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Title: Representation and beyond : female victims in Post-Suharto media
Date: 2012-06-12

Chapter Nine

Conclusion

> In any case, the term *victim* is a product of social relations, culture, and language (Lamb 1999: 3, italics in the original).

This thesis began by pointing toward the struggle for political identity of Indonesian women in the discourse of reformasi. One of the imperative characteristics of this era, which has been afflicted with the vast mediatisation of a wide range of violent acts, is epitomised by the presence of abundant images of 'female victims'. In the introductory chapter I briefly outline the discourses of reformasi, which have been imbued with the disclosure of cases of violence against women and the increasing demand for 'transparency', and its proximity to the proliferation of the images of female victims in various media presentations. The subsequent two chapters presented the historical, economic, social, and political contexts as the implications of the fall of Suharto's regime on the lives of Indonesian women and the development of the media industry. The fall of the regime brought a huge impact for women in which their participation in the public has flourished and the opening of the media has facilitated this development.

The reading of media presentations as discussed in the last five chapters contend that the mediated images of female victims are products of a complex interaction, tension and negotiation among the forces of state gender ideology, middle-class notions of female victimisation, religious doctrines, discourses of victimhood, and media culture values. These chapters shed light on the deployment of the images of female victims—predominantly through the presentations of the transgressions of women's bodies and sexuality—as 'scaffolding' of the representations of victimhood. In other words, these chapters hint at the implications of the proliferation of images of women as victims towards the canonisation of female victimisation during reformasi.

As mentioned earlier, this thesis is about representations of female victims in post-Suharto Indonesia. Through readings of these images the query to identify who falls into the category of *perempuan korban* (female victims) becomes imperative; the last question to be answered. To answer this question, and because this thesis focuses on the images of the female victims represented in the media, we must first look at how they are represented, by whom, for what purposes, and in what context. This thesis has examined how "social relations, culture, and language" (Lamb 1999: 3) produce (the images) of female victims. Furthermore, the reading of the images of female victims here hints that "the label [of victim] will mean different things in different contexts, depending on who is using the label and to what end" (ibid.). In Chapter One, I rendered the underlying concern of reading the representations of female victims in Indonesia during reformasi into three major questions. This final chapter will address those questions.

First, I will discuss context. As mentioned in Chapter One, the context becomes very important in reading representations. Chapters Two and Three discuss the contexts of reformation in a more detailed fashion with regards to the discourse concerning violence during the regime change, the development of the women's movement and the opening of the media. By understanding the context in which changes have taken place, the answer to the question of why representations of female victims suddenly became abundant following the regime change becomes clear. The representations of various images show examples of how the opening of the media during the initial processes of reformasi prepared the ground for, and was partly boosted by, women's abundant use of the media to express their ideas and protests. Furthermore, through reading the profusion of images of female victims made available in a broad range of media presentations, we can observe how these images define the new construction of women's identity.

The second section concerns how the representations of female victims discussed in the empirical chapters build a framework for the new identity of women during reformation. This section addresses the concept of ideology, interpellation and identity (Chapter One) to show how the media culture in the reform period, or rather the cultural producers during this time, construct the identities of female victims by selecting and sorting out which representations fitted the context and history of the regime change. This section also discusses the issue of agency of the female victims. This discussion of agency (see Chapter One) also becomes important when reading the representations of female victims in the context of disruptive regime change. Considering that the representations of female victims studied here are from different violent

contexts, it is important that we acknowledge those "kinds of victimization and continue to see women's agency and strength" (Lamb 1999: 11).

Reformasi and the (Mediated) Identity of Female Victims

The violent regime change in 1998 no doubt brought countless major changes in the lives of Indonesians. Amongst many things, this thesis focuses on the changes that affected women and the media. The conditions of the multidimensional crisis that hit Indonesia hard in 1998 also influenced the direction of feminist movement. Criticism of the state's failure in handling the crisis had been voiced by a few women activists, namely members of SIP and KPI, prior to the resignation of then president Suharto (Chapter Two). However, it was only after Suharto's resignation and public discussions concerning cases of state violence against women flourished, that many feminist groups working on crisis and conflict emerged. Their open protests against the fallen regime and support for the female victims of state violence became the inspiration for the formation of the National Commission for Anti-Violence against Women (*Komisi Nasional Anti-Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan*, henceforth *Komnas Perempuan*). The establishment of the Komnas Perempuan was a sign of the alignment of the feminist movement and reformasi, and the surfacing of the discourse concerning violence against women.

