
READING AYU UTAMI: NOTES TOWARD A STUDY OF TRAUMA AND THE ARCHIVE IN INDONESIA

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Then it was 1966 and just remembering the date makes people here shudder, even little things about any neighbor who was killed when the troops of the angel of death incarnated on earth as humans, but we never knew who they were. We only knew when they were already herding us toward the gaping hole, their faces dark and eyes missing. We couldn't trust anybody, not our lovers, not even our own selves. Because at that time only by pointing to someone else could we save ourselves, moving death over our heads over the heads of others.¹

Ayu Utami, *Larung*

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¹"Ketika itu tahun 66, tetapi mengingat angka tahunnya pun orang di sini gentar, apalagi hal kecil tentang siapa saja tetangga yang dibunuh, dan sukan malaikat maut turun ke bumi menjelma manusia, namun tak kita kenali yang mana. Kita hanya tahu ketika mereka telah menggiring kita ke muka lubang, wayah mereka yang gelap dan mata yang hilang. Tak seorang pun bisa kita percaya, kekasih kita, bahkan diri kita sendiri. Sebab saat itu hanya dengan menunjuk orang lain kita bisa menyelamatkan diri, memindahkan maut atas kepala kita ke atas kepala orang." Ayu Utami, *Larung* (Jakarta: Kapustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2001), p. 35.

It occurred to me that myths, poems, and journalism had to lean on each other in dealing with hatred and cruelty of such intensity. This is especially true because language shaped by Indonesia's painful experience has a quite untidy past.²

Goenawan Mohamad, "Kali: A Libretto"

Evaluating postcolonial novels as situated testimonies, this essay looks at the way violence and trauma haunt Indonesian historical and literary archives in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. I show how literary works offer a method of reading the traces that exceed the archive,³ traces that historians are unable to record or to witness. Scholars of Indonesia are beginning to look at questions of archives, witnessing, and trauma, and literary works that have appeared in Indonesia since the fall of the New Order have also addressed these problems in unique and powerful ways.⁴ Ayu Utami is one of the most impressive of the new generation of novelists writing in Indonesia today. Combining her skills in research journalism with a poetic feel for language and a fresh approach to women's subjectivity and sexuality, Utami's novels have become popular in Indonesia and beyond.⁵ This essay explores Utami's novel *Saman* and focuses on its sequel *Larung* to investigate how trauma shapes and haunts Indonesian archives. Because history-writing during the New Order period (March 1966 to May 1998) was supposed to follow government master narratives, and foreign researchers could be banned from Indonesia for stirring up controversial memories, there is not yet a substantial body of information about the aftereffects of the violence of the New Order government in studies by both Indonesian and non-Indonesian scholars.⁶ Since the late 1990s, critical work by Indonesian scholars taking

² Goenawan Mohamad, "Kali: A Libretto," in *Beginning to Remember: The Past in Indonesia*, ed. Mary S. Zurbuchen (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2005), p. 50.

³ I use the idea of the archive in this essay in a figurative sense as a site of limitation, exclusion, haunting, and lack, as well as in a literal sense that points to collections of documents and testimonies that exist in institutional forms and spaces.

⁴ The most innovative work on Indonesian historical archives has been done by Ann Laura Stoler. See her essays "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 87-109; "On the Uses and Abuses of the Past in Indonesia: Beyond the Mass Killings of 1965," *Asian Survey* 42,4 (2002): 642-650; "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form," in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (Dordrecht and Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002); and "Memory Work in Java: A Cationary Tale," written with Karen Strassler, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (January 2000) and republished as chapter 7 in Stoler's *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002). For recent attempts to gather testimonies of the violence of the mid 1960s, see John Roosa, Ayu Ratih, and Hilmar Faridet, *Tahun yg tak Pernah Akhir: Memahami Pengalaman Korban 65; Esai-Esai Sejarah Lisan* (Jakarta: Elsam, 2004). See also Chris Hilton's powerful film, *Shadowplay* (Hilton-Cordell/Vagabond Films and Thirteen/WNET New York, 2002). A very selective and subjective list of Indonesian novelists, playwrights, and poets whose work deals with questions of history and memory includes Seno Gumira Ajidarma, Nukila Amal, Djenar Maesa Ayu, Fira Basuki, Sapardi Djoko Damono, Slamet Gundono, Goenawan Mohamad, N. Riantiarno, Oka Rusmini, Rachman Sabur, Ratna Sarumpaet, Ani Sekarningsih, Ahmad Tohari, Putu Wijaya, and the late Pramoedya Ananta Toer.

⁵ For information on Utami's career and the writing and reception of *Saman*, see Barbara Hatley, "New Directions in Indonesian Women's Writing? The Novel *Saman*," *Asian Studies Review* 23,4 (1999): 449-60.

⁶ See Gerry Van Klinken, "The Battle for History After Suharto," in *Beginning to Remember*, p. 239: "Over 2,000 books are estimated to have been banned over the three decades of Suharto's rule (Human Rights Watch 1998). A report on these bans discusses twelve historical titles in the last decade alone. Most dealt with the events of 1965-66, but others dealt with the regional revolts of 1957-58 and the role of

an analytical approach to the violence of the 1960s and the later New Order period has appeared, and it may take a generation to rethink the historiography of the recent past.⁷ It is in novels like Utami's—written by authors willing to carry out research at personal cost—that oppositional interpretations of the New Order survive. I suggest the need to value Utami's work as both history and literature to see the ways in which the past can be both captured and contested through literary work. This essay offers some preliminary thoughts on what Utami's novels add to academic debates about trauma and the construction and deconstruction of Indonesian archives.

Novels, Trauma, and the Archive

What are the problems that attend historical writing in the face of trauma and its vicissitudes? Freud is credited with popularizing the discourse of the traumatic neuroses after World War II even though other researchers had already developed the discourse and study of trauma in the mid- to late nineteenth century.⁸ Scholars of European history have written about the inabilities of trauma victims to narrate the past, and there is an extensive body of work available on the problems of witnessing faced by Holocaust survivors.⁹ Dori Laub, a Holocaust survivor, has summarized the

Indonesians of Chinese descent." See also Ariel Heryanto, "Can There be Southeast Asians in Southeast Asian Studies?" in *Knowing Southeast Asian Subjects*, ed. Laurie J. Sears (Seattle, WA, and Singapore: University of Washington Press, 2007), p. 86, on access to documents regarding the 1965–66 massacres in Indonesia; see also John Roosa's new book, *Pretext for Mass Murder: The September 30th Movement and Suharto's Coup d'Etat in Indonesia* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006). For a recent study of the history and fate of members of Gerwani, the leftist women's movement, see Saskia Wieringa, *Sexual Politics in Indonesia* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, GB and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

⁷ See, for example, Vedi R. Hadiz and Daniel Dhakidae, eds., *Social Science and Power in Indonesia* (Jakarta and Singapore: Equinox Publishing, 2005); Ariel Heryanto and Sumit K. Mandal, eds., *Challenging Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia: Comparing Indonesia and Malaysia* (New York, NY, and London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003); Abu Talib Ahmad and Tan Liok Ee, eds., *New Terrains in Southeast Asian History* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003); and the essays by Indonesian scholars and intellectuals in Mary Zurbuchen, ed., *Beginning to Remember*. In her essay in the volume, "Historical Memory in Contemporary Indonesia," p. 15, Zurbuchen notes: "In the personal realm, it is clear that victims and survivors of violence must overcome considerable risk and fear to tell their stories. For example, 1965 was particularly disruptive within families and communities, and a great deal of memory remains below the surface. There has been little research on the dynamics of trauma in Indonesia, and few experts who know how to facilitate testimony from victims of violence." For other important work by prominent American scholars, see the essays on violence in Indonesia in *Asian Survey* 42,4 (2002).

⁸ See Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 3–8, for a discussion of this history. Freud's writings today serve as a reference points among scholars working in the field of trauma studies even though his work has come to be seen as an idiosyncratic approach to questions of trauma and memory, and Freud's own life experiences, dreams, and interpretations serve more as a source of inspiration for literary analysis than psychoanalytical study. Extended critiques of Freud's work are common. Some of the most important ones, both admiring and highly critical, are found in the works of Peter Gay, Nicholas Rand, Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, and the well-known work of Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. There is also a host of feminist critiques that date back to the early twentieth century, including the work of Helene Deutsch, Karen Horney, and Melanie Klein, and continue today in the work of Nancy Chodorow, Jane Flax, Juliet Mitchell, and others.

