Cover Page



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Chapter Four

Representation of (Racialised)[1] Rapes: Fantasising the Female Victims of May 1998 Rapes

> In most cases of rape we are left with a huge silence and absence at the centre of the issue. Rapists and raped, being equally legitimate sources of knowledge about what actually happened, do not usually give us their accounts, for obvious though opposite reasons. Paradoxically, in the face of such silence/absence, there is a prolific production of competing narratives concerning what might have happened and what such events might mean. This is especially true in political rapes, which are by definition a public event (Heryanto 1999: 304).

It has been argued that the rapes that occurred during the riots in Jakarta in May 1998 have had significant resonance on the way rapes have been subsequently perceived, interpreted and reported. While rape had previously been ascribed mainly to sex, after the May 1998 mass rapes, it was no longer perceived as distant from politics and contests of power. The riots in Jakarta on 13-15 May 1998 erupted in the aftermath of the deaths of six students during demonstrations in several cities in Indonesia, which precipitated the resignation of President Suharto. The issue of the rapes that occurred during the riots was initially exposed by the Voluntary Team for Humanitarianism (*Tim Relawan untuk Kemanusiaan,* hence *Tim Relawan*) in June 1998. Tim Relawan reported finding that many Chinese women were raped and tortured,

[1] There has been a movement to shift away from the use of the word 'race' as it connotes only biological traits and has a potential for more essentialisation of the people who are grouped into a particular category. The word 'ethnicity' has been considered to be less risky in explaining this type of categorisation. In this chapter, I use of the word 'race' when referring to the representations of the May rapes discussed here to underline how people, in this case media producers, often still emphasise racial traits of Chinese. However, I will use 'ethnicity' when referring to a more general discussion about this categorisation. As such, 'race' and 'ethnicity' are *not* used interchangeably here.

and some were killed during the riots.[2] It was also found that gang rape was systematically instigated by a group of trained individuals. A link between the army and the gang rapes was one possible explanation. It was believed that a certain army commando instigated the rapes.[3] During the investigation, the families of the victims and the members of Tim Relawan were threatened and terrorised through telephone calls and anonymous letters demanding that they discontinue the investigations (*Tempo* 1998(a)). Meanwhile, the scenario of the military involvement in the riots and rapes was barely noticeable in the media reports. Instead, media presentations were dominated with suppositions that economic jealousy, and to some extent religious dispute, were the triggers of the outburst. Economic jealousy, for the most part, positioned the Chinese communities, the so-called *non-pribumi* (non-indigenous), in opposition to the rest of the Indonesian population, called *pribumi* (indigenous). The infamous, yet misleading, statement that the Chinese, who comprise only 3.5% of the population, dominate 70% of the national economy supposedly served as a justification for the lootings and rapes against those of Chinese descent (Aditjondro 1998). This popular assumption rationalised the violence directed against the ethnic Chinese.

While the May 1998 riots included looting and destruction of property, the rapes have attracted most of the public's attention. The rapes have become a "public event" (Heryanto 1999: 304) for both national and international communities. In addition to this, the explanation about why the riots broke out and the rapes occurred, which was narrowed down primarily to the issue of ethnic conflict, colours the way the rapes have been represented in the media (Heryanto 1999). In turn, the racialisation of the May rapes has, as a consequence, overshadowed its gender aspect (ibid.). Racialisation of the May 1998 events results in, among other things, the media's prevailing use of symbols, images and expressions related mainly to ethnic Chinese physical traits to signify the victims and make meaning of the events. Further signification may show that the racially fetishised symbols and images, such as the slanted eye(s), become more noticeable currencies in visualising rape victims and providing a possible meaning of the rape acts as racial, rather than other explanations regarding gender or political aspects.

In this chapter, I will discuss how the media has presented the story of the May 1998 rapes, even though both the raped and the rapists remain absent from the public eye. While the particular media in focus in this chapter is an

[2] Data and analysis about the May 1998 rapes are available in a number of publications by Komnas Perempuan. See Komnas Perempuan 1999.
[3] As strongly asserted by Sandyawan Sumardi, a Roman Catholic priest who was a volunteer with Tim Relawan. See *Tempo* 1998(b).

illustrated story, *Jakarta 2039: 40 Tahun 9 Bulan Setelah 13-14 Mei 1998* (Ajidarma 2001), a broader genre of media presentations is also discussed to provide a foundation for the significance of the discussion. It is noted that, as 'political rapes' (Heryanto 1999), the May 1998 rapes do indeed bear importance in the trajectory of contemporary Indonesian history. As the identities of who actually raped and were raped are still not available, mediatisation of the rapes is considered imperative to prevent the events from being forgotten. For some, the most significant point of the representations of the May rapes in various media presentations is its meaning in the struggle to fight against 'forgetting' (see Kusno 2003). It is claimed that by ceaselessly publicising the May rapes through media presentations they will not be forgotten.[4] For feminist activists, much remains to be done to fight against the 'culture of denial' that the state and the public have thus far clung to, because without any acknowledgement that these horrific events occurred, the rapes and the victims will barely be remembered (Komnas Perempuan 2003).

The (Racialised) Rapes

Unlike the 'ethnic war' that occurred during the disintegration of Yugoslavia, in which the borders between the ethnic groups were drawn in parallel with the marking of "*ethnically defined territories*" (Zarkov 1999: 30),[5] the delineation of ethnicity in Indonesia, in this case between pribumi and ethnic Chinese, cannot be approached in the same manner. The 'Othering' of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia is not comparable to the 'Othering' that occurred in the former Yugoslavia, which represented "*ethnic groups* fighting for *ethnic territories*" (Zarkov 1999: 30, italics in the original), but was more a form of the New Order state's attempt to define its Self (Heryanto 1998).[6] The Othering of ethnic Chinese under the New Order state took shape in many forms, which were manifested in the arguments that the Chinese in Indonesia had geographically and culturally distinct origins from all other Indonesians; were economically dominant although ethnically a minority; and were "deeply attached or essentially susceptible to communism" (Heryanto 1998: 97-98). However, the

[4] The term *amnesia sejarah* (historical amnesia), for example, was used by Sandyawan Sumardi to criticise the sixth year commemoration of the May 1998 tragedy in May 2004 held by the *Pergerakan Reformasi Tionghoa Indonesia* (Reformasi Movement of Chinese Indonesians) because it over-emphasised the racial aspect of the events (*Kompas* 2004(c)).

[5] Zarkov argues that ethnic war during the conflict in the former Yugoslavia cannot be defined "*as a war between ethnic groups, but rather as a war which produced ethnic groups through violence*" (italics in the original) (Zarkov 1999: 31).

[6] According to Ariel Heryanto, there are four major "Others" for the New Order Self, i.e., ethnic Chinese, the "West", "Communism" and "Fundamentalist Islam". See Heryanto 1998.

parallel between both cases of ethnic demarcation in the former Yugoslavia and the New Order Indonesia can be seen in the use of violent techniques to draw the boundaries between ethnicities and in which women became the target upon which these borders were inscribed.[7]

In war or conflict situations, sexual violence against women of the opposing side is used "to communicate with the other men that they are not masculine and competent enough to 'protect "their" women'" (Tay 1998). Coupled with the intention to delineate the "ethnically defined territories" (Zarkov 1999: 30), violence is often used against women's bodies in conflict areas because there are "goals to be achieved, or rewards to be gained", such as "territorial occupation, peace and stability, and suppression of dissent" (Heryanto 1999: 309). These defined goals and rewards are absent in the case of the May 1998 riots and rapes (ibid.). Thus, Heryanto finds that the term 'war rapes' is not relevant, and instead, the term 'political rapes' may represent an alternative for an analysis of the May 1998 rapes in Indonesia (1999: 310).

The history of discrimination against ethnic Chinese in Indonesia has its roots in the Dutch colonial period. The Dutch colonial government attempted to differentiate the Dutch East Indies population by ethnicity for the purposes of, amongst other things, repression of potential ethnic Chinese influence on the sense of nationalism among the indigenous people.[8] Under the Old Order Indonesia, the first Indonesian president Sukarno implemented Act No. 10/1959, which stated that by 31 December 1959 all business permits for small Chinese-owned enterprises at the village level were revoked. As a result, it was reported that there were hundreds of thousands of ethnic Chinese who left the country for China (Lopulalan and Tukan 2000: 61-62).

