BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE? INTERSTITIAL FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY IN BETWEEN COLONIALISM AND PATRIARCHY: WOMEN IN PRAMOEDYA ANANTA TOER'S BURU TETRALOGY

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Pramoedya's checkered literary career has made reception to his works inconstant and inconsistent. Incarcerated by the colonial power he sought to displace and then banned by the very government he helped to bring about, Pramoedya's position is controversial, to say the least. This "outside/insider" status[1] problematizes any reading of his works. As a controversial figure situated on the margins of discourse in several senses, traversing the intersections of historical junctures, notions of selfhood, and subjectifying practices, Pramoedya offers a unique perspective on how female subjectivity can be articulated differently than the socially dominant discourses of Indonesia would have it. In patriarchal colonial culture, female identity has always been "doubly colonized"; a woman finds herself rendered subject to a "higher" power once because she is a woman and again by virtue of her status as "other" (read: native).

[1] For interesting discussions of Pramoedya's "outsider" position, see A. H. Johns, "Pramoedya Ananta Toer: The Writer as Outsider—An Indonesian Example," in *Cultural Options and the Role of Tradition: A Collection of Essays on Modern Indonesian and Malaysian Literature* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1972), pp. 96–108; and Bakri Siregar, "Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Orang Luar dan Orang Dalam," *Bintang Timur*, February 23, 1964.

Pramoedya's writing is an attempt to create the necessary conditions for the dismantling of this double marginalization and the fabrication of a new space wherein woman's specificity can be narrated: in between colonialism and patriarchy.

Acting as a synthesis of much of Pramoedya's previous writing on women[2] and literature, the Buru tetralogy blurs the boundaries between mapping the process of "coming into subjectivity" and its very occurrence as an "event." In other words, the tetralogy both chronicles the process of recovery and becomes that process itself, the necessary and difficult articulation of the previously silenced female voice. Painfully, agonizingly, Pramoedya's female characters and their narrative voices make and unmake words and worlds. Female protagonists in the tetralogy like Nyai Ontosoroh and Mei struggle for selfhood, stumble, fall, and start again, until the possibility of articulation is no longer in question and the narrative of women's experience begins to show itself.

Narrative "Dispatterns"

The explosion of pain and anguish that so defines Pramoedya's work is intensely personal,[3] signaling the eruption of his own passion as he struggles to write Indonesian women and their role during the fight for independence into existence. It becomes obvious, as soon as one reads other works by Pramoedya—his essays, short stories, and the interviews he has given—that he believes fervently in the important role women played in the Indonesian nationalist struggle. While many writers have explored the impact of colonialism on the discursive, constructed, or imagined nature of national identities, Pramoedya has gone further by exposing how patriarchy and colonialism exacerbated gender oppression and showing that men and women were subjected to it differently. Through his description of the coming into being of national consciousness in Indonesia, we begin to see that women were not only objectified collectively through the figure of the "child-bearer," portrayed as nurturers of the cultural and family values of the nation (as gendered assumptions of women would have us believe), but that they were active participants in the struggle for independence.

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[2] See Pramoedya's novellas, *Keluarga Gerilya* (1949; repr., Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1980); *Midah—Si Manis Bergigi Mas* (Bukittinggi: Nusantara, 1955); *Gadis Pantai* (Kuala Lumpur: Wira Karya, 1987); his articles, "Hamidah," in the "Mengenangkan Kembali Bangkitnja Bangsa Indonesia" series in *Bintang Timur*, June 8, 1962; "Hikayat Njai Dasima," *Bintang Timur*, December 13, 1964; and "Sekali Lagi tentang Njai Dasima," *Bintang Timur*, December 27, 1964; and series of essays in *Panggil Aku Kartini Sadja* (Jakarta: Nusantara, 1962).

[3] In an interview with Chris GoGwilt, Pramoedya, asked to comment about the feminist "awakenings" in the tetralogy, replied: "In my view, women deliver everything. In the back of my mind is always my mother—my mother as teacher, educator, and bearer of ideas." See Chris GoGwilt, "Pramoedya's Fiction and History: An Interview with Indonesian Novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer," in *Pramoedya Ananta Toer 70 Tahun: Essays to Honour Pramoedya Ananta Toer's 70th Year*, ed. Bob Herring (Stein: Yayasan Kabar Seberang, 1995), pp. 12-13. In a footnote on Pramoedya's reference to his mother, GoGwilt notes that "[t]he second volume of Pramoedya's Buru memoirs, made up of letters written to family members, includes an extended meditation on the image of his mother. Entitled, "De Revolutie, moeder van alle deugden" [The Revolution, mother of all virtues], the letter develops a moving and striking analogy between the memory and image of his mother and the ideals of the Indonesian revolution." Ibid., p. 25n.

What is of particular interest here is the portrayal of women in Pramoedya's works, which breaks away from traditional stereotypes of female subordination and instead provides a model of autonomous womanhood. Barbara Hatley offers an analysis of Pramoedya's female characters along these lines:

> [Pramoedya's] female characterization ... confronts dominant gender ideology. Where women figured in mainstream literary works embody notions of cultural continuity and conservative social values, Pramudya[sic] ... depict[s] female characters of a contrasting type with opposing political suggestion. These women arguably recall age-old images of independent, assertive female power, but here with implications which are positive, even heroic, rather than threatening. Rather than marginalising them from the national domain, exclusion of such women from traditional structures of political control instead frees them to represent possibilities of a new, transformed Indonesian polity. The stereotypical association of women with nature, nurture, and "tradition," as well as their exclusion from the domain of politics and nation, is boldly challenged."[4]

In the tetralogy, Pramoedya's portrayal of some of his female characters reveals the ideologies of misogyny or patriarchy that operated in the hierarchical arrangement of both colonial and Javanese societies in the East Indies at the turn of the twentieth century—a moment in which female subjectivity is affirmed, yet shows itself to be inscribed with the marks of patriarchal discriminations and divisions which are at work in the novel's representations. Here we should also consider the fact that the textual constructions of "woman" and "femininity" are being mediated at all times by a man (whether Pramoedya, as the author of the tetralogy, or Minke—the narrator in the first three novels—or even Pangemanann, the narrator of the last novel); this adds a further layer to the contestations surrounding the representation of gender in the tetralogy.

The tetralogy's movement, along with the formal manipulation of narrative lines, or "story lines" in "he said/she said" form,[5] within the text depict and enact the emergence of previously silenced female voices in Indonesian literature and history. The Buru tetralogy, made up primarily of Minke's, the male protagonist's, narration in the first three novels, is interspersed with accounts (in the form of retelling, letters, and court testimony) by female characters—interconnected fragments of narration within narrations. This narrative pattern, or "dispattern," reflects the structure of the entire tetralogy. By interjecting these female accounts, Pramoedya builds a material history of women's experiences in colonial Indonesia, a history that is literally "in pieces." Even more prominent in the tetralogy is the story of Nyai Ontosoroh, the native concubine whose dignity and indomitable will defy subjection both by Dutch colonialism and traditional Javanese androcentricism. This "story" is also constructed fitfully, almost as a matriarchic source that gives birth to Minke's story of nationalist awakening. The reader pieces together the life of Nyai Ontosoroh, in particular, and native women, in general, after coming across a multitude of references to her and to the oppressive colonial and patriarchal systems women are subjected to; these references are strewn

[4] Barbara Hatley, "Nation, 'Tradition,' and Constructions of the Feminine in Modern Indonesian Literature," in *Imagining Indonesia: Cultural Politics and Political Culture*, ed. Jim Schiller and Barbara Martin-Schiller (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Centre for International Studies, 1997), pp. 103-4.

[5] Jamie James, "The Indonesiad," *The New Yorker*, May 27, 1996.

throughout the tetralogy and narrated in both the first and third person. These female accounts, these multiple "story lines" merge, intersect, and move in and out of the pages of the tetralogy.

The tetralogy, at the level of narrative structure, sets in place several female narrative subjects whose identities and stories interact and intersect. In chapter five of the first novel, *Bumi Manusia*,[6] for example, Annelies, the half-Dutch-half-Javanese (Indo)[7] daughter of Nyai Ontosoroh, relates to Minke her mother's own account of her woeful and wretched life as a *nyai*[8] or concubine before she picks up from where her mother's account left off with her version of how the arrival of her Dutch stepbrother, Maurits Mellema, destroyed the former "happiness" of Nyai Ontosoroh's family. Interwoven into Minke's narration of the chain of events leading to the trial of Nyai Ontosoroh's son, Robert Mellema, and the mysterious Fatso, over the murder of Herman Mellema, Robert's father, is Maiko's (Maiko is a Japanese prostitute) testimony in court. In the second novel, *Anak Semua Bangsa*, Minke's narration is corroborated by the story of Surati, Nyai Ontosoroh's niece, retold in Minke's narrative voice, which describes the economic hardship experienced by Nyai Ontosoroh's

[6] All references to the Buru tetralogy are to the Wira Karya, Kuala Lumpur editions: *Bumi Manusia* (This Earth of Mankind) (3rd ed., 1990); *Anak Semua Bangsa* (Child of All Nations) (2nd ed., 1989); *Jejak Langkah* (Footsteps) (1986); and *Rumah Kaca* (House of Glass) (2nd ed., 1990). Quotes from the tetralogy in this essay are my English translation of the original Bahasa Indonesia version and will be marked by their abbreviated Bahasa Indonesia titles as *BM*, *ASB*, *JL*, and *RK* respectively.

[7] The children of a liaison between a *nyai* and her *tuan*—referred to as "Indo" (mixed-breed or *peranakan*) or, often denigratingly, as *anak haram* (illegitimate children or bastards)—were at the mercy of the father. Only the father had the authority to grant or withhold the gift of citizenship to his Indo child/ren under the new Mixed Marriage Regulation promulgated in 1898. He could consign them to an orphanage when he left the country. Even after the death of the father, the mother had no rights of guardianship. The status of the child would then become the prerogative of the Court of Justice. If the children were not recognized, then they had few prospects and could be abandoned, along with their mother, at any time. Children were a mother's responsibility, as Tineke Hellwig notes in *Adjustment and Discontent: Representations of Women in the Dutch East Indies* (Windsor, Ontario: Netherlandic Press, 1994), p. 33.

[8] The term *nyai* in the context of association with foreign men is usually translated into English as "concubine" or "native mistress." Commonly, the word was applied to a woman, usually a *pribumi* (native), who lived with a foreigner (*orang asing*) as if she were his wife, but outside a recognized marriage. Despite the provision of the *gelijkstelling* or "equalizing" policy (which regulates the granting of full rights of Dutch citizenship to an *inlander*), the *nyais* were veritably *personae non gratae*, without any legal rights to protect themselves or their children. A *nyai* was subject to the whims of her male partner. She was often treated as a "property" and often referred to as *isteri/bini simpanan* or *bini piaraan* (kept woman). Her treatment at the hands of her *tuan* (literally, "Mr.," or "master," usually used for foreigners) also denoted her status as property: a *nyai* could be evicted from the *tuan*'s home at any time for any reason; or she could be treated as chattel, abused and discarded when no longer of use. Although the word *nyai* is usually understood to mean "native mistress," this is not the only meaning. The term *nyai*, and its equivalent terms, were used in a wide variety of household situations. Apart from their role as sexual partners or mistresses (usually coerced) for which *nyais* are best known, they were usually required to fulfill many other duties: for instance, as housekeepers, cooks, laundry maids, language teachers, financial consultants, and mothers. The term *nyai* then has a multiplicity of meanings and connotations. It cannot solely be equated with "concubine," "native mistress," or "housekeeper." In part this is reflected in the names used for unmarried women who were perceived to be in illicit relationships. They were referred to as *nyai* and *gundik* (mistress, housekeeper, concubine) as well as *jalang*, *sundal*, and *gendak* (prostitute). Furthermore, there were *pribumi* women living in diverse relationships with foreigners—Dutch, Indo, Arabian, European, and Chinese men—and there were *peranakan* women in relationships with *peranakan* men. There were also a number of Dutch terms used to denote *nyai: huishoudster* (housekeeper), *bijzit* (concubine), *menagere* (housekeeper), and *meid* (maidservant, girl, wench). All of these equivalents, though euphemistic, were taken to mean *nyai*. For an insightful summary, see Hellwig, *Adjustment and Discontent*, pp. 31–37.

brother, Sastro Kassier, and his family in the rural village of Tulangan under the forced cultivation, or *rodi*, system of the colonial Dutch regime. Missives and notes from the de la Croix sisters, Miriam and Sarah, also intermittently intersect with the main narration. The narration of the third novel, *Jejak Langkah*, is interspersed sporadically with letters from Nyai Ontosoroh, who now lives in self-exile in France with the French artist, Jean Marais, as well as letters from Maysoroh, Jean's daughter. In *Rumah Kaca*, twenty-one female villagers, while under interrogation, relate their stories of rape, abduction, and brutalization at the hands of European plantation owners to Pangemanann in a way that makes his "heart shrivel up" (*RK*, 43). While women are hardly present in the action of the fourth novel, they are *imaginatively* present, as evidenced by Pangemanann's anxiety over the influence women's writing could have on the burgeoning nationalist sentiment. Their metaphoric significance in this narrative cannot be overestimated. I am referring here, of course, to Raden Adjeng Kartini and Siti Soendari,[9] whose writings are alluded to quite frequently by Pangemanann in his narrative throughout the course of the novel.