⁹ For a sampling of these works, see Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992); Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2002); Leys, *Trauma*, as well as Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995).

different sense of time, memory, and narrative of those who have survived exceptional suffering as follows: "Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect."¹⁰ Laub suggests that trauma survivors experience time differently from others and that this has implications for both witnessing and testimony. Dominick LaCapra also raises the notion of a break in time for trauma survivors: "Trauma indicates a shattering break or cesura in experience which has belated effects."¹¹ This delay has relevance for those Indonesians who survived the violence of 1965–1966 in that their stories have been suppressed for decades, and the inability to narrate those stories has had an impact on the ways in which they have been remembered. I suggest that traumatic narratives are created in their telling. There is no essential narrative that exists in trauma survivors waiting to be given voice. The historian or listener elicits a narrative that takes shape in performance or in the act of telling.¹² Thus those who listen and record stories reshape memories and leave their traces on them in the process of documenting them.

The work of scholars who have studied the narratives of trauma survivors confound older notions of how archives can be used and suggest a need to consider archives as more fluid and contingent than scholars have posited in the past.¹³ How political factors influence processes of shaping and preserving archival materials is the focus of recent studies that look at archival constructions under colonial conditions or in the face of postcolonial state repression.¹⁴ Achille Mbembe comments on the ghostly qualities of archives in the face of state violence and censorship. "[T]he destroyed archive haunts the state in the form of a spectre, an object that has no objective substance, but which, because it is touched by death, is transformed into a demon ..."¹⁵ Mbembe's comments evoke Freud's original conception of the traumatic neurosis, discussed below, as a delayed reaction to a fright that goes unremarked until it reappears in the forms of neuroses or hauntings. Freud's ideas and discourses have entered the field of Indonesian literature and popular culture, particularly in the work of the *sastra wangi* (fragrant literature) writers, a group that includes Ayu Utami and other women writers who are young, attractive, sexually explicit, and prolific.¹⁶ Utami,

¹⁰ Dori Laub, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening," in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, p. 69.

¹¹ LaCapra, *Writing History*, p. 186.

¹² Hyunah Yang of Seoul National University has carried out interviews with former Korean comfort women, and her work raises important questions for this hypothesis. See "The Comfort Women as a Problem for Justice and Intelligibility," paper presented at the conference, "War, Capital, Trauma," held at the University of Washington, Seattle, WA, May 9–10, 2005.

¹³ See Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, and Graeme Reid, "Introduction," in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (Dordrecht and Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), p. 9, as well as the rest of the essays in the book; and Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

¹⁴ For new work on Southeast Asian archival constructions, see Judith Henchy, "Disciplining Knowledge: Representing Resources for Southeast Asian Studies in the Libraries of the US Academy," in Sears, ed., *Knowing Southeast Asian Subjects*.

¹⁵ Achille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and its Limits" in *Refiguring the Archive*, p. 24.

¹⁶ See, for example, Nova Riyanti Yusuf's *Mahadewa, Mahadewi* (Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2003) or even Dee's (Dewi Lestari) *Supernova* novels (Bandung: Truedee Books, 2001) for works that explore Freudian and psychoanalytic themes. Freudian ideas appear in writings of Indonesian intellectuals

in particular, introduces two traumatized heroes in her novels, portrays experiences of delay and haunting, and offers fragmented stories that can be illuminated through Freud's ideas. The idea of destroyed archives haunting the nation is particularly relevant for work on New Order Indonesia, and this idea is a starting point for reconsidering Indonesian histories and their silences. In the end, Utami suggests that post-*reformasi* Indonesia still suffers from the traumas of the New Order period and that melancholia or depression may be the affect haunting Indonesia's future.

Ayu Utami's *Saman* and *Larung* and Indonesian Histories

Utami's novels offer glimpses into the post-traumatic conditions just before and after the fall of the New Order in 1998 as well as the earlier violence of the mid-1960s. Reading them would not imply a search for truth claims but rather a search for insight into habitual and emotional life, and an exploration of practices of mourning, melancholia, and survival. Novels here are treated as part of an archive of testimonies situated in particular times and places that bear witness to the excesses and atrocities of Indonesia's New Order government. In 1965–66 and after, those responsible for the killings of hundreds of thousands of supposed communists in Java, Bali, and elsewhere in Indonesia were treated as heroes, and what they did was argued to have saved the nation from the evils of communism. This message was constantly reiterated during the thirty-two years of the New Order through yearly commemorations, films, books, and government programs and proclamations. Those who survived the violence of 1965–66 have been left in a traumatic condition, unable to articulate their experiences, memories, or feelings of bitterness and outrage. Utami's novels explore these legacies of violence in Java, Sumatra, and Bali.

Saman, the first of Utami's novels, appeared in 1998 just before the fall of the New Order government, and its sequel *Larung* appeared three years later.¹⁷ *Saman*, the hero of the first novel, is a Catholic priest who is drawn into the struggle of poor farmers against multinational agribusiness. Because of his deepening involvement with a poor community of transmigrant rubber tree farmers in south Sumatra who refuse to follow the dictates of the oil palm monopolies, *Saman* is jailed by the Indonesian authorities, tortured, and eventually smuggled out of Indonesia. In the course of his dangerous escape, he becomes involved with Yasmin, a married activist, who helps him to flee from Indonesia to New York City. The sequel, *Larung*, continues the story of *Saman* and introduces a second activist named *Larung*. Utami's novels take place in urban spaces between Jakarta and New York City, in south Sumatra and Bali, in occasional journeys into the villages and towns, and on the high seas of late New Order Indonesia. The novels also take place in the dreamlike hallucinations of *Saman* and *Larung*, the activist heroes, and the fantasies of *Shakuntala*, one of the heroines.

in the early part of the twentieth century. See, for example, Laurie J. Sears, *Shadows of Empire* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1996), chap. 3, and Laurie J. Sears, *Dread and Enchantment in the Indonesian Literary Archive* (forthcoming). See also Ann Laura Stoler's important discussion of the implications of the thought of Freud and Foucault for work on colonial sources in her *Race and the Education of Desire* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1995), chapter six.

¹⁷ *Saman* (Jakarta: Kapustakaan Populer Gramedia, 1998); *Larung* (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2001).

Saman introduces the intertwined lives of four women who have known each other since childhood. Laila is a photographer working on a story about the oil company Texcoil, active in the South China Sea around southern Sumatra. Laila's childhood friends include a bisexual dancer, Shakuntala, on a fellowship in New York City; Cok, a Balinese businesswoman who runs a hotel in Pekanbaru; and Yasmin, a married Menadonese human rights activist who becomes emotionally and sexually involved with the ex-priest, Saman. The women are wealthy enough to move around without financial concerns. They speak Jakarta slang, are sexually explicit and adventurous, and serve as each other's emotional supports. They become involved in Yasmin's human rights work through their various connections with Saman, their former teacher when they were middle and high school students at a Catholic school in Jakarta. They move, occasionally alone, often as a group, through their memories, fantasies, and desires. Their narrative voices, constantly shifting from first to third person, are restless, continually probing the limits of individual subjectivity. Although each woman is quite different, their voices blend into a syncopated chorus as they discuss their sexual, political, and romantic adventures in Jakarta and New York City.

Through these women's relationships with each other and with the various men and women in their lives, Utami reveals the brutality and sensuality of life in late New Order Indonesia and provides a sobering commentary on the events leading up to the fall of Suharto and the general disillusionment after the failure of Abdurrachman Wahid's *reformasi* government. *Saman* is an innovative novel in the field of Indonesian literature, with bold depictions of government abuses and torture as well as female sexuality and discussions of Saman's loss of faith and subsequent adulterous affair. The second, and less accessible, novel, *Larung*, presents more complex views of elite female Indonesian subjectivity through its continual questioning of intention, consciousness, and political commitment, and its sophisticated analysis of the aftereffects of the New Order period. The first seventy-four pages of this novel take place in the mind of Larung, the main character; other voices appear only through Larung's perspective in this part of the book. After the lengthy introductory scene with Larung and his Balinese grandmother, to be discussed below, Larung hardly appears again until the very end of the novel. The macabre scenes where Larung searches for a way to kill his grandmother move from the phantasmatic into the quotidian when Larung meets Cok and chats with her at his grandmother's funeral in Bali. Larung succeeds in having his grandmother's remains included in a large cremation ceremony, despite her having been banished from her upper-class Gianyar family in the early part of the last century when she ran off with a Dutchman. Larung is a friend of Cok, the woman from Bali. Through Cok, Larung meets Yasmin and becomes involved in the human rights work that connects Yasmin and Saman. When Larung is the activist chosen at the end of the novel to guide three young anti-New Order students to meet up with Saman on the island of Bintan and escape from Indonesia, the reader is forewarned that their survival is in jeopardy.