As discussed in Chapter Two, the New Order regime began after the abortive coup allegedly masterminded by the Communist party in September 1965. There were fewer ethnic Chinese casualties killed in comparison to other ethnic groups during the communism-cleansing programme following the alleged coup, which was led by General Suharto. However, the attack against those assumed to be involved in the so-called 'abortive-coup', regardless of their ethnicity, has caused as great an affliction amongst the ethnic Chinese, who the newly formed regime overtly associated with communism. As such,

[7] Debate over numbers in the cases of mass rapes, such as those in Bosnia or in the Indonesian contexts during the implementation of military zones in East Timor, Aceh, and Papua, and also during the May 1998 riots, have always been political in the sense that the issue of rapes have often been used as political weapons to attack those in power.

[8] The Dutch colonial government for example implemented different regulations (*staatsblad*) for the ethnic Chinese (No. 130/1917), indigenous Muslims (No. 75/1920), indigenous Christians (No. 75/1926) and Europeans (No. 75/1933). The civil registration implemented among the Europeans was, respectably, to minimalise possible anti-colonialism brought forward by European migrants, such as Multatuli. See Prasetyo 2002.

the stamping of ET (*Eks Tapol,* or ex-political prisoner) on the identity cards of former members of the Indonesian Communist party or those suspected of being involved in the 1965 coup, and the prevailing stigmatisation against the members of their families is to some degree as equally brutal as the oppression against the ethnic Chinese during the course of the New Order power (Heryanto 1998). The ethnic Chinese were recognised as Indonesian nationals only after the issuance of a *Surat Bukti Kewarganegaraan Republik Indonesia* (Letter of Verification of Indonesian Citizenship, hence SBKRI), which was not required of members of other ethnic groups.[9] At this point, "the stigma of being Chinese and hence ideologically 'unclean', or that of being Chinese and hence having been 'involved in the 1965 communist coup' were declared contagious and hereditary" (Heryanto 1998: 99).

During the New Order, almost all things related to Chinese culture were banned. This included written Chinese characters and language, the lion dance and Lunar New Year celebrations, and even mooncakes. Access to public services by Indonesians of Chinese descent was also restricted. For example, they were not allowed to become civil servants or enlist in the military. They were also required to give up their Chinese names and adopt up "Non-Chinese-sounding names" (Heryanto 1998: 104). These conditions were upheld for over three decades until the end of the 1990s when Suharto was forced to resign after prolonged student demonstrations and wide-scale riots in Jakarta and other major cities in Indonesia.

As mentioned earlier, one of the widely mentioned, yet uncritically examined, scenarios of the May 1998 riots was that they were instigated by a basic economic jealousy of the ethnic Chinese held by the pribumi. It is, however, highly improbable that such jealousy could spontaneously direct angry masses to rape Chinese women throughout the city. Concerning this, Heryanto argues, "rather than causing the rapes and riots, racism appeared to have escalated as the consequence of the rapes, riots, and the racialising media coverage that propagated the economic gap theory" (1999: 315). In other words, racial tension was the outcome and product of the violence, not the trigger. The scenario of military involvement in the riots and rapes remains repressed below the current of mainstream media presentations, while the issues of economic jealousy and ethnic discrimination dominate the frames of

[9] The identity cards for ethnic Chinese were also clearly distinguished by the use of a specific numbering system. In 1997, when the government announced the introduction of "a new computerised system of identification cards", they were also preparing to register ethnic Chinese in a separate database (Heryanto 1998: 112).

media reporting.[10] The question remains why the previous pogrom against the Chinese (see Sidel 2006), which was allegedly based on economic jealousy and primarily indicated and premeditated by destruction of property, was later directed toward attacks on people, especially women.

On the Subject of Eyes

The May rapes have thus far been highlighted, contextualised and made available for public consumption by singling out the victimisation of Chinese women. As such, the rapes and the media presentations about the rapes have been naturalised by visualising the identities of Chinese women. Since no 'real' victims have come forth, the fantasy about the victims has often been based on stereotyped physical characteristics, such as the shape of the eyes.

The Politics of the (Slanted) Eye

It was common knowledge that the New Order controlled the media and repressed those who were politically critical of the state, including *Tempo* news magazine. After being banned in 1994, *Tempo* news magazine reappeared in 1998. On the cover of the first issue after the ban, 6-12 October 1998, is a full-page drawing of a slanted left eye with a tear just about to drop. The issue headline, "*Pemerkosaan: Cerita dan Fakta*" (Rape: Fiction and Fact) is embossed above the drawing (Figure 4.1). Of course, this drawing is open to various interpretations of whose eye it represents. One possible interpretation is suggested by the headline that indicates that this eye has something to do with the May 1998 rapes. Since the rape victims were said to be primarily of Chinese descent, this eye is presumably an eye of a Chinese woman.[11] As it is the left eye, of possibly a Chinese-Indonesian, one might even wonder about its symbolic significance with the stigmatisation of the political left and an association with communism.

[10] The suggestion that the military was involved in the riots and rapes was promoted primarily by activists and was presented in formal reports, such as the one provided by the TGPF (see Komnas Perempuan 1999).

[11] Circulated testimonies report that some Chinese women were safe from the rapes or sexual assaults during the May 1998 rapes because they did not look Chinese, that is, their eyes were not obviously slanted (Komnas Perempuan). Meanwhile, Heryanto notes circulating stories of "the normalisation of raping Chinese" in which "sinic looking females passing by public places were interpolated by shouts of 'Rape, rape, rape!'" (1999: 317).



Figure 4.1: Cover *Tempo*, 6-12 October 1998

Another possible interpretation is provided by one of the magazine's readers that appeared two weeks later. At the end of October 1998, *Tempo* published a reader's letter that revealed a personal reflection about the eye. The reader's letter reads as follows:

> [....] I guess the picture of the eye on the cover of the first edition of *Tempo* is *mbak* (sister, Mrs.) Megawati's eye. And the tears are of the victims of rapes, repression, and the families of the victims of kidnappings who long for just and humane treatment (*Tempo* 1998(c)).[12]

The reader introduced himself as a retired *lurah* (village head) who is also a "painting and caricature lover", as if to justify his aesthetic appreciation of the picture. Driven by the overarching political situation at the time, the semiotic reading of the eyes is, for this reader, seemingly inseparable from the image of Megawati Sukarnoputri. Ironically, if in this reading Megawati was positioned as the holder of the nation's tears for the victims of the rapes, repression, and student kidnappings, in the subsequent development of her political career

[12] The translation of the direct citation is mine.

leading to the presidency, she was criticised for her ignorance about the violence during the May 1998 riots.[13]

Made-up Race

Regarding another visualisation of slanted eyes in the imaging of the May 1998 rapes, there is a rather perplexing image on the cover of a book entitled, *Puncak Kebiadaban Bangsa: Pemerkosaan Etnik Tionghoa 13-14 Mei '98* (The Pinnacle of a Nation's Cruelty: Rapes of Ethnic Chinese, 13-14 May 1998).[14] What is astonishing about this book cover (Figure 4.2) is the use of a fashion model presenting a stark contrast with the book's contents, which are journalistic and analytical accounts of the May 1998 rapes with clear sources of information.[15]



Figure 4.2: Front Cover of *Puncak Kebiadaban Bangsa*

[13] See *Kompas* 2004(b).

[14] Published by Yayasan Karyawan Matra (I presume that it is part of the *Matra* Magazine Group). The book was compiled by *Tim Pemburu Fakta* (Fact Hunting Team), but there is no further mention of names, place and time of production.

[15] List of sources include Tim Relawan; Badan Komunikasi untuk Kemanusiaan; Divisi Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan; *Tempo* Interaktif; *Matra*; *D&R*; *Harian Suara Pembaharuan*; Radio Netherland; Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa (an ethnic Chinese NGO); and *Huaren*.