These fractured female accounts function as textual representations of women's "broken" and "ravaged" nature, as Nyai Ontosoroh puts it. She states: "Consider me your egg that has fallen from the egg racks. Broken." (*BM*, 82); "I had no soul anymore, like a *wayang* puppet in the hands of the puppet-master ..." (*BM*, 79); "... like a wooden doll ... " (*BM*, 78). As the novels present it, the telling of women's stories cannot be coherent or linear in any traditional sense, for there is no coherent or linear story to tell. This story has to be created from ground zero, and the process is painful, splintered, and ruptured. Narrative voices of the female characters in the tetralogy and the complicit narrative structure present a patchwork of reflections, experiences, and histories that signal the preliminary breaking forth of woman into language. It is true that the feminine "I" frequently emerges in the narrative of the tetralogy, but its referents are many and various. Paradoxically, therefore, far from representing a unitary and coherent subject, the inscription of the feminine "I" in the discourse produces an enunciative plurality. Despite the reiteration of the "I," it is not *one* voice that speaks in the text and still less one particular subject; it is a polyphony of feminine voices that can be heard in these individual collective forms. This enunciative plurality (which never totally eradicates singularity) calls into question the myths of the unitary feminine subject and of a homogeneous female collective voice. It is as if the tetralogy is multiplying "differences" by indexing them to the changing forms of the feminine "I": from the gloriously divine but childlike and innocent "Creole beauty" (*BM*, 201) Annelies, to the "beauty that wasn't empty" "with different origins" (*JL*, 70) that is Ang San Mei, Minke's Chinese second wife; from the "lioness without strength" (*ASB*, 185), Djumilah, the wife of Sastro Kassier, who despite her frequent vituperative tirades is helpless to safeguard her daughter from being sold to the Dutch manager of the sugar mill in Tulangan (Frits Homerus Vlikkenbaaij, alias Plikemboh [Ugly Penis]), to Djumilah's daughter, Surati, who contracts smallpox voluntarily as a way to commit

[9] Raden Adjeng Kartini (1879–1904), a native princess from Jepara who became the first Western-educated native woman in twentieth-century East Indies. A feminist and educator, she wrote extensively to support the emancipation of native women in the East Indies. On her role in generating a new nationalism and her contribution in promoting popular education for Native children, girls as well as boys, see Pramoedya, *Panggil Aku Kartini Sadja*, pp. 62–65.

suicide and thus escape becoming Plikemboh's mistress;[10] from Rientje de Roo,[11] the alluring high-class prostitute who tempts Pangemanann's fancy in *Rumah Kaca*, to Princess Kasiruta, Minke's fiercely loyal third wife who shoots Robert Suurhof in defence of her husband's life.

Pramoedya's depiction of the incoherent female "non-subject" as she exists prior to the act of "writing" herself recalls feminist paradigms that use notions of madness or hysteria to describe the condition of women in uncontested patriarchal systems.[12] Unlike feminist theorists who go further and recognize spaces conceived as outside "reason," or outside the "real," as the locus of legitimate opposition, Nyai Ontosoroh's narrative voice insists, although tentatively at first, on her presence in the text and in the world. She ends the first section of the tetralogy with this manifesto:

> Yes, Child, Nyo, we must fight back, we must resist ... We need not be ashamed if we are defeated. We must know why ... The main reason is that we don't have the courage. And more generally still, we haven't learnt anything. All their lives the Natives have suffered what we are now suffering. No one raises his or her voice—dumb like the river stones and mountains, even if cut up and made into no matter what. What a roar there would be if they all spoke out as we will now speak out. Perhaps even the sky itself would be shattered because of the din. (*BM*, 330)

Coming at the end of one of the most inspiring sections of the first novel, this statement can be read as an affirmation of the desire not to be silenced. Whereas so much of the preceding imagery has evoked silence, surrender (Nyai Ontosoroh's mother, we are told, could only cry and sob in a corner of the kitchen, "silent in a thousand tongues" [*BM*, 74] when Nyai's father decided to sell her to Herman Mellema as his concubine), immobility, and entrapment, here the speaking voice begins to talk of movement, of approaching boundaries with words, of speaking out so that "the sky itself would be shattered because of the din" (*BM*, 330). This affirmation of presence, like the multiple female "story lines" and accounts, moves in and out of the text. Its contorted path, which leads the female presence in these novels from a condition as voiceless object to speaking subject, is also mirrored in the formal structure of the tetralogy.

Angels and Monsters

Beginning with the narrative representations of women in the first novel, *Bumi Manusia*, we can identify Annelies and Nyai Ontosoroh as the two main loci on which the text focuses its construction of "women" and "femininity." The image of Annelies as an "angel," "beautiful," and "arresting" (*BM*, 34), and as a "child-like maiden" (*BM*,

[10] Pramoedya "borrows" this smallpox episode in Tulangan from *Tjerita Nji Paina* (published in Batavia in 1900), by H. Kommer, a Dutch journalist and story writer. This story is included in Pramoedya's anthology of "pre-Indonesian" literature, *Tempo Doeloe* (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 1982).

[11] A character Pramoedya modeled after the historical figure of Fientje de Feniks, an Indo prostitute who, after she spurned the advances of one of her Dutch patrons, was murdered by the jealous man's hired killer in 1912 in Batavia. For a study see Tineke Hellwig, "A Double Murder in Batavia: Representations of Gender and Race in the Indies," *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 35,2 (2001): 1–32.

[12] See for example, Elaine Showalter, "Feminism and Hysteria: The Daughter's Disease," in *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago Press, 1987), pp. 145–64.

44), and of Nyai Ontosoroh as a "sorceress" (*BM*, 42) whose "black magic" grips people's hearts and minds (*BM*, 61), conforms most closely to the archetypal dual images of women as either "angels" or "monsters." In her influential analysis of the question "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?," the anthropologist Sherry Ortner notes that in every society "the psychic mode associated with women seems to stand at both the bottom and the top of the scale of human modes of relating." Attempting to account for this "symbolic ambiguity," Ortner explains "both the subversive feminine symbols (witches, evil eye, menstrual pollution, castrating mothers) and the feminine symbols of transcendence (mother goddesses, merciful dispensers of salvation, female symbols of justice)" by pointing out that women "can appear from certain points of view to stand both under and over (but really simply outside of) the sphere of culture's hegemony."[13] That is, precisely because a woman is denied cultural autonomy, or the subjectivity, she comes to embody just those extremes of mysterious and intransigent "otherness" that patriarchal culture confronts with worship, fear, love, or loathing. Because the male construction of "woman" in the tetralogy reveals the very anxieties of a patriarchy in transformation, and because this male representation of "woman" has for so long been radically qualified by the angel- and monster-imagery in male-authored texts, I will attempt here a brief analysis of the fundamental extremes of angel and monster archetypes of women as they are engendered in the Buru tetralogy. Although the tetralogy seeks to impose its own hegemonic definition of "masculinity" and "femininity," neither goes uncontested. The very representations of male emasculation and female empowerment constitute slippages that can expose and question the constructions themselves. As a work full of overlaps and ruptures where discourses intersect, the Buru tetralogy stands as an intriguing example of the shifting ideological tensions to be found in Pramoedya's representation of women.

The ideal woman that male "authors" in the tetralogy dream of generating is ineluctably almost always an angel: "[h]er cheeks, her lips, her forehead, her nose, even her ears—all are as if formed in wax, shaped according to all men's dreams" (*BM*, , 303). At the same time, this angelic figure of woman has an alter-ego in the pernicious images of the witch, siren, ghost, or whore. Throughout history, women in Javanese narratives have been represented both as angels and monsters, a condition that can seem quite varied, even rich, because so many masks, reflecting such an elaborate typology, have been invented for them. Where and how did this ambiguous image originate? In Javanese myths, legends, and folklore, mankind's great teacher of purity was Kunti, the selfless and devoted mother of the Five Pandawas, the archetypal Indonesian mythic heroes (of Indic origin)—Bima, Arjuna, Yudistira, and the twins, Nakula and Sadewa. She is the symbol of motherhood, a mother goddess who perfectly fits the female role Ortner defines as "merciful dispenser of salvation."[14] This eternal type of female purity is represented also in a pantheon of other Javanese legendary and mythic icons in the figures of Dayang Sumbi in the Legend of Tangkuban Prahu (Indonesia's answer to the Oedipus story); Roro Jonggrang in the legend of the Temple of Prambanan; Nawangwulan, the fairy nymph, in the legend of

[13] Sherry Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" in *Woman, Culture, and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphère (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), p. 86.

[14] Ibid.

Jakatarub; Sita, the beautiful and faithful wife of Prince Rama of the Ramayana epic; and, of course, the famous Nyi Roro Kidul, the goddess of the Southern Ocean. In these legends and myths, the female goddess (or *dewi kayangan,* literally "ethereal maiden"), invested with supernatural beauty, power, and immortality, embodies the role of interpreter or intermediary between divine and mortal men. This female intercessor at the symbolic level operates as an agent of a greater Javanese cosmology; through her, the inaccessible is symbolically portrayed and the inexpressible is symbolically made manifest. The eternal feminine (that is, the eternal principle symbolized by woman) draws men to other-worldly spheres; in Javanese legends and myths, Woman can drag men down into ignobility and perdition or exalt him to great glory and triumph. The ideal of contemplative purity is always feminine, while the ideal of significant action is masculine. An "angel" woman's essential virtue, in other words, is that her virtue makes her *man* "great." (This is obviously not true of the witch or monster woman.) According to the laws of this cultural grammar, a good "woman" can serve only as a signifier of "man," her very ability to *mean* predicated on her functioning as a subordinate term. Once again, therefore, it is just because "angel" women are defined as wholly passive, and completely void of generative power, that they become numinous to male authors. For in the metaphysical emptiness, their "purity" signifies that they are *self-less,* with all the moral and psychological implications that word suggests.

Minke's description of Annelies conveys the conventionally masculine image of the angel figure:

> Down those stairs descended the angel Annelies, in a *batik kain,* a laced *kabaya.* Her *sanggul* was a bit too high, revealing her long white neck. Her neck, arms, ears, and bosom were decorated with a pattern of green-white emeralds, pearls and diamonds ...
>
> I was entranced. She must have been more beautiful and arresting than Jaka Tarub's angel in the legends of *Babad Tanah Jawi.* She was grinning all over as if embarrassed ... And I knew she had dressed up for me and me alone. (*BM,* 34)

Annelies "feels permanently dependent" (*BM,* 198) and has a mentality "of a ten-year-old child" (*BM,* 231). She gives advice and consolation to others, listens, smiles, sympathizes; her unselfish grace, gentleness, simplicity, and great beauty make her fit to be the "adornment of [Minke's] life" (*BM,* 194).[15] In short, Annelies has no story except a sort of anti-story of selfless innocence based on the Javanese feudalistic notion that

> A good wife serves her husband, takes care of the children and makes the family happy irrespective, and ahead, of her own feelings; contributes and maintains the success of her husband's career/reputation by accentuating his positive characters while understating the negatives.[16]

There is a long and crowded road—from G. Francis's *Tjerita Njai Dasima* (1896) and Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana's *Layar Terkembang* (1936), to Ajip Rosidi's *Roro Mendut: Sebuah Tjerita Klasika Djawa* (1968) and Umar Kayam's "Bawuk" (1975), to Y. B.

[15] The Indonesian word "*menyuntingkan*" here means both to put flowers in the hair or behind the ear as ornaments, as well as figuratively to take as a wife.

[16] "Èstri apik nyánggá bokong, nyánggá karma, mikul dhuwur, mendhem jero."

Mangunwijaya's *Roro Mendut* (1983) and *Durga Umayi* (1994)—of Indonesian works of fiction that, despite having female protagonists who are assertive and independent minded, play a part in the confirmation of those "eternal feminine" virtues. The virtues of modesty, gracefulness, purity, delicacy, civility, compliancy, reticence, chastity, affability, selflessness are all modes of mannerliness that contribute to woman's angelic innocence.

The arts of pleasing men, in other words, are not only the characteristics of angelic, mythic prototypes; in more worldly terms, they are the proper acts of a lady:[17] "It was not proper for a well-mannered girl to lift up her eyes and face towards a male guest who was not known well to the family. Especially if he was white" (*BM*, 75). Even the well-educated and "modern" Moluccan Princess van Kasiruta resigns herself to a domestic role, reaffirming the traditional belief that "women began their life with the wedding bed" and the opinion of the Governors-General of the Indies that "women could be silenced by bringing them to the wedding-bed" (*JL*, 375). "I only have one husband," declares Princess van Kasiruta. "My husband's work involves taking care of many things. My main work is to look after my husband ... [My] husband is [my] star, [my] moon, [my] sun. Without him, nothing will exist, including myself" (*JL*, 436, 454). Similarly, Ang San Mei regrets her own perceived failing as a wife: "Since a child I have been told to be *correct*, to behave *correctly* ... I've been very unfair to you these past months, not like a good Chinese should be to her husband" (*JL*, 137, 141). Thus marriage has been seen as a primary site for women's subordination, as many feminists have noted.[18] As the ultimate of exchange commodities, women are highly

[17] The Javanese has strict precepts governing female morals and manners encapsulated in what is called the *Kodrat Wanita* (Woman's Nature), which characterizes the proper women as "*lemah lembut* [soft and weak], don't speak out loudly, and specifically not in their own interests, don't push their own affairs against those of husbands and fathers, but are instead docile wives and dutiful daughters." Saskia Wieringa, "The Perfumed Nightmare: Indonesian Women's Organizations after 1950," in *Pramoedya Ananta Toer 70 Tahun*, ed. Bob Hering, p. 277. These precepts are epitomized in the ideology of the New Order family welfare programme, the PKK (Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga), which promotes the *Panca Dharma Wanita* (Five Duties of Women), which are: "to be a loyal companion to her husband, to procreate for the nation, to educate and guide her children, to regulate the household, and lastly, to be a useful member of society." Wieringa, "The Perfumed Nightmare," p. 277. For an analysis of this Javanese code, *Kodrat Wanita*, as it applies to Sri, the central figure in Pramoedya's short story, "Dia Yang Menyerah," from his collection of short stories, *Tjerita dari Blora* (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 1952), see Hatley "Constructions of the Feminine," pp. 90-93.

