

THE "ROH" OF THE SYSTEM:  
ON THE UNIFICATION OF MEANING AND EXPRESSION  
IN A CONTEMPORARY INDONESIAN NOVEL<sup>1</sup>

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Leonel then handed the newspaper to his wife.

"The Royal Armed Forces have suffered 30 casualties. Reinforcements came too late. Zabaza gained a total victory by the most atrocious methods, far more atrocious than in their previous attacks. Every single villager, without exception, was slaughtered. The King will be inquiring why Zabaza has suddenly increased the level of its savagery."

Leonel's wife looked at the newspaper attentively. Actually, she had already read it, but now hearing her husband's "introduction," she felt she was reading something quite new. She stared at the pictures so carefully presented by the press. Something uncanny arose from the effort to show what had happened in pictures. Two things were obvious right away. First, the inability of the monarchy to protect its people. Or, a well-designed plan to lure Zabaza to its doom.<sup>2</sup>

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1. This paper is a preliminary reflection on Putu Wijaya's novel *Nyali* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1983). On Putu Wijaya and his works, see A. Teeuw, *Modern Indonesian Literature II* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1979), pp. 190-92, and Pamusuk Eneste, *Leksikon Kesusastaan Indonesia Modern* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1981), p. 75. I would like to thank B. Anderson for his encouragement, insight, and translation of the Indonesian original, and to Kamala S. for her feedback and comments.

*Roh* means "ghost" in a dual sense, i.e., it is scary/spooky and it also conveys the essence of a thing. It implies the meaning of ghost in the saying "the soul is the ghost in the machine" and the Javanese word *memedi* as described by Clifford Geertz in *Religion of Java* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press and University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 16-29.

2. "Leonel kemudian menyodorkan koran pada istrinya.

"Tigapuluh orang tentara kerajaan mati. Bantuan terlambat datang. Zabaza memperoleh kemenangan mutlak dengan cara yang kejam sekali, jauh lebih kejam dari serangan-serangan mereka sebelumnya. Seluruh penduduk desa dibunuh tanpa pandang bulu. Baginda akan menanyakan apa yang menyebabkan Zabaza tiba-tiba meningkatkan kekejamannya?"

"Istri Leonel memperhatikan koran itu. Ia sudah sempat membacanya, tapi kini dengan pengantar dari suaminya ia merasa itu berita yang baru. Diperhatikan potret-potret yang disuguhkan oleh para wartawan. Sesuatu yang aneh muncul dari usaha memamerkan peristiwa itu dalam gambar. Ada dua hal yang segera tertangkap. Ketidakebecusan tentara kerajaan dalam melindungi warganya. Atau

Those days the capital felt rather eerie. Especially to outsiders, who sensed that something was up. "I realized some unfathomable intrigue was going on. The people were being tricked. But they're also to blame since they enjoy the trick," said a tourist who happened to pass through on a visit.<sup>3</sup>

Don't wander around at dusk, little one, or Bathara Kala will eat you up!"<sup>4</sup>

If something extraordinary or at least out of the ordinary occurs continually, and is so experienced, then first it stops being extraordinary and finally becomes normal. This process may proceed so slowly and gradually that people do not realize how extraordinary their view of the extraordinary as ordinary actually is. It becomes noticeable only when an outsider appears and mixes with the members of a society/community that regards the extraordinary as something ordinary. At that point, this outsider can become the means for showing the members of that society how extraordinary the situation is.

Another means of showing this extraordinariness is a person who understands the real background of a particular extraordinary event. His knowledge enables him to understand what seems ordinary but which is in fact extraordinary (or strange), and may enable him to show this to other people. The likelihood is that such a person is someone who has the power to influence the use of language to make things seem ordinary; or he may be someone who understands the real situation, but cannot talk about it openly; thus he uses a type of language which seems ordinary but has a tone or style which is odd, strange, or "extraordinary."

For something extraordinary to be initially accepted as ordinary, and subsequently to become really and truly ordinary, its initial acceptance must be accompanied by fear. In effect, something genuinely frightening is needed to have the extraordinary accepted as ordinary. And this is why the element of fear is the crucial element for the existence of the individual in any society compelled to regard everything as ordinary. If the element of fear is missing, his very existence threatens to disappear. This is why, even when members of that society do not believe in, or only half believe in, the reality of the thing that frightens them, they act as if they did. And in

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sebuah rencana matang yang sedang menggiring Zabaza pada akhir riwayatnya.

"Istri Leonel terpukau.

"Banyak hal yang ingin aku ketahui, tetapi rasanya lebih baik aku tak tahu,' bisiknya kemudian." *Nyali*, p. 36.

3. "Hari-hari di ibukota jadi terasa agak aneh. Terutama bagi orang luar yang melihat ada sesuatu yang tidak wajar.

"Kami melihat semacam muslihat yang sulit sekali ditebak. Rakyat sedang ditipu. Tetapi mereka ikut bersalah karena suka akan tipuan itu,' kata seorang pelancong yang kebetulan sedang berkunjung." *Nyali*, p. 68.