The discourse on violence and the emerging civil society movement, prior to and following the resignation of Suharto, redirected the trend in mediatisation that is toward the fixation on 'transparency' (Siegel 1998, Spyer 2002(a), Strassler 2004) (Chapter One). This passion for a transparent society, reinforced by the weakening of the corrupt state power, meant an increasing demand for freedom of the press. For women, the freedom of the press has had a twofold impact. On the one hand, rather detrimentally, it facilitated the explosion of media products, many of which leaned toward pornography and titillating news about violence against women (Chapter Three). On the other hand, the opening of the media landscape also promoted the burgeoning of alternative media with their advocacy for, and empowerment of, disadvantaged groups. Women's groups, such as Rahima and YJP, also started to enthusiastically use alternative media to voice their protests against injustice and advocacy for female victimisation (Chapter Three). This twofold impact on the demand for freedom in women's lives contributed to the formation of the discourse of female victimhood.

Through close readings of the images of female victims discussed in the empirical chapters (Chapters Four to Eight), we can see how the discourse on violence against women and the demand for an open media have coloured the

way women are represented. The May 1998 rapes marked the violent nature of the regime change at the expense of many women victims, and yet, to this day, the cases remain in dark (Chapter Four). Since the identities of both the victims and the perpetrators have not been disclosed, while at the same time there is a demand that the media keep in line with the spirit of reformasi, that is promoting transparency and justice, attempts to mediatise these cases have been problematic. One of the attempts to bring the May rapes into public view through the media was the publication of an illustrated story, *Jakarta 2039: 40 Tahun 9 Bulan Setelah 13-14 Mei 1998*. This attempt was laudable as it is part of the resistance to 'forgetting' that such cruelty ever occurred. However, as it is still imbued with ethnic overtones, by highlighting the ethnicity of the female victims, it assigns these rapes to be the concerns only of the Chinese. It also maintains the stereotyped claims of material possession that has been aligned to members of this ethnic group, which is infamously said to be the reason why the pogrom was directed at them.

In addition to the May rapes, cases of violence against women in conflict areas were also discussed publicly. Cases of violence in Aceh during the military operation were amongst those discussed shortly after Suharto resigned. Along with the spirit of reform, much attention has been directed to the female victims in this area. Mediation for the victims in Aceh was also conducted through the making of two semi-documentary films—*Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik* and *Bade Tan Reuda*—by YJP dan Offstream Production House, respectively (Chapter Five). Both films highlight the silencing of the female victims and consider the need for a venue to voice their suffering. In response to the general discourse of victimhood that ponders the unavailability of a space for the victims to voice their loss of agency, these films attempt to provide such a space. Close readings and inquiries about their production and reception show that these two films are framed following a specific 'speech genre' (Morris 1996) that shape how victims and their suffering should appear in representations. In the spirit of the two organisations that produced these films, *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik* and *Bade tan Reuda* indeed look political, with a strong condemnation of the New Order, an alignment shared widely by the public sentiment during reformasi.

The centralised state power of the New Order was heavily criticised, and decentralisation and power sharing was demanded. The fall of the New Order changed the political landscape. One of the directions on the decentralisation project was toned down with a rise in religious fervour. Several regions have been eager to implement sharia Islam as an integral element of their demand for more power for the local government. However, many of these regions have placed more emphasis on the aspect of the physical appearance of being

Muslim, particularly by promoting veiling amongst women. Often harsh punishment is applied to those who violate this regulation. On the other hand, the emerging Muslim (women's) groups, among others, Rahima, support the freedom for women to choose whether or not to veil and defend those who are victimised by the regulation (Chapter Six). In this discourse, whether the enforcement of veiling is promoted or rejected, women are, for the most part, positioned as victims. By examining the positioning of women as victims in this discourse, not only can we see the political significance of veiling, but also that it becomes a sign of the intermingling of Muslim women's activism with the discourse of victimhood that has emerged in the reformasi period.