[18] One thinks of the eponymous juvenile female protagonist in Pramoedya's short story, "Inem," who is forced into marriage at the age of eight. The story, a critique of the traditional practice of child marriage, is narrated by Gus Muk, who follows the life of his neighbour, Inem, the daughter of a breeder of fighting cocks and a larcenist. Inem is forced by her parents into marrying Markaban, a seventeen-year-old son of a well-to-do man who often beats her. After a year, Inem leaves her husband and returns to her parents. Her tragedy is not unrelieved, however. Escape from an abusive forced marriage not only brings pecuniary penalty but shame, stigmatization, and abasement, as the narrator ruefully reflects: "And thereafter, the nine-year-old divorcée—since she was nothing but a burden to her family—could be beaten by anyone who wanted to: her mother, her brothers, her uncle, her neighbours, her aunts. Yet Inem never came to our house." Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Inem," in *Contemporary Literature of Asia*, ed. Arthur Biddle et al. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), p. 148. Another of Pramoedya's earlier work that looks at the intransigent nature of prevailing patriarchal attitudes towards women is *Gadis Pantai* (The Girl from the Coast) (first appeared in 1962; reprinted by Hasta Mitra in 1987), which looks at the custom followed by aristocratic Javanese men who took "practice wives" to fulfill their personal and sexual needs until they decided to marry a woman of their own class. The novel is modeled after the lifestory of Pramoedya's own maternal grandmother, Satima, who suffered the fate of being a "practice wife" to the head of local religious affairs, a Javanese man working for the colonial Dutch administration. See Pramoedya, "What They Did With Their Lives," *TIME* Asia, Special Issue on Asian Heroes, April 29, 2002, pp. 46–47. The

valued for providing a family lineage, and the centrality of marriage to a woman's self-conception is a common theme through traditional discourses on women. What is interesting here is that the standards by which Mei and Princess Kasiruta measure themselves as ideal "woman" and "wife"[19] remain so deeply informed by traditional codes that seek to contain women. Enshrined within her home, the East Indies pure, contemplative angel-woman becomes her husband's holy refuge from the blood and sweat that inevitably accompanies *his* life of significant action, as well as a living memento of the otherness of the divine.

In the severity of her selflessness, as well as in the extremity of her subordination within patriarchal and feudalistic cultural praxis, the representative angel-women in the Buru tetralogy, Mei and Annelies, become not just mementos of otherness but actually *memento mori*, producing both a conventionalized iconography and a stylized hagiography of ladylike fragility and delicate beauty doomed to ephemeral existence. Annelies dies in chapter two of *Anak Semua Bangsa*, shortly after being extradited to the Netherlands, where her fragile health quickly deteriorates after she is forcibly separated from her natural mother, Nyai Ontosoroh, and her husband, Minke, and placed under the legal custody of her vindictive stepmother, Mrs. Amelia Mellema-Hammers.[20] The Chinese Mei, whose selfless devotion to the Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan,[21]

narrative tells of Bendoro, the son of a minor aristocrat who has taken a girl from a fishing village as his "practice wife." As his "practice wife," she is bestowed with the honorific title "Mas Nganten," bedecked with all the finery befitting a woman of his class, and even instructed by a private tutor in the etiquette expected of a lady of the nobility. In exchange, she is expected to pay absolute obeisance to her master, Bendoro. Despite the prestige she enjoys in return for the ignominy she suffers, she remains his property. And readers are reminded poignantly of this when Bendoro discards his "practice wife" after she has given birth to a baby girl. Bendoro immediately and unceremoniously takes custody of this child, and the baby's mother is sent packing back to her parents in disgrace. There she decides that, instead of living out the rest of her life in humiliation in her own village, she will eke out a living on her own, away from her birthplace, in effect choosing autonomous womanhood over subordination. See also Tineke Hellwig, *In the Shadow of Change: Images of Women in Indonesian Literature*, Centers for South and Southeast Asia Studies, International and Area Studies, Monograph no. 35 (Berkeley, CA: University of California at Berkeley, 1994), pp. 69-95, for a juxtaposition of *Bumi Manusia* and *Gadis Pantai* that lays the basis for an analysis of patriarchal power over women in the two novels.

[19] It is interesting to note the etymological affiliation between the Indonesian word for "wife," *isteri*, and the Sanskrit *upastri*, meaning subordinate, concubine. The customary appellation for "wife" in traditional Javanese culture, as Hatley, "Constructions of the Feminine," p. 97, points out, is *kanca wingking* (literally "background companion").

[20] For want of a better term, I use the term "stepmother" here though it does not capture the exact nature of the relationship between Annelies and Mrs. Mellema-Hammers, who is the legal Dutch wife of Mellema in the Netherlands. In Java, Mellema took a *nyai* and fathered Annelies out of wedlock.

[21] The Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan (Chinese Assembly), which was founded on March 17, 1900, in Batavia, was said to be the precursor and inspiration for the first modern nationalist political organization in Indonesia, the Boedi Oetomo, which was founded on May 20, 1908. The Chinese community during this period was riven by a schism between the *totok* (characterized by its pure Chinese culture) and the *peranakan* (composed of Chinese already partly assimilated into Indonesian society and characterized by its cross Chinese–Javanese culture) communities. In 1901, the *totok*-dominated Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan set up the Tiong Hoa Hak Tong (Chinese schools), whose aim was two-fold: to revive *peranakan* interest in, and to maintain and propagate, pure Chinese culture among the *peranakan* Chinese; and to redress the neglect hitherto shown by the Dutch colonial government towards the education of the local Chinese community. These schools proved to be very popular, and by 1911 the Tiong Hoa Hak Tong had developed into a nationwide Chinese educational movement in Indonesia, which challenged Dutch hegemony in education by providing an alternative school system in the East Indies. To counter the spread of incipient nationalist sentiments bred by the movement and the threat to Dutch control over the *peranakan* Chinese community, the colonial administration established the first Dutch primary school for the Chinese, the Hollandsch-

an organization dedicated to furthering the cause of her people and country, takes a toll on her health, finally succumbs to hepatitis and dies "without leaving behind a word" (*JL*, 145). Together these two pale, frail, and consumptive heroines constitute complementary halves of the emblematic "angel-woman." It is the surrender of self—of personal comfort, personal desires, or both—that is the beautiful angel-woman's key act, while it is precisely this sacrifice that dooms her to death and elevates her imaginatively to heaven. For to be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead. In noting the unidimensionality in Annelies's character representation, for example, we can see that, in general, a life that has no story, like the life of Annelies Mellema, is really a life of death, a death-in-life. The ideal of "contemplative purity" evokes, finally, both heaven and the grave. To return to our earlier patriarchal archetypes of woman as "angel" and "monster," there is a sense in which woman as "angel" has the pernicious potential to become a "ghost, fiend and witch." Certainly, imprisoned in the double-walled tomb of both sexism and racism, a woman might long demonically for escape. In addition, the fact that the angel woman, as the providentially selfless mother, manipulates and mediates through her maternal power her domestic/mystical sphere in order to ensure the well-being of those entrusted to her care reveals that she *can* manipulate, she can scheme, she can plot—stories as well as strategies.

Nyai Ontosoroh, for instance, proves to be considerably more powerful and influential than at first she seems. As if symbolizing the indomitable earthliness that no woman, however angelic, could entirely renounce, Nyai Ontosoroh shows herself to be powerful through her psychological hold over Annelies (*BM*, 244) and her overwhelming personality, which casts "giant" (*ASB*, 68) shadows over men and "dwarfs" them (*ASB*, 72). As a character, she resists being immured in the prisonhouse of subordination and subjugation that both a feudalistic Javanese society and a patriarchal colonial system would impose on her. Viewed from either a feudal or patriarchal perspective, her ability to resist suggests monstrous female sexual energies. Repression disfigures the angel-woman and makes her monstrous, makes her a furious, uncontrollable avenger filled with destructive force: "She has real strength of character, reinforced by the hardness of someone with revenge still in their heart" (*BM*, 199). To Dr. Martinet, in his assessment of Annelies's psychological condition, which he shares with Minke, Nyai's assertive personality and influence over her daughter make her seem both terrifyingly physical and fiercely supernatural:

> Without being conscious of it, Nyai has moulded Annelies into her second personality. That child will never show any initiative if far from her mother. Initiative, in the form of commands that Annelies cannot refuse, will always be something that comes from her mother ... The mother's personality is overwhelming, she knows so much: more than enough for her life's needs in this jungle of ignorance which is the Indies. People are afraid to face her, afraid that they will be unable to move once under her influence. (*BM*, 244–45)

Chineesch School (HCS), in Batavia in 1908, with branches in other major cities established in later years. See Leo Suryadinata, "Indonesian Chinese Education: Past and Present," *Indonesia* 14 (1972): 49-71.

Motherhood Reconceived

Motherhood as a site of origin needs to be problematized here. Feminist theories of nationalism have pointed out that the nation is essentially feminine in construction. The nation is narrated on the body of women who collectively become an emotionally laden symbol of the nation, self, the inner, spiritual world, and home. One's motherland, or *ibu pertiwi* (literally "mother-earth"), as it comes to be called in Indonesian,[22] becomes invested with the kind of erotic attraction felt towards women by men, especially as regards the figure of the mother. The country comes to be represented and appropriated in words that have strong romantic and erotic, as well as maternal, connotations. The desire for this land/woman/*pertiwi* is constructed as a masculine desire: the desire to possess it, see it, admire it, love it, protect it, and die fighting for it against rivals. The imagery of nation-as-mother and motherland suggests common mythic origins: like the land (which gives shelter and "bears" offspring), she is eternal, patient, essential. There seems to be a primordial sense of connection between earth (*pertiwi*) and mother; both are perceived as being in need of protection; both are loved and admired; both are respected; there is a willingness to die for the honor of each. Woman, by providing that originating moment which gives "civilization" a sense of roots and beginnings—the moment of birth—figures as a site where the pristine, pure childhood of man could be glimpsed. The figure of the mother is used to provide a site for the fantasy of origins.

If motherhood is so closely associated with the concept of nation, we see how the symbolic appropriation of woman as mother into the narrative of the nation-state involves an immense emotional investment. Women's primary entry point into the nation-state is as mothers, as producers of strong, brave sons ready to fight to death for the sacred land. It has been argued that the family plays such a central role in the nation's public imaginings that motherhood could be viewed as a national service. The idea of motherhood as a national service was explicitly present in New Order Indonesia's instructions to women's organizations, which were expected to support moral motherhood for the benefit of the family, nation, and State.[23] The New Order family was the basic unit of society, as well as the pillar of the State, and it was within the family that the nation could reproduce itself, its sons and future mothers. It was the family, therefore, that exercised the greatest control over female sexuality in the name of the purity of the nation. To the extent that the nation was considered to be the family writ large, women's sexuality can find legitimate expression only in national service through the family.

The irony is that, while the trope of mother-as-nation is so powerful in nationalist thought, actual mothers and women are unequal, lesser citizens with fewer rights in the nation's power structure. Since the desire for women gets transferred onto the nation, and women's bodies come to signify the nation, communal, regional, and national conflicts, as well as battles for empire and dynasties, come to be played out on women's bodies. "In days of yore," Minke's mother reminds her son, "countries would wage all-out wars to win a maiden like my daughter-in-law, *mbedah praja, mboyong putri*, was our ancestors proverb, *victory over kingdoms, possession of its princesses*" (*BM*,

[22] The other Indonesian phrase to describe "motherland" is *tanah tumpah darah* (literally "land where blood is spilled"), which is consanguineous with the metaphor of birth.

[23] Wieringa, "The Perfumed Nightmare," pp. 275–83.

303). Women's bodies thus become arenas of violent struggle. Women are humiliated, tortured, brutally raped, and murdered as part of the process by which the sense of being a nation is created and reinforced.

The image of Minke's mother, the quintessential aristocratic Javanese wife, as the ever-faithful and hard-working wife and mother, conforms most closely to the traditional image of the virtuous wife and good mother. The extent to which Minke's mother (whose name significantly is not revealed to us, as if she is signified only by her role as "mother," her identity elided, erased) conforms to this model of behavior is clearly portrayed by her serendipitous appearances throughout the first three novels of the tetralogy. It is her role to fuss over Minke's brides each time he is about to get married, and, more importantly, to dispense pearls of wisdom about Javanese codes of conduct and heritage or to relate some Javanese legends or folklore to remind Minke of his noble lineage. In the still feudal atmosphere of Javanese society at the turn of the twentieth century, the importance of a good upbringing for those who would struggle to save the nation effectively linked the role of women as mothers to the fate of the Nation. The sacrificial mother performs the age-old traditional function of producing and reproducing for the patriarchal family or Nation. In this role, women act as the mediators. Through their efforts, children grow into citizens and come to be valued for their contribution to the Nation.

The family, often mobilized as a metonym for the nation in nationalist thinking, becomes a site laden with meaning having to do with the ways women's roles are imagined in the nation. The Indonesian *Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga* (Family Welfare Development) program, for example, firmly delineated women's place in Indonesia as the home.[24] Nationalism, as Parker and co-authors observe, "depends for its representational efficacy on a particular image of woman as chaste, dutiful, daughterly, or maternal."[25] Although the domestic setting is extremely common in twentieth-century Indonesian fiction, in Pramoedya's tetralogy the domestic setting has the added significance of being the sphere in which women's social role in the nation is defined. Definitions of "womanhood" and of women's place within the nation form an integral part of nationalism in the tetralogy. Minke's mother conforms to her culture's ideals of femininity, showing more interest in domestic order, playing her role as propagator of traditional cultural values and supportive, subordinate wife and mother, which is how nationalism idealizes the role of women. Pramoedya's portrayal of Minke's mother exposes the misogyny inherent in nationalist thinking and exaggerates the conventional ideal of Indonesian womanhood as passive. It serves to expose the gender politics behind a national discourse that stereotypes the female, discourse that has served two distinct ideological purposes: as applied by feudal Javanese society, it has helped to confine Javanese women in a straitjacket of purity and passivity; and as applied by Dutch cultural imperialists, it imprisoned the whole race in debilitating clichés.

The Buru tetralogy presents an alternative discourse, in which the search for identity that the female subject negotiates outlines her own subjectivity in a patriarchal system that is based on dominative and *gendered* power relations, where the only

[24] Hatley, "Constructions of the Feminine," p. 98.