Utami's novel *Larung* explores how subjectivity and memory are intertwined and what happens to subjectivity and memory in the face of trauma. Larung is psychotic, and his inability to feel empathy will lead to both his and Saman's deaths. Utami's characterizations are more complex in *Larung* than in *Saman*, and the lines between the

imaginary and the “real” are intentionally blurred.¹⁸ More than *Saman, Larung* is a critical study of memory, haunting, and trauma, and the next section explores the implications of these intertwined processes for the writing of Indonesian histories.

Freud, Trauma, and Ghosts

Newer evaluations of Freud’s *oeuvre* see psychoanalysis as both a colonizing discourse and a postcolonial method of literary analysis.¹⁹ Freud took ghosts and haunting seriously, and his ideas are useful for analyzing the violence and ghosts that are ever-present and meaningful in Utami’s work. People are murdered and traumatized in Utami’s novels because they interfere in government corruption and they know too much, even though the perpetrators of these atrocities often remain hazy. Whereas the traumas presented in *Saman* center on the late-New Order government and its abuses, *Larung* investigates the traumas left in the wake of the killings of 1965–1966, the colonial legacies of the Indonesian state, and mythological stories from the Javanese and Balinese past.²⁰ The Freudian concepts of traumatic neurosis and deferred action are useful in explaining the return of a trauma experienced by the troubled hero, Larung, as a young child. Freud commented on the “traumatic neuroses” in his 1920 essay on the pleasure principle when those neuroses became particularly evident after the end of World War I. “A condition has long been known and described which occurs after severe mechanical concussions, railway disasters, and other accidents involving a risk to life; it has been given the name of ‘traumatic neurosis’ ...”²¹ Freud’s ideas about the cause and symptoms of traumatic injuries developed in his major revisionist writings that appeared in the 1920s with a stress on the “compulsion to repeat” and the idea of deferred action. Larung, the hero of the novel of the same name, and his grandmother, whom he will kill, have both witnessed traumatic events in their childhood. Larung is unable to bring these events into narrative memory.²² Utami depicts his inability to assimilate the traumatic scenes he has witnessed and their repeated return as delusions and hauntings.²³

¹⁸ Interview with Ayu Utami, Jakarta, September 2003.

¹⁹ Some classic texts in the field of psychoanalysis and colonialism include the work of Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, and other French writers from the colonial world. Several of the essays in Homi K. Bhabha’s *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) are key works. See also Ashis Nandy, *The Savage Freud and other Essays on Possible and Retrievable Selves* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995) and Ranjana Khanna’s *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2003).

²⁰ See Laurie J. Sears, “Postcolonial Identities, Feminist Criticism, and Southeast Asian Studies,” in *Knowing Southeast Asian Subjects*, for a short discussion of Utami’s novels as feminist critiques of the postcolonial Indonesian nation.

²¹ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1961), p. 10. Freud’s definition of trauma also mentions the inability of the psychic apparatuses to bind the excess of stimulation produced by “excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield.” See, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 1989), p. 607. I cite this annotated selection of Freud’s work when possible in this essay because it is an accessible collection of Freud’s most important writings and uses the accepted but increasingly controversial translations from the Standard Edition by James Strachey.

²² For more on the idea of narrative memory, see Barbara Herrnstein Smith, “Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories,” in *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980); and Ann Laura Stoler and Karen Strassler, “Memory Work in Java: A Cautionary Tale,” in *Carnal Knowledge and*

In his work on criminality in Indonesia, James Siegel explored the appearance of ghosts and trauma in the New Order period and its aftermath.²⁴ Siegel's theory linked ghosts and criminality to the nation-state through notions of the counterfeit (*palsu*) and the fictive and the substitution of criminals for the people (*rakyat*) in the transition from Sukarno's Old Order to Suharto's New Order state.²⁵ Siegel explained how the ghosts of a failed nationalism have continued to haunt the Indonesian nation-state. Under the late President Sukarno, it was possible for the President to speak for the people to engender a sense of belonging to the nation. This construction of the "people" went awry in the New Order, producing only the counterfeit, the fictive, and the criminal. But in Siegel's explanation of criminality, the ghosts of the failed revolution serve as intermediaries that have helped introduce the new concept of "trauma" into Indonesian popular discourses through the press and the middle classes.

Rather than asking why it is that ghosts are expected not to appear, it might be better to point out that police and criminals both arise precisely where ghosts were expected before. There would be no "trauma," no explicable effects, if full belief in ghosts still existed.²⁶

Siegel suggested that "trauma" and "shock" spread out in Indonesia through the medium of newspapers like *Pos Kota*, a sensationalist and pro-government newspaper with a high circulation aimed at a lower-class, uneducated readership. It is from the pressure brought to bear on the lower classes by the middle and upper classes that ideas of trauma spread into the villages of Indonesia. Siegel suggested that the experience of "trauma" for Indonesians was similar to ghostly possession. Ghosts were associated with "The place that one knows one does not know about and cannot fathom ... " Siegel argued that ghosts today have become associated with trauma and with the signs of modernity that villagers do not quite understand—like discotheques, universities, and wealthy homes.²⁷

In his remarkable new book, *Naming the Witch*, on the killing of witches in East Java in the post-Suharto period of 1998–99, Siegel expands some of his insights from his earlier work and moves toward a very specific study of how and why witches were identified and killed in one area of Indonesia during a time when centralized state power had weakened. He suggests, "Witchcraft makes comprehensible what is beyond

Imperial Power, pp. 162–204. Stoler and Strassler discuss two models of memory: the hydraulic model and the identity model. For an extended discussion of the hydraulic model and Freud's conceptualization of it, see Khanna, *Dark Continents*, chapter 1. See also Leys, *Trauma*, pp. 111–13.

²³ Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 20, explains that the "trauma was constituted by a relationship between two events or experiences—a first event that was not necessarily traumatic because it came too early in the child's development to be understood and assimilated, and a second that also was not inherently traumatic but that triggered a memory of the first event that only then was given traumatic meaning and hence repressed."

²⁴ James T. Siegel, *A New Criminal Type in Jakarta* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1998). For a different look at ideas of haunting in Indonesian literatures, see Pheng Cheah, *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), especially chapters six and seven.

²⁵ Siegel, *A New Criminal Type in Jakarta*, chapter three. For now, I am leaving out of my analysis Siegel's stress on photography as the technology enabling the displacement of the "people" with *kriminalitas*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 94. See pp. 30–31 for a discussion of the audience for *Pos Kota*.

reason.”²⁸ Taking belief in ghosts very seriously, Siegel resists explaining the cause of witchcraft in logical ways. In trying to account for the brutal killings of those accused of witchcraft in East Java, Siegel suggests that the older world of the Javanese spirits has disappeared and the ghosts that the government both fears and expects have become national ghosts rather than Javanese ones.

In the context of Java, the mere return of ghosts is not unexpected, as we have seen. The problem comes rather with the formation of national rather than Javanese ghosts. The hundreds of thousands of people massacred because they were suspected Communists were held in memory by the Suharto regime precisely as those who might return. And return, as we have said, in uncanny forms. Political disruption was frequently blamed on Communists and their descendants. The fear was that Communist ideas would prevail even without Communists. And so, in various disruptions, their traces could be made out. It was an example of “O.T.B.” (*organisasi tanpa bentuk*) or “organizations without form or bodies” in the formulation of the time. Communists, defeated once during the revolution, came back again in the Suharto regime. Massacred at the beginning of the Suharto regime, it was feared they could rise again through some unknown process, meaning without formal organization, but saying, also, “bodiless,” just as specters lack bodies.²⁹

Thus communists can appear in both embodied and disembodied forms, linking New Order violence with belief in spirits and ruthless political expediency. Siegel’s explorations of the killing of witches in East Java have repercussions for the writing of Indonesian histories. Rather than contributing to history written in what Dominick LaCapra calls the “documentary approach,” where scholars make truth claims through a gathering of evidence to fulfill the “necessary and sufficient conditions of historiography,” Siegel’s analysis contributes to what LaCapra calls the radical constructivist model: truth claims are questioned, and performative, aesthetic, ideological, and political factors become those “in which referential statements are embedded and take on meaning and significance.”³⁰ Novels can serve as one of many possible sites where referential statements express aesthetic, ideological, or political factors.