4. "'Aja kluyuran surup-surup, lé, nèk dipangan Bathara Kala!'" This phrase is usually uttered by a Javanese mother to make her children stay inside the house at dusk. Bathara Kala is the god of destruction and evil. He is the son of Bathara Guru--the Lord Shiwa and the head of all gods and goddesses, and Bethari Durga--the goddess of violence, darkness, and death. He is given by his father the right to eat children of particular numbers or combinations of gender in a family, such as a single child, one male and one female, all five being male, etc.

conversation, consciously or unconsciously, they strengthen and consolidate this feeling of fear. They do this partly to get other people to believe in it, and partly to make it appear as if they themselves believe in it. Or, at the very least, there is a kind of tacit agreement at the level of language that everyone really and truly believes.

Once people have become used to this feeling of fear, in practice it disappears. But if someone suddenly says that there is no fear, or that what people fear does not exist, then something extraordinary will happen--so people feel. For this reason they reject such a person.

In the case of *bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian), there is a fear that someone may suddenly use the language in a different way from everyone else. This includes a fear of saying anything not said by everyone else. The result is a use of the language based on fear, which eventually creates a whole system of language-use.

In the process of any language's development, each subtype of language grows according to its own logic: one finds languages of literature, of journalism, of officialdom, of the street, and so on. In the case of *bahasa Indonesia*, the growth of these sublanguages shapes the mindset of both users and listeners, that certain things are well understood but should not be spoken of, and also that certain words have particular references. Such agreements include certain situational nuances which may influence the feelings, attitudes, and thinking of the reader/listener. Precisely because such a person is fully accustomed to the conventions of the particular sublanguage, each time he encounters something to be read or listened to, he is automatically prepared to handle it with the necessary attitudes, feelings, and thoughts. There is thus, in advance, something he expects of what he reads and hears.

It is true that, earlier on, the sense of certain things being extraordinary arose from sharp differences in cultural and literary conventions. But in recent times it has become clear that the "extraordinary" arises from political aspects of language use: i.e., from the fear of using language in ways "outside" the "ordinary" system of language use. In this system, what is important is the atmosphere of fear instead of the things that cause fear, because there is no direct relationship between the feared and the causes of fear. This happens because the locus of fear is not clear, or the feared cannot (dare not) point out the locus of fear, which means that they cannot express their genuine feeling of fear. What they can and should express is the institutionalized fear.

In my discussion of the novel *Nyali*, I would like to demonstrate how Putu Wijaya, the author, is overwhelmed by fears of using language as it is used in a system of language-use based on fear. He is terrified of joining this system. Thus, to be able to speak without being trapped by this system, he has created a protagonist, called Kropos, who has no fears.

### *Synopsis of the Plot*

Kropos is a tough, disciplined military man who is assigned by his superior, Colonel Krosy, to infiltrate the rebel band known as Zabaza. This band has a reputation for bloodthirstiness and cruelty, and is greatly feared, not only for its savagery, but also for its cohesion and operational efficiency. Over the space of five years Kropos manages to win the band's trust. To demonstrate his loyalty, he has the courage (or *nyali*) to go so far as to kill Colonel Krosy, his boss, and to carry out various horrifying missions. Each time he

commits one of these acts--murder, robbery, and so on--he always tells himself that it is for the sake of some great plan. At one point he manages to wipe out the village of Tong-tong, the strongest stronghold of the armed forces of the Kingdom. He does this purely to prove that he really has become a reliable member of Zabaza, but it turns out that his success only increases the band's suspicions of him; for they see that he is still trying to prove something; in other words, he still has a motive for what he is doing. This eventually leads to his facing a firing squad of his own men.

The destruction of Tong-tong leads the King to summon General Leonel, commander-in-chief of the royal armed forces, to his palace late at night. He wants to find out what Leonel really has in mind, for he knows that the Zabazas would never have succeeded in the operation unless Leonel permitted them to do so. At the meeting Leonel tells the King that he was the originator of Zabaza: in fact, he was Zabaza. He says he is using the rebel band to frighten the King's subjects and to unify the army. Yet at the same time he adds that he is no longer in control of Zabaza; it has become too big to be used to frighten the population. Thus he has now decided to destroy Zabaza. At this point Leonel expresses quite frankly his desire to turn the Kingdom into a Republic. The King, however, already knows this, as Leonel's wife is his spy. Leonel insists that the path of bloodshed and violence is the best: not only will it achieve the aims already mentioned, but will weed out bad elements in the population, create a certain atmosphere, and become a matter of pride, provided it is pursued with valor. The meeting ends in an embrace of mutual understanding, like a kris within its sheath. As they embrace, word comes that Leonel's children have been murdered by his wife.

It turns out that Kropos has not actually been killed: facing the firing squad was simply the final test for becoming a real member of Zabaza; he now replaces Leonel as its chief. Soon after, Leonel's wife appears, asking to join the band. She has to undergo exactly the same ordeals as Kropos and learn to eliminate all "human" traits and all "motives." The calculation is to produce a person who carries out murders, tortures, etc., without personal motives, but yet with a plan--yet to outward appearances without a plan, since the inner logic of the plan cannot be grasped by ordinary people. Such then are the conditions for becoming a member of Zabaza: in other words, one must cease being human, one must have no personal motives.