[25] Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger, eds. *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992), p. 6.

exercisers of power are those accorded status as Subject—that is, male, non-native (read: white) owners of capital. My reading of the tetralogy focuses on the signs that the text marks out as indicative of female subjectivity, and, more crucially, focuses on how its narrative structure places the narrating subject in positions where its desired sovereignty and autonomy interpellate, and are created in conjunction and opposition to, several axes of domination: race (Miriam Frischboten *née* de la Croix/Anneliese/Nyai Ontosoroh/), class (Princess Kasiruta/Nyai Ontosoroh/Djumilah, Surati, and Minem), and gender (Pangemanann/Siti Soendari). Racial and sexual categories provide a fantasized site, sometimes of origin and at other times of difference, against which the emerging narrative subject is created and placed.

White, But Not Quite Right

If the imperialist formula that figures the East Indies as paradisial "mother"-land mythologizes the colony as female, which is made to "bear fruit" for the colonizer, the same discourse these sexualized tropes imply also makes "colonizer" synonymous with "man." It is interesting to note, too, that while the metaphor for country, nation, and land is the figure of the mother, Pangemanann, the narrator of the final novel, *House of Glass*, makes an analogy linking "colony" with "wife:"

> A country without colonies was like a widower who had to do all the housework as well as make a living by himself. The colony was like the wife who went out to work, who was submissive and faithful and obedient. Even though it was contrary to Christian morality ... the more wives a colonial power had, the more prosperous he would be, and the more desirable. (*RK*, 65)

The question arises, then, whether a European woman's responses to the enterprise of empire in the East Indies might not potentially be as different from a European man's as would her relation to the maternal/feminine figure(s) in her psychosexual history. The intricacies of the Dutch de la Croix sisters' ambivalence toward colonialism and the political, moral, and social implications of their ineluctable complicity with it, and the import of their doubled positioning—as at once subject and object within the imperialist frame of reference—require a comment. Despite their affiliations with the colonialist project, which implicitly granted them "freedom" to "speak" on the oppression of the Natives (in their many correspondences with Minke in the first two novels), as women they too are among the colonized. The definitions of woman that have evolved throughout Western cultural history are strikingly similar to the definitions of colonized people shaped by colonialism, both groups having been construed as naturally secondary, properly subordinate, and acceptable only when kept "in their places" for the sake of (white, masculine) "civilization."

The dogma of culture versus nature, "us" versus "them," that structures the logic and ideologies of imperialism also structures the logic and ideologies of gender, which subordinate woman in the name of the father just as colonialist enterprises have sought to subordinate the colonized in the name of civilization—a construct commonly represented as the peculiar property of the white man. Both symbolic orders operate within an economy of difference based on a subject/object dichotomy, whereby colonized peoples are regarded as inferior, insensate, or subhuman instruments of the

colonizers, and women regarded as ciphers who, merely because they belong to the female sex, do not "exist" outside their relation to men. The case of Miriam and Sarah de la Croix is a good case in point. The de la Croix sisters, daughters of the Assistant Resident of Bojonegoro, Herbert de la Croix, are portrayed as ardent supporters of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje's "Association Theory"[26]:

> Association means direct cooperation, based on European ways, between European officials and educated natives. Those of you who have advanced would be invited to join together with us in governing the Indies. So the responsibility would no longer be the burden of the white race alone ... The *bupatis* could cooperate directly with the white government. (*BM*, 140)

During their first encounter with Minke, the garrulous and rather belligerent sisters mocked, teased, and tested him on what he has been taught in school by his Dutch teacher, Magda Peters. They engaged in an animated argument with him on the knowledge he has obtained from his European education about his own country, while at the same time extolling Dutch tutelage in the education of the Natives in the East Indies and expressing their belief in the altruistic intentions of the Association Theory. Echoing Hurgronje, Sarah and Miriam declare that the "one and only road" (*BM*, 187) for the native is to be taken under the patronage of Dutch "philanthropists," who make it their business to educate and thereby elevate his/her untutored self into respectability, so that the educated native can share (albeit not quite on an equal footing) the tasks of the "white" civilizing mission with their Dutch overlords. This is the project that the de la Croix sisters intend to undertake with Minke, whom they regard as their own personal "experiment" and "guinea pig" (*BM*, 143–44). What is lost on the two sisters is their complicity in the reification of the colonizer's uncritical assumptions about race and cross-racial understanding.

Although Sarah and Miriam have persuasively defended the altruism of those who advocate the Association Theory, their description of the methodology employed by its original proponent is revealing:

> The important thing is that he [Hurgronje] has undertaken a valuable experiment with three Native youths. The purpose: to find out if Natives are able truly to understand and bring to life within themselves European learning and science. The three students are going to a European school. He interviews them every week to try to find out if there is any change in their inner character and whether their scientific knowledge and learning from school is only a thin, dry, easily

[26] C. S. Hurgronje (1857-1936) was a professor of theology and Arabic studies at Leiden University. He lived among the Indonesian community in Mecca and published a study of Islam in 1889. Subsequently, he became advisor to the Dutch government (1889–1907) and the architect of its colonial "Ethical Policy" and developed what he termed his "Association Theory." One key step for instituting the ideals of the Ethical Policy was to provide opportunities to Indonesian pupils to profit from modern Western education so they could develop as persons, and in turn develop their land and peoples. This meant that Western education and science should be related as much as possible to the life and culture of the Indonesians. (This was called the "policy of association," especially by Snouck Hurgronje.) But what was really intended was Westernization, even a kind of spiritual annexation (*geestelijke annexatie*) of native society. Hurgronje believed that, in order to deflect and harness the nascent but growing anti-Dutch sentiments among the native populace, education should be used as the vehicle for co-opting Native leadership. On a critical re-evaluation of Hurgronje's role and contribution to Dutch colonial policy, see A. S. Karni, Mohammad Deden Ridwan, and M. Nur Ichwan, "Snouck Hurgronje: Dipuji Setinggi Wali, Dikutuk Serendah Iblis," *Gatra* 23 (2003): 47–52.

> shattered coating on the surface, or something that has really taken root. (*BM*, 139-40)

Most immediately disturbing in the experiment described here is the way the native youths are summoned to stand under the scrutinizing gaze of the white scholar. They are appraised to determine whether they deserve the approval of the arbiter of culture, the white man. The gaze of Hurgronje, *despite* his benevolence and no matter how well-intentioned, enforces a hierarchical relationship between the gazer and the object of his scrutiny. The prejudice involved in this effort to recognize some equality between the colonizer and the colonized—identifying the racial Other with one's own ego-ideal—while in many ways more *humane*, is finally no more effective in creating real understanding *between* the Subject and Other than the prejudice that grounds the colonizer's sense of superiority. The native is considered "a leader, a pioneer, an example to [his] people" (*BM*, 143) only as (and precisely because) he or she embraces white values of progress, modernity, science, and learning (an imitative race[27]). So the native, whose "psychology hasn't yet developed as far as that of the European: his wiser considerations [are] ... still too easily pushed aside by lustful passions" (*BM*, 216-7), can yet succeed "one day in the future ... [to] sit together, as an equal with Europeans, in advancing [his] people and [his] country" (*BM*, 187). "... that will be the face of Java in the future, a Java which has absorbed itself into [European] civilization, no longer shriveling up like a worm struck by the sun" (*BM*, 185). Minke, in particular, whom the Dutch Assistant Resident considers to be "a different type of Javanese, of a different ilk, a pioneer and innovator at one and the same time" (*BM*, 185), has succeeded in imitating his white mentors, copying and conforming to their standards. Only as such does he become acceptable, his status as a member of "this nation of worms" (*BM*, 185) held in abeyance so long as he maintains his obedience to Dutch liberal middle-class cultural and societal norms.

But just as Minke—who realizes that he "was the guinea pig caught by [the de la Croix sisters] along the side of the road" (*BM*, 140)—is made to stand under the gaze of the de la Croix sisters ("Sarah de la Croix had stopped laughing. She put on a serious face, and observed me as if I was some mysterious animal" [*BM*, 137]), the two Dutch girls are also being appraised, albeit to a vastly different end, to determine if they meet the approval of the arbiters of their own (paternalistic) culture. "European dilemmas concerning sexuality and its control," Sander Gilman notes, were "transferred into the need to control the sexuality of the Other, the Other as sexualized female."[28] There were profound "structural connections between the treatment of women and of non-

[27] Though Dutch liberals like the followers of Hurgronje sought to eliminate categories of racial difference—to show that Natives *could* be like Europeans—what they failed to allow (the Native's prerogative to evaluate the world and draw conclusions that differ from those of the white middle class) effectively prevents them from establishing any tolerance or understanding of difference at *any* level. This is, ironically, lost on Herbert de la Croix, the Assistant Resident, who exhorts: "Minke, if you maintain your present attitude, I mean your European attitude, not a *slavish* attitude like most Javanese, perhaps one day you will be an important person. You can become a leader, a pioneer, an example to your race" (*BM*, 143; my emphasis).

[28] Sander Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth Century Art, Medicine, and Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12,1 (1985): 237.

Europeans in the language, experience, and imaginations of western men"[29] in the nineteenth century: both groups were characterized as childlike, dependent, and in need of active male guidance. The attitude of the de la Croix sisters towards Dutch male cultural and social authority is undeniably ambiguous. Arguably feminist in outlook, as these sisters are inimitably trenchant and stirring in their criticisms against the inherent evils of colonial rule, and unwavering in their sympathy for the Natives, they are, however, cast, foremost and ineluctably, as "daughters"—both literally and figuratively. The symbolic father who signals most fully the sisters' equivocal status as young women engaged in basically frivolous—unnecessary—occupations is the patriarch as "social parent": this is the liberal father, epitomized in this case by their own father, Herbert de la Croix, who ordains his daughters to attack injustice, celebrate the spirit of Reform in nineteenth-century Dutch colonial policy in the East Indies, and justify Western cultural superiority. Shaped by their privileged white middle-class background, which is characterized by benign paternalism, Sarah and Miriam fawn over father-figures: their early letters from Holland to Minke are memorable, as much for their firm, lucid, uncompromising style, which conveys their strong feelings about the colonial situation in the East Indies, as the refrains of "Papa said" that punctuate "their" arguments in the letter. Their admiration of Hurgronje, the "brilliant scholar" (*BM*, 139), whose experiment they try to "ape" (*BM*, 140), is almost devotional.

"Paternalism" is a suggestive word in this context. It directs us to consider the complexities of the European woman's involvement in a colonialist project that she simultaneously participated in, benefited from, despised, and unsuccessfully sought to subvert. As an "eccentric" (also read: ex-centric), liminal figure at once inside and outside the colonialist frame of reference, she, like the Natives as they were construed by colonialism, constitutes a site of potential disorder, a profound disruption of those categories of existence which the notion of "an inside" and "an outside" upholds. In the tetralogy, Dutch patriarchal society considers instability of this sort to be a problem that requires a remedy. Though it has no doubt about the capabilities of women, it subscribes to the prevalent ideology of gender, which severely limits the public role of women.[30] The assertiveness of women, as exhibited by the "subversive," liberal, progressive female European characters like Magda Peters (Minke's teacher of Dutch language and literature at the HBS school) and the de la Croix sisters, as well as the "real" characters in the novels, such as Marie van Zeggelen,[31] though often deemed necessary, is to be taken as a sign of a destabilized situation that needs to be rectified. Indeed, it can hardly have been otherwise, for a situation in which there is no suitable man to take charge is inherently unstable, within the ideological context from which Dutch patriarchal society operates. The success of a white colonial woman's exercise of power in such a situation can thus be gauged by her return to a traditional role, often involving marriage ("condemn[ed] to the matrimonial bedroom, to be silenced" [*JL*,

[29] Joanna de Groot,"'Sex' and 'Race': The Construction of Language and Image in the Nineteenth Century," in *Sexuality and Subordination: Interdisciplinary Studies of Gender in the Nineteenth Century.* ed. S. Mendus and J. Rendall (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 91.

[30] Miriam remonstrates ruefully: "One day, in the future, we will go home to the Netherlands. I will go into politics, Minke. It's a pity though that the Netherlands still doesn't allow a woman to sit in the Lower House" (*BM*, 188).

[31] Marie van Zeggelen (1870-1957), a Dutch writer who wrote many historical novels about the Dutch East Indies. Sympathetic to the Natives' struggle for freedom, she wrote a biography of Kartini as well as a trilogy of novels about Aceh in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

162]), once the crisis that has summoned her to a position of authority has passed or has been resolved by her.

Attacking the iniquities of colonial policy in the East Indies, saluting the spirit of reform, and greeting scientific and technological change with sanguine forecasts of improvements for humanity all round, the female Dutch characters in the tetralogy do, indeed, enact dutiful, daughterly work for their political fathers. This filial usefulness, however, becomes a threat and destabilizing force the moment they stray into the male sphere of public affairs and make conspicuous success of it. There needs to be some force that directs them back into their proper place, at least according to patriarchy's logic. For all their idealism, energy, and capabilities, they are treated like a set of ignorant and wayward children in need of a man's guidance, a dependent state that prevents them from achieving their full potential, as the text makes clear. And this is what they get: by the third novel, *Jejak Langkah*, Miriam Frischboten *née* de la Croix—who has returned together with her sister and father to the Netherlands in the first novel—has married a Dutch lawyer, a thirty-eight year old widower, her once youthful idealism about Hurgronje's Association Theory all but dissipated: "That's all in the past now...all that talk about the Theory of Association, about *gamelan*, it was all garbage, it was all mixed-up nonsense" (*JL*, 225). Sarah's spirited missives to Minke from the Netherlands too have long ceased, and we learn later that she has married a Canadian and emigrated to Canada to live with her husband. Magda Peters, on the other hand, has been banished from the East Indies for her radical and critical views on Dutch colonial policy in the East Indies, by the end of the first novel. There is thus a nervous unease in the tetralogy around gender roles among members of the colonial community, both an awareness of the mechanisms by which they are sustained and also an unwillingness to examine too closely how those mechanisms were essential not only to the maintenance of middle-class respectability, but also of racial identity, as well as how the ideology of the separate spheres was imbricated with other areas of colonial social life.