In contrast with the serious nature of the book's contents, the cover of the book portrays a female Chinese model, which presents an image not far removed from a much more popular, racialised account of the rapes. She is bare-shouldered, her lips are heavily coloured red and slightly parted. While her hair covers her left eye, her right eye is lined in black mascara and she is wearing false eyelashes. The eye make-up seems to emphasise her Chinese appearance. There are (fake) tears to reconstruct the image of a Chinese woman, supposedly a victim of rape, who is crying. It is assumed that most readers will interpret the image as a 'real' Chinese woman. Even if readers are not convinced that her 'made-up' look is Chinese, the title of the book, which is placed immediately below the picture, *Pemerkosaan Etnik Tionghoa* (Rapes of the Chinese), suggests that she is a Chinese victim of rape.

This image adds a sense of gruesome sensualisation to the racialised images of the victims of the May 1998 rapes. If the tears were wiped away, the image of the woman would not be very different from the sexy models in soap or body lotion advertisements in which sexually suggestive images are deployed. Her left hand that covers the front part of her body suggests that she might be, at least, topless, if not entirely naked. Her slightly parted lips imply seduction more than misery. The coloured lips fail to signal that rape has just occurred since the lipstick remains perfectly untouched. Over all, the portrait circumvents the problem of bordering on pornography with the simple addition of the fake tears.

The Unpaired Eye

Another interesting aspect about both images presented above is the imaging of an unpaired eye. Intrigued by a series of 17th century paintings that portray aristocrats with "one glove on, one off", Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones write, "the unpaired glove takes on a new animation, as it is released from the 'utility' of the pair […] If, as Derrida suggests, the fetish emerges when the unpaired object is no longer bound 'to "normal" use', the paradox of the single glove in the Renaissance is that it is the ***norm,*** at least within literary and artistic representation (2001: 131, italics in original)". At that time, gloves were crucial for labourers to protect their hands from harsh work. However, Stallybrass and Jones find that "the gloves of aristocrats and gentry-male and female alike-usually operated to display hands to which such labor was alien" (2001: 118). There lies the irony: "they draw attention to the hands while making the hands useless, or useful only for putting on or taking off a glove" (ibid.: 118).

The unpaired eye, in comparison to the unpaired glove, may also be a signal that "the power of fetish emerges through an act of separation" (Stallybrass and

Jones, 2001: 126). While denying the utility of normal sight, the unpaired (slanted) eye emphasises the efficacy of the fetish in the representations of the victims of the May rapes. The hair that flows in front of the woman's left eye (figure 4.2), separates the eyes, thus "unpairs the human body" (Stallybrass and Jones 2001: 119). It sets the right eye against the left, and vice-versa.

This is comparable to the crossbar usually placed in front of the eyes of victims of sexual violence that is meant to conceal their identities in media presentations, both printed and electronic mediated, to conform to the ethical code of journalism that does not allow disclosures of victims' identities. This also applies to the crossbarring of the eyes of alleged criminals in media presentations based on the provision of presumption of innocence, *praduga tak bersalah*. The criminals' identities are hidden, although clandestinely presented to the readers through initials and crossbarred faces, to signal to the readers and invite their curiosity that "there is something there that could be known, but this knowledge is prohibited" (Siegel 1998(a): 35). Just as the unpaired eye in Figure 4.2, the covering of one eye, on the one hand, hints of secrecy, while on the other hand, emphasises that there is something intriguing about it. The uncovered eye becomes important then as it offers hints about its significance: it is about slanted eyes. Since this signification is enveloped within the story of racial rapes, the unpaired eye serves not to conceal, but to emphasise the identities of the raped victims.

The unpaired eye also implies a denial of the agency of 'normal' eyes. The eye is a witness. In this context, Figure 4.1 shows that not only is it only one single eye, but it is also teary, which makes it blurry, resulting in a lack of clarity and agency. With regards to witnessing, the unpaired eye represents ineligibility, especially when a teardrop blurs the vision. The absence of the mouth may refer to the muteness of both the victims and the witnesses. The unpaired eye seems to mark ambivalence while at the same time acknowledging the occurrence of the rapes, and that the raped were Chinese women, while still questioning the legitimacy of the claims.

During the May 1998 riots, the rapes were also a form of communication to the other, not clearly defined, opponent.[16] The rapes were made public, and as such, the definitions of the victims do not only refer to those raped women, as 'primary victims', but also to the wider audience who was forced to 'witness' the assaults, or 'secondary victims', who had to bear the reproduced fear and horror (Heryanto 1999: 311). The eye animates the entire scope of the stories

[16] This reminds us of the *petrus* (*penembakan misterius,* mysterious shooting) incidents in which the corpses of tattooed criminals were publicly displayed not only to warn other criminals, but also to show the state's power. (See Siegel 1998(a))

about the rapes and the victims and the emphasis on the slanted-eye and at the same time signals that it has something to do with ethnicity.

Rape and Ethnicity Forty Years Later

The May 1998 rapes inspired a well-known journalist and novelist, Seno Gumira Ajidarma, to write short stories based on the events, marrying fact and fiction.[17] *Republika* online (26 June 1998) posted *Clara*, a story about a victim of the May rapes who attempted to report the crime to the police. Although it was very painful to tell about the gang rape, the policeman demanded that she disclose every detail of the attack. Since she was unconscious during the attack, her account lacked many details, so the policeman concluded that her story about the rape was imagined.[18] Towards the end of the story, it is implied that the policeman himself was one of the rapists.

In 1999, Ajidarma wrote another short story based on the May rapes entitled *Jakarta, 14 Februari 2039*. This short story appeared in the 'millennium edition' of a popular magazine, *Matra* (December 1999). *Matra* is a popular, glossy magazine that targets a male readership. Its main focus is the lifestyle of urban, middle and upper class of men, and features topics on careers, lifestyle and sexual interests, primarily from a male perspective. In 1999, it was also one of a number of popular magazines criticised for distributing pornography through its regular presentations of sensual female models on its covers.[19]

Besides the publication of the short story, *Jakarta, 14 Februari 2039*, in December 1999, discussions of the rapes appeared in earlier *Matra* issues. The September 1999 issue, for example, featured a report on the development of the investigation of the May 1998 rapes.[20] In the following issue (October

[17] Political rapes and sexual assaults in regions such as East Timor and the province of Aceh have also inspired other authors to write about them in the form of popular stories. See Mayon Soetrisno's adaptation of the conflict in East Timor in a short story entitled *Bunga-bunga Gugur di Timor-Timur* (Fallen Flowers in East Timor) in Kartapati (ed.) 2003. Soetrisno brings to light the conflicts among the warring parties in East Timor, i.e. the Indonesian, Java-based military troops, East Timorese women and Fretilin revolutionary fighters by highlighting the cases of illegal abortion that have cost the lives of many local women. A collection of heart-rendering short stories based on cases of violence during the military operation in Aceh, including sexual assaults against Acehnese women, is available in Sukanta (ed.) 1999.

[18] This short story appeared after a report about the rape of a Chinese woman, told in the first-person, appeared in *Nyata*, a women's tabloid. See Siegel 1998(b): 96-98.

[19] One of the verdicts mentioned that the cover of the July 1999 issue of *Matra* had trespassed upon moral values and exploited women's bodies (*Kompas*, 5 October 1999). The cover displayed a well-known artist, Inneke Koesherawati, crossing her arms to cover her bare torso (*Matra*, No 156, July 1999). Its editor-in-chief, Riantiarno, was found guilty of the charge of distributing pornography in June 2000 and was sentenced to five months imprisonment (*Kompas*, 9 June 2000).

[20] The feature appeared on four full pages with quotations from official and unofficial reports concerning the ensuing investigation and the conditions of a number of the victims. However, it was ironic that on the next page, there was a cartoon showing a teacher (supposedly) teaching Chinese language. While he was pointing to a picture of a bull on the blackboard he said, "The

1999), *Matra* published an article concerning rape in war and conflict situations by comparing those that happened in other regions of Indonesia, as well as in other countries.