Ayu Utami’s novels, *Saman* and *Larung*, offer interpretations of how ghosts and witches might link to Freudian notions of trauma, melancholia, and deferred action. Utami’s twinned heroes are both wounded, and one is psychotic. The characters Saman and Larung are both witches who haunt the present in uncanny ways: Saman is a sympathetic witch and Larung is not. The four heroines are alternately strong-willed and indecisive, cosmopolitan and insular, sexually adventurous and emotionally naïve. Promiscuous in word and deed, the women serve as mediators between men who do

²⁸ James Siegel, *Naming the Witch* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 9. Siegel distinguishes the experience of witchcraft from that of trauma in the case of a man’s death from voodoo or witchcraft in Australia. “Belief causes his death. Belief and not trauma. The person who suffers from trauma repeats the traumatic event in his dreams or in his speech precisely because he cannot believe it. He cannot understand what happened to him, even though he can say what it is that occurred.” Siegel, *Naming the Witch*, p. 48.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

³⁰ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 1.

the serious political work of the underground movement.³¹ In the end, Utami suggests that the answer to Indonesia's traumas may be a resigned form of melancholia or depression that is left in the wake of trauma. The most powerful figures in *Larung* are the two widow/witches, Larung's grandmother and her friend, who lived through the killings of the 1960s. The theme of the uncanny double is a strong one in *Larung*, and as the novel opens, Larung is contemplating how to kill his aging and powerful grandmother.³²

Memories

Whenever you confront my grandma, you can't run away and you feel something indescribable: deep anxiety that life has no meaning.

She is a creature whose trembling mouth leaks filth and bile. This is the meanness of my grandma: words. Her words wound, but you can't retaliate with hate. You can only torture yourself as a projection of your overwhelming desire to kill her. I remember after she was wounded by curses, my mother once stabbed her own wrists and another time stabbed her own throat with a fork. And Grandmother only looked at her, like a mirror reflecting Mother's criminal intentions. Because that was exactly what Mother wanted to do to her.³³

"Who determines the hour of someone's death?"³⁴ These are the opening words of *Larung*. As the story unfolds, the reader is drawn into the mind of Larung Lanang, a man returning on the train to Tulungagung in East Java, where he lives with his mother and grandmother. Larung is returning with the intention of killing his very old and very spiteful grandmother. The reasons for his murderous resolve revolve around the longevity of the old woman and the ugliness and uselessness of old age. Larung observes: "This is my grandmother: she is so old. She is no longer human, no longer male or female, like used-up humanity. Like a zombie or a mummy."³⁵ When Larung asks her what it is like to be old, she responds:

When a person becomes old, she becomes an eye. And only an eye. There is no more I. Only them.

³¹ When I queried her about this, Utami said that her work reflected the way things were. Interview, Jakarta, September 2003.

³² I thank Henk Maier for encouraging me to investigate the theme of doubling that I found appearing and reappearing in Utami's novels.

³³ Ayu Utami, *Larung*, p. 10: "Setiap yang bertatapan dengan nenekku tak bisa melarikan diri dan akan mengalami yang takterkatakan: semacam gangguan jiwa bahwa alam tak punya tujuan.

Ia adalah makhluk yang dari mulutnya yang tremor keluar kotoran dan kekejian. Inilah kekejian nenekku: kata-kata. Kata-katanya melukai, tetapi engkau tak bisa menyerangnya karena benci. Kau hanya bisa menganiaya dirimu sendiri sebagai proyeksi dari luap keinginanmu membunuh dia. Aku mengingatnya, setelah ia menghunjamkan serapahnya, ibuku menusuk pergelangan tangan sendiri dengan garpu suatu kali, dan menusuk juga dengan garpu lehernya kali lain. Dan Simbah hanya memandangnya, ia sebagai selembar cermin yang memantulkan niat jahat ibu. Sebab, itulah yang Ibu ingin lakukan padanya." All translations from Utami's novel, *Larung*, were done by the author of this essay.

³⁴ Utami, *Larung*, p. 1. "Siapakah yang menentukan jam kematian seseorang?"

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7. "Inilah nenekku: Ia sudah begitu tua. Seperti sudah bukan manusia bukan perempuan bukan lelaki, seperti bekas manusia. Zombi atau mumi, barangkali."

You are not there. Because I don't exist.³⁶

When he looks at his grandmother, Larung can only compare her to a baby monkey: "Every time I look into those eyes looking at me, I become a nursing monkey and those eyes belong to my baby as its mouth sucks the tip of my breast and its hands massage it and its ears search for my heart-beat which calms it."³⁷ Larung slowly draws the reader into his murderous delusions as he weaves the rationale he needs to carry out his self-appointed task.

In relation to his grandmother, Larung becomes feminized. He takes care of her. He imagines nursing her at his breast. He is the only one who can approach her without being cursed by the vicious and powerful old lady. Larung thinks that his mother told him that the grandmother cannot be killed until the magic pellets and needle are removed from her forehead and the spells are released from her mouth. Those are the signs of a practitioner of black magic, or a witch, in Java. The black magic that the grandmother possessed had a dual function: it gave her a certain invulnerability, which enabled her to protect her family, although not Larung's father, during the *zaman edan* (time of madness) of the 1965–66 killings of supposed communists and leftist sympathizers. On the other hand, the magic is said to be dangerous to those around her. All the men in her family have died or been killed, according to the stories that Larung heard from his mother. Larung thinks his mother tells him that he too will die unless he takes the magic away from the old woman. And this is what sets him on his quest to find out how to kill his grandmother.

"Who am I to her: grandchild, child, husband?"³⁸ Larung asks this several times as he ponders his relationship to the old woman, further destabilizing his masculine subjectivity. And who is she? His mother tells him that the grandmother was supposedly born in Bali just before 1900 and that she witnessed the *puputan*, or mass suicides, of the courts of southern Bali in their last stand against the Dutch. The grandmother married a Dutch opium-seller and then went with him to Java since her family did not approve of the match. When this Dutch husband was interned by the Japanese during World War II, she took a more politically correct husband, a revolutionary fighter, and it was he who became Larung's father. In 1962, Larung's father was sent to work in Denpasar, and the family returned to the grandmother's place of origin. Larung was then almost two years old.³⁹ Part of this story seems to come from Larung's mother, representing the view of a daughter-in-law toward a difficult mother-in-law, but it also comes from Larung's confused state of mind.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 17. "Ketika orang menjadi tua maka ia menjadi mata. Dan hanya mata. Tak ada lagi saya. Hanya mereka.

"Tak ada kamu. Sebab tak ada saya."

³⁷ Ibid., p. 9. "Setiap kali aku menatap mata yang menatap aku itu, aku adalah monyet betina yang menyuisi dan mata itu milik bayiku ketika mulutnya mencucup ujung susuku dan tangannya memijat dan telinganya mencari-cari detak jantungku yang memberinya ketenangan."

³⁸ Ibid. "Siapakah aku bagi dia: cucu, anak, suami?"

³⁹ Thus Larung would have been five or six years old when the killings in Bali took place. It could be a later experience of trauma or violence such as occurred during the New Order period that, according to Freudian theory, would trigger Larung's memories of the earlier killings and code them as traumatic. See fn. 23 above.

Larung is supposed to be taking the antipsychotic drug "haloperidol,"⁴⁰ a drug prescribed for schizophrenia, manic depression, hallucinations, and anxiety.

Larung thinks his mother challenges him to kill the grandmother. But she also tells him that he is crazy and that she does not want him to carry out the deed.

Is it also me, mother, who has to kill Grandmother?

"You're crazy Larung!"

I'm crazy, you say, because I take haloperidol. You, mother, are sane but cannot solve this problem. You say I'm crazy, but I never complain.

"I don't want you to have thoughts like that. And you couldn't kill Grandmother anyway."

You want me to kill Grandmother and I can.⁴¹

Larung will be surprised after he has succeeded in his task that his mother is horrified. It is the journey that Larung undertakes to find out how to break the protective spells and kill his grandmother that confronts him with the ghosts of his traumatic past.

Hauntings

The smells of my grandma come from the cupboard and the floor of the bathroom too. Batik, *lerak*, plain cloth, and beeswax. Coconut hair oil that binds the powdered hair dye. "Bigen" brand. The older I got the more I could smell the cells of her body. Dandruff, sweat gathered with vinegar and grease, all kinds of shit and droplets of cleaning fluid to wash the urine and feces from the bathroom tile.⁴²

Larung is haunted by the familiar and foul smells of his grandmother as he goes on his Javanese journey to seek the mystery of her long survival and the key to her secret vulnerabilities. The smells of Larung's childhood are vividly evoked, and they call up his memories of time past. In a nearby Javanese city, he finally finds her old friend whom he has been seeking for a year, a woman he had seen in a photo when he was looking through his grandmother's possessions to discover her secrets. There were two photos of this woman, leading Larung to think she might be important to solve the

⁴⁰ Utami, *Larung*, pp. 14–16.

⁴¹ Apakah aku juga yang harus membunuh Simbah, Ibu?

"Kamu gila, Larung!"

Aku gila, katamu. Sebab aku minum haloperidol. Ibu, Ibu waras tapi tak bisa menyelesaikan persoalan.

Aku gila, katamu, tapi aku tak pernah mengeluh.

"Ibu tidak ingin kamu punya pikiran seperti itu. Dan kamu tak akan bisa membunuh Simbah."