Similarly, along the interstices of race and class, colonial attitudes toward women are differentiated as they interpellate these categories, and although the patriarchal colonial construct of "womanhood" serves to objectify all women, whether Pures, Indos, or Natives, the Native woman is inevitably most fully affected by the negative aspects of the construct. For the "*totok*" (read: "pure" or full-blooded Dutch) woman, womanhood functions as a positive objectification—a stereotype that, hypothetically at least, she could achieve and profit from.[32] Colonial phallocentric cultural economy may have extracted a heavy psychological toll on the Dutch woman in the East Indies, encouraging her to repress her sexuality, yet it compensated her in ways that allowed the white *mevrouw* (Dutch for "Madam") to live her contradictory role in comparative comfort. As Elsbeth Locher-Scholten points out, this objectified gender role "merged seamlessly" with the "social roles and sense of identity" of the Dutch woman.[33] She

[32] I mean this term "positive objectification" only as a conceptual handle. Of course *no* objectification is good, but it is important to be able to differentiate here in order to understand what was at stake for different groups of women.

[33] Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, "So Close and Yet So Far: The Ambivalence of Dutch Colonial Rhetoric on Javanese Servants in Indonesia, 1900-1942," in *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism*, ed. Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998), p. 133.

could at least experience womanhood as protection, and could at best partake of the material benefits of the status she reflects for her husband. If her chastity is ultimately a commodity, the product of her sexuality serves the positive good of society that simultaneously objectified and exalted her. Her reproductive role is "glorified," and her children, as Frances Gouda notes, "[are] heirs to the economic, social and political interests in the maintenance of the colonial system":[34]

> "Hendrik," said Mir[iam], "here is your child, the child you have been longing for."
>
> "As white as cotton, Meneer!" added the midwife. "Congratulations, Meneer, congratulations, Mevrouw. No, Meneer, don't squeeze his nose like that, his bones aren't strong yet. A true Roman nose. No, not really, more a classical Greek." (*JL*, 360)

The idea of "womanhood" for the Dutch woman, however, is more complex than an analysis of her domestic role within nineteenth-century colonial phallocentric order in the East Indies would suggest. As the drama of paternity in the above extract exposes, imperialism is fundamentally masculine in its construction and instrumental in creating and reinforcing notions of gender roles and national culture. It seeks to exercise control of women, the family, sexuality, the home, and reproduction as part of its formulation of national identity. The women are bodies to be policed and confined since female sexuality threatens to undermine the nation's eugenic purity, just as it threatens to disrupt the family's integrity. Dependent on the myth that nationality can be pure, this subjectifying practice casts women as the territory upon which the men reproduce that pure nation and as the ground that can be sullied by foreign penetration. The women's position on the periphery of the nation—since according to the logic of an androcentric symbolic order they can never be fully active citizens, even in their highly symbolic roles as domestic caretakers and mothers—makes them dangerous to a regime grounded in fictions that idealize racial purity precisely because it makes their sexual purity central to the race's purity.

However, the assertion, defence, and definition of eugenic purity through the exercise of paternal control—both on the level of the family and as "fathers" of the nation—are proven to elicit evidence of masculine *in*sufficiency, as Miriam's attempt to get herself pregnant reveals:

> "My husband wants to have children, but he has already given up all hope. He no longer believes that he will ever have any children. Twice he has offered to divorce me ... You must know, Minke, it's not only he who suffers, but me even more so ... I don't believe in *dukuns* or herbal medicines, Minke. And that's why I have come to you. Forgive me!"
>
> "Mir!"
>
> "Give me what my husband cannot give me. Give me your seed!" (*JL*, 310–311)

More is at stake here as the father of Miriam's newborn son turns out to be none other than Minke, her Native friend whose relationship she reestablished when she and her

[34] Frances Gouda, "Teaching Indonesian Girls in Java and Bali, 1900-1942: Dutch Progressives, The Infatuation with 'Oriental' Refinement, and 'Western' Ideas About Proper Womanhood," *Women's History Review* 4,1 (1995): 42.

husband, Hendrik, returned to the East Indies. Confiding in Minke one night about her husband's impotency, Miriam entreats him to impregnate her as her husband longs to have children. Despite Minke's refusal to acquiesce to her request, she eventually gets her wish and becomes pregnant with Minke's child. Minke's impregnation of Miriam represents his penetration of the colonial territory and his sullying of Dutch racial purity. As Jean Franco says in her examination of gender and Mexican nationalism,

> The problem of national identity was ... presented primarily as a problem of *male* identity ... In national allegories, women became the territory over which the quest for (male) national identity passed, or, at best ... the space of loss and of all that lies outside the male games of rivalry and revenge.[35]

Franco describes here the phenomenon in which the woman's body—and specifically her reproductive capabilities—becomes the very site of nationalist territorial dispute. For colonial society in the East Indies, the child's paternity is the only issue, and Miriam plays no part in assigning nationality to the child, except that she exists as a conduit that the patriarchal order must control. Yet the child is a hybrid of Javanese and Dutch ethnicity and in itself constitutes a threat to the designation of race as oppositional. Miriam exemplifies the threat of the "sexualized woman" that the inadequately policed female body represents to colonialists. Minke has not only penetrated the racial boundary between definitions of "Pures" and "Indos" but he has also impregnated one of the daughters of the Dutch nation: a threat both to Hendrik's masculine authority and to patriarchal Dutch colonial society.

Miriam reassures her unknowing, cuckolded husband of his patriarchal claim over the newborn child by saying, "Here is *your* child, the child you have been longing for," thus denying Minke access to paternal dominance (*JL*, 360; my emphasis). As if to reinforce this, the Dutch midwife remarks that the baby's complexion is "[a]s white as cotton," asserting Dutch paternal authority over the child, an assertion to which Miriam assents silently, without objection. For paradoxically, "legitimacy" itself depends on the mother's verbal guarantee: the necessary paternal affirmation—"this is my son"—is a leap of faith across an unbridgeable gap in time and knowledge, an act of interpretation hinged on *woman's word*.[36] The mother of the "illegitimate" child, its paternity suspect, exposes the instability and finitude of masculine authority by representing a subversive maternal lineage and implicitly calls into question the symbolic order maintained in the Name-of-the-Father. Thus woman's word becomes for the father *unspeakable* in several senses, the ultimate scandal and potentially the most radical source of disruption in a symbolic economy predicated on the control of women's bodies, wills, and voices. In reserving the term "illegitimate" for the fatherless child, so that to be "only" the child of a mother is to be a sign cut off from any *proper* referent, the patriarchal system counters that threat by doubly ratifying the erasure of the mother as origin and name.

By this formulation, not only does Dutch colonial society seek to control definition of the national progeny, both at the individual and at the more general level, but also it

[35] Jean Franco, *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 131.

[36] Hinting to Minke that he should conspire to let Hendrik think that he is the father of the child, Miriam emphasizes to Minke that it is "Hendrik's child too" (*JL*, 360).

seeks to control the means by which that progeny is defined, and its definition is permeated by its fear of the source from which they see the nation's future emerging—female reproduction. At the same time also, it seeks to keep the national blood "pure" and to ward off "difference" in the composition of demographics in its colony.

Miriam's child of mixed nationality threatens that national purity that colonial society must uphold. Ironically, Miriam's pregnancy—a hybrid originating from Javanese and Dutch roots—is a harbinger that perhaps the nation that will be born out of the nationalist struggle in the East Indies will also be a hybrid, that the archipelago will not remain "purely" a Dutch possession forever. Dutch colonialism's dependence on the myth of essential racial purity means that the ideology cannot accommodate miscegenation: hence its need for control over female reproduction and sexual behavior. If the state adopts the role of "father," this entails keeping the national bloodlines "pure," maintaining the sexual purity of its women, and ensuring that the women's behavior is appropriately chaste. The "state fathers" can legislate to ensure national purity. However, because at any moment a nation's composition is unstable and impure, any version of national purity will be an arbitrary construction and will disclose the irreparable rifts in the fabric(ations) of androcentric sociosymbolic order.

My Master Had Power and Law; I Had a Determined Will

In order to explicate further the perceptual and conceptual schemata that help sustain the structures and ideologies of both imperialism and patriarchy, we turn our attention now to the problematic of womanhood and the Native woman. For the native woman, "womanhood" operates as a *negative* objectification—a model that was unattainable and offered her neither protection nor benefit. This cultural ideal for the native woman served as a double negation, branding her with dishonour. First, as for the white woman, the imaginative ideal of womanhood required an ostensible denial of her full sexuality. But secondly, because of the enforced cohabitation—essentially collective rape—institutionalized by Dutch colonialism,[37] womanhood functions as a negation of the native woman's ability to live up to that ideal of the asexual woman, immune to and untouched by passion. The depth of the Native woman's anxiety about the oppressive structures that govern phallocentric definitions of sexuality (and concomitantly, the commercial basis on which her subjectivity is transacted) is reiterated as Surati, Nyai Ontosoroh's niece, contemplates her wretched fate as her father, Sastro Kassier, plans to trade her to the Dutch manager of the sugar mill in Tulangan in order to settle his debts:

> She was unwilling to go freely to become someone's concubine, isolated from the world, looked upon by everyone as something strange, a public spectacle to be gaped at ... Then for a moment she saw Annelies's marriage again—Annelies sitting beside her husband, looking so happy. Surati knew such happiness as that was not now for her, nor would it ever be. A tear dropped. She too wished for such happiness. But it seemed her fate was to be different. And she was afraid of her parents' curse." (*ASB*, 140, 143)

[37] Until the late nineteenth century, the European community in the Indies had tolerated, and in some of the outer regions even institutionalized, concubinage and mixed marriages as a normal convention. See Gouda, "Teaching Indonesian Girls in Java and Bali," p. 50.

Surati's *enforced* sexuality, like her auntie's, Sanikem alias Nyai Ontosoroh, before her, defined her failed status as "woman." The stereotypes attached to native women either cast them as "the substratum of life" (*ASB*, 287) (Djumilah: the wife of Sastro Kassier, Nyai's sister-in-law, and Surati), or present them, in the tetralogy, as wantonly promiscuous (Nyai Ontosoroh and Minem, the village coquette and Nyai's farm worker, who has a child by her employer's son). Either stereotype serves to obfuscate the operative dynamic by displacing responsibility for native women's sexuality from the party whom it benefited to the victim. Thus, as Nyai Ontosoroh sardonically remarks, the white master is never held culpable for the atrocities he commits; instead, the "The Natives must always be in the wrong, Europeans must be innocent; so just being a Native is already wrong. To be born a Native is even more wrong"(*BM*, 272). The system works to ensure for the white master that both his licentiousness and avarice are safeguarded by law. For the native woman, it negates her entitlement to her own subjectivity and womanhood, as those concepts are culturally constructed.

Pramoedya's tetralogy lays bare to reader scrutiny not only the negation of female subjectivity but also how male subjectivity is structured and becomes dominant. In a series of ruminations, Pangemanann, the male narrator of the last novel, *House of Glass*, reflects with triumph on his role as "overseer" of the movements of the female nationalist figure, Siti Soendari. Here, the tetralogy structures its analysis of the motivations of patriarchy and its psychological connections with colonialism through the trope of the surveilling gaze:

> I do not want to go hunting after her ... She must not meet too hasty an end inside my house of glass. She deserves the chance to enjoy her beauty, youth, education, and intelligence. Let her develop in accordance with her true nature, let her full beauty bloom ... Of course she would never be a Native Joan of Arc, but she still deserved to get more out of life yet ... Silently and secretly, I kept watch on this young woman as her star rose higher and higher, shining brightly in the firmament ... "Yes, make that leap, Soendari, go on, do it! ... Isn't life strange? I had already put Marco inside my house of glass. And now you, sweet maiden from Pemalang, you have joined him inside too ... [as] objects of my study ... I will still be watching you, *Non*, pretty maiden from Pemalang. Be careful ... I will use all my abilities to make sure that I do nothing to harm you, Soen. My pen will not decide your fate ... I feel a moral and intellectual responsibility for you. I have given you a chance. Now what will you be able to achieve? (*RK*, 207–210)

Significantly, it is the specter of that *surveilling* gaze, the Foucauldian Panopticon effect,[38] that most fully constitutes Pangemanann's triumph. Just as Snouck Hurgronje's approving gaze on the three Native youths in the first novel confirms their worth for him, so does Pangemanann's surveilling gaze—and the almost licentious

[38] Michel Foucault, in his discussion of the prison system, describes surveillance as a form of social control which enables the group with the power to observe (or gaze upon) those whom they have power over and to control their behavior at all times. Calling it the Panopticon (first coined by Jeremy Bentham in 1791) effect, he explains: "[T]he major effect of the Panopticon [is] to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things so that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action, the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary." Michel Foucault, "Panopticism," in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 201.

pleasure he derives from "keeping an eye" on Soendari's movements—ensure his male dominance in the phallocentric symbolic order. Not only is the power to oversee, to monitor, to keep an eye on someone, intrinsically connected with the power to regulate, to manipulate, to dominate, but the scopophilia reveals the power dynamics inherent in traditional representations of the female body as the site of masculine desire, signified by the appropriative gaze which that body is constructed to elicit. Feminist film criticism has extended this analysis of male spectatorship as it relates to narrative, demonstrating (to quote Teresa de Lauretis's summary) that "it is men who have ... defined the object and the modalities of vision, pleasure, and meaning in the basis of perceptual and conceptual schemata provided by patriarchal ideological and social formations." In the trajectory of both the look and the narrative line, "the male is the measure of desire."[39] Soendari, surveyed by Pangemanann's gaze, is appraised ("[an] interesting object of study" [*RK*, 233]), assayed ("she is indeed beautiful in an unassuming way" [*RK*, 208]) and divined ("What joy she would give to the man who captures her heart" [*RK*, 209]). Within the economy of the phallocentric gaze, to be a spectator/voyeur marks a position of power and subjectivity; conversely, to be subjected to surveillance is to be made a spectacle of, trapped inside a glass house, exposed to gawkers and observers. In short, spying on Soendari, monitoring her every move, and relishing the prospect of her eventual containment, endows Pangemanann with a sense of potency and pleasure, as well as confirming his male subjectivity. The gaze structures, within this masculine specular economy, the hierarchic relationship between the viewer and the object displayed/exhibited figured, in this case, through the analogies of man/woman, violation/privacy, possessor/possession, hunter/quarry. It is that old "dream of symmetry," as Irigaray puts it, from which woman's subjectivity is excluded like a "blind spot" and within which woman is set "off-stage, off-side, beyond representation, beyond selfhood," caught in a "game for which she will always find herself signed up without having begun to play."[40] Despite Pangemanann's professed sympathy with Soendari's positioning in this "game" of cat-and-mouse, it is he who proposes to his superiors to "apply gentle pressure on her father to find her a husband" (*RK*, 234), in the hope that the "Native girl would cease her histrionics[41] once she had been taken to the wedding bed" (*RK*, 244). His subsequent patronizing analysis of the "circulation" of women in the tetralogy who are wont to make "gifts" of themselves, and his professed sympathy for "poor Rientje" is a masterpiece of ambivalence, its condescension charmingly mixed and masked with sympathy:

> Woman! You passed briefly into my life, bringing with you other stories. But you always remained a woman. And womankind was created by God for

[39] Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 67.