Overview of the Comic

The short story, *Jakarta: 14 Februari 2039*, was republished in the form of *cerita bergambar* (illustrated story) in 2001. Ajidarma worked in collaboration with Asnar Zacky, an illustrator.[21] The short story was re-titled, *Jakarta 2039, 40 Tahun 9 Bulan Setelah 13-14 Mei 1998* (Jakarta 2039, Forty Years and Nine Months after 13-14 May 1998, hence *Jakarta 2039*).[22] This comic, to my knowledge, is the only one that attempts to represent the May 1998 rapes in the form of an illustrated story.[23] Also, it should be noted that the difference between the short story and the comic lies in the graphic presentation.

The illustrated story opens with a two-page drawing of the Jakarta landscape, showing its two sides — its city life and its slums. There are three word bubbles emerging from three different places, representing three different voices: "Where are you, my child?", "My daughter, I am a rapist", and "I am a child of a rape". The first section, "I am a child of rape", takes place on 14 February 2039, at 22:15. A helicopter tracks two men who are running in the rain in between buildings and down narrow alleys in a poor Jakarta neighbourhood. They are eventually trapped in a cul-de-sac. The helicopter flashes its light immediately above them. Two police officers in the helicopter point their guns at the two men on the ground while the pilot shouts, "Give up if you don't want us to blow your heads off!" Apparently, this is a police raid. Only later, at the end of the story, is it revealed that the two fugitives are rapists. Hardly anybody pays attention to the raid. It is as if to say that rapes are a normal occurrence in the city, that violence is still alive. As Kusno writes in response to this depiction, "the lack of reaction suggests that this is something people see every day. The city itself is a memorial to a violence that keeps reproducing itself" (2003: 196).

Meanwhile, a woman with slanted eyes watches the event from behind a glass window, but then turns away from it. She inserts a disc into a digital

Chinese language of this (picture) is Kwik Kian Gie (a functionary in the Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle, PDIP)" (*Matra* 1999: 55).

[21] Following the publication of this comic, Ajidarma also republished two other short stories in comic form, i.e., *Taxi Blues* and *Kematian Donny Osmond*, both published in 2001 (Kaleidoskop Sastra 2001: Antara Supernove, Sastra Cyber dan Sastra Komik, Editorial 2001 New Year edition by Cybersastra.net (http://cybersastra.net.edisi_jan2002/index.shtml. Accessed 8 November 2004).

[22] Cartoons have been parts of Indonesian political texts, and have been the focus of a number of studies. See, among others, Anderson 1973; Warren 1998; and Sen 2002. See also a comic about racialism written in the aftermath of Suharto's resignation, Jusuf and Purba (2001).

[23] This comic is a reminder of the 'graphic novel', *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, written by Art Spiegelman (1986), but the difference is that Maus is written from the eye of a 'survivor'.

video camera recorder. She starts speaking to the camera, which she calls "*kameraku*", my camera (Figure 4.3). The camera serves to mediate her story. Kusno has discussed the necessity of keeping diaries as mediators, where he argues that it is relevant for the victims for "keeping them off official records and confined to personal narratives and recording devices" (Kusno 2003: 175).

Then the story reverts to the woman's background. Her foster mother, just before she died, revealed that the woman was adopted from an orphanage called *Cinta Kasih* (Love). The woman then visited the orphanage and was told by one of the attendants that there might still be an old nurse who might know about her origins. When she finally found the old nurse, she learned that her mother was a victim of the May 1998 gang rapes. The old nurse died after telling her the story.



Figure 4.3: *Jakarta 2039*, p.8

The second section, entitled "Where are you, my child", is set on the same day, 45 minutes later. The helicopter has successfully pinned down the two men. One policeman climbs down the helicopter ladder, ties the two men together and hooks them up to the helicopter. Meanwhile, another woman also watches this scene from behind a glass window of an apartment. She is stunned watching the chase and capture of the two men that awaken a memory stored deep inside her.

The woman then turns on her laptop computer. She begins to talk to it, as it serves as her electronic diary that can decode aural input, an innovation in the year 2039. It is revealed that she was a victim of a gang rape. She remembers that that day is the fortieth birthday of the child who was conceived during the rapes and who she abandoned after birth. She does not know which one of the rapists fathered her child. Twelve male faces are illustrated: one is chubby with a beard and moustache and wears a headscarf, another one is thin-faced, wearing a hat that covers part of his face (Figure 4.4).



Figure 4.4: *Jakarta 2039*, p. 36

Still another has long hair and a thin face, while another is chubby and bald. The twelve men are distinctly different from one another. Zacky, the illustrator, revealed that he modelled these faces after his friends and acquaintances. By sketching ordinary faces, it appeared that the whole society, including him, were morally responsible for the rapes, at least in the realm of illustrations.[24] The other characters in this illustrated book were also modelled after people in his social circle. The illustration of the woman in this section, for example, was

[24] See "*Prihatin Korban Perkosaan, Seno Buat Komik*" (Concerned about the rape victims, Seno created a comic). http://www.gudeg.net/isi/berita/cetak.asp?id=432&print=1 (accessed 17 October 2004).

modelled on his best friend, who he then imagined had aged. In his vision, all of the victims are of Chinese descent, while the perpetrators are pribumi.

As she recounts the event, the illustration sketches a scream above the city surrounding the phallic national monument, Monas: "Aaaw!! Aaaaaa! Don't! No! Mercy, Don't burn me! Mommy!! Daddy!" (Figure 4.5). The scream is metaphorically significant in this violent event, as it symbolises the repressed voices of the victims. Discussing utilisation of scream in films, David Morris argues that the "[…] scream might serve as a potent image for the metaphorical silence at the heart of suffering" (1999: 27). The victims of the May rapes, to this moment, still cannot speak, and this silence is neatly voiced, metaphorically, in this comic through the illustration of screams.



Figure 4.5: *Jakarta 2039*, p. 37

After giving birth to her child, the woman left the country in order to be far away from the child. However, the image of her child haunts her wherever she goes. She is sure that her child is better off away from her because she might abuse the child out of mischanneled rage. The illustrator visualises this part of the story with a woman in a kung fu pose, brandishing two long sticks and chasing after a little girl (figure 4.6), further emphasising, in a rather playful

manner, the woman's Chinese-ness and its relationship to people's imagination of the land of China as a detached place of origin, which in turn draws the boundary between 'us' (pribumi) and 'them' (Cina).



Figure 4.6: *Jakarta 2039*, p. 43

The pain of being raped constantly haunts her, yet she eventually misses her child, of whom she has very little memory. She does not even know if her child is a boy or a girl. When she finishes her diary 'writing', the laptop turns off automatically as she says, "Finished for today".

The reference to the rapists as *anjing buduk* (street dogs) appears many times in this story (*Jakarta 2039*, pp. 44, 47, 72). The analogy of the rapists with street dogs and the raped bodies with corpses (ibid. 62) not only dehumanises both the rapists and the raped women, but also naturalises the act of rape itself with street dogs encircling a dead body. In this sense, human responsibility and accountability is not necessarily sought. Similarly, when demonising the rapes as inexorable conduct driven by external evil power (ibid.: 32), the rapists are void of any responsibility, since their actions are the results of irresistible influence.