Ibu ingin aku membunuh Simbah dan aku bisa. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

When I discussed Larung's mental state with Utami, she noted that the only voice the reader hears in the first seventy-four pages of the novel is Larung's voice. In other words, his mother's voice in this part of the book and all of the other voices could be hallucinations.

⁴² "Bau nenekku juga datang dari almari dan lantai kamar mandi. Bau batik, lerak, mori, dan malam.

Minyak ceceman yang penguk, serbuk cat rambut. Bigen. Lalu, semakin aku dewasa semakin aku bisa mengendus sel-sel tubuhnya. Ketombe, keringat yang mengendap bersama asam, lemak, segala tai dan leleran karbol untuk menyiram kencing dan kopet dari ubin." *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25. *Lerak* is a type of berry used to wash fine batik. "Bigen" is a type of hair dye. Thanks to Sylvia Tiwon for helping me to translate some of the difficult words in this passage.

mysteries of his grandmother's life and death. She too is a *pawang*, a practitioner of black magic. She takes him on another journey that answers his questions.

This second old woman, who says she is 120 years old, takes him far into a cave full of bats and nocturnal animals. It is dark and damp and terrifying. In the cave is a river that runs out into the dangerous southern ocean.⁴³ In this cave, Larung is introduced to the ghosts of the killings of 1965–66. These are the ghosts of people who were dragged from their houses in the middle of the night, never to return, never given a proper burial, often thrown into the rivers of Java and Bali. Larung's name, in fact, means a dead body or an offering that is thrown into the sea.⁴⁴ Since Larung and his family were living in Bali during these deadly years, it is the story of the killings in Bali that Utami tells through the words of Larung's grandmother's old friend. This point is a key one for Utami's interpretations of the killings. Returning to the passage from *Larung* that opened this essay:

We couldn't trust anybody, not our lovers, not even our own selves. Because at that time only by pointing to someone else could we save ourselves, moving death over our heads over the heads of others.⁴⁵

Utami's text suggests that the ghosts are trapped in the haunted cave not because of the injustice and barbarity of what was done to them, but rather for what they did or tried to do to save themselves. Larung listens to this second old woman's story about the fate of the ghosts and then asks if she might have a happier story to tell. Fixated on the solution to his problems, Larung disavows the dark story that is being told to him. He is only concerned with getting the magic or the power that will allow him to kill his grandmother.

Trauma

The story that the old lady tells is also the key to Larung's life and early trauma. She tells him that his father might be one of these ghosts in the cave. Larung himself and his mother could have been among the ghosts, too, if the powers of his grandmother had not protected them. When the men in the trucks from Java came that night with covered faces to take his father away, the grandmother let them take him. But when the men came back for the rest of the family, she stood in the doorway and

⁴³ The river is named Lembu Peteng, or "dark cow," which means a bastard child, often from a noble family. See Nancy Florida, *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 100, n. 25.

⁴⁴ John M. Echols and Hassan Shadily, *Kamus Indonesia-Inggeris* [An Indonesian-English Dictionary], 3rd ed. (Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1994), p. 331. Since *lanang* is the Javanese word for "man," the full name means "floating dead man," what Larung becomes in the end.

⁴⁵ "Tak seorang pun bisa kita percaya, kekasih kita, bahkan diri kita sendiri. Sebab saat itu hanya dengan menunjuk orang lain kita bisa menyelamatkan diri, memindahkan maut atas kepala kita ke atas kepala orang." Utami, *Larung*, p. 35. This tallies with some of the stories that have been gathered about the killings in Bali. See Robert Cribb, "Problems in the Historiography of the Killings in Indonesia" in *The Indonesian Killings 1965-1966*, ed. Robert Cribb (Clayton, Victoria: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1997). Geoffrey Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995) argues that the killings in Bali were more methodical than they have been portrayed to be. They were organized by army forces from Java and carried out by local people as well as army men. See especially chapters 10 and 11. See also Wieringa, *Sexual Politics*, chapters 6–8.

her sheer physical presence prevented them from entering. After the old woman tells him this, Larung says: "I didn't understand. (I didn't want to understand.)"⁴⁶ Larung's search is not a search for understanding but rather a search for efficacy. Larung's encounter with the old woman is a transaction he is willing to die for. Either he will die or she will give him the answer he seeks.

Then she tells him the Calonarang story from the eleventh century. This is the story of the widow/witch Calonarang with the beautiful daughter, Manjali. No one will marry Manjali because they are scared of her mother. Calonarang causes plagues and troubles, and finally the king sends his minister, Mpu Baradah, to marry Manjali to break the power of the old witch by pacifying her anger. And this comes to pass and the witch is killed. The beautiful Manjali, however, cannot bear how she was used to destroy her mother. She leaves her husband and becomes a witch too, living in an endless night, and with her spite, like the ghosts in the cave whom Larung has just met.⁴⁷ The introduction of Manjali doubles yet again the stories of the two grandmother/witches with their supernatural powers—characters who cannot be killed without specific knowledge from another witch.

Larung waits in the cave with his grandmother's old friend and her servant for a long time as the old woman tries to conquer his desire to appropriate and use her magic to kill his own relative. He becomes like an old statue from the the fourteenth-century kingdom of Majapahit, an icon of faded glory. And he questions his existence in this world of ghosts.

Then I became quiet and alienated because I was not from this world of phantoms. Who am I in this density? Not subject, nor object, just something strange. Who are they, that darkness, that in this moment seem more alive than I. I feel like letting go, or already dried up.⁴⁸

Finally, after hours go by, Larung has countered the power of the old woman, and she provides him with the magic charm that will allow him to kill his grandmother. The old lady gives him six magic containers, *cupu*, with magical charms inside. She tells him he will have six opportunities to regret his decision and turn back. The six *cupu* are to be placed on the body of his grandmother to open the magical pathways and allow her spirit to leave.

Larung can now accomplish his mission and kill his grandmother. He only hopes that she might die by herself before he returns home. But she is still there when he returns, always a watchful eye, waiting for him. His mother has also been waiting for him at home and scolds him for being away so long. She was worried about him because he had forgotten to take his antipsychotic medicine. When Larung enters the

⁴⁶ Utami, *Larung*, p. 33.

⁴⁷ This story is popular these days in Indonesia. It has been retold in Goenawan Mohamad, "The King's Witch," in "Silenced Voices: New Writing from Indonesia," ed. Frank Stewart and John McGlynn, *Manoa* 12,1 (Summer 2000); Pramoedy Ananta Toer, *The King, the Witch, and the Priest*, trans. Willem Samuels (Jakarta: Equinox Publishing, Asia, 2001); Toety Heraty, *Calonarang* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor, 2000). In the Balinese tellings of this story, one of the followers of Manjali is a woman named Larung.

⁴⁸ "Lalu aku menjadi amat sepi lagi asing sebab aku bukanlah bagian dari dunia bayang-bayang ini. Pekat, siapakah aku. Bukan subyek, bukan obyek, melainkan cuma sebuah asing. Siapakah mereka, kegelapan itu, yang pada momen ini hidup lebih daripada aku. Aku rasanya mau lepas, atau telah kering." Utami, *Larung*, p. 43.

room of his grandmother, she seems barely alive, and yet she immediately sees and asks what he has around his neck. He has put the six *cupu* into a cloth bag that he is wearing around his neck for safekeeping on the train home. After a schizophrenic internal dialogue, he decides to lie to her about the contents of the container that holds the *cupu*. She falls asleep and he tries once to set out the *cupu* on her body as instructed. He sets out four of them—four chances to regret what he is doing. Then he trembles a bit, and the fifth one falls to the floor and is lost. He gathers up the four *cupu* already placed, and it takes him another day to find the lost one and make another attempt. His mother has gone away to visit the grave of her own mother, a foreshadowing of what is to come.

When Larung returns to try again, the grandmother seems almost dead. He again lays out the *cupu* on her body one by one. This time he does not falter until just after he has put the sixth one in place, just a second after he has lost his last chance to regret his actions. At that moment, just before she dies, his grandmother wakes and begins to speak, telling him once again the stories of his traumatic past. First she tells him that he is not the real child of his father, her son. She reminds him that he once had a playmate, a Chinese girl about nine years of age, when he was four. Her father was a rice seller and a neighbor. He would buy rice from the farmers and then sell it at a good mark-up to the army people who, like Larung's father, were stationed in Bali. Larung's father was his friend, so he made money on the deal also.