[40] Luce Irigaray, "The Looking Glass, from the Other Side," in *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 22.

[41] I choose the term "histrionics" for the Indonesian *ulah* (in Pramoedya's original Bahasa Indonesia version) or *olah* or *kerenah*, which, in this context, describes more aptly the unpredictable, often exaggerated, emotional behavior that the conventional sexist attitude usually associates with woman. It is this "histrionics"—a force of excess and transgression at once repellent and seductive to man—which breaches every masculinist code of logic, probability, decorum, decency, refinement, dignity, good sense, and "womanly modesty" that threatens the boundary of order that the male senior colonial officials struggle to control.

> men. And men for women. You trod your own path in giving yourself to men. Different from Madame Pangemanann. Different from the way Annelies gave herself to Minke ... And then there was Sanikem who gave herself to Herman Mellema. How numerous were the different paths that bring together men and women. And is it correct to describe all these relationships as women giving[42] themselves to men?
>
> Madame to Monsieur Pangemanann was based on mutual affection, each giving him and herself to the other. It was the same with Annelies and Minke. Rientje gave herself to whoever could pay the money that she asked for, but the essence of the surrender was the same. Sanikem gave herself because of *force majeure*, because of a stronger force that acted against her will. (*RK*, 274)

With his own security badly shaken by the departure of his wife and children, and by the news that Rientje, for whom he has begun to feel affection, has been brutally murdered, Pangemanann finds solace in his assignment to "watch over" (*RK*, 210) Soendari. He considers her no "angel" (*RK*, 226), but a "delinquent young woman, who didn't know what was proper, a Dutch woman in Javanese clothes" (*RK*, 225), and her radically unconventional, nonconformist ways that defy the stereotype of the Native woman titillate Pangemanann and at the same time encourage him to regard her as a kind of "gift" from the gods (RK, 226). Thus she seems bestowed on him as a healing assurance of his own sovereignty, assuaging his besieged male pride, predicated as it is on man's mythic status as hero on his "possession" (read: control) of woman. Her surreptitious activities to incite nationalist agitation amongst her people are a challenge to his manhood, and he relishes the opportunity to monitor and quell the young female rabble-rouser. Pangemanann's attempt to restore his manhood by regaining control over the insurgent movement led by Soendari leads to the transferral of eroticism from her (as the desexualized woman leader of the movement) to his own mission of counter-insurgency. Penetrating Soendari's clandestine movement, possessing her subjectivity, becomes the indubitable sign of manhood for Pangemanann,[43] becomes his *raison d'être* and a major motivation for his dogged commitment to his job to pursue and persecute her, perhaps to the detriment of his own domestic relationships. He describes his emotional crisis and, while denying the pain his broken marriage has caused him, insists that "Madame Pangemanann had left, and I had felt no loss then either. My children went away and I felt no loss about that either. So why was it then that I would feel a loss if my position was taken away and my reputation sullied in public?" (*RK*, 275)

Rumah Kaca employs sentimental language to reveal Pangemanann's emotional crisis; throughout this text, sentimental language (even when inherently insincere or unconvincing) is directly opposed to the exploitively dominative nature of colonial male subjectivity. In fact, this episode subtly provides an alternative reading which

[42] The Bahasa Indonesia word *mempersembahkan*, from the word, *sembah* (meaning worship/adore/idolize/submit/surrender/acknowledge the power of, etc.) is interesting as it also has another meaning: to present, or put up a show, presentation as in *persembahan*, which also means gift, or present.

[43] Pangemanann's remark as he was about to deliver his *coup de grâce* on Soendari—"now my pen, and my ink, must interfere in your [i.e. Soendari's] life, still so young and beautiful" (*RK*, 234)—reiterates the Freudian topos of the pen as a phallic symbol, and the countervailing sign of woman as a lack or castration.

suggests that the hierarchic power structure figured through the topos of viewer/viewed, male gaze/surveillance of woman has begun to shift imperceptibly even as it is articulated. As Pangemanann recounts his persecution/harassment of Soendari, we see the extent to which his mastery of her depends on *her*. Repeatedly in his interior monologue, he apostrophizes her to recognize his dominance: "that is as far as you will ever go, you will never develop further ... I will be watching you, *Non*, pretty maiden from Pemalang. Be careful" (*RK*, 210; *Non* is the contracted form of "Noni" or Miss). In a key scene at the end of chapter eight of *Rumah Kaca*, Pangemanann, in a clearly agonized reflection on his own complicity in the oppressive practices of his Dutch colonial masters, which he finds morally abhorrent, invokes the absent Soendari: "And you, Siti Soendari, do you know that Pangemanann, the man devising all these plans for you, is as sane as sane can be?" (*RK*, 214). Addressing her using a diminutive of her name which he has patronizingly coined for her, he pleads for Soendari's understanding, and forgiveness, of his actions: "It's not because I want to do it, Soen...you must forgive me if you suffer because of what I must do" (*RK*, 234) and goes on to protest that he "will prepare the most moderate proposal that [he] can" (*RK*, 234) because of the affection he feels for her, despite the pressure from his political superiors in the Dutch colonial government who favor more drastic measures be taken against her. His response here asserts the prerogative of the Subject over the Object—to silence, to suppress. But Pangemanann *could not* resort to more draconian measures in dealing with Soendari because he *needs* her to confirm his mastery of her (her symbolic death). His own identity depends on her recognition of it. He apparently cannot feel his mastery until she reflects it to him.

One might argue that Pangemanann's need to tell his story, to turn Soendari into a figure in his own account, indicates his concern that her prominence in the annals of the nation's history would eclipse and elide his own ("her star rose higher and higher, shining brightly in the firmament; the higher she rose, the brighter she shone" [*RK*, 208]), which would mean he had lost control not only over her, but over his story—and history. While upholding the masculine perspective through Pangemanann's first-person narrative, Pramoedya undermines its authority by suggesting another way of seeing, and the existence of other writing, neither counted on nor comprehended by Pangemanann's phallocentric narrative economy. Undoing the process whereby Pangemanann would enter Soendari into his account, Pramoedya turns his narrator to account in his. Putting him into circulation, as it were, by retailing his retellings, Pramoedya subverts the hierarchical oppositional logic whereby man situates himself as the sovereign subject-speaker vis-à-vis woman as object. Pangemanann's earlier rhetorical question—"[I]s it correct to describe all these relationships as women giving themselves to men?" (*RK*, 274)—is made moot by Pramoedya's ironic representation. Here Pramoedya anticipates Jacques Derrida's recognition of the continual eruption therein of the discourse of woman as giver:

> Either ... woman is woman *because she gives herself*, while the man for his part takes, possesses, indeed takes possession. Or else ... she is woman because, in giving, she is in fact *giving herself for*, is simulating, and consequently assuring the

possessive mastery for her own self. Henceforth all the signs of a sexual opposition are changed. Man and woman change places.[44]

Nyai Doesn't

We return now to one of the most remarkable female characters in the tetralogy—Nyai Ontosoroh. Her portrayal in the first three novels asserts the subjectivity of a native *nyai* and thus serves as an ideal ground for enlarging the ongoing discussion of subjectivity and representation within feminist theory: "Ontosoroh is a very fascinating character in *This Earth of Mankind,* precisely on account of her position as *nyai.*"[45] Western colonial culture, which begins with a notion of normal from which any deviation is counted as a negative mark, can only see Nyai Ontosoroh as an extreme example of alterity who is so thoroughly marginalized that she should simply not exist. She is a *nyai,* whose marginalized position as transgressor of both native and colonial boundaries of race, sentiment, and morality situates her outside the borders of "reason."

In Nyai Ontosoroh we see the most explicit demonstration of female creativity as she defies the phallocentric sociosymbolic order and the mutually inflecting homologies of patriarchal colonialism and feudalism. The roles Nyai Ontosoroh assumes are not random: she becomes, successively, a *nyai* (read: mistress/concubine/whore), revolutionary, and heroine, enacting thereby three of the most overdetermined versions of "woman" in colonial patriarchal culture.[46] But with a difference. For by playing these roles, she remains at once inside and outside the semiotic systems that would codify "woman" according to masculinist logic, resisting even as she appears to fulfill traditional categorizations of the feminine. In traversing the whole continuum of roles that tend to polarize the aspects of a woman, rendering her either as heroine or whore, domesticated object or revolutionary agent, Nyai Ontosoroh demonstrates the essential interchangeability—and hence the invalidity—of these oppositions. Through her assumption of these roles, she exposes the provisionality and instability of phallocentric conceptions of woman, thus implicitly threatening the foundations of a culture predicated on the control of women as both bodies and signs. Nyai Ontosoroh brilliantly anticipates Simone de Beauvoir's famous observation that "man dreams of an Other not only to possess her but also to be ratified by her."[47] Herman Mellema, her Dutch *tuan* (master), in an obvious gesture of ownership, refers to her as "*my* nyai" (*BM,* 79), seeking to claim her permanently as

[44] Jacques Derrida, *Spurs/Eperons: Nietzsche's Styles,* trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 67.

[45] Gerard Termorshuizen, "From Whore to Heroine: The Nyai Motif in Some Novels by Pramoedya Ananta Toer and P. A. Daum," in *Pramoedya Ananta Toer 70 Tahun,* ed. Bob Herring, p. 56.

[46] To complete the range of "feminine" possibilities under patriarchy, she is also represented as a daughter sold by an avaricious father, "mother" to her "bastard" Indo children, and as "sorceress" ("a regal woman of great powers of bewitchment" [peribadi mengagumkan dan mengesankan itu—seorang ratu pemilik dayasihir] (*BM,* 184); she has the power to "[hold] people in her grasp, and bewitch them from afar" [mencengkam orang dalam genggamannya, dan mampu pula mensihir orang dari kejauhan] (*BM,* 62); she "cast[s] a spell over [Minke's] mind"; she is "clever" and "subdue[s] people so they would bow down to her will" [Nyai kurasakan telah menyihir kesedaranku ... pandai menaklukkan orang untuk bersujud pada kemauannya] (*BM,* 41).

[47] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1953), p. 170.

"his" by writing her into his own finalizing script. Having been sold to Mellema to be his mistress for twenty-five guilders (*BM*, 77) by her own father, Nyai was initially submissive and resigned to her fate: "there was nothing I could do. Neither the tears nor the tongue of my Mother could prevent the disaster. Let alone I, who neither understood nor owned this world. I did not even possess my own body" (*BM*, 76). Her utter submissiveness encourages Mellema to believe that he possesses her, confirms his reading of her as "mine," his ownership ratified by the signs of her passivity, as evident in Nyai's recollection of their first encounter:

> I was left on the chair, bathing in my own tears, shaking and not knowing what I must do. The world seemed dark ... He came out from the room and approached me. He pulled my hand ordering me to stand. I trembled. It wasn't that I didn't want to stand up, or that I was rebelling against an order. I didn't have the strength to stand. My *kain* was soaking. My two legs trembled so badly it was as if bones and sinews had come loose from their joints. He picked me up as if I were an old *guling* and carried me in his arms into the room, and put me down on a beautiful and clean bed, powerless. I was not able even to sit ... I rolled over prostrate on the bed ... he picked me up and carried me around the room like a wooden doll ... He picked me up again and hugged me and kissed me. I can still remember his words, though I didn't then understand their intent:
>
> "Darling, my darling, my doll, darling, darling."
>
> He threw me up and caught me around my waist ... I felt I had no soul anymore, like a *wayang* puppet in the hands of the puppet-master. (*BM*, 77–79)

Mellema's relationship with Nyai Ontosoroh is predicated on his possession over her, as assurance of his own sovereignty in a feudalistic and colonial Indies where men control the circulation of women as of money and "livestock" ["My father sold me like the offspring of a horse" (*BM*, 80)]. But if Mellema thinks that he has total possession of Nyai, that he has penetrated and possessed her subjectivity and her discourse as he has her body, then he is wrong. For toward the end of their relationship, as Mellema's sense of his own moral security is badly shaken with the arrival of his son Maurits (the offspring of his marriage to a Dutch woman, contracted prior to his coming to the Indies), who confronts his father with his licentious relationship with a *nyai*, the hierarchic power structure figured through the codes of man/woman, colonizer/colonized, and owner/property has begun to shift in obvious ways. Armed with the knowledge she imbibed from her Dutch master, she begins to wield the power he once had over her, gradually taking over Mellema's "big, European-type [agricultural] firm" (*BM*, 65), the *Boerderij Buitenzorg*, and assuming control over his household. She becomes "a woman ... who didn't want to make peace with her own fate" (*BM*, 227):

> So it was that Mama began to understand that in reality Mama was not at all dependent on Mr. Mellema. On the contrary, he was dependent on me. So Mama then began to take a role in making decisions on all matters. He never rejected this. He never forced me to do anything, except for study. In this matter, he was a hard but good teacher. I was an obedient and good pupil. Mama knew everything he was teaching me would, one day, be of use to me and my children if he went home to the Netherlands. (*BM*, 82)

Ironically, Nyai's link to the "world of the rulers,"[48] which could gain her access to cultural centrality, is precisely that which Indies society relegates to the margin. Nyai—native, shrewd businesswoman, literate, self-educated, angry, articulate, renegade—hardly matches the image, either as ideal or degraded stereotype, of the passive native woman. Yet Nyai Ontosoroh affirms her identity, refusing to be marginalized. She will not yield to the rulings of the Amsterdam district court concerning the custody of Annelies, though eventually her resistance proves to be futile. She insists that she be addressed as "Nyai" instead of "Madam" by those uncomfortable with the former, not only as a sign of defiance against the moral norm of polite society that tries to gloss over the existence of women like her, but more so as an emblem of pride of what she is. Not only does she defy the Dutch court's injunction that she address them in Javanese; she speaks in flawless Dutch, unleashing a tirade against colonial hypocrisy and the oppressive nature of its laws. In a cultural economy in which only males have rights of ownership over female bodies, woman's subjectivity represents a dangerous excess that, by transgressing the bounds of the androcentric system, might subvert its claims to dominance. By effectively removing herself as an object of exchange within a masculine economy, by choosing, that is, to *own herself*, to determine her own fate, Nyai Ontosoroh positions herself (figuratively) as her own *tuan*.