Zabaza in fact is not a rebel band intent on overthrowing the government, rather it represents an effort to establish a new morality, a kind of revolution of the personality which will make each person a good and loyal subject of the monarchy. Such a revolution is needed because everyone speaks of nothing but this and other people's interests. In Zabaza there are no personal interests. Each member feels himself to be merely an instrument. And this is what creates the band's solidarity.

One night a mass slaughter takes place. Kropos leads his men in an attack on the royal capital, meaning that he leads them to their deaths. But before this can take place, he meets the King and tells him that he has had to advance the date of the slaughter because he has discovered treachery. He does not say who is the traitor or who is the betrayed. That same night the King and his family are all slaughtered. We are not told who kills them. In the aftermath, Leonel becomes head of state and turns the monarchy into a Republic, in line with his stated aims.

After the coup, Kropos finds himself adrift. His mission has been accomplished. He feels that the time has come for him to die, and he tries to kill

himself, but without success. The era is now the era of development, but not for Kropos. He travels far away until he finds a woman in a certain place, and lives with her, in complete silence, until she is on the point of giving birth to their child. Then, one night, he wakes up and finds beside him the beheaded body of his wife, drenched in blood. When he steps out of their hut, he finds himself awaited by a group of people dressed in black. Their leader, whose voice is exactly like that of Leonel's wife, says to him: "Kropos . . . it's time again." Kropos nods.

### *General Features of Nyali*

From the very beginning of the novel the reader is served a smorgasboard of cruelties, murders, slaughters, robberies, arsons, etc., all described so graphically that the reader quickly feels nauseated. When I asked various friends of mine their reaction, they all said the same thing—that it made them feel sick. The only act of violence not committed by Zabaza is rape—something the author is very careful to avoid. Here are some examples of atrocities:

The place seemed to be where throats were usually cut. With eyes almost starting out of his head he watched ten prisoners have their throats cut. He was then handed a jack-knife to cut some more throats himself.<sup>5</sup>

Kropos waited. What he was waiting for then happened. The messenger took a knife from his waist. Then he cut his own throat in front of everyone, and everyone watched him with cold eyes. As the messenger lay slowly dying, someone else took over giving his report.<sup>6</sup>

Suddenly he awoke. It was already night. He realized his body was soaking wet. At first he thought it was his own sweat. Then he was shocked to the core. Beside him lay his wife, bathed in blood. Her head had been separated from her body, and rolled off down onto the floor. Kropos felt faint with nausea . . . he moved away from his wife's body. He turned his face away from the woman's swelling belly.<sup>7</sup>

All these atrocities are committed for the achievement of certain targets, for the implementation of a certain master plan. The atmosphere of the novel is one in which anything and everything can be done for the sake of the master

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5. "Tempat itu rupanya biasa dipakai untuk penyembelihan. Dengan mata yang membelalak ia melihat sekitar sepuluh orang tawanan disembelih. Sesudah itu diberikan golok padanya untuk menyembelih beberapa tawanan lain." *Nyali*, p. 7.

6. "Kropos menunggu. Yang ditunggu kemudian terjadi. Pelapor itu mengeluarkan pisau dari pinggangnya. Lalu ia menggorok lehernya sendiri di hadapan semua orang yang memandang dengan mata dingin." *Nyali*, p. 56.

7. "Tiba-tiba ia terbangun. Hari sudah malam. Ia merasa badannya basah. Semula ia mengira keringat. Tetapi kemudian ia terkejut sekali. Di sampingnya istrinya berbaring bersimbah darah. Kepalanya telah putus dari badannya, berguling ke lantai.

"Kropos bergidik .....

"Kropos menjauhi tubuh istrinya. Ia memalingkan mukanya dari perut wanita yang sedang melending itu." *Nyali*, p. 94.

plan. Kropos is no exception. For example:

But then he too followed suit [cut the throats of some villagers]-- not because he was in danger of being clubbed to death but because, as he saw it, he shouldn't mess up his plan.<sup>8</sup>

"Forgive me," said Kropos, pointing his pistol straight at Colonel Krosy.

"What do you mean?"

"I already told you, forgive me. Not everything we do we do willingly. This is a tactic. A master plan. And the burden of carrying out a master plan cannot be borne by the rank-and-file alone. Everyone must join in carrying out the plan for the sake of the monarchy. It is quite possible that even the King himself sometimes cannot turn it back. Sir, you yourself have taken part in planning all of this. All I now ask is for your understanding. Forgive me."<sup>9</sup>

Because the justification for every atrocity is always "the plan," and because every time anything happens, it is always said to be "part of the plan," i.e., that someone has planned it, the impression arises that everything "sudah diatur."<sup>10</sup> Incidents that are not part of the plan are still declared to be "planned."