In the first two sections, the two female victims of the May rapes encountered difficulties in revealing the rapes to others, especially to police officers. Instead, they tell their stories to their video camera and computer. In the handling of the actual cases, the silence of both the victims and witnesses has been discussed by many as one of the reasons why the May rapes have been difficult to investigate (Tim Relawan 1998: 12-17). Their silence may be due to the difficulty of discussing rape, as the loss of virginity outside matrimony is still stigmatised (Heryanto 1999: 302-3; Komnas Perempuan 1999: 79). Also, it was reported that the victims and witnesses were threatened and terrorised so that they would not continue the investigations. Tim Relawan registered a number of factors behind the reluctance of the victims and witnesses of the May 1998 rapes to talk about them: the profound trauma suffered by the victims; the social stigma about rape; cultural values shared among the ethnic Chinese not to reveal *sial* (bad luck) to prevent its reoccurrence; the issue of 'racialism'; the politicisation of the rapes; limited access to legal trial; gender bias; professional code of ethics among medical doctors; and the emergency nature of the medical treatments that were often careless with details (Tim Relawan 1998).[25]

The last section of the book, "My daughter, your father is a rapist", is set in a different part of Jakarta, that is, in one of its slum kampongs. The time is 23:30. The two men are still dangling from the helicopter that is flying above the houses on the outskirts of the city. An old man is lying down on his bed while his daughter brings him a glass of water. The old man wants to tell his story to his daughter. The girl remembers how her father worked so hard his whole life as a labourer. Her mother became a prostitute and left the family for another man. While her siblings live in the city, she stayed with her father to take care of him. The illustration about the economic situation of this family shows a stark contrast with that of the aforementioned women. Again, the imagery of ethnic identity clearly maintains the stereotype that Chinese people, here symbolised as the victims of the rapes, are economically well-to-do, while the pribumi, here the rapists, are poor. The poverty of this family is dramatised even more with the additional story of the girl's mother becoming a sex worker. Here again, women are forced into sexual intercourse, either by rape or prostitution.

[25] Not only the victims and witnesses were threatened, as the members of Tim Relawan were also terrorised. One threat materialised in the murder of Ita Marthadinata, who was said to be one of the volunteers preparing for a trip to the United States to testify. The UN Special Rapporteur keeps a collection of anonymous letters that threatened victims, victims' families, witnesses, and human rights defenders so that they would not proceed to report crimes of violence. There was also a second type of letter that aimed at terrorising the Chinese population and were signed by "Pribumi". See UN Rapport on Violence Against Women – Report on Indonesia and East Timor.

The man's story is then described to the readers through his daughter's visions. While listening to her father's story, she closes her eyes and imagines how shops were burnt and looted, groups of people threw gasoline while a few well-built, short-haired, men in a jeep shouted a command, "Burn!" (Figure 4.7).[26]



Figure 4.7: *Jakarta 2039*, p. 59

The presence of the well-built, short-haired men in the illustrated story is in accordance with the circulating conjecture that the riots and rapes were instigated by military troops and trained civilians. In their report, the Joint Fact Finding Team, (Tim Gabungan Pencari Fakta, TGPF), identified three groups of people as agents of the riots: the provocateurs, the active mass, and the passive mass.[27] The team identified the active and passive masses as provoked onlookers and passers-by, respectively. Meanwhile, the TGPF found small

[26] The reference to a jeep as a military vehicle is also mentioned in Siegel (1998(a): 2).
[27] TGPF report has been ground breaking as it was the first official account that 'acknowledged' the likely involvement of 'members of the Indonesian government and military' in instigating the 1998 riots (Purdey 2002: 622).

groups of about ten people each who acted as provocateurs and instigated the masses to commit acts of vandalism, burning, and looting. These groups worked in an organised manner; they moved quickly and were facilitated with vehicles and communication devices, such as walkie-talkies and hand phones (Komnas Perempuan 1999). In another report, it was mentioned that the riots were directed through a special radio frequency, to which only the elite *Komando Pasukan Khusus* (*Kopassus*), that is, the military Special Command Troops and the Armed Force Intelligence, had access.[28] These special troops are also unique as the only "social groups in the nation with ideas, training and history, if not personal experience, of political gang rapes in areas like Aceh and East Timor" (Heryanto 1999: 315).

With her eyes still closed, the girl hears the women behind the walls scream, "Help! Aaaa!" Then she sees her father in his twenties, the same face as she has seen in his old photo. He wore a cap, was bare-chested, smoking, and while he was wandering around the city he witnessed two women being raped. In her imagination she sees her father witness other gang rapes in which "every woman was raped by nine to twelve men". Then he found a woman, alone and crying. He grabbed her and dragged her to a corner. Not long after, a group of men whose faces were illustrated on a previous page (*Jakarta 2039*, p. 36) approached the corner. Her father left the crowd. In the following illustration, there are more screams, "Have mercy!", "Don't!", "Help!", "Mommy!….".

The man could not answer his daughter's question as to why he raped the woman. He could only rationalise that the situation at that moment was chaotic with everyone acting wildly. Her father also revealed that he never met the other men and even if he did, they would not talk about the event and would prefer to forget it. The girl reflects on her father's story and tries to digest the fact that her father is one of the rapists involved in the gang rapes written about in the history book that she read at school. Soon after this, her father dies.

Then the story returns to the helicopter and the two men hanging below it. The helicopter stops at a beach. One of the police officers climbs out from the helicopter, approaches the two men and unties them. Calling them, "rapists" and "street dogs", the police officer refuses to get his hands dirty by punishing them. When he returns to the helicopter, one of his colleagues asks why he did not kill them. He tells him that he overheard a conversation between a journalist and the caretaker of the orphanage where he grew up. He found out that his mother was a victim of the rapes on 14 May 1998, forty years and nine months ago. That day was his fortieth birthday. The narrative that this forty-

[28] "Kelompok Perusuh Itu Dipandu Frekuensi Khusus" (http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/4120/asiaweek3.html)

year-old man, whose mother was a rape victim, had become a member of the police force is ironic in light of the circulated allegations of the military's role in the gang rapes in 1998 and of the absence of police officers during the three-day chaos in Jakarta and its surroundings.

By using a framework of forty years into the future, this comic stretches further the distance between the actual events and the story, and as such complicates any remembrance of the victims' anguish. As the May 1998 rapes remain in darkness, even at the time the comic was published, the reconstruction of the memories ends in the glossed historicising of the events. As it will be engraved in the history text books forty years in the future, the rapes will not be resolved by then, indeed, there will be "nothing to return to", nothing we can "act on", but only bequeath the shadow of the May 1998 rapes to the next generation.[29]

At the end of the story, the policeman encounters a dilemma as to whether or not to kill the two criminals, who were later identified as rapists. As he has revealed that he is a child of one of the victims of the May rapes, he cannot decide whether killing the rapists is tantamount to killing his own father. The actual dates of the rapes are retained and reconstructed in the setting of the story, which is exactly 40 years and nine months later. The emphasis on the accurate conversion of dates shows the author's concern for the historical veracity based on the time factor, however frozen in terms of its spatial, social, political, and economic dimensions.

[29] This is parallel to Benedict Anderson's statement about the New Order "Under the New Order there is nothing to return to, and the 'Spirit of '45' is less to be acted on than to be bequeathed". See Anderson 1990.

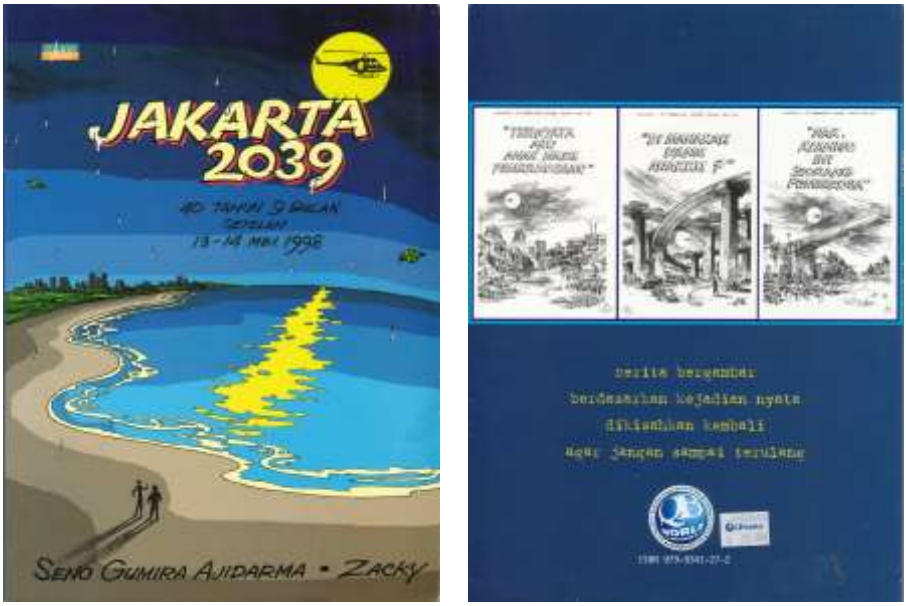


Figure 4.8: Front and Back Covers of *Jakarta 2039*

Ethnicity Interpellated

There is no significant change between the short story and its illustrated version, except for the illustrations. The illustrations make a considerable difference since the pointers to ethnicity, class status, social context, and even the horror of the rapes are graphically visualised with the pictures of Chinese women, the contrast between the simple house on the river banks with tall buildings in the background, and the sketched screams of the raped women that are absent in the original short story. The re-publication of the short story with illustrations presumes the necessity for visualisation of the rape story.[30] At the same time, it signals the moment in which 'ethnicity' becomes visible via the depictions of associated physical traits, such as the shapes of eyes and material possessions.