According to the logic of an androcentric symbolic order, all contracts between men and women become variants of prostitution. The objectification this economy forces on native women in the Indies is epitomized by the role of the *nyais*. The tetralogy interrogates this system and the ties that bind it together, explicating the symbolic contracts it entails while at the same time addressing the problematic of woman and reading, or—to borrow a phrase from John Berger's classic study of the female nude—of "ways of seeing" woman within phallocentric referential frames.[49] Through the trope of the *nyai* as prostitute, which locates the relationship between colonial man and colonized woman at the core of the narrative, we can relate the act of reading to both a specific historical moment and, more fundamentally, a larger history of social and psychological systems that underwrite Dutch colonial management of sexuality, domesticatie, and motherhood in the Indies.

While the subordination of the *nyai* as prostitute may appear, in the foregoing analysis, to occur at the symbolic level, the actual material circumstances of the position of the *nyai* are, of course, more palpable:

> [A *nyai*] is just a bought slave, whose duty is only to satisfy her master. In everything! Then, on the other hand, she has to be ready at any moment for the possibility that her master, her *tuan*, will become bored with her. And she may be kicked out with all her children, her own children, unhonored by Native society because they were born outside wedlock. (*BM*, 80)

Nyai Ontosoroh's position, it can be said, is not dissimilar to that of Maiko, the Japanese prostitute, who inhabits the "pleasure-house" run by Babah Ah Tjong in the first novel. By comparing Nyai and Maiko, we can extend our critique of the use of

[48] Jean Gelman Taylor, "Nyai Dasima: Portrait of a Mistress in Literature and Film," in *Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia*, ed. Laurie J. Sears (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 227.

[49] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972), pp. 45-82.

woman as property in male economies. If Nyai Ontosoroh was sold to Mellema by her own father in exchange for "the promise that father would be made cashier after he passed a two-year internship" (*BM*, 77), Maiko is Ah Tjong's "gift" to Robert Mellema in return for future favors Ah Tjong hopes Robert will bestow on him once he inherits the Buitenzorg business from his father (*BM*, 171). This symbolic mode of exchange, based on the condition of women as property, highlights the fact that in a feudalistic and colonial value system, which assumes the privileges of class and property and exalts androcentric codes, men circulate women like gifts in order to extend their own bonding systems: "Almost every wealthy Chinese had his own brothel, his own pleasure-house. In Hong Kong, Singapore, Batavia, or Surabaya, they all had the same custom, namely, to take turns in visiting each other's places" (*BM*, 167).

As a transgressor of codes and boundaries, Nyai Ontosoroh challenges this androcentric economy. Since the violence to women on which this order is founded is decreed and protected by colonial law, anyone who transgresses this law threatens, potentially, to dismantle it. As Michèle Richman notes,

> ... the symbols men manipulate in order to perpetuate the differential hierarchies which either subordinate or exclude women, children, and the weak, are systematized into codes whose key is their monopoly on power ... It has traditionally been argued in favor of [the exchange of women] that it channels the force of sexuality which would otherwise unsettle the fragile foundations of the social order. But ... the real violence lies on the side of the law which seeks to maintain one segment of society in bondage to the other ... By challenging the anachronistic remnants of [this system, women] have at their disposal the most effective weapon to precipitate the demise of the patriarchal order.[50]

The trial scene in the first novel, one of the most dazzling in all of Pramoedya's fiction, represents a quintessential defiance of official patriarchal worlds and words. As a synecdoche of the larger text that undermines and challenges the repressive paternal order of colonialism and feudalism, it uncovers the instability of the categories on which patriarchal "reality" appears grounded—revealing law, marriage, patrilineal property, filial identity, and the name and word of the father to be profoundly inflected by the very forces they would repudiate. The scene is constituted as a series of oppositional categories—civilization/savagery, law/ anarchy, security/danger, purity/pollution, sacred/profane, good/evil. Their epitome is the contrast between the sanctioned and legal marriage of Herman and Amelia Mellema, and the "unnatural" familial relations and social disintegration represented by the illicit union between Herman Mellema and his native concubine, Nyai Ontosoroh. The scene is a telling one, for the text in every sense "questions" boundaries, and it is useful to quote it at length:

> The next question was flung at Nyai Ontosoroh: Nyai Ontosoroh, alias Sanikem, concubine of the late Mr. Herman Mellema: "How could Nyai allow such improper relations between Nyai's guest and Nyai's child?" The surging laughter became more exuberant, more insulting, more demonstrative ... With a clear voice and in flawless Dutch—defying the judicial order that she use Javanese, and ignoring the pounding of the gavel ... she began: "Honourable

[50] Michèle Richman, "Eroticism in the Patriarchal Order," in *Violent Silence: Celebrating Georges Bataille*, ed. Paul Buck (London: The Geroges Bataille Event, 1984), p. 99.

> Judge, Honourable Prosecutor, seeing that you have already begun to make public my family affairs ... I, Nyai Ontosoroh, alias Sanikem, concubine of the late Mr. Herman Mellema, look upon the relations between my daughter and my guest in a different light. I, Sanikem, am only a concubine. Out of my concubinage my daughter Annelies was born. Nobody ever challenged my relationship with Herman Mellema. Why? For the simple reason he was a Pure-Blooded European ... Between Mr. Mellema and I there were only the ties of slavery and they were never challenged by the law ... Europeans are able to purchase Native women just as I was purchased ...
>
> There was turmoil in the courtroom. Nyai kept on speaking, paying no heed to the Judge's gavel ...[she] no longer heeded the court's authority ... her tongue did not stop letting fly words, bullets of revenge: "Who turned me into a concubine? Who turned us all into *nyais*? European gentlemen, made Masters. Why in these official forums are we laughed at? Humiliated? Or is it that you gentlemen want my daughter to become a concubine too?" Her voice rang throughout the building. And all present were silenced ... She, this Native woman, had now become the unofficial prosecutor, plaintiff against the European race—a race now ridiculing their own deeds. (*BM*, 281–283)

The trial episode in the tetralogy can be analyzed as a paradigm to explore Nyai's resistance to patriarchy and colonialism. For it is precisely in that episode that we see most clearly some of the integral features of the rhetoric of imperialist law: a language that disguises power relations beneath the idealization of unity, stasis, and totalization in textualized form. The "law" seeks to veil and sanction the self-interest of patriarchy and colonialism. As this telltale scene indicates, law serves as a rhetoric of camouflage. But as the text makes clear, laws cannot be separated from the motives that occasioned their existence. Colonial law, in this sense, emerges in the tetralogy as that official attempt to "arrest" the dangers of ambiguity (hence, fluidity, amorphousness, anarchy) by caging such ambiguity in the fixed "hardness" of written language.[51] As such, hermeneutic disputes about it cannot help but be political struggles. Within this context, the trial of Nyai Ontosoroh reappropriates colonial law; it dramatizes (and makes visible) the invisible processes by which colonial law per se embodies oppressive centralist ideologies. The trial scene can be seen as a semiosis of power relations: *the* site wherein colonial authority asserts its own supremacy, listening unendingly to its own voice. Accordingly, although both Nyai and Minke are fluent in Dutch, they are prohibited from using it to address the court. Instead they are made to "speak" through a translator.

Since it is predicated on male agency, female objectification, and the legal subordination of women, Dutch colonial law does not acknowledge children born out of the relationship between *nyais* and their European masters:

> One day Tuan and I went to Court to acknowledge Robert and you as the children of Mr. Mellema. In the beginning I thought that with such acknowledgement my children would receive legal recognition as legitimate children. But it wasn't so, Ann. Your elder brother and you continued to be considered illegitimate but now you were recognized as the children of Mr.

[51] Sanford Levinson, "Law as Literature," in *Interpreting Law and Literature: A Hermeneutic Reader*, ed. S. Levinson and S. Mailloux (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 156.

> Mellema and could use his name. The Court's decision meant that the law no longer recognized you as my children, you weren't my children any longer, though it was I who gave birth to you. Since that day, both of you, according to the law, were the children of Mr. Mellema alone. According to the law, Ann, Dutch law in these Indies. Don't be mistaken. You're still my child. Only then did I realize how evil the law was. You obtained a father, but lost a mother. (*BM*, 85-86)

Dutch patrilineal kinship system is predicated upon the dependence of genealogical and racial purity on maternal chastity. It is interesting to note the etymological affiliations of the words *chastity* (Indonesian *suci* from the Sanskrit *zuci*) and *caste* (Indonesian *kasta* from the Portuguese *casta*) in this context. Both words possess a common root in the Latin *castus*—"spotless, innocent" but also akin to *carëre*, "to be without," related to Greek and Sanskrit words meaning "to split," "to cut to pieces" (*keazein*, *sàsati*). The *chaste* mother, then, necessary guarantor of patrilineal *caste*, must also exist as a kind of eunuch, symbolically dismembered by a phallic culture, in other words, castrated and severed from her own desire. For native women deemed genealogically "tainted" or racially "impure," whose children are born of Dutch fathers, Dutch law—in a strategy to displace, disclaim, and distance the native mother from her offspring—*cuts the mother off* from her own biological children by effecting a law whereby their European father is recognized as the sole parent if he acknowledges them, even though the children are legally regarded as "illegitimate."

It is a critical commonplace that for patriarchal culture, concubines (prostitutes) and their illegitimate offspring (bastards) represent a "socially unstabilised energy that may threaten, directly or implicitly, the organisation of society, whether by the indeterminacy of their origin or their attitude to the ties that hold society together and that they may choose to slight or break."[52] These forms of social disruption find analogies in narrative disjunctions within a system where textual genealogy, traditional narrative, and language itself operate, in Edward Said's words, "dynastically," in "relationships linked together by family analogy: *father and son* ... the process of *genesis*, a *story*."[53] As figures outside the bounds of legitimate culture, devoid of "official" lineage or names, the bastard children of Nyai Ontosoroh, and the Indo "half-breeds" they represent, become persistently associated with the breakdown not only of social and familial structures but also the racial "purity" the Dutch apartheid colonial regime sought to preserve. Yet as Pramoedya would repeatedly suggest, the figure of the Indo conceals—even as it implicitly re-presents—a figure still more scandalously anomalous: the bastard's mother, who by giving birth outside the "legitimate" confines of what, in English, we so tellingly name "wedlock" (in Indonesian, *anak luar nikah* from the Arabic word, *nikah* meaning "marriage"; or *anak haram*—with its religious/Muslim connotation—meaning literally "forbidden child"), fractures the containing social caste system, causing unwanted leakages and seepages to result in a hybrid race. Potentially more threatening to androcentric culture than her

[52] Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 3–4.

[53] Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 66; my emphasis; see also pp. 83, 93, and especially 96–100, 141–145. Citations are to the Columbia University Press edition.

children, it is she whose origins and origination colonial culture most insistently seeks to cancel or conceal in order to maintain its authority. The mother of the "illegitimate" child exposes the instability and limitations of paternalistic colonial authority by representing a subversive maternal lineage, and she implicitly calls into question the symbolic order maintained in the Name-of-the-(Colonial)-Father. Thus Nyai Ontosoroh's outburst during the trial scene becomes for the colonial court *unspeakable* in several senses, the ultimate scandal and potentially the most radical source of disruption in a symbolic economy predicated on the control of women's bodies, wills, and voices.[54] In reserving the term "illegitimate" for the bastard child, so that to be "only" the child of a native mother is to be a sign cut off from any *proper* referent, the partriarchal colonial system counters that threat by doubly ratifying the erasure of the mother as origin and name. In making "identity" and "origin" equivalent in the tetralogy, Pramoedya underscores these interpretive issues. Through the character of Nyai Ontosoroh, he enacts a metaphorical relation between the mother-figure of the *nyai* and the "concubinage" of the Indonesian motherland under Dutch colonial exploitation.

By (re-)claiming the large Buitenzorg farm formerly owned by her Dutch master, Herman Mellema, and taking charge of it, Nyai Ontosoroh ruptures the lines of male colonial genealogy and hence, implicitly, destablizes the patriarchal colonial order that reigns over the Dutch East Indies. The responses Pramoedya's characters adopt toward the "(il)legitimacy" of Dutch claims over Indonesia may be read on one level, then, as his indirect interrogation of the colonial symbolic order and its strategy of naming and claiming. The genealogical model predicated on woman's erasure is repudiated, for it is precisely through the figure of woman that Pramoedya interrogates the guilt-inducing logic that conditions the plight of the *nyais* in the colony during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Offering an alternative to the essentially masculinist vision of law, history, and text perpetuated by the figure of the bastard, he celebrates the mother-figure's (this figure is embodied by Nyai Ontosoroh) most flagrant gestures of "illegitimacy" as fertile sources of leadership and originality. As he has Nyai Ontosoroh observe, "Shame is not a concern of European civilization" (*BM*, 330)—it is only in the illicit that a new space opens, and with it freedom to "challenge ... with words" (*BM*, 273), with signification itself, to make up new fictions in a bastardized language with an imaginative "legitimacy" of their own.