Then it was 1964, she tells him, and Gunung Agung, a major volcano, erupted in Bali, killing many people. The eruption ruined the rice fields, leaving people poor and hungry.⁴⁹ Angry too. One day a crowd of people came down from the mountains. Some said they were communists, but the grandmother said they were just hungry people. They beat the Chinese rice seller to death and took his rice. Larung never saw his little Chinese friend again. The grandmother retells the stories that Larung had already heard from the old woman. The people came for the man Larung thought was his father. The grandmother would not let them take the rest of the family. The grandmother added that the neighbors had whispered that her daughter-in-law, Larung's mother, was a member of Gerwani, the leftist women's organization. The grandmother told the killers and whisperers that her daughter-in-law was not Gerwani, just a mother. If anyone was Gerwani it was she, but they believed she was a witch anyway. Then the grandmother looked out to the sea, and slowly the men went away. Now Larung has heard this story repeatedly: from his mother or his own memories, from the old woman in the cave, and from his dying grandmother. But he seems unable to assimilate these stories even though new pieces of the puzzle are added in each telling.

Larung owes a debt to his grandmother: she saved his life. But he has now taken hers. And it is not enough just to have killed her with the magic he received from her friend. He now searches for kitchen knives and a saw to cut up her body and find the magic pins and pellets that, according to his mother, were the secret of his grandmother's strength. He performs a macabre operation. He mentions that he had

⁴⁹ The volcano Gunung Agung in Bali erupted in March and May of 1963. The eruptions claimed an estimated 1,500 lives and destroyed more than 62,000 hectares of land, causing severe malnutrition. See Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise*, p. 239.

medical training and was once a doctor.⁵⁰ He recites what he is doing with clinical precision, cutting and slicing the skin of her stomach and head, the most likely places to look for the magical pins and pellets. At one point he needs a piece of wood to help lift the grandmother's head so that he can operate more effectively. Since no piece of wood is handy, he uses a copy of Soekarno's revolutionary speeches, the nationalist book *Di Bawah Bendera Revolusi* (Under the Banner of the Revolution).

I don't know how long I worked but I just couldn't find the metal bits or the needles in her stomach. Where could they be hidden if not there? They must be in the head. The magical pins were inserted into the skin in back of her head. Sorry to have to slice up your head. Of course I remember how to do it. (1) Place a wooden block to support the neck. I don't have any wood, but the book *Under the Banner of the Revolution* that is so thick and hard can be used instead. (2) Make a slice around the skull, above the eyebrow and passing through the base of the ear and the occipital protrusion, just like Columbus sailed around the globe. (3) Make a vertical section dividing the middle of the forehead around to the back of the head. The skin over the skull is always thicker than that of other parts of the body, it's like it's braided together with the hair follicles and the rubbery sebaceous glands. (4) Continue the previous longitudinal section downward, dividing the skin of the nose to the upper lip. (5) Make a tear from the tip of the right lip, around the head, passing below the ear, up to the tip of the left lip. (6) Make another vertical section on a line from the edge of the cheek to the ear. (7) Peel off this skin, slowly, from the side of the ear toward the nose. The skin tissue here sticks tightly to the muscles of the face.⁵¹

Unable to find the evidence he was seeking in her head either, Larung cleans up the bloody mess, puts his grandmother's body parts into two boxes, and buries her in the back yard. Then he washes the sheets. He apologizes to the dead grandmother for not bringing her to the crematorium as he had promised; the condition of the body would have looked too suspicious.⁵²

⁵⁰ See "Ayu Utami tak Mampir de Kedai," *Pantau*, Tahun II, Nomor 020 (Desember 2001), pp. 9-10, www.pantau.or.id/bxt/20/06.html/, accessed on April 5, 2004. The article notes how Utami spent some time studying medical texts at a hospital in Jakarta and in Tulungagung and Kediri, learning about the traditions of black magic in East Java.

⁵¹ "Entah berapa lama aku bekerja namun tak ketemuan juga biji-biji logam maupun jarum-jarum susuk di antara isi perut. Di manakah mereka bersarang jika tidak di sana? Tentu saja di kepala. Susuk-susuk itu terselip di balik kulit kepala. Permissi, biar kusayat kulit kepalamu. Aku juga ingat caranya. (1) Letakan sebuah balok menyangga leher. Tetapi tak ada kayu, maka buku *Di Bawah Bendera Revolusi* yang tebal dan keras bisa dijadikan ganti. (2) Buatlah sayatan melingkari batok kepala, di atas alis melewati pangkal telinga dan tonjolan oksipital, seperti Columbus mengelilingi bola bumi. (3) Tarik irisan vertikal membelah tengah dahi hingga belakang kepala. Kulit batok selalu lebih tebal daripada kulit bagian tubuh yang lain, seperti teranyam oleh folikel rambut yang serta kelenjar minyak yang kenyal. (4) Lanjutkan irisan bujur tadi ke arah bawah, membelah kulit hidung hingga bibir atas. (5) Sobeklah, dari ujung bibir kanan, melingkari kepala, melewati bawah kuping, hingga ujung bibir kiri. (6) Buat lagi irisan vertikal di garis batas pipi dengan telinga. (7) Kelupaslah kulit ini, pelan-pelan, dari sisi telinga ke arah hidung. Jaringan kulit ini melekat erat pada otot-otot muka." Utami, *Larung*, p. 73. See Benedict Anderson, "Bung Karno and the Fossilization of Soekarno's Thought," *Indonesia* 74 (October 2002): 7, where he describes this collection of Soekarno's speeches as "The official, bowdlerized compilation of his major texts, published late in his presidential career."

⁵² Utami, *Larung*, pp. 72-74.

Larung's mother comes home to find what he had done, and she is horrified. He simply replies: "No, Mother." This part of Utami's novel ends after seventy-four pages of psychotic ramblings, macabre hauntings, personal memories, and traumatic histories. The reader is left to wonder: was it all a delusion, a fantasy, or a grisly murder?

Trauma and Melancholia

The ambivalence about Larung's paternity, intensified by the stories Larung's grandmother tells before she dies, reverberates through this section of the novel, establishing a theme of missing or estranged fathers and of sons who are failures. Larung cannot integrate the traumas of his youth, the disappearance of the man he thought was his father, or the disappearance of his childhood friend and the murder of her father, into his conscious mind. These repressed events manifest themselves in unpredictable and macabre ways. Larung is indebted to his grandmother for saving his life and his mother's life. But he cannot assimilate this debt. The debt is bound up with tradition and hierarchy, and linked to the work of mourning. Larung cannot mourn because he is not able to feel, but his delusions of his own power allow him to work his way into the world of anti-New Order activists. More importantly, Larung is psychotic, and, in his case, memory and subjectivity have become unhinged.⁵³ Larung has lost, or perhaps never had, the ability to draw his memories into a coherent narrative.⁵⁴ Larung's story illuminates one of the major problems in the field of trauma studies today: whether the traumatic memories are available to the victim at all.⁵⁵ If memories are not available to the victims of trauma, or are unreliable at best, how can such victims testify or give witness to their suffering? If both victims and perpetrators of horrendous crimes are traumatized by those crimes, and they cannot put the trauma into narrative memory, the testimonies of both victims and perpetrators become unreliable, rendering ethical considerations fuzzy and problematic.⁵⁶ On the other hand, if there is a radical separation between "autonomous subjects" and the external trauma that engulfed them—so that questions concerning memory's relation to trauma are not taken into account—this allows questions of blame and responsibility to be posed, but situates the traumatized as quintessential victims, both sovereign and

⁵³ Utami told me Larung was schizophrenic, but we are never specifically told that diagnosis in the book; personal communication, September 2003. Utami does specify the drug haloperidol, however, and this is still one of the drugs prescribed to treat schizophrenia. In his essay on narcissism, Freud discusses the symptoms of schizophrenia and notes that schizophrenics are inaccessible to psychoanalysis. See Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay, p. 546.

⁵⁴ See Ruth Leys, *Trauma*, pp. 110-12, for a lucid presentation of Pierre Janet's ideas of narrative memory. She notes: "For Janet in this mode, memory proper was more than dramatic repetition or miming: it involved the capacity to distance oneself from oneself by representing one's experiences to oneself and others in the form of a narrated history."

⁵⁵ As Leys explains: "Trauma was therefore understood as an experience of hypnotic imitation or identification—what I call *mimesis*—an experience that, because it appeared to shatter the victim's cognitive-perceptual capacities, made the traumatic scene unavailable for a certain kind of recollection." *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

⁵⁶ This case is particularly relevant for soldiers like some of the American ones who fought in the Vietnam War, carried out or were made to carry out atrocities, and now suffer from the unbearable memories of those atrocities. The medical field of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) developed to deal with these cases. See *ibid.*, pp. 15-16, 230-233.

passive.⁵⁷ For those who would want to see the possibility of agency in even the most abject of victims, or for those who follow anti-essentialist approaches to subjectivity and memory, both interpretations have limits. Utami creates the character and actions of Larung as one response to trauma. But, in Utami's novel, this character is the exception rather than the norm. Her other characters also experience suffering, loss, or estrangement, but they maintain a coherent sense of their own identity, even though some will be destroyed along with Larung. Paralleling the fantasies and delusions of the more sympathetic hero, Saman, in Utami's first novel, Larung integrates the ghostly into the everyday world and his actions mimic the modern gone awry. In his delusion, he searches for the needles and pellets in his grandmother's body with the tools of modern medical precision, even though he also knows that the old woman's powers are metonymic, ghostly ones.