Issues of domestic violence also started to surface following the regime change. Under the New Order's gender ideology and regulations that promoted harmonious, middle-class-modelled families, spousal violence was never recognised, let alone regulated (Chapter Seven). This isolated this kind of violence that was, indeed, not even considered to be 'violent'. The introduction of cases of domestic violence into the public sphere also represented an open protest against the state's ignorance of these issues. As such, efforts by many feminists and social activists to bring the issue to the public are inseparable from their attempts to deconstruct the rigid boundary between the public and domestic spheres. The more discussions and media campaigns on domestic violence are available in the public means the more possible it is for the domestic nature of the problem to be transformed and the public urgency to address the matter to be reinforced. In these "subaltern counterpublics" (Fraser 1999), the deployment of visualisations of domestic violence and its victims becomes important. In line with the public appeal to the aspect of 'visibility' that has infringed reformasi (see Chapter One), one aspect that has become a must in the representations of domestic violence is the visual availability of victims. One among many campaign media for the discussion of domestic violence provided by feminist groups is a video entitled *Menguak Kekerasan dalam Rumah Tangga*, produced by Kalyanamitra. The title, *Revealing Domestic Violence*, hints at the obscurity of domestic violence and thus the need of its revelation. However, the predominant visualisation of violent acts appearing in this video risks the reproduction of such violence.

Together with the opening and rise of the media industry during reformasi, people can witness the creation of spectacles that were previously unlikely to be made public. Various media forms, such as VCDs, DVDs, print publications, Internet-mediated, and television, were instrumental in making these new spectacles available. Following the explosion of media productions after the weakening of the New Order, 'media spectacles' (Kellner 2003) have multiplied in full force. In the *dangdut* music scene, a popular music genre associated with

the middle-and-lower classes in Indonesia, the year 2003 was marked by the controversy over *goyang ngebor*. This dance style involves speedy gyrations of the hips and was popularised by Inul Daratista. It is heavily facilitated by, and shapes, the popular mediascape through the use of various media forms (Chapter Eight). The public was divided: some were disturbed by the perceived eroticism of the dance, while others enjoyed it. In the heart of the controversy was the condemnation of Inul, the new upcoming young singer-dancer, by the 'king of dangdut', Rhoma Irama. However, his denunciation was ineffective in stopping the growing popularity of goyang ngebor, and instead, resulted in additional support for Inul. The resultant increase in the tension between the opposing arguments concerning her is inseparable from the context in which issues of women's voices, religious revivalism, an open media, and the waning of state control were rising to the surface. The controversy over goyang ngebor demonstrates that the dangdut spectacle and the discourse of female victimisation are significant in the transformation of women's identity that occurred during the post-Suharto period.

Where is the state going?

When this thesis underlines the waning of the New Order state power as one of the aspects intertwined in the discourse of victimhood, it does not overlook the encounter of the 'new' state in the contexts of violence discussed here. By the time this chapter is written, that is, 13 years after the May 1998 rapes occurred (Chapter Four), the questions concerning the perpetrators of the riots and rapes still linger and bind the present government (*Kompas* 2011; *Tempo Interaktif* 2011). If during the disintegration of Yugoslavia, "the absence of the state was the prelude to the desperate civil violence that followed" (Das and Kleinman 2000: 6), in Indonesia, while the New Order's absence led to the massiveness of the scale of violence, it is the present state's silence that prolongs it.

A similar encounter with state power is also evident in the discussions of the cases of violence against women in conflict areas (Chapter Five) and in the domestic sphere (Chapter Seven). While in the latter case the government finally demonstrated its concern with the ratification of a law concerning domestic violence, it exhibits minimal effort in resolving cases of violence in former conflict areas. The state's role has also been called for in coping with the proliferation of detrimental local regulations that, having leant heavily toward misogynist interpretations of religion, place women in disadvantaged positions (Chapter Six). In the controversy of goyang ngebor, the state's intervention was eventually manifested in the endorsement of the anti-pornography law (Chapter Eight).

(Mediated) Female Victims: Interpellation, Identity and Agency

Interpreting the concept of interpellation as proposed by Althusser (1972) (see Chapter One), as grasping how the subjectivity of female victims is constructed, leads to an understanding that being a victim means someone acknowledges and reacts to her/his positioning, by means of others, as the one who bears the violence. Here, as interpellation concerns the representations of female victims, the subjectivity of these women is determined when the violence that befalls them is recognised and represented, for the most part, by others. By saying this, I would not suggest that we ignore the actual acts of violence and the immediate victimisation that these women bear, but since we are referring to representations, only those that get represented are recognised. Since this thesis concerns the representations of female victims by various people and organisations, the interpellating process thus involves the utilisation of ideologies of the image producers and the contexts of violence, the operating mechanisms of image production, and the expected audiences.