Now every murder is part of the plan. Including unpremeditated murders, since if it were not so, everything would suddenly become futile.<sup>11</sup>

Thus all the protagonists and incidents in the novel focus on the implementation of the plan. All are influenced or obsessed by the plan, since if the plan is not carried out or falls apart, then everything will turn upside down:

The common people must be made to think continually about Zabaza. We've suffered too many casualties already; if we stop now, the whole plan will automatically become a crime. And the

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8. "Tetapi ia kemudian melakukannya juga (menyembelih orang-orang desa). Bukan karena diancam untuk dibantai tetapi ia pikir, ia tak boleh merusakkan rencananya." *Nyali*, p. 8.

9. "'Saya minta maaf,' kata Kropos selanjutnya sambil mengacungkan pistol tepat ke arah Kolonel.

"'Apa maksudmu?'

"'Sudah saya katakan, saya minta maaf. Tidak semua yang kita lakukan kita setuju. Ini adalah taktik. Sebuah rencana besar. Dan rencana besar tidak hanya harus dipikul oleh prajurit. Semua orang harus melaksanakan rencana ini untuk kepentingan kerajaan. Barangkali juga Raja kadang-kadang mungkin tak bisa menolaknya. Bapak sendiri telah ikut merencanakan ini semuanya. Sekarang saya hanya minta pengertian. Maafkan saya.'" *Nyali*, p. 26.

10. "Sudah diatur," meaning "it's all been planned, arranged, organized," implies an atmosphere of "order" and "organization" in which no further question is considered necessary or allowed. The focus should be exclusively on the implementation of what has already been "arranged."

11. "Setiap pembunuhan sekarang adalah bagian dari rencana. Termasuk setiap pembunuhan yang tidak diperhitungkan sebelumnya. Karena kalau tidak, semuanya tiba-tiba akan sia-sia." *Nyali*, p. 27.

danger of a halt can arise from quite trivial matters. I want Krosy to become a hero. This will help our operation, which is swooping down on its target very slowly.<sup>12</sup>

We are never told what the master plan is. Constant reference is made to steps taken to implement the plan, but it is never stated what the plan is for. This silence creates a constant sense of mystery about the real nature of the plan.

The results of the endless reference to the master plan and the silence as to its goals create an atmosphere: it is as if between writer and reader there is a tacit agreement and understanding about the real nature of the plan. In this way the reader is invited to feel that in reality there are two distinct groups: a tiny group which plans and "arranges" everything, and another, much larger, which is "organized" and carries out what it is supposed to carry out. No importance is attached to the content of the plan, or to having its executors understand its logic or any "lofty" objectives. The important thing is that people agree that the plan exists, so that an atmosphere of "planning" and "organization" comes into being. It is interesting that Kropos, who is fully aware, and accepts, that he is merely an agent for the fulfillment of the plan, sees that everyone, including Krosy, Leonel, and the King, are agents, no different from himself. But is it really so?

Kropos and Leonel's wife become true members of Zabaza by essentially the same process. A true Zabaza member is a human being who is no longer human. What Putu means by "no longer human" is that these people no longer have the characteristic traits of most human beings: their "logic" is hard to fathom, yet they always have goals and plans for everything they do. These goals and plans are always for the sake of the master plan, never for their own interests. Zabaza members must abandon all personal motives; they must be fully conscious and aware of the fact that they are simply agents. In addition, Zabaza members must tolerate torture, tolerate atrocities, tolerate bloodshed, and free themselves from all social bonds of whatever kind, including those of the family. They must *bernyali*<sup>13</sup>--or, to put it another way, to be able to be "tolerant" a person must *bernyali*.

The novel appears to describe the course of human life as an endless mass of small-scale cycles--birth, growth, marriage, and death; and the combination of all these minicycles into a larger cycle which is the cycle of the state. The novel's protagonist is described as developing within a cycle exactly analogous to that of the state. Now usually, stories which see life in cyclical terms end with a certain "moral." Here the striking thing is that Putu makes absolutely no mention of any "moral," or indeed of "justice." Murders and atrocities are mentioned quite simply, without any moral evaluation, and they continue incessantly from the beginning of the novel right up to its end. This means that the atrocities do not occupy a certain place within a cycle; rather, like the master plan, they are endlessly reiterated. This, in turn, means

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12. "Rakyat harus terus ikut memikirkan Zabaza. Sudah terlalu banyak korban yang kita berikan, kalau sekarang berhenti, seluruh rencana ini otomatis akan menjadi kejahatan. Dan resiko berhenti muncul dari soal-soal yang remeh. Aku ingin Krosy jadi pahlawan. Itu lebih membantu usaha kita yang sedang menukik mencapai tujuannya dengan lambat sekali." *Nyali*, p. 30.