Ghosts also haunt Larung's double, Saman. Saman's mother had a ghostly lover when he was a small boy, and the family lived in Perabumulih, in southern Sumatra. Three younger siblings either disappeared suddenly from his mother's womb in late pregnancy or died mysteriously a few days after birth. Saman, then named Wisanggeni,⁵⁸ could hear his younger siblings crying and could hear the whisperings of the ghostly lover, but no one else could. The fates of Saman and Larung converge at the end of *Larung*, and the outcome is tragic. The two men, and the three young activists whom Saman and Larung are trying to rescue, are all captured by the police because of the weaknesses of the young activists and the inability of the psychotic Larung to feel empathy. Saman is trapped in this volatile alliance and brought down by it. The commentary on activism presented by Utami is a conflicted one. Utami offers a complex understanding of the relationship between agency and activism by showing "activists" as wounded, lacking in faith, psychotic, or incompetent. The group is finally caught because one of the young men calls his brother on his cell phone and the call is monitored. The last member of the group is the physically maimed petty criminal Anton, who is driving the boat that has been hired to take them out of Indonesia. By presenting this collection of male characters, Utami suggests the activist men of post-*reformasi* Indonesia are a traumatized group. But the women who serve as their supports, if not activists themselves, remain alive, melancholic, yet still capable of action at the end of the novel.

It is the uncanny doubling of the sympathetic Saman into the psychotic Larung that is most disturbing at the end of the second novel. Saman and Larung both suffer from delusions intertwined with the spirit worlds of Sumatra and Java. This connection to the spirit worlds indicates a weakness, a susceptibility to being entered by undesirable spirits or forces that will lead to death and destruction. By linking the two activists to uncanny powers and to the ghosts of Java, Utami seems to suggest that activists and

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 8–10.

⁵⁸ Wisanggeni is the name of a well-known shadow theatre character in Central Java. He is the son of the refined hero, Arjuna, and a heavenly nymph, daughter of the god Brama. Wisanggeni is known for his total honesty and his ability to act as a savior of his family. As someone whose power is so strong that he cannot be killed, he chooses to ascend to heaven (*moksa*) before the Bratayuda War. Wisanggeni has been a popular name for characters in modern Indonesian literature. Besides Utami's *Saman*, Seno Gumira Ajidarma wrote *Wisanggeni Sang Buronan* [Wisanggeni the Fugitive] (Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 2000) and the theatre group Teater Tetas has performed *Wisanggeni Berkelebat* [Wisanggeni Suddenly Appears] in 2000.

witches are interchangeable in the *reformasi* period. As Siegel has noted in his explanations of why witches were killed after the fall of the New Order:

To ask if one is a witch is to say that I cannot put myself in the place that others once placed me. I can no longer see myself as they saw me at an earlier time in my everyday identity. Earlier, I would be able to say "I am not a witch," because I would be unable [to] find in myself the confirmation of my accusers. But under the conditions that prevailed during the witch hunt, self-image disappeared, as multiple possibilities of identity thrust themselves forward. "Witch," under that condition, is a name for the incapacity to figure oneself.⁵⁹

If "activist" is substituted for "witch" in Siegel's quote, this passage comes close to the message of Utami's novels about activism both during and after the New Order: activists are those who are unable to figure themselves or to construct a coherent identity for themselves. The activist characters who are the heroes of the novels offer an ambiguous message about activism. Saman is the good activist, the defrocked priest who works himself to the bone to save the transmigrant villagers of south Sumatra. His hallucinations and attachments to women, both the developmentally impaired sister of his friend, Anton, and the rich lawyer and activist, Yasmin, cause him pain and suffering. But he remains a sympathetic character. Larung is never a sympathetic character since he is introduced in the midst of a psychotic delusion that ends in a gruesome murder. But Utami seems to say that these two characters are not that different, are in fact interchangeable, and their tragic fate is the fate of activists after the fall of the New Order. They are damaged by the past. They cannot find a way to survive in the post-New Order world of Indonesia.

The failure of the revolutionary postcolonial nation that emerged during Soekarno's Guided Democracy period and the failure of revolutionary protest or resistance during the violent New Order period that followed it return again in the *reformasi* period and allow Utami to present her activist heroes as traumatized failures. Since *Saman* was published while the New Order state was still in power, Utami was not able to address the issues of the traumatic past as clearly there as she does in *Larung*. It took courage to publish *Saman* when the book first appeared in 1998 because it addressed the corruption and brutality of the New Order in startlingly explicit terms. However, Utami's work has been most celebrated for its graphic depictions of female sexuality, both verbal and physical.⁶⁰ As they introduce discussions of sexuality into the public sphere, Utami's novels have been important to her female readership in Indonesia not only for their representations of upper-class women's habitual life, but also in symbolic ways. But Utami's work is not only about women's right to a cosmopolitan sexual freedom. Her characterization of Larung exposes the depths of violence, cruelty, and insanity left in the wake of the New Order. The novel *Larung* is a step toward the working out of the traumas of the past, but Utami does not easily place the origin of these traumas in the colonial period. Utami's re-telling of the Calonarang

⁵⁹ Siegel, *Naming the Witch*, p. 124. Siegel posits a choice for Indonesians between becoming a revolutionary or naming a witch. Utami offers a slightly different set of choices.

⁶⁰ For a recent survey of discussions of *Saman* and sexuality, see Soe Tjen Marching, "Descriptions of Female Sexuality in Ayu Utami's *Saman*," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 38,1 (February 2007): 133-46.

story locates the traumas of the state in an unspecified moment before linear time, as Larung's mother names the pre-twentieth-century world.⁶¹

The most powerful characters in the segment of *Larung* discussed in this essay are the old widow/witches, the grandmother and her old friend in the cave. They have mastered the esoteric black magic of Java and Bali that allows them to kill and to protect. And they are difficult to kill, as demonstrated by the difficulties Larung encounters as he plans and attempts to murder his grandmother. It is easy to see in these doubled widow grandmothers the weight of "tradition," of the past, of a life and time that is seen nostalgically as both irretrievable and desirable. But for Larung, the activist, the past that his grandmother represents is so threatening that it must be totally destroyed, cut up into little pieces, so that it cannot be available for reconstruction or assimilation. In fact, in the novel that bears his name, Larung defeats almost everyone. He destroys his grandmother, the grandmother's old friend from whom he extracts the power to kill the grandmother, his mother, eventually Saman, and Yasmin, Saman's married lover. He even bloodies Soekarno's iconic speeches, credited with creating the nation. And he destroys himself. It is the inability to assimilate the past and the traumas of that past that turn the men of Utami's novels into failures. They cannot heal themselves, and they cannot heal the nation. Most tragically, they can be suddenly snatched away and killed, leaving loss and rupture in their wake.⁶² Is there an answer or a way to speak to the traumas and problems of Larung and those of his generation?

Jim Siegel's work on the killing of witches in the late 1990s helps to strengthen this interpretation of Utami's narrative as one that addresses the traumas of history and nation and the failure of witches. The grandmother/witches are portrayed in Utami's novel as powerful figures with esoteric knowledge. When Larung sets out to kill his grandmother, he first needs to find esoteric knowledge to accomplish the deed and then he is not content to have her merely dead, but must totally destroy her body. Siegel explains:

When the witch lacks a figure, it seems necessary to disembody him to get at the essence of witchcraft. Simply killing the person does not do it. To be rid of the witch, particularly given the lack of ritual means to do so, means killing something that one cannot find. It means killing more than the body, and therefore it requires the witch to be slain multiple times, as it were.⁶³

Larung's grandmother is both a good and a bad witch: she is the savior of her family and its destroyer too. Utami's portrayal reflects the ambiguity of the position of witches in post-Suharto Indonesia. And Larung, haunted by ghosts and a killer of witches, is also a controversial figure. He too must be a witch, or a potential witch, but Utami chooses to portray him as a victim of trauma, perhaps reflecting what Siegel sees as the failure of sorcery in contemporary Indonesia. In his explanation of the

⁶¹ Larung's mother tells him that the grandmother was born "Before time was something linear, rather like a cycle that goes on and on." ("Ketika waktu belumlah sesuatu yang linear, melainkan sebuah siklus yang terus-menerus.") Utami, *Larung*, p. 13.