Interpellation has also been appropriated in the field of media study in a way that the proliferation of media with their abundant images has contributed to the propagation of identity models to whom women are hailed and to whom they adhere their subjectivity. However, as Kellner (2003: 11) suggests to "perceive a plurality and heterogeneity of contending spectacles in the contemporary moment and to see spectacle itself as a contested terrain" (see Chapter Eight), that interpellation through media representations should not be seen as 'dominating' the process of formulating subjectivity. In other words, with a myriad of choices of identities to model, audiences, to a certain extent, have the autonomy to choose and, as such, refuse being interpellated by certain ideological messages.

The hailing of Chinese women as (sole) victims of the mass rapes not only casts their subjectivity as victims, but also draws the boundary of victimhood based on stereotyped ethnicity and potentially casts out the roles of women and men from different ethnic groups in the effort to bring light to the case (Chapter Four). In the comic *Jakarta 2039*, as the female rape victim is nameless, her interpellation as a victim can also have pervasive implications for the rest of the women in the same ethnic category. The description of the victim's economic possessions in contrast to the poor pribumi rapists once again draws a boundary between the ethnic groups based on what has been deemed the reason for the rapes, that is, economic jealousy. The idea of agency is least presented in this illustrated story. The characters are depicted as having no 'autonomy' to their lives after the rapes: the raped woman cannot face her child because of her fear of social sanction, the rapist eventually dies with the burden of guilt, a feeling that he would never be able to redeem, the daughter of

the rapist has nowhere to run from the shame "in the way of the illegitimate" (Siegel 1999: 100), and the police officer could not decide what to do with the criminal. There is not a single mention about the feminists and human rights activists who are working diligently to help the victims. As such, it leaves the rapes in a darker state of affairs.

The ideological inclination of the image producers may influence the way they represent the female victims and construct their subjectivity. In relation to the representations of the cases of violence against women in conflict areas, discussed through the films *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik* and *Bade tan Reuda*, the political bearings of the two organisations who produced these films, YJP and Offstream Production House, are strongly visible in their contention that female victimisation in conflict areas are about silencing the victims of violence conducted by the state and its apparatuses (Chapter Five). YJP's emphasis on lamentation highlights the scale and the unbearable burden of the violence that these female victims bear. This, unfortunately, parallels the subjectivity of the female victims represented in the film to hopeless women who lack agency to deal with the situation. On the other hand, Offstream places more emphasis on the aspects of resentment and perseverance of the survivors, and as such represents the subjectivity of the female victims with a certain degree of agency.

In the case of veiling, the process of hailing victims is problematic (Chapter Six). Veiling here has been used both to hail female victims and heroines, the ignorant and the knowledgeable, the powerless and the powerful, and the fashionable and the outmoded. While in other contexts of female victimisation, victims are often positioned in parallel to a lack of agency, in the case of the veiling movement in Indonesia in the 1980s, the victims gained a 'canonised' position as heroines, or fighters who independently decided to veil as a form of resistance, despite the persecution they faced from their parents and schools. On the other hand, liberal Muslim feminists acknowledge the choice of women to not veil and thus hail the enforcement of veiling as female victimisation. Meanwhile, celebrities donning fashionable veils can exercise a certain degree of agency by freely choosing their favourite style. Labelling these celebrities as 'fashion victims' thus ignores the fact that veiling entails a multifaceted "relationship among faith, gender and materiality" (Jones 2007: 211-212). The subjectivity of Muslim women cannot be determined merely by their veiling; their acts of veiling should be scrutinised discursively. This proves the importance of veiling for the formation of identity among Muslim women.

Interpellating others as victims of violence is done not only by those assumed to have the authority to do so, but also in the second degree, by those already identified as victims. In Chapter Seven, the hailing of the female victims

of domestic violence is performed through the incorporation of scenes of violence, experts' explanations, and a 'real' victim's testimonies. When the interpellated victims have transformed into survivors, it is now their turn to hail other female victims to stand up and join them to become advocates for the elimination of domestic violence. Regardless of the emphasis on the representation of violent acts, this should be seen as the constructive value of the film *Menguak Kekerasan dalam Rumah Tangga* since its support for the victim-turn-survivor's agency to hail other victims and invite them to be survivors as well has upset the emphasis on the ideology of victimhood and replaced it with the culture of survival.