13. *Bernyali* can be roughly translated as "to have the courage in spite of everything."

that Putu does not think of these atrocities in cyclical terms, but simply in terms of *repetition*. In fact, he is afraid of being trapped by the cyclical idea, which would inevitably force him to talk about justice and morality, as typically happens in so many other Indonesian novels. He opposes the "system" and rejects stereotypes.<sup>14</sup> He fears becoming their victim. For example, he quotes a stereotypical speech of Leonel, but breaks off mid-sentence:

I, General Leonel, hereby request that all the citizens of the capital and all my fellow countrymen, wherever they may happen to be, remain calm. . . . Believe me, I will do everything in my power, with the support of the entire armed forces of the realm to return to normalcy a situation which . . .<sup>15</sup>

"My friends, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks that . . ." No one dared criticize these formalities. People listened, accepted, and felt that things were just as they should be.<sup>16</sup>

The entire Royal family, together with the King and the Queen, have fallen bravely, defending our motherland against the attacks of Zabaza. But I have succeeded in smashing . . .<sup>17</sup>

The breaking off of these sentences means that there is no need to continue, since the listener knows exactly what is coming next. There's a sort of tacit agreement about the words, the expressions, even though they may have no content. This parallels exactly the atmosphere that everything is "organized" and "planned" without any need to know the content of the "plan" or of what is being "organized." The important thing, clearly, is the atmosphere. Putu is "afraid" of being trapped within a system of language use of this kind in which an atmosphere is generated in which words lose their meaning because they are "taken in" by readers and listeners via a particular mindset. Thus language loses its communicative function. To be able to use language communicatively, one has to create a different atmosphere, one which will make readers/listeners have a different mindset.

Putu says: a human being capable of being human is one who at all times and on every occasion is calculable or accounted<sup>18</sup> for, since this also means

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14. By avoiding talk about morality and justice, Putu Wijaya shows his responsibility and concern about these two major issues in Indonesia. He employs the repetition technique in his writing in order to challenge the common mindset of looking at things always in cyclical perspective.

15. "Saya Jendral Leonel, dengan ini meminta seluruh warga kota dan rakyat di negeri ini, dimana saja saudara berada, supaya tenang. .... Percayalah, saya akan berusaha sekuat-kuatnya, dengan seluruh dukungan tentara kerajaan akan mengamankan kembali keadaan yang sedang terjadi ....." *Nyali*, p. 76.

16. "'Saudara-saudara sekalian, kami mengucapkan terimakasih sebesar-besarnya ....."

"Tak ada yang berani mencela ucapan basa-basi itu. Semua didengarkan, diterima dan terasa amat wajar." *Nyali*, p. 77.

17. "Seluruh keluarga istana, beserta Permaisuri dan Baginda Raja telah wafat dengan gagah perkasa, membela Tanah Air dalam serangan Zabaza. Tapi kami berhasil menumpas ....." *Nyali*, pp. 77-78.

18. Translation of the word "diperhitungkan." *Nyali*, p. 43.

a human being who constantly calculates everything; i.e., is not swept away by the atmosphere.

No matter how many thousands of people you kill, if you still feel yourself to be a human being, you are still no member of Zabaza. Here, there are no feelings of love, hate, etc. . . . We don't differentiate between deaths. They all mean: someone is now absent and is out of the calculation. And anything outside the calculation is useless to Zabaza.<sup>19</sup>

The description of Kropos's life after he loses his function (i.e., the end of the monarch) as though it meant his death, and of his only beginning to function again when a new rebel band is born, is not a cycle, but a repetition. Putu is opposed to the habit of interpreting experiences which are repeated from individual to individual as "cycles." He sees that such "cycles" always end up with a sort of "wisdom," which serves to "settle" a problem, or have a problem regarded as "settled." On the other hand repetitions create the fear that one will no longer have a function. It is a good bet that this fear on Putu's part comes from his view of the various "rebel bands" of the present Development Era: groups of students, artists, reporters, young activists, etc. For him the problem then is how to express this anxiety of fear in an unstereotyped, unsloganistic, exact, and effective language.

A final characteristic of the novel is that Putu completely avoids a satirical tone which would invite the reader to laugh along with the author. The novel is not a caricature of the present situation in Indonesia, for such caricatures have already become part of the ongoing language-system: rather, it is an imaginative figure or fiction. Caricature and stereotype are used in the novel, but only to make more visible its central imagining, not as the central imagining itself. That is why the novel's real protagonist is not the coupmaker Leonel, but Kropos.

### *The Setting*

The tale of Kropos has its setting in a state which is originally a Kingdom but becomes a Republic. In contrast with the atmosphere of "master planning" carefully built up by the author, this state has no clear, hierarchical governmental structure. Instead, one finds merely offices and ranks which do not at all imply the existence of a structure that limits and defines the activities and powers of people within it. Higher ranks simply indicate that some people have higher positions than others; they say nothing about their real importance or the authority they are seen to exercise. Thus, the existing system of government is in no way the reason why things happen the way they do. Each person can move around and have contact with every other person, without the restrictions that a structure would impose. Thus, Kropos has no trouble seeing the King late at night; he also has no trouble killing his boss, Colonel Krosy.