⁶² See Ayu Utami, "Writing as Negating," Paper presented at IWP Panel, "Why I Write What I Write," Iowa City Public Library, October 26, 2005, pp. 1-4, http://www.uiowa.edu/~iwp/EVEN/documents/Utami_Why_I_write.pdf, accessed on March 4, 2007.

⁶³ Siegel, *Naming the Witch*, p. 119.

killing of witches in East Java in 1998, Siegel contends that the older spirit world of Java—much commented on in scholarly literature—has fallen out of balance.

The remedy against sorcery is no longer sorcery. Gossip no longer satisfies. The power of the *dukun* will now not prevail against sorcerers. When sorcery was the answer to sorcery, the spirit world was in equilibrium. This is presently not the case. The menace is general and catastrophe threatens.⁶⁴

In Utami's novels, Larung and Saman, as potential activists or witches who commune with the Javanese spirit world, must both be destroyed as they are out of balance with the times. For Utami, neither the witches of the past nor the activists/witches of the *reformasi* period have power that is efficacious.

Utami's work is very much concerned with power: the power of women, of black magic, of ghosts, of activists, and of the state. In *Saman* and *Larung*, older women are in touch with the spirit world, whether it is Larung's grandmother and her friend, or Saman's mother with her spectral lover. These characters mediate between seen and unseen worlds. When Larung reinterprets his debt to his grandmother, he combines a modern sensibility with the debt of tradition, and he cancels the debt he incurred by choosing to determine the hour of his grandmother's death. Utami suggests that it is, in fact, the ghosts of the past that need to be banished or confronted to heal the nation and its people. Utami is not necessarily advocating a move away from older forms of religious belief or spirituality, but she wants to work towards liberating women and men from the constrictions placed upon them by tradition, religion, gender constructions, and, most of all, the violence of state power.⁶⁵

In her novels, Utami has begun the critical work of integrating Indonesia's ghosts into its national histories. She has also begun the work of reintegrating feminine voices into national narratives. Whereas the power of the old women—and Utami emphasizes this theme through her re-telling of the Old Javanese and Balinese Calonarang story—may come from their ability to learn the arts of invulnerability, the four young heroines, never much more than wives and mistresses of the male activists, are still exploring their own identities. They are not yet able to accrue power beyond the fragile power they have as elite women in twenty-first-century Indonesia. Even when the heroines are in New York City, they are there in a group, and it is as a group that they find their power. They do not make new friends, and they could as easily be in Jakarta as New York. These women's loyalties are to each other and to Saman, the wounded, martyred ex-priest who was their teacher and now is Yasmin's lover.

Characters in the novels like Saman or Leila are trapped in their own melancholic worlds because they feel a lack of self-worth. Since they are unable to mourn or identify their losses that arise from the lingering traumas of the 1960s and the failures of *reformasi*, these losses keep returning to leave them dissatisfied and full of longing. Freudian melancholia is characterized as an inability to assimilate a loss and then the constant return of the loss through haunting and repetition. But Freud also suggested a way in which the melancholic disorder and its attending loss of self-worth could

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 130-31.

⁶⁵ Utami, as a Catholic, cites the New Testament as her major inspiration (interview, Jakarta, September 2003), but she also spoke vehemently about the unfair burdens placed on women in contemporary Indonesian society by the expectation that they preserve their virginity.

isolate a part of the ego that criticizes the feelings and thoughts of the rest of the ego. This internal criticism can, in the best of cases, lead to what Freud called “critical agency” or conscience.⁶⁶ Ranjana Khanna, a recent interpreter of Freud’s work in the field of postcolonial studies, draws on Freud’s notion of critical agency to open up a space where the condition of melancholia might call for confronting the ghosts of the past. Although aware of the possibility that melancholia might commonly result in “paralysis, stasis, or ... loss,” Khanna suggests that the critical agency that can arise from melancholia might productively be used to work through trauma toward a more ethical future.⁶⁷ If Khanna’s reinterpretation of Freudian melancholia is a possibility in post-*reformasi* Indonesia, the women in Utami’s novels are the kinds of people who might be able to develop this new form of critical agency. In their fluid and overlapping subjectivity, represented in the novels by their overlapping and intertwined voices and movements, there is a promise of a future feminist agency and power that would not be activist in a masculinist sense, but would seek to find collective rather than individualistic ways to answer the problems of the postcolonial nation. Melancholia is a troubled and dangerous condition, but it may be the best one can hope for in the post-traumatic world of the twenty-first century in Indonesia and elsewhere.

Indonesian Histories and Literary Archives

This essay has explored the ways in which novels might expand and enrich the Indonesian archives of the recent past by bringing issues of trauma and memory into discourse. History writing is always a process of double inscription: what may have happened is always shadowed by the historian’s attempt to record what may have happened. This essay has suggested that, like history writing, haunting is also a process through which time is stretched, diminished, or doubled.⁶⁸ In Utami’s novels

⁶⁶ “Mourning and Melancholia,” *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay, p. 585: “We see how in him [the melancholic] one part of the ego sets itself over against the other, judges it critically, and, as it were, takes it as its object. Our suspicion that the critical agency which is here split off from the ego might also show its independence in other circumstances will be confirmed by every further observation. We shall really find grounds for distinguishing this agency from the rest of the ego. What we are here becoming acquainted with is the agency commonly called ‘conscience’ ...” Freud developed this idea of “critical agency” in 1917 in his essay “Mourning and Melancholia.” Critical agency will eventually become the “super-ego” in Freud’s later development of “ego psychology” in the 1920s. Cf. Ranjana Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 15-17, and Sarita See, “An Open Wound: Colonial Melancholia and Contemporary Filipino/American Texts,” in *Vestiges of War*, ed. Angel Velasco Shaw and Luis H. Francia (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2002), pp. 377-400. For a complete text of Freud’s classic essay “Mourning and Melancholia,” see *A General Selection from the Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. John Rickman (New York, NY: Anchor/Doubleday, 1957), pp. 124-40.

⁶⁷ Khanna, *Dark Continents*, p. 25. Khanna, pp. 23-25, combines Freudian ideas on melancholia with ideas on the incorporation of lost objects swallowed whole that cause demetaphorization in the work of the late psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. Khanna, p. 204, explains the logic of connections among haunting, melancholia, and critical agency as: “. . . an examination of the manner in which past inassimilable experiences constitute phantoms or specters, and manifest themselves as melancholic affect and a form of critical agency for the future to come.” She is concerned in her book to provide a feminist vision for a more ethical global future.

⁶⁸ For discussions of time and history, see Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); and Harry Harootunian, “Some Thoughts on Comparability and the Space-Time Problem,” *Boundary* 32 (2005): 23-52.

there are doubled heroes, doubled grandmothers, doubled lovers, and continual hauntings that work to disrupt time and challenge memory. Returning to a point made earlier in this essay, no essential narrative exists in trauma survivors that is waiting to be given voice. If the historian or listener elicits a narrative that takes shape in the act of telling, then the historian works in a similar manner to the novelist in reshaping and giving voice to memories. The historian and the novelist both become part of this process of doubled inscription.

Indonesian historical archives have many unrecognized losses, recurring returns, ruptures, and wounds that become spectral presences haunting contemporary narratives of the past. At the end of *Larung*, the sudden disappearance of the tormented and wounded heroes reinscribes the loss that was experienced by various Indonesians when children, friends, and fellow workers vanished in the struggle against the New Order state.⁶⁹ These ideas of trauma and archive serve as a starting point for understanding the Indonesian nation's ghosts, but the work of integrating them into national histories is just beginning. This essay has also begun to investigate what a reconsideration of Freudian literary critiques might have to offer the study of Indonesian history.⁷⁰ To assume that the narratives of the mid-1960s and the late 1990s are open to various interpretations is to see their truth claims as conditional or contingent. But this is not to suggest that such truth claims are unimportant. As old archives are reconfigured and new ones come into being, it is important to cultivate new interpretive methodologies along with new accumulations of data and stories. If time and memory are reconfigured by traumatic events, those who create, maintain, or even destroy the traces that historical archives collect need to learn how to read the doubled inscriptions of Indonesian pasts.

⁶⁹ Interview with Utami, Jakarta, September 2003.

⁷⁰ As Susan van Zyl has pointed out in "Psychoanalysis and the Archive: Derrida's *Archive Fever*," p. 51: "That psychoanalysis is a science of memory, of unwanted remembering and active forgetting on the individual level, is of undoubted importance to what Freud has to contribute to an understanding of the archive." See also Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 94 who points out: "In cultural theory, 'the archive' has a capital 'A,' is figurative, and leads elsewhere. It may represent neither material site nor a set of documents. Rather, it may serve as a strong *metaphor* for any corpus of selective forgettings and collections—and, as importantly, for the seductions and longings that such quests for, and accumulations of, the primary, originary, and untouched entail."