While the probe of the reality of the May 1998 rapes is set in the future, the author seems simply to relocate the past/present reality into the future as

[30] The probe for proof of the rapes with the existence of female victims, in which in the case of the May rapes has also become an issue for the Chinese diaspora, has resulted in the abuse of photography and the Internet. Photographs of women who had been tortured during the implementation of DOM in East Timor, which were smuggled to East Timor International Support Centre, have been relabelled and appropriated by a number of websites addressing the rapes of Chinese women in May 1998. In other cases, some pictures were culled from an Asian pornography site. See Tay 2000.

'frozen time and space'. Abidin Kusno also reminds us that this illustration is parallel to the building of new structures by erasing all the memories about the riots, in his term, "amnesiac architecture":

> Avoiding the traumatic past as expressed through the playing out of Chinese culture and the building of amnesiac architecture on the sites of violence serves to neutralize the demands of trauma both to remember and to forget. [...] It is out of this tangled web of forgetting and remembering memories of violence that the recent architecture in Jakarta and the concomitant discourse of Chinese cultures are produced (Kusno, 2003: 167).

More importantly, the visualisation of 'ethnicity' is also contextualised in relentless racial prejudice. Indeed, physical visualisations of the ethnicity of the female victims of the May 1998 rapes, the rapists, and preserved symbols of possession that materially differentiate between both ethnic and class status become its distinct signification in the redrawing of the rapes and fantasising the victims. For those familiar with the public discussions about the May rapes in academic circles and the journalistic media, both the story and its illustrated version offer no new, clear insights about the events, and even invoke a serious question of whether they contribute anything to the victims.[31] This also means that to understand the short story and its illustrated version, one is assumed to have prior knowledge about the social and political contexts of the events, which so far have been predominantly mediated by academic papers, journalistic reports or Internet-mediated discussions.

On the other hand, the use of a comic book or graphic novel to deliver the politically-laden message of autocracy against women in Indonesia offers an alternative venue for mediation and broadening of the targeted audience. Quite different from many reports, both formal and informal, that rely upon realistic descriptions, testimonies from people who were involved both directly and indirectly, geographic mapping of the events, statistics, and experts' analyses, this comic has animated the rapes through visualisation of the events (ravaged buildings, screams, chaos, etc.) and of the faces of both the raped and the rapists, mainly slant-eyed Chinese women and poverty-stricken pribumi men. The choice of the form of the medium and its mediation, that is, a short story in a male-oriented popular media (*Matra*) and its re-publication in the form of a comic book, hence, breaks through the borders of previously restricted and closely defined discourses of (racialised) rape, ethnic tension, and politics. The question remains whether this new alternative mediation indeed promotes any

[31] During the launching and discussion of *Jakarta 2039* in Yogyakarta, one participant questioned the author's intention and criticised him for using the victims for his own profit (Kompas 2001).

liberating attitudes towards gender equality, dispassionate ethnic relations and just politics.

All of the characters in this illustrated story are unnamed. Names, or even pseudonyms, may simply be irrelevant since the identification has been bridged by the visualisation, both in graphics and texts, of their figurative characteristics. The nameless images of the victims do not only represent the unidentified 'real victims of rapes', but also the women who were or were not raped. Thus, the absence of names of the raped victims symbolically addresses all Chinese women.[32] Without mentioning any specific names of the victims, the scale of the rapes amplifies and the repercussions of its phantomness intensify. All women of Chinese descent are being told that they are 'interpellated' as potential victims.[33] The image of the rape victims is built through loose identification with Chinese women as those who share stereotyped physical traits and material possessions.

The Phantom of Racialised Victims

The visualisation of symbols of ethnicity, class, and culture is blatant in the illustrated story. The female victims, who are supposed to be of Chinese descent, are depicted driving luxurious cars, living in apartments, and having access to high-technology gadgets. Meanwhile, the rapist, who is depicted as pribumi, remains as poor as he presumably was forty years earlier. This economic determination often distances the Chinese and pribumi from each other. As Siegel argues:

> 'Chinese' as used for certain inhabitants of Indonesia is a racial category, one that marks identity through inheritance of physical traits and moral characteristics. It supposedly designates those whose ancestors (or sometimes themselves) were born in China. … An inborn quality keeps them 'Chinese', or so it is thought; this quality is the state of being wealthy, even when they are in fact poor (1998(b): 83).

Thus, one can identify a Chinese not only by physical resemblance to a stereotyped image of a 'Chinese', but by whether or not they are "made of wealth" (Siegel 1999: 83). This illustrated story has preserved this ethnic identification based on traits of wealth, which was said to be the trigger of the riots and rapes in May 1998, even in the projection to forty years in the future.

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[32] There are documented testimonies that during the rapes, the rapists said something like "you are being raped because you are Chinese" (Komnas Perempuan 1999: 90).

[33] Ien Ang, a media analyst of Chinese descent, revealed her feelings of being interpellated after the producer of the Huaren website (run by the World Huaren Federation based in San Fransisco that claims to represent ethnic Chinese as a whole) asked her to speak on behalf of the Chinese diaspora about the May 1998 rapes. As quoted in Tay 2000. For a discussion of interpellation, see Chapter One.

The implication is also drawn to imply that the rapists were pribumi and the victims were non-pribumi.

The story also places a strong emphasis on familial relationships. The narration and illustration serve as guides for the readers to imagine that it is the dying man in section 3 who raped the woman in section 2. Meanwhile, as the woman herself is not sure if her child is a girl or a boy, this leaves open the possibilities that either the young woman in section 1 or the policeman at the end of the story is her child. This emphasises the breadth of the scale of the impact of the rapes: it is everywhere. It also emphasises the idea that potentially everyone is related and thus implicated in the May rapes—either as a primary victim (the raped women) or as a secondary victims (those who bore witness of the rapes and who are products of the rapes).

All of the main characters in this story are crying out for their relatives: child, mother, and father. These genealogical associations, on the one hand, soften the rapes, as the raped women, the children and the rapist are related to each other. Eventually, the woman misses her child and the policeman cannot kill the rapists who represent the image of his own father.

On the other hand, by framing the narration and illustration of the May 1998 rapes into a familial scenario, *Jakarta 2039* signals a sense of "catastrophe" (Siegel 1998(b): 100). The members of the family bound by the rapes must bear the *aib*, shame. As Siegel argues:

> The mark of the violation, the shame itself, which is also a stain, will be passed down to her descendants if it is not obliterated. … Rape in that sense harms not only women but threatens legitimacy of descent (1998(b): 100).

But such exigency is impossible, as Siegel points out that obliterating the trauma is essentially erasing one's life history. Kusno, on the other hand, draws a parallel between the nation's and the victims' sufferings: "Like the nation that finds it difficult to incorporate the rape into its history", the raped woman in this story "finds it hard to integrate the horrible event into her own life" (Kusno, 2003: 172).

As for the girl, a legitimate daughter of legitimate parents, knowing that she is a daughter of a rapist, suddenly aware that she is part of the history of 'cruelty', and with the knowledge that her father is one of the 'street dogs', she is "shamed in the way of the illegitimate" (Siegel, 1998(b): 100). By emphasising the ambiguity of hate and longing that are thrown on to the shoulders of the future generation, the consequences of rapes and ethnic disputes are immortalised. For the daughter of the rapist, although she is not a daughter of a raped woman, the burden of the history of the rapes is thrown on to her shoulders by the fact that her father is one of the rapists. Similarly,

disgrace has also haunted those who were stigmatised as the families of ex-members of the Indonesian Communist party and most Chinese Indonesians who were, by the New Order state's construction, associated with communism (Heryanto 1998). The highlighting of this phantomised ethnic prejudice is a significant point presented by the comic.