Relations between commanders and subordinates (*bapak* and *anak buah*) are not based on personal loyalty but on ideology and plan. Under such conditions rapid changes in these relations become quite understandable. For example, when Kropos returns from his successful destruction of Tong-tong, his *anak buah*

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19. "Biar ribuan orang kamu bunuh, kalau kamu masih tetap merasa diri kamu manusia, kamu tetap bukan seorang Zabaza. Di sini tidak ada rasa cinta, benci dan sebagainya. .... Kami tidak membedakan kematian. Semuanya berarti tidak hadir lagi dan tidak diperhitungkan. Dan segala sesuatu yang tidak bisa diperhitungkan tidak membantu Zabaza." *Nyali*, pp. 43-44.

kiss his feet in token of complete obedience; but when he is then immediately interrogated by Zabaza, they suddenly become the icy creatures preparing to shoot him. Rank and office have no influence on the relationships between parts or between individuals. On the other hand, personal connections have no influence on rank and office. Rank and office do not denote function or position in what appears to be a giant machine for the achievement of the master plan. In fact, no such machine exists; all there is is a cluster of people with titles bearing no functional relationship to one another. Thus anyone can do anything, without being restricted by function or relationship. All this indicates a set of relationships which are truly "just," in that no one depends on anyone else, and everyone is "complementary" to everyone else. *Gusti* and *kawula*<sup>20</sup> are simply labels, implying neither special privilege nor special obligation.

Since Zabaza is a band created by the state in the person of General Leonel, there is no clearcut dividing line between the state and Zabaza. Kropos, too, belongs to both. Each "side" continually infiltrates its spies into the other in order to ferret out its secrets; often it is unclear who is spying for whom. Everything is confused and confusing, a person may be on one side or the other, or both, and known to be such. For example: the wife of General Leonel is a spy for the King while Leonel is still running Zabaza, but then becomes a Zabaza even as she helps Leonel once he becomes head of state.

The "obscurity" of the social structure and political structure of this country, compounded by the obscurity of the dividing line between opposing sides, and the general atmosphere of chaos and brutality, enables the author to highlight protagonists, plans, achievement of targets, or anything else, at any time, just as pleases. He thus can create a feeling of suspense, mystery, perplexity, and sometimes of deception. But if the narrative and plot are so confusing, how does he manage at the same time to give an impression that "everything is organized"? The answer, I think, is by the endless repetition of atrocities. This gives the impression that someone or something is "arranging things," though it is never clear who; even the conversations between the King and Leonel do not indicate that they are the ultimate "managers" behind the scenes. The opposite, however, is the case with the atmosphere of general fear: it is clearly stated that Leonel arranges it, in that he has created Zabaza for the purpose of terrifying the population and unifying the armed forces of the Kingdom.

We are thus given a picture of a state in which the population experiences an atmosphere of control and terror, while the rulers feel the need for something to terrorize the populations, but no need actually to control it, since terror by itself will do the job. In fact, it is precisely the terror that creates the atmosphere of "order" and "organization." Thus the population becomes accustomed to the terror, which in time no longer terrifies, yet at the same time both ruler and ruled feel the need to maintain the atmosphere of terror. Why so? The reason is that all concerned interpret repetition as cycle. Repetitions in the history of the state are understood cyclically, not iteratively. Thus things begin with a monarchy in which a small band called Zabaza

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20. The *kawula* (servant)-*gusti* (lord, master) ideology conceives society in terms of harmonious inequality: in return for unquestioning loyalty, the servant gains the benevolent protection of his lord. For full explication of this conception, see Soemarsaid Moertono, *State and Statecraft in Old Java* (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, Monograph Series, 1968), pp. 14-26.

forms; it gets bigger and bigger; when it gets too big it is destroyed by the monarchy's armed forces; the monarchy is overthrown and a Republic is established, which however does not differ in any essential way from the monarchy; a new era of Development opens; critical groups of intellectuals appear; then come demonstrations and riots; and finally once again a new band/gang appears to haunt the population. The gang's appearance signals the beginning of a historical repetition, not a cycle. As the new head of Zabaza, the wife of Leonel, says to Kropos: "Kropos, it's time again."<sup>21</sup> It is to repeat history once more.

### *The Figure of Kropos*

In terms of conventional analysis, it's impossible to call Kropos the protagonist of *Nyali*. In no way is his "character" developed until he serves as a magnetic figure. The author describes Kropos simply as a figure who is "pure Zabaza," with all the necessary attributes thereby implied. Kropos consciously accepts himself as an "agent," and in fact he feels at peace because he is not a hero.

This thought made him feel at peace once again. For he felt that he had not the slightest significance. He was not a hero, merely an expendable element in the achievement of the target.<sup>22</sup>

This peace of mind arises because Kropos thinks that heroes always have personal motives; that they always regard themselves as crucial to a struggle or an activity, or feel that their roles are more important than others. Logically, therefore, they feel entitled to more than those who are not heroes. Kropos thinks that "being a hero" is simply a justification or legitimization for control of positions or power or for the undertaking of particular operations. For example, when the coup takes place, General Leonel shoots himself in the hand because he is aware that he has come through the bloodshed unscathed; to become a real hero of that bloodshed, his blood must also be shed.