Reading the character of Nyai Ontosoroh offers a model of a certain "feminine" critical practice: one that would elude paternally constructed enclosures, rereading woman's much-deplored marginality as a powerful positive position, both for the perspective it offers for a critique of the Centre—and the centrisms—of the fathers, and as an ever-moving site of vision, a horizon rather than a limit. It is also notable that in attempting to represent Nyai, the men in the tetralogy can only explain her in terms of metaphor—she is "a castle of puzzles" (*BM*, 17), "like something out of a legend from

[54] It is her outburst in court that prompts the Eurasian-owned newspapers to publicize the controversial issue of Dutch patrilineal family laws in the Indies and the omniphagous expression of phallocentrism and power-hungry paternity they sanction—Nyai is stripped of her ownership of Buitenzorg by the same laws that robbed her of the family business she helped build—which eventually culminates in the riots over the court's decision to grant Maurits Mellema custody over Annelies. (*BM*, 320-322; 339–341)

A Thousand and One Nights" (*BM*, 227),[55] "like a giant, like a mountain of coral" (*ASB*, 68). Minke ruminates on the tragic, yet enigmatic, position of the *nyais*:

> Those issues formed a web of life like that of a spider's web. And in the middle of the web were the concubines and *nyais*. They don't catch all the victims that come to them. On the contrary, the net seems to catch all sorts of humiliation that they alone must swallow. They aren't employers even though they live together in the same room with their masters. They are not included in the same class as the children they themselves have given birth to. They are not Pure, not Indo, and can even be said not to be Native. They are *secret* mountains. (*BM*, p. 325; my emphasis)

The ambiguous figure of the *nyai*—like the Javanese feudal attitude that reviles concubinage publicly but condones it privately; and like the traditional Judeo-Christian bifurcation of woman into temptress and virgin which subtends it—registers in concentrated form the paradoxical conjunction of horror and revulsion with attraction and desire. This ambivalence has repeatedly marked masculine responses to feminine sexuality—that "taboo" that underwrites the most diverse male representations of woman-as-sign. Within this context, the desirous *nyai* figure is so gravely threatening to the self-regarding phallocentric order that she must be contained, domesticated, or neutralized, either transformed into an asexual ideal, written into patriarchal marriage plots, or cast out as a scapegoat. De Beauvoir writes that

> ... the male's hesitation between fear and desire, between the fear of being in the power of uncontrollable forces and the wish to win them over, is strikingly reflected in the myth of Virginity. Now feared by the male, now desired or even demanded, the virgin would seem to represent the most consummate form of the feminine mystery; she is therefore its most disturbing and at the same time its most fascinating aspect.[56]

Similarly, though conversely, the *nyai* is at once alluring and forbidding, a liminal figure whose body signifies the quintessence of transgression as surely as does the body of the virgin. "In this way," the *nyai*, as de Beauvoir notes of the prostitute, "regains that formidable independence of the luxurious goddess mothers of old, and she incarnates the Femininity that masculine society has not sanctified and that remains charged with harmful powers."[57]

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[55] Pramoedya's reference here to Scheherazade's *The Thousand and One Nights* is ingenious. We recall a tale in *Thousand and One Nights* when Ali Baba's slave, Morgana, saw that the forty thieves had found her master's house and marked it with a cross in order to return and kill him. She took a piece of chalk and marked ninety-nine other houses in the neighbourhood with the same sign, so that Ali Baba's house was undistinguishable among them. This was a stroke of genius, and as a result Morgana has become justly immortal, for she not only had ingenuity, initiative, and self-confidence, but she knew what she was doing: her purpose was to confuse. In *Bumi Manusia*, writing is used in comparable ways—as both protective device and sign of subversion. Nyai Ontosoroh urges Minke to write to "oppose [the Dutch] with words," and like Morgana, Nyai Ontosoroh too, under the guise of submission to both patriarchy and colonialism, would enact a feminine duplicity in subverting these oppressive orders that would ultimately liberate her from being a "slave" in her Dutch master's house.

[56] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 141.

[57] Ibid., p. 181.

Forever resistant to colonial and feudal mentalities and ideologies, Nyai Ontosoroh defies the laws that seek to hold her as their object, putting her in her (read: their) "place." Sarah Kofman has demonstrated how obsessively and unsuccessfully Freud sought to "solve" the "riddle" of woman, to comprehend a power at once repellent and seductive to man, a fixation that he would struggle to control:

> Does he admit that woman is the only one who knows her own secret, knows the solution to the riddle and is determined not to share it, since she is self-sufficient ...? This is ... a painful path for man, who then complains of woman's inaccessibility, her coldness, her "enigmatic," indecipherable character. Or does Freud proceed, on the contrary, as if woman were completely ignorant of her own secret, ... persuaded that she must be, that she is, "ill," that she cannot get along without a man if she is to be "cured"? This path, reassuring for man's narcissisms, seems to be the one Freud chooses ... [T]he task assigned to thought in both cases seems in fact to be that warding off some formidable danger ... Men wonder about [woman] because she worries them, frightens them, gives them the impression of a disturbing strangeness.[58]

Pramoedya perhaps anticipates this critique of the masculine plight by representing Nyai Ontosoroh as the embodiment of woman at her most baffling, a "castle of puzzles" who constitutes so extreme a contradiction that she can be accounted for only as a "secret mountain." The mountain has a special symbolic significance in Javanese cosmology. The *gunungan*, a ubiquitous mountain shape that can be found in various Javanese rituals and ceremonies, is a symbolic expression of the cosmic order. It represents Mount Meru (Sumeru, Mahameru), the cosmic mountain, abode of the gods and axis of the universe in Indian cosmology. Like the cross in Christian tradition, it assumes various dimensions and serves numerous functions. Every *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet) performance begins with a lacy *gunungan* occupying the centre of the screen. The offerings of rice and fruit that retainers bear through the *kraton* (palace) may be heaped into mini Merus. With its peaked roof, each *pendopo* (a large roofed verandah or reception area at the front of a Javanese dignitary's residence) is also a *gunungan*; and so is the layout of the whole *kraton* with its elevated central focus. The tiers of Borobudur and the towers of Prambanan (a great Hindu temple complex located near the city of Yogyakarta) tell of the symbol's antiquity, while the soaring profiles of Mounts Merapi and Agung serves as primordial prototypes. It is within this mystical topos, simultaneously a symbol of divinity and the transcendental as well as the "tree of life," that Nyai Ontosoroh is also prefigured. We recall here Minke's mother's peroration on the significance of the woman as symbol: " ... without a woman, a knight goes against his nature as a man. Woman is the symbol of life, and the bringer of life, of fertility, prosperity, of well-being. She is not just a wife to a husband. Woman is the centre around which circles and from which comes the giving of life, and life itself" (*BM*, 307). While marking the opposite ends of the androcentric cultural spectrum—at once located at "the substratum of life" (*ASB*, 287) and the apex of divinity—the figure of woman also operates homologically as culture's most extreme paradox. It is this vast maternal

[58] Sarah Kofman, *The Enigma of Woman: Woman in Freud's Writings*, trans. Catherine Porter, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 66-68.

body, this free-floating "feminine" force, that embodies the very principal of transgression—literally the crossing of those boundaries that maintain civilization.

If Nyai Ontosoroh is on one level a classic image of immobilized and appropriated woman (the puppet traditionally represented as female "doll" under male control), on another she is the ultimate figure of mystery, sorcery, illegitimacy, and transgression, a threat to the very foundations of patriarchal culture. Far from being mere object, Nyai Ontosoroh appears driven by her own "demonic" powers. Indeed, in the mother-daughter joint construction of her life history as *nyai,* her control over Mellema increases in direct proportion to his progressive loss of control over himself. In all these incarnations—from whore to self-sacrificing mother, from repressed concubine to furious, uncontrollable avenger, from mocked and scorned native woman to the object of man's desires—Nyai Ontosoroh is a striking illustration of Simone de Beauvoir's thesis that woman has been made to represent all man's ambivalent feelings about his own inability to control his physical existence. As the "other," woman comes to represent the contingency of life. "It is the horror of his own carnal contingence," de Beauvoir notes, "which [man] projects upon [woman]."[59] Not surprisingly, given women's comparable association with divergence, marginality, and disruption, the most powerful figure of this untamed world in the tetralogy is a woman. Like a temptress, Rientje de Roo, the "young prostitute whose beauty had stirred the hearts of Betawi's young dandies" (*RK,* 30), appears to the police commissioner, Pangemanann, like an alluring siren, a wanton vamp, a figure of excess, who tempts him with the forbidden fruit of carnal lust; she is also the barely displaced sign of incest:

> [S]he greeted me sweetly, displaying all her allure for me to savour. Without any kind of preliminaries, she sat herself on my lap ... "This is not what you desire, Meneer?" ... She got up and came close to me, showing off her body in its light brown silk gown ... [and] whispered: "I have never had a favourite. Perhaps if one day I have one, he will be a police commissioner" ... She grew more sweet and endearing—this child who was perhaps the same age as my young daughter ... In her embrace, and with her head nestled up against my chest, it felt once more as if she was my youngest daughter ... "Would you like to see my room?" asked Rientje. (*RK,* 31–34)

In conflating the element of the incest taboo with the image of woman as "seductress" who goads phallocentric fantasy, as the putative object of man's sexual desires, and as an embodiment of the forbidden fruit itself, the text hints at the potentially devastating effects of transgressing the taboo that both represents and insures women's subordination. In addition, as Karen Horney and Dorothy Dinnerstein have shown, male dread of women has historically objectified itself in the vilification of women, while male ambivalence about female "charms" underlies the traditional images of such terrible sorceress-goddesses as the Sphinx, Medusa, Circe, Delilah, and Salome—to which we might add female sorceresses in Javanese mythology like Nyi Roro Kidul, female ghosts like the *Kuntilanak* (the ghost of a woman who dies at childbirth), and monsters like the Balinese Rangda, the ugly, lolling-tongued, pendulous-breasted Supreme Witch—evil incarnate in the *Barong*

[59] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* p. 138.

dance, the Indic Kali and Durga—all of whom practice duplicitous arts that allow them both to seduce and to steal male generative energy.[60]

Emblems of filthy morality and monstrous female sexual energy, and constantly equated with degeneration, disease, and death, women in the tetralogy continue to imperil the paternal order by their ability to infect, both literally and figuratively, the body of men. Surati infects herself with smallpox in order to wreak revenge on Plikemboh by infecting and killing him with the virus:

> She ascended the steps, escorted by Plikemboh, and surrendered herself to be taken into his room—the place which forever would be the boundary that marked the end of her life as a virgin and the beginning of her condition as a kept mistress.
>
> Take me! Take all you can get from me, she thought, and may you soon be destroyed.
>
> As soon as she entered the room, the smallpox ran amok within her. Her strength was broken. From the moment she lay prostrate on Plikemboh's bed, she was unable to rise again. And very quickly Plikemboh too became infected. During those last few days, they both lay sprawled out on the bed, awaiting death. (*ASB*, 151)

Robert Mellema, infected by Maiko, the Japanese prostitute in Babah Ah Tjong's brothel, finally dies in Los Angeles having contracted venereal disease (*ASB*, 289). If woman is the "repressed" of man within phallocentric culture, which is grounded on male-ownership of both woman's body and the social text of the body politic, the tetralogy implies that the inverse may be true, especially when women wields power over man sexually—at birth and in death. The instances of women infecting men with disease and death in the tetralogy anticipate the ideology that can be seen to underlie Bataille's assertions about the operations of eroticism. To give oneself over to eroticism, writes Bataille, is to give oneself over not only to the "efferverscence of life" but also to its loss: "The loosing of the sexual urge ... means a barrier destroyed ... [J]ust as the violence of death overturns—irrevocably—the structure of life, so temporarily and partially does sexual violence ... Inevitably linked with the moment of climax there is a minor rupture suggestive of death."[61] In essence, the domain of eroticism is the domain of violence, of violation, conventionally involving the sacrifice of the female "victim" and the male sacrificer:

> In the process of dissolution the male partner has generally an active role, while the female partner is passive. The passive, female side is essentially the one that is dissolved as a separate entity ... Stripping naked is the decisive action. Nakedness offers a contrast to self-possession ... Stripping naked is seen in civilization where the act had full significance if not as a simulacrum of the act of

[60] See Karen Horney, "The Dread of Woman," in *Feminine Psychology*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Norton, 1993), pp. 133–46; and Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Other Press, 1999 [Harper and Row, 1976]), pp. 124–54. Citation is to the Other Press edition.

[61] Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. Mary Dalwood (London: John Calder, 1962), pp. 106–7.

> killing, at least as an equivalent … [T]he female partner in eroticism was seen as the victim, the male as the sacrificer.[62]

In contraposition to this observation, the two episodes most explicitly demonstrate not only man's vulnerability and mortality (mediated by female bodies), but the provisionality of a phallocentric cultural economy founded on the subordination and exogamous exchange of women. Here Bataille's androcentric analysis of eroticism, via magisterial discourse on the sacrifice of the female "victim," is impugned. Surati's and Maiko's role—the former intentionally; the latter unintentionally—in this case is certainly not as stereotypical "passive" victims. Simultaneously "sacrificer" and "sacrificed," occupying both polarities on the axis of sexual pleasure and danger, they are the doubly extreme embodiment of forbidden eroticism for which men who seek it sometimes pay dearly.

And yet it is from the point of view of the victim that the tetralogy constructs a critique of patriarchy's dominative model of identification. The four novels provide important critiques of patriarchy and its deployment of female subjectivity by factoring in *gender* and insisting on the social, political, and economic axes along which power is distributed and identities are constructed. For these reasons, the tetralogy is valuable to an understanding of the drives of power and authority in patriarchy and colonialism, and how they create prejudiced social formations based on gross falsehoods. Remarkable for its portrayal of individual female subjectivities and national identity against the grim background of the triadic intersection of race, class, and gender, the tetralogy is an important voice in the literary dialogue on the subjectifying practices used to inscribe Indies female selfhoods and the engendering of that narrative.

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[62] Bataille, *Eroticism*, pp. 16-18.