing. But have you ever wondered… even just a little—what would life be… if you have chosen the other choice? …In my other life, would I be happy? Would I still be a mom?" These questions drive the plot which depicts two possible realities for Maria and the life she would lead depending on the choice she makes and the path she takes: the first reality shows her determination to stay single and refusal to marry Ishak, the man she loves; here, she focuses on her career and decides to adopt a child. The second, alternate reality sees Maria marrying Ishak and getting pregnant. Later she gives birth to a daughter. In both realities, however, Maria is stricken with advanced stage of breast cancer.

What is interesting about the script is Maria's negotiation with two life choices as a modern Malay woman: a conventional one that includes marriage, husband and child, and an unconventional one where she is subjected to gossip and social scrutiny for remaining single. Depending on her choice, Maria's identity either revolves around marriage and husband, or around her career; in the first, she is a happy, loving wife who enjoys wedded bliss with Ishak while in the latter, she is a modern professional who spends most of her time at work. While one presents a picture of fulfilled happiness, the other struggles with the fear of being "trapped" in a marriage. Despite these contrasting differences, certain facets remain the same in both realities: Maria is modern in her outlook and behaviour, works in an office, is in a serious relationship with Ishak who loves her dearly, and desires a child. In both realities too, her younger sister, Aida, is getting married; she also serves as a foil to single Maria.

The two realities delineate two common types of gender identities and roles that can be found in Brunei: the single career woman, and the working, married woman. Although Maria is portrayed as a modern woman in both realities, the script also makes it clear that there is a difference in how modern womanhood is perceived in Brunei. There is the modern woman that is approved by MIB, and the one that is frowned upon. The identity approved by MIB is the one who manages her career while performing her duties to the family and state as a proper wife and mother, and whose children are integral to the future of the nation and its continued development and prosperity. In this role, the Malay woman can embrace modernity, but it is critical that she remains within the boundaries permitted by MIB. Then there is the identity that strays too far and gives cause for concern.

Maria's identity as the single career woman causes consternation and uncertainty among her social and family circles not because she is working, but because she rejects marriage. In this sense, single Maria can be read as a subversive and rebellious figure, for in refusing to conform to normative gender identities of wifehood and motherhood, Maria also rejects the family institution and values, as well as the traditional gender roles upheld by MIB. As the focused career woman, single Maria is portrayed as both vocal and assertive, especially when it comes to her choice to remain single:

> AIDA: Okay, okay, it's just that. You're twenty-five…
>
> MARIA: Here… we… go… AGAIN. And you're twenty-three. So?
>
> AIDA: Well… You know people and their "Questions"
>
> MARIA: Ugh. I know, people are going to annoyingly point out the obvious "Eh! *Adik-mu dulu kahwin*?"[18]
>
> AIDA: Awu… None of their business but…
>
> MARIA: It IS none of their business! They'll go on asking "*Ada berpunya sudah? Alum kahwin? Berapakan umurmu sudah?*"[19] Come on-lah, do we all have to get married in our twenties? What if we want to get married in our thirties? Or like… never?
>
> AIDA: NEVER? Do you want to be called "*Anak Dara Tua-kah*"[20]?
>
> MARIA: What matters is I am happy with my life. And why do you think people take so much time digging into other people's life? Criticising this and that? Is there nothing else they can do?

The excerpt above reveals the insidious forms of social control and regulation of young women's bodies as Malay women are expected to get married in their twenties or be called *Anak Dara Tua*, a derogatory term used to label spinsters. Maria is resistant to this discriminatory practice and insists on what she wants regardless of the social pressure that surrounds her. The language strategy used here is also significant, for Maria uses English when speaking about herself but switches to Malay when mimicking the voices of the "people" who scrutinise and question her life choices. By differentiating "they" from "I" through the language medium, in that "they" are orthodox Brunei Malays who follow MIB traditions, Maria portrays her identity as Anglophone, non-conformative and individualistic—an identity that has been influenced by the West and its liberal discourse of individual rights and freedoms.

Maria's westernised and liberal character is reaffirmed when it comes to her views on motherhood. When Aida asks if she'll get married since she is adopting a child, Maria is quick to defend her right to be a "single mom" by criticising society's expectations that a woman should be married in order to be a mother: "I'm not getting married! What is wrong with being a single mom? Don't tell me society's crappy comments again. I don't care about that. …My child doesn't need

[18]Your younger sister is getting married first?

[19]Do you have a boyfriend? You're not married yet? How old are you?

[20]Old virgin.

two parents—one is enough". Disdaining the demands placed upon her by the social and state collectivity, Maria insists on her right to her choice, no matter how bad it makes her look in society.

By spurning traditional femininity and all that it entails, Maria's un-Malay behaviour also runs the risk of flouting the cultural values upheld by MIB. While at the prayers for her deceased mother (*tahlil*), Maria's visitors keep asking when she is getting married. One elderly woman, Fatimah, even tells her, "*Baiktah kau kahwin, lai. Adikmu sudah kan kahwin*"[21]. Angered, Maria retaliates with sarcasm: "I still want to enjoy my life. Don't want to grow old with no fun memories now, do we? I think that's why SOME people are so judgmental; THEY didn't have fun when they were younger". More than her refusal to be married, it is Maria's disrespect towards Fatimah that goes against the grain of Brunei Malay culture and MIB, which encourage the respect of the elderly. Even Aida rebukes her sister: "We can't be disrespectful. They're our elders. … You just have to be *sabar*, *ka*!"[22]. Maria's individualistic behaviour thus leads her away from the Malay way of life and more pertinently, the cherished values that have been inculcated into Malay children.