Kropos has become a human being without personal motives or feelings. The one thing that makes him really angry is when one of his men reports a set of murders that involves him personally--i.e., the murders of his wife and children. Why is he angry? Because the murders involve what is most dangerous for a true member of Zabaza. It is noticeable that among all the various murders in *Nyali*, the ones that are described as "mattering" are those where the victims are related to the killers, or where relations of personal interest exist between them.

These murders all have the implication of "repression." What is repressed is personal interest, or pleasure, or family ties. (There are no rapes among the murders.) The murders run parallel to the mission of the ascetic, who is required to "kill" all his passions, and close all nine orifices of his body

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21. "Kropos, sudah waktunya lagi sekarang." *Nyali*, p. 94. The word *lagi* (underlined by author) is essential in showing that what follows is not the continuation of history but it is its repetition. This also implies that what Putu Wijaya describes in this novel is not a beginning, instead, it is a repetition of the same history preceding it.

22. "Pikiran itu membuat hatinya kembali tenteram. Karena dia merasa ia sama sekali tidak berarti. Ia bukan seorang pahlawan, tetapi korban target saja." *Nyali*, p. 10.

to the outside world, while the greatest temptation comes from the ascetic's most immediate family. The greatest temptation for Begawan Ciptoning is when Dewi Supraba manifests herself before him in the shape of his wife Sumbadra carrying his son Abimanyu in her arms.<sup>23</sup> This is what enrages Kropos! This is what Kropos rejects!

What makes this "asceticism" (*tapabrata*)<sup>24</sup> different, however, is that it is performed without personal motive. In wayang and in everyday Javanese ascetic practice, there is always a personal goal or motive. The result is that once the goal is attained or the request (e.g., for the *wahyu*)<sup>25</sup> is granted, the person ceases his asceticism. But Kropos's *tapabrata* never ends, because it has no personal goal. Furthermore, this *tapabrata* does not involve any *gusti* or *kawula*, and thus no giving or receiving of the *wahyu*. (This ascetic does not depend on *wahyu*-granting gods.)

What makes Kropos's *tapabrata* so strange is that it is lifelong, and becomes his very mode of existence. It never ends and is never repeated. That he appears to "follow" the ups and downs of his country's history is simply a matter of his function; but his inner stance never changes. From the very start of his mission Kropos refuses the personal intent (*pamrih*)<sup>26</sup> that always motivates the ascetic. And because he is in a permanent state of *tapabrata*, it is impossible for him to accept or receive the "results" or "reward" of his asceticism (a *wahyu*, etc.). It is true that the novel describes Kropos as feeling pity or nausea. But although these feelings exist, they are not "felt," which shows that his essential *tapabrata* continues undisturbed. It is the same when he goes to live with the woman. Not a word is exchanged, each is indifferent to the other, there is no pleasure, sexual or otherwise. All Putu says is: "Her massage made him drowsy." We are not told how he *feels*. The fetus in the woman's womb appears simply as an outcome of her contact with Kropos.

The absence of personal motive--the logical consequence of Kropos's lifelong asceticism--his dedication of himself as agent, his complete independence of everyone and everything: all make him a figure who "knows no fear," a *tokoh berryali*. The degree to which this figure is deliberately deprived of significance and is indifferent to labels, is symbolized by his name: Kropos, which means:

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23. This scene is taken from the wayang story "Arjuna Wiwaha" in which the meditating Arjuna (Begawan Ciptoning) is tempted by celestial nymphs, some of whom even assume the appearance of his wives, such as one who impersonates his head-wife, Sumbadra, with their little son, Abimanyu. See K. G. P. A. A. Mangkunegara VII, *On the Wayang Kulit (Purwa) and Its Symbolic and Mystical Elements*, trans. Claire Holt, Southeast Asia Program Data Paper No. 27 (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1957), pp. 23-24.

24. *Tapabrata* is a deep variety of meditation in which bodily functions are suspended. For further explication of this conception, see K. G. P. A. A. Mangkunegara VII, *On the Wayang Kulit*, pp. 13-24; Geertz, *Religion of Java*, pp. 325-26; and David Bouchier, *Dynamics of Dissent in Indonesia: Sawito and the Phantom Coup* (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, Interim Reports Series, 1984), p. 41.

25. *Wahyu* is a divine token of greatness and honor. See Moerton, *State and Statecraft*, pp. 56-58.

26. For a full explication of *pamrih*, see Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture," in *Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, ed. Claire Holt et al. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), pp. 38-41.

"without content," "easily destroyed," "weak," "decayed," "useless." He has no need of all of this, no need of all these meanings. He is what he is: *Nyali*.

### *Nyali*

Although the novel is entitled *Nyali*, the word itself occurs nowhere in the actual text. From the very beginning, the reader starts to search for the locus of this "Nyali," but when the last letter on the last page has been read, it still remains hidden. On the other hand the text is littered with quasi-synonyms: *tekad/determination*, *keberanian/courage*, *keteguhan/fortitude*, *kegagahan/valor*, etc. Nonetheless, they are not *nyali*. *Nyali* is thus like a ghost that appears only when not expected, and even then only in dim silhouette, but still haunts the reader as he winds his way through the narrative. Why does Putu so resolutely refuse to speak this word?