The controversy over goyang ngebor (Chapter Eight) is a perfect example of how the proliferation of media, with its plurality and heterogeneous 'contending spectacles', has dismantled the dominant discourse of interpellation of passive female victims in Indonesia during reformasi. Inul's resistance to become more involved in political activism, regardless of the support from feminist groups, illustrates that there is not only a single narrative of female victimisation. Her exit from the context of what the activists consider to be female victimisation via spectacular media appropriation of survival shows that the feminist discourse of victimhood may not be that dominant. For the entertainment industry, Inul's victimisation does not need any ideological remedy, only a metamorphosis of her appearance. For Inul, her decision to align herself with the entertainment industry may be more advantageous than joining the feminist protests.

The concept of agency can work in a more complicated fashion than just its basic understanding, "the ability to act or perform an action" (Ashcroft, et al. 2006: 8). Spyer, observing the violent conflict that occurred in Ambon in 1999, where people suffered "bodily exposure, terror, and enforced passivity", argues that in such a situation, agency means not only acting, but also "being acted upon" (2002: 24). Being in a situation of profuse uncertainty, yet fixated to 'transparency', everyone had the potential modality of agency by being acted upon as a part of the "anticipatory practice in the context of extraordinary, violent circumstances" (ibid: 35). From another perspective, Mahmood finds that the concept of '*ṣabr*' (Ar., patient) has the modality of agency, as she found in her study about the piety movement among Muslim women in Cairo (2005). While for many, being patient can mean 'passivity' which "women are often encouraged to cultivate in the face of injustice", it is first and foremost, a choice one can take to do good deeds, including "the virtue of patience" (ibid: 171). Ṣabr does not mean a "reluctance to act", as many of the women that Mahmood met during her studies were engaged "with social injustice", but in a "nonliberal tradition" (ibid: 174). Although in a very different context, Inul's agency

seemed to never fail, even when she was harshly condemned by Rhoma Irama, to the extent that his ultimate purpose was to 'erase' her—by stripping away her goyang ngebor. Inul's demure reaction to Rhoma's hostility revealed, visually, her ṣabr, although some may have found her pretentious as she bared her modality of agency and eventually appealed for support and sympathy. This may demonstrate what Mahmood means when writing that ṣabr "is integral to a constructive project: it is a site of considerable investment, struggle, and achievement" (ibid.)

This thesis finds that the female victims' presentations have also been dispersed and highly performative, dependant on who portrays and is portrayed as the victim, what the portrayal mechanism is, and what the reason and context of the portrayal is. However, since the representations of female victims discussed here are imbued with a highly saturated political significance of women's victimisation, it results in, on the one hand, a public awareness of violence against women which allowed certain issues, so far unacknowledged, to come to the fore and be addressed. On the other hand, this has often been disadvantageous for women. While the ways in which women are interpellated in these representations can vary, they offer relatively no room for women being anything other than the 'victim'. As such, women are deprived of agency and assigned to subject positions in which the only solution is for others, i.e. men or privileged women, to rescue them from the violence that happens to them. Another concern with the prominence of the political aspect of representations of female victims is that while the visual availability of images of women as victims serves to highlight certain important issues, it may bring harm to actual women suffering from violence. This can be well observed in the case of the May rapes and violence against women in conflicting areas, as discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

In the light of the above discussion, as the production and reproduction of new identities are never disentangled from the social and historical contexts of the society concerned, it is discernible that the images of women 'newly' identified as female victims have become abundant during Indonesia's reformasi. The female victim, here a category represented by various figures, borrowing Barker and Linquist, et al., can also be one of the 'keywords' in "considering Indonesian modernity" (2009: 36). As mentioned previously, the emergence of the figure of the female victim, here discussed in its representational aspect, cannot be disentangled from the complex circumstances of the regime change, which was afflicted with violence, open public debates of violence against women, and an abundance of media coverage concerning such violence, characteristically the period of reformasi. By the fall of the New Order, a 'new' "set of figures" began to emerge on the Indonesian

landscape (ibid: 71). Just as Barker and Linquist, et al., find the figures in their paper, the female victim, as this thesis has attempted to show, is also "unequivocally historical" (ibid: 71).

It is hoped that this thesis will be a tribute to the endeavour to recount Indonesian women's experience of violence in their lives, to suggest that despite all of the rich words this text may offer, it can never be truly complete—for the emotional, aesthetic, and intellectual power of those women involved, be they victims or activists, media producers or audiences, is of such resonance that there will always be more to say. While this thesis may read sceptical on the ingenuousness of the representations of women as victims as portrayed by the media presentations discussed here, it merely attempts to offer an alternative view in reading and understanding the representations and how such a reading is in fact highly political, just as much as the process of the production of the images and the characteristics of the image producers.