What stands out in the reconstruction of the story of the May 1998 rapes in *Jakarta 2039* is the hyphenation of Chinese women as victims and the visualisation of their physical appearances. In the above discussion, we find that while the original short story has minimal visual metaphors that designate the specific physicality of Chinese women – in fact there is only one sentence in the story that explicitly refers to this, i.e., "their white skinned-bodies are full of bruises" (*Matra*, p. 122) – this is not the case with the illustrated story. There are many iconic visualisations, i.e., stereotypical physical traits and materials possessions, which strongly suggest to the readers the images of Chinese women.

The comic personalised the issue of the May 1998 rapes exclusively with Chinese women as victims and non-Chinese men as perpetrators. There was no clear mention of the military involvement and activists' roles, thus emphasising the agencies of both the (Chinese female) victims/survivors and (indigenous male) perpetrators.[34]

It is difficult to fully comprehend this retrospective display of the victimhood of Chinese women through wanton incorporation of the eyes, as well as material possessions, without knowing the historical account of the symbolic relevance of physical appearances that have long been stereotypically used to identify this ethnic group in Indonesia. Quite to the contrary, in the wake of violence directed against the Chinese, the images of Sino-looking women and men, Indonesian and East Asian, increasingly fill the television screen, popular magazines and live performance stages. These images swiftly transform the pitiable look of the Sino-looking women from rape victims into glamorous celebrities.[35] This is in line with Heryanto's (2004: 36) argument

[34] Ita Nadia, one of the volunteers who assisted the rape victims, brought up the issue of the gang rapes. Nadia is also a well-known feminist activist. Among feminist activists in Jakarta, access to the rape victims remains exclusively in Nadia's control. This lack of openness and the resulting ambiguity created some doubt among the activists about whether or not the rapes actually occurred. Ambivalence arose because some feminist activists in the inner circle, that is those who were involved in the campaigns to prosecute the rapes and advocacy for the collective victims, were never able to meet any of the victims. Questions and demands for revelation of the identities of the rape victims were not answered in the name of legal protection. Discussion with Yuniyanti Chuzaifah, former activist in *Solidaritas Perempuan* (Women's Solidarity) in September 2004. See Sai's analysis on the shift from support to criticism among activists and newspapers (2006).

[35] In this account, Heryanto has ventured that: "One possible scenario of the future is further commodification of Chineseness both in political rhetoric and the entertainment industry. Instead of being an essentialised, embodied identity that comes with birth, Chineseness (or Javaneseness,

that "the end of the New Order is neither the sole nor the most important cause of the change. The 'racialised' violence against the ethnic Chinese was a more important cause factor than President's Suharto's resignation in triggering the trend." After 1998, many Chinese celebrities became very popular in Indonesia's entertainment industries.

But What about Pre-2039?

In media presentations, the prevailing physical markers of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, e.g., slanted eyes, eclipse the gender aspect of the rapes and both highlights the ethnic markers and exoticises the foreignness of the Chinese in Indonesia. While this illustrated story stretches the memory of the rapes to forty years in the future, its attachment to the preserved stereotyped markers of ethnicity harness it from any further developments, explanations or revelations. Indeed, it takes less than 40 years to see that the dis-remembering of the rapes has already been realised, as in only a few years after the real events we can see the popular flourishing of Chinese cultural performances and figures.

New Government, New Sentiment

Positive changes in attitudes towards the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia have been apparent since the 1990s.[36] However, the changes during that period overtly accentuated the economic aspect "driven by instrumental rather than ideological motivations" (Hoon 2004, as quoted in Heryanto 2004: 32). In the 1990s, the changes of attitudes towards the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia was supposedly driven by the expanding economic power of the People's Republic of China, which created closer ties between Chinese businesspeople and Indonesian conglomerates, most of whom were the cronies of Suharto. However, the attitude changes did not encompass other aspects of social, cultural and political life.[37] With the fall of the New Order regime and the appointment of Abdurrahman Wahid as president of Indonesia, more changes were possible.

Soon after his appointment as president, Abdurrahman Wahid (popularly known as Gus Dur) made some progressive changes concerning the lives of Chinese Indonesians. He revoked the old Presidential Decision (*Keputusan*

Balineseness, and so on) may refer to nothing but new trends in garment fashion, architecture, film genre, cuisine, dance, or one of the several tourist destination in post-crisis capitalism" (Heryanto 1999: 330).

[36] However, Purdey notes that violence against the Chinese still occurred after Suharto stepped down, between June 1998-October 1999. See Purdey 2005.

[37] In the 1990s there were "booming courses on speaking Mandarin", although officially written Chinese characters and language were still banned (Heryanto 1998: 105).

Presiden, *Keppres*) Number 14/1967 that had banned Chinese cultural celebrations, such as Lunar New Year, and replaced it with Keppres No 6/2000. In February 2000, Chinese families started to openly celebrate Lunar New Year and perform the famous lion dance (*barongsay*) in public places.[38] In 2003, Chinese New Year was declared a public holiday.[39]

As mentioned previously, Chinese cultural celebrations were forbidden by the New Order regime. While it might be misleading to assume that his motives were in response to the May 1998 riots and rapes in which the Chinese communities suffered heavily, we can say that these decisions were at least partly reflections of Gus Dur's exceptional embrace of humanity. Gus Dur was widely known as an inclusive Muslim leader. His effort to revoke some of the discriminative acts against Chinese Indonesians was due partly to the history of essentialised identification of ethnic Chinese with the Indonesian Communist party during the New Order (Budiawan 2003). His intention to revoke some of the acts was in response to increasing demands to end the marginalisation of former political prisoners (*tahanan politik*, hence *tapol*) and their families. However, on May 29, 2000, the Ad Hoc Committee of the Working Body of the MPR rejected Gus Dur's major effort to revoke the Stipulation of the Provisional People's Consultative Assembly (Tap MPRS) No. XXV/MPRS/1966, which outlawed the Communist party and banned the dissemination and teaching of communism/Marxism-Leninism, based on the argument that the aforementioned Tap MPRS was a protection of human rights (ibid.). By construction, the New Order had stigmatised the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia as being associated with the communist movement in the 1960s, so all acts that discriminated against the *ex-tapol* were extended to the ethnic Chinese. Although some failed, Gus Dur's efforts, were fundamental in the endeavour to change many facets of the lives of Chinese Indonesians. It was also during his administration that there was open acknowledgment that the May 1998 rapes did indeed occur. Kofifah Indar Parawansa, the minister for women's empowerment in his cabinet argued that the state must take responsibility for the May 1998 rapes and demanded further investigation into the events (*Kompas* 2000).

[38] During my field research in Yogyakarta, for example, I attended a performance of the lion dance during the Lunar New Year 2003 celebration at a Catholic church, Hati Kudus Yesus, in Pugeran, Yogyakarta. The three priests, wearing Chinese costumes, performed the Catholic mass prior the dance, and people, mostly children, took photos with them after the mass. Field notes (February 2003). See also Kusno 2003, f.n. 45, p. 165.

[39] This was announced on 17 February 2002 when Megawati attended a celebration of Chinese New Year 2002 (*Kompas* 2002(d)).

New Images of the Chinese

It is within this frame of changes, coupled with the emergence of popular culture and economic power in Indonesia and Asia at large, that the images of ethnic Chinese have saturated popular media presentations in Indonesia (Heryanto 2004). In stark contrast to news coverage, the advertising industry also deployed images of ethnic Chinese in the popular representations of the May 1998 riots and rapes. One television advertisement for Indosat, a telecommunication service, for example, used the issues of rape and mass exodus of Chinese Indonesians to Singapore in the days following the May riots to promote its products and services.[40] For its advertising campaign in the second half of 1998, one television advertisement was set in the Sukarno-Hatta International Airport in Jakarta. The ad opened with shots of the airport signboards displaying "*Kedatangan"* (Arrival), "Singapore", and "Immigration". A female voice announced a flight arrival from Singapore. Then a smiling young woman attendant was shown walking and carrying a telecommunication device in her hand. We can see some women and children happily waving from behind a big glass window. Among them is a woman who looks distinctively Chinese. She seems to be the reference to whom a male voice-over then says: "*Ajak keluarga dan kerabat berkumpul kembali ke tanah air dengan Indosat 001"* (Invite your relatives to come back together in Indonesia with Indosat 001) (Sushartami 2010).