To suggest the meaning of *Nyali*, Putu incarnates it in the person of Kropos. He is so aware of the importance of the essence of words and that the revelation of that essence cannot be separated from its context; he is so aware that the essence of the word must be understood in a new and specific context (in other words that its meaning cannot be a priori assumed by his readers/listeners before being fully spoken), that he draws a sharp line between the word "nyali" as a verbal expression and the content of his novel as that expression's meaning. The entire content of the novel functions as its meaning, a meaning that includes its context; thus if the expression is inserted into, or mixed with, the meaning, it will not only obscure the meaning, but it will lose its own integrity as . . . an expression.

In this way it is rather like the telling of ghost stories or terrible tragedies. If the story is simply laid out as it is, without comment by the storyteller, the listener is free to enjoy it or experience it on his own. But the minute the storyteller tells him that the story is "tragic" or "terrifying," the impression of that experience vanishes: he has been forewarned. He is being told in what light or category he is supposed to regard the story. This is why Putu refuses to say what or who *Nyali* is. He gives his readers the freedom to puzzle for themselves and seek the answer for themselves, as well as to enjoy the graphically described atrocities and sadisms, the bewilderment and the terror, without any closing word from the author to bring the tale to an end. How different it would be, for example, if the novel ended like this: From then on, Kropos, with his great *nyali*, began to commit atrocities once again.

My sense is that Putu avoids, indeed criticizes, the standard format of Indonesian popular novels. This format requires that the descriptions and narrative be spiced with the author's own judgments, moralizings, or conclusions, so that everything becomes clear. Thus when the reader has finished reading, he feels relieved, knowing that in the end everything is *beres*, in order. This novel does not make the reader feel pleased and satisfied--just the reverse! The reader feels disgusted, nauseated, puzzled, and annoyed. This is also why Putu avoids giving the novel a title that will let the reader feel he knows what it is about before he reads it. Almost all Putu's novels have one-word titles: *Pabrik*, *Keok*, *Stasiun*, *Lho*, *Telegram*, and *Nyali*. The aim is to get rid of references, allusions, nuances, and connotations--all of which can shape the reader's mindset in "reading" words. But why does he want to do this?

I think the reason is that he does not want his listener to be a passive listener, the kind that quickly assumes that what he is hearing is just what

he has always been accustomed to hear. It is like the episode in *Nyali* where Leonel's wife reads a newspaper and then feels, when she gets an explanation of the news in it from Leonel, that she has heard something completely new. The converse is that the writer or speaker should always avoid being entrapped within the ongoing language-use system.

In the figure of Kropos, Putu describes what it is to be someone with a big *nyali*, *yang bernyali besar*. At the start he shows that the person with a big *nyali* is always positioned in the midst of fighting, resistance, competition--i.e., in a situation where two or more parties are at odds with one another. "Nyali" is always found on the weaker side, and thus in a defensive position. Not only is the man with a big *nyali* physically weaker than his adversaries, but he also has no "power," or at least his "power" is much smaller than theirs. His *nyali* only manifests itself when he is in a corner. For example, when Kropos is about to be shot by the Zabaza firing squad, he shouts: "Long live Zabaza! Death to Leonel!" These are not shouts of despair, or rage, or pleas for mercy. They are the shouts of a man with *nyali*, who even in the face of his own death continues calmly with his resistance.

The man with *nyali* has no need to display his heroic qualities, let alone make use of these qualities to save himself when in trouble--which is what Leonel does when he has his audience with the King. Leonel tells his master that he (Leonel) is so important at this juncture that if he is killed or forced to kill himself, the people will rise. He is thus not a man with *nyali*, and just the opposite of Kropos.

*Nyali* is a label for the second and third person (i.e., other people), not for oneself. One can say: "I dare to fight ghosts," but anyone who would say: "I've got a big *nyali*, you know!" would be ridiculous. And because "nyali" thus comes from the outside, it is connected to fear along a different axis than "courage" or "daring." *Nyali* is not a polar opposite to fear--it is directly proportional but does not depend (for its meaning) on fear. The more a man is regarded as having a big *nyali*, the greater the fear that he can overcome. But this does not mean that *nyali* "suppresses" fear; *nyali* exists in the context of fear, but does not arise because of fear.

#### *A Last Word*

"It's a weird story, hard to understand. But I'm positive the writer had something in mind!"

(Comment of a reader of *Nyali*)

If something which is ordinarily regarded as terrifying, but which actually makes no one afraid, should suddenly make people afraid because the way it is conveyed is not via a system of language-use formed on the base of fear--i.e., the horrifying thing is not advertised, stated to be horrifying, but simply described, without comment or label--then the fear will really be felt. For someone who really feels afraid must himself express the fear that he really feels. And this means that meaning is offered for the reader to provide the expression, in a process of unifying meaning and expression.

This then is the enterprise that Putu undertakes in his novel *Nyali*. This undertaking naturally requires its own *nyali*.