In opposition to single Maria, the Maria who chooses to marry Ishak is characterised as cheerful, calm and optimistic. She is also less assertive and less vocal than single Maria. The difference between the two characters can be seen in their settings. Married Maria has many photo frames on her table while there is colour amidst her black furniture—"two colourful flower-printed pillows" and "pink cushion"—in contrast to single Maria's space, which features only two photo frames, black furniture and white cushions. Married Maria is in a warm, loving relationship with Ishak and expecting their first child; she has, in the eyes of state and society, made the right choice.[23] However, she is also less realistically portrayed than single Maria, as she experiences few obstacles and has overcome her fear of being married. In fact, all goes swimmingly well in her life until she learns of her illness.

At the end of the play, Maria reveals the life that she chose: the conventional one, with marriage and baby in tow. The scene ends with her revelation that she has written a letter for Salmah, her baby daughter, which opens with "My Child". Following the prescribed path of marriage, wifehood and motherhood, Maria has subscribed to the injunctions of MIB in all the ways that are important to her identity and place as a modern Brunei Malay woman. In reading this, I could argue that what is important here is Maria's agency, as it is her choice that matters at the end, made out of her own free will. However, I wish to posit another interpretation

[21]You should get married soon, since your younger sister is already married.

[22]You just have to be patient, sis!

[23]Even so, the writer satirises Brunei Malay society for its expectation for women to be pregnant within their first year of marriage. In a parallel '*Tahlil'* scene, the same elderly woman, Fatimah, tells married Maria, "*Kesian your husband kalau alum ada anak*" (Pity your husband if you don't have a child yet). It is not enough for a young woman to be married, for to be a "real" woman, one must also conceive or else it would reflect badly on the husband's virility. The onus thus lies on the wife to quickly conceive lest her femininity or worse, her husband's masculinity, is questioned.

that problematises this ending, for the unorthodox choice to be an unmarried, single mother still remains. Although unchosen, it is nonetheless presented as a valid choice, one that is ambivalently present within the textual space of narrative in the flesh of a fully developed personality and voice, thereby constituting a site of disruption and disjunction. The ending may have conformed to Malay social and cultural expectations, but it also undermines them through the figure of single Maria, whose sharp criticisms of the patriarchal and panoptic eye of state and society should be considered a significant counter-discourse.

By juxtaposing two different Marias and realities, the writer contrasts different discourses, meanings and representations of modern womanhood that also form the site of contestations between Brunei as a nation-state and the outside world: one is conventional, compliant, domestic and recognisably Brunei Malay in sensibility and worldview; the other is liberal, vocal, individualistic, westernised and decidedly un-Malay in the ways that matter. Incorporating both viewpoints and voices into the script, the writer creates a poly-vocal and multicultural literary terrain that celebrates the possibility and plurality of gender identities, roles and relations. In so doing, she counters the monoculturalism and homogeneity of essentialised racial and gender identities promoted by MIB and the nation-state.

8.4 Conclusion

Through the figure of the modern Brunei Malay woman, the scripts analysed above challenge, resist and even subvert dominant MIB discourses of race, gender and language in the nation space. Both *Hope* and *My Child* imagine a woman-centred world of gendered solidarity through female friendship (Zara and Arissa) and sisterhood (Maria and Aida) through which female autonomy, agency and strength are affirmed. They do so by drawing on Western or global discourses to bring in a culturally different understanding of femininity in the nation space. *Hope* uses the Western trope of second chance romance to dismantle the prevailing Malay narrative convention that attends the themes of the unfilial child and the transgressive woman; instead of punishment and exile, *Hope* boldly calls for the possibilities of love and redemption by depicting an alternative worldview in which the errant character of Zara learns her lesson and gains her happy-ever-after ending with Adam. *My Child* cleverly uses the voice of single Maria to criticise the state and social surveillance of young Malay women's bodies, and the corresponding pressure that shapes women into compliant wives and mothers. *My Child* also differentiates two types of modern womanhood in subtle but pointed ways: one identity is approved, while the other is censured. Of interest too is the similar manner in which both scripts employ English and/or bilingualism to distinguish the modern (and usually young) Malays from the traditional (usually older) Malays; for the former, English is used as the dominant code but Malay is more prominent when it comes to depicting the latter. By anchoring modernity to English, the scripts also reveal that the students imagine modern gender identities, roles and relations by engaging

cultural difference or Otherness, seen in the Anglophone, westernised, and liberal-minded characters like Adam, who accepts Zara's "tainted" past, and Maria, the single career woman and mother.

Presenting a counter-position and viewpoint to that of MIB and the nation-state, the scripts analysed above posit the symbolic space through which students are able to negotiate Otherness as integral to their perception and articulation of the modern Brunei Malay woman. By appropriating these culturally different ideas and making them "part of us", the scripts also reveal that the writers are in continuous interaction and dialogue with the shifting values, meanings and symbols of their social reality and the different cultural worlds they have been exposed to, whether through imagination or experience, as a result of the global cultural flows. The textual space of narration thus constitutes the site through which the perception and ideas of modern Malay femininity are being mediated by the creative self at a specific time. Such ideas are never finished, only part of the students' process of becoming, and are reflective of a society in flux. Contrary to the state's homogenising forces and attempts to regulate Malay-ness and femininity, the students' writings underline ongoing sociocultural transformations and hybridisation occurring at the micro-level of everyday life (Saxena 2014; Chin 2016), of which the modern Brunei Malay woman is but one such representation.

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