This ad invited the audience to remember the May 1998 riots by creatively adopting and incorporating the discourse of the riots, and accommodating it to the importance of telecommunications services, yet erasing the horrors associated with it. The telecommunication tool was promoted "not as a means to instigate riots or social movements, but instead to call and gather back the families who had fled the country" (ibid.: 154). The portrayal of the smiling Chinese woman welcoming her family back after they fled the country distorted the harsh reality of the mass brutality of the riots. The image of the Chinese woman in the ad, on the one hand, normalised the rapes, while on the other hand, validated the realism of the events adopted in the ad.

In 2001, the first television film about ethnic Chinese produced in the post-Suharto era, *Loe Fen Koei*, was shown on RCTI television station to celebrate the Chinese New Year on 23 January 2001.[41] The broadcasting of Chinese stories during the celebration of Chinese New Year had never occurred during the period of the New Order.[42] The film tells about a rich Chinese man named Lo

[40] PT Indonesia Satellite Corp (Indosat) is the state-run operator for international telephone service.

[41] The series was based on the novel, *Loe Fen Koei*, written by Gouw Peng Liang (1903).

[42] A study compared *Lo Fen Koei* and *Putri Giok* (a film about ethnic Chinese made during the New Order) and found that while the latter film was characterised by the state's propaganda of ethnic

Fen Koei who is willing to do anything to attract women. In 2002, a film about ethnic Chinese, entitled, *Ca Bau Kan*, was produced to commemorate the Chinese New Year, which had just been declared a public holiday. This film is based on a novel with the same title written by Remy Sylado. This movie, set in the 1930s, tells about a female pribumi (*ca-bau-kan*, or hostess) who marries a Chinese man.[43] Another post-Suharto film about the Chinese in Indonesia but produced for television was *Jangan Panggil Aku Cina* (Don't Call Me Chinese), which aired on SCTV in 2003.[44] The story is about a Chinese woman who wants to marry a man from Padang Pariaman of West Sumatera. Although they love each other, they face cultural barriers; one of which was the dowry that the woman must give to her future husband's family, although her own family is poor.[45] Despite the ordeals they face, the story ends happily with the couple finally getting married. This kind of story would have been impossible to show during the New Order regime.

To celebrate the Chinese New Year in 2004, SCTV showed *Hsiao Tsing* (*Xiao Qing*), which was based on a short story with the same title written by Veven Wardhana. This film was about a Chinese woman singer who became one of the victims of a racial conflict following Indonesian independence in the late 1940s. However, the whole story ends with the figure of the Chinese female singer singing the same song over and over again to a display of a series of Chinese dresses. Regardless of further questions regarding the significance of these films in capturing or promoting a new sentiment towards the Chinese in

assimilation of the ethnic Chinese with the rest of the population, the former shows more liberating association of ethnicity. In Bestantia 2002.

[43] For more discussion of the film see Heryanto 2008(a).

[44] This movie starred Leoni, a popular Chinese Indonesian female artist. Another profile of a young, oriental looking, Indonesian television star, Agnes Monica, who received the SCTV and Panasonic Award in 2002 as the most sought after female artist, is also widely available in all media references. It was reported that she would act in a Taiwanese-produced film with one of the members of the famous Taiwanese (turned international) boy band, F4. It must also be noted that the phenomenal popularity of F4 and their spectacularly popular television series, *Meteor Garden*, sparked much bewilderment, since their Indonesian fans blast through long-standing ethnic boundaries (see Ida 2008). A relative of mine, for example, a Muslim woman of Batak and Javanese descent in her late twenties and a university graduate who works for a reputable NGO concerning HIV/AIDS in Jakarta, who has never shown an interest in Chinese men, confessed to her infatuation with Tao Ming Se, the most popular among the four singers. She collects souvenirs, such as posters, stationery, books, paper fans, and other knick-knacks with his image imprinted on them. She simply ignored her sisters who teased her as being *norak*, a hick (Fieldnotes, August 2003).

[45] Physical references to Chinese ethnicity are very blatant in this movie. Slanted eyes, as the typical indicators of Chinese ethnicity are verbally referred to many times. For example, at the opening of the film, the protagonist, a young Chinese woman who is born and lives in Padang, quarrels with her brother who thinks he is not their mother's biological son. He says, "Look at your eyes. My eyes are not as slanted as yours." In another part of the film, she refers to her own eyes when questioning her pribumi boyfriend's love: "Look at my eyes, … my eyes are slanted".

Indonesia, they have indeed presented the images of the Chinese people in the society.

Conclusion

Attempts to 'visualise' the May 1998 rapes are problematic, not only because the cases remain unsolved and the identities of the people involved, both the victims and the rapists, are not publicly known. The heart of the problem is that the rapes are heavily imbued with ethnic overtones. While political or gender explanations about the cases are often offered, the rapes, for the most part, are understood or projected to be based on ethnic conflict.

The visualisation of female victims with regards to their perceived 'racially'-related physical traits or stereotyped material possessions brings to light two trends: First, that such representations may be restrained in popular ethnic stereotyping. The blatant racialisation of the May 1998 rapes in the generous media coverage made it possible for some of the ethnic majority to emotionally detach themselves from the horror, and to assign this genre of political violence to a specific group: Chinese females (Heryanto 1999).

In the case of the May 1998 rapes, the racialised "imagined memory mediated by media" has limited its dimension of victimisation of women to only one stereotypically defined ethnic "Other" that is the Chinese. The targeting of Chinese women as the main victims has encouraged the racialised account of the rapes and produced a foreign body of Chinese women. This inclination unavoidably influences the realism of the media presentations built around the circulating stereotype of a concerned ethnic group. Thus, not only were the other aspects of the rapes, i.e., politics and gender, pushed aside, but the racialisation of the May 1998 violence resulted in the media's prevailing use of symbols, images and idioms related primarily to ethnic Chinese physical traits to signify the victims and make meaning of the events. A further signification process shows that the racially fetishised symbols and images, such as the slanted eye(s), become more important currencies in representing rape victims and making meaning of the rape acts than other explanations from the gender or political aspects.

Secondly, as the above discussion regarding the popularity of Chinese artists and films about Chinese people in Indonesia shows, an alternative reading of the slanted eyes as an icon of ethnicity may instead blur and erase the horrors of the violence. While the eyes were formerly adopted by media presentations as symbols of victimisation, they have later become icons of success and popularity.

The idea to "create public spheres of 'real' memory" of the May 1998 rapes, borrowing from Huyssen, "that will counter the politics of forgetting" (2000:

26) may have a reverse effect. In the period when the fear of losing memory intensifies and mediation of memory reaches its peak, ironically, the effort to remember may lead to amnesia. That is, the boom of media productions may stimulate an escalation of remembering, but paradoxically, also of forgetting, since "the mass marketed memories we consume are 'imagined memories'" and are "more easily forgotten than lived memories", thus leading to a "contemporary memory culture of amnesia" (Huyssen 2000: 27). If mediatisation is considered to be an attempt to fight against 'forgetting', while it utilises a 'reconstructed racial issue' that is mediated imagination/memory, then once the racial traits that are used, such as the slanted eye, shift away from their original context, they are at risk of loosing their critical meaning, as with the case of the popularisation of Chinese culture and celebrities following reformasi. The government's eagerness in embracing the 'new culture', to some extent, does not help either, as Kusno appropriately states: "The public declaration of Chinese culture is a by-product of the May riots, donated by the government as a gift to tranquilize, if not erase, the memories of the May riots themselves" (Kusno 2003: 167).