Cover Page



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Summary

This thesis is about representations of female victims in post-Suharto Indonesia. The fall of the New Order (*Orde Baru*) regime and the vibrant women's political movements that both preceded and followed it brought to the fore an ambivalence of gender identity in Indonesia. While the New Order had constructed a dominant system of gender ideology and practise, its fall gave way to a vigorous process of reification, renegotiation, and contestation of gender identity in the vacuum of power. The allegation of the state's misinterpretation and mistreatment of women during its power has become one of the predominant discourses upon which the emerging feminist trajectories have been founded.

The debates concerning cases of violence against women cannot be separated from the discourse of violence in general—yet, in a particular time and context—in Indonesia. In focusing on the discourse of female victimisation, this thesis also underlines the import of the fall of the New Order regime and the opening of the media world in Indonesia at the same time. It finds that within this process of opening, the reinterpretation of women's identity inevitably became a must and, in the meantime, new vocabularies were adopted as political statements in the current feminist movement. The term 'female victim', and its associated phrases, have become the vernacular language in the process of the 'reformation' of women's identity in the post-Suharto period—*reformasi*, as it is commonly referred to, observed in this thesis during its first five years.

This thesis addresses these three broad questions: first, why did the images of female victims become abundant in media presentations during reformasi? Secondly, how are women represented as victims in the media? Lastly, in line with the above questions, how does this mediated new identity of women play a role in shaping the nationalist gender ideology and frame the direction of the new feminist movement in Indonesia?

To answer the above questions I selected notably prevalent and influential issues among media producers, feminist activists, social scientists, policy makers, and general audiences that emerged during the period of study (1998-2004). This thesis places its analysis at a very specific point of Indonesia's history, i.e., reformasi, and on representations that appeared in 'public culture', including the print media (i.e., comics, books, journals, newsletters, and also newspapers and magazines), audiovisual media (i.e., video compact disc and radio/television programmes), and electronic-mediated media (i.e., Internet).

This thesis collects its data via multiple methods of data collection. First, through both structured and unstructured observations at Rahima, Yayasan

Jurnal Perempuan, and the State's Office for Women's Empowerment to monitor their media products and the processes of production and circulation. Secondly, through participatory observation that also extended to other women's NGOs and social groups that were concerned about women. Thirdly, through interviews and informal conversations with other individuals engaged in projects related to mediation of women, for example, those involved in Offstream Production House, Kalyanamitra women's organisation, *Kompas* newspaper's women's section, *Swara*, and others. And finally, through content analysis of the mainstream media presentations, such as national-scale newspapers, magazines, television, radio programmes, and the Internet. This thesis, as such, is concerned less with the quantitative analysis than the discursive and descriptive examination of the images and the production and consumption of the representations of female victims in various media presentations.

This thesis presents its findings in five content chapters that focus on the representations of female victims of the May 1998 rapes, in areas of conflict, in instances of religious discrimination, in cases of domestic violence, and in a popular media setting. Taking into consideration the visualisation of female victims of the May 1998 rapes, which underlines perceived 'racially'-related physical traits or stereotyped material possessions in the comic *Jakarta 2039: 40 Tahun 9 Bulan Setelah 13-14 Mei 1998*, this thesis 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 specifically to Chinese women. 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.

In reading the films *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik* and *Bade tan Reuda*, this study finds that in both of the films, violence in conflict areas is marked with the silencing of the victims, who are primarily women. This is in accordance with the general discourse of victimhood in which the loss of the victim's agency is often considered to be the effect of the unavailability of a space to speak. In light of this, a considerable effort is required to provide female victims with a space to express their voices regarding the violence from which they suffer. The voices presented by the two films are the voices shaped by 'codes'

of how activists or filmmakers alike convey what suffering means for the female victims and how they should look to the audience.

The phenomenon of veiling among Indonesian Muslim women is distinctive. Under the New Order in the 1980s, when the Islamic movement was condemned, female students who began wearing veils were symbolised as victims and fighters at the same time: victims of the *kafir* state and fighters for Islamic truth. Meanwhile, in the case of progressive Islamic women's organisations advocating the freedom for female Muslims to choose whether or not to veil, the struggle is twofold. While they attack the state's imposition to veil, at the same time they criticise the male-centrist interpretation of the sharia. For those advocating women's freedom of choice whether or not to veil, women's authority is being rejected once their freedom to clothe their bodies is denied or directed by others. However, what should be underlined is that whether veiling was banned or imposed, it has been interpreted as the primary marker of 'being Muslim'.

Campaign media such as the film *Menguak Kekerasan dalam Rumah Tangga*, has been an important tool of the Indonesian feminists' attempt to bring domestic violence into the public view. What appears to be the most important issue in the venture to make domestic violence public has been how to present it in a public campaign media in presentations that are as real as possible and that will ultimately prompt public awareness and contribution. The film also hints at how to make domestic violence public by asking the audiences to get involved as active witnesses who are expected not only to watch, but actually to do something to address the issue, as voiced by the victim when questioning of the silence of people when they saw her husband brutally hitting her.

The last content chapter analyses the transformation of a female image from aggressor to victim to survivor, embodied in the popularly controversial *dangdut* star Inul Daratista. This transformation was heavily mediated by media presentations, both print and electronic. The discursive transformation of the triad aggressor-victim-survivor is particular to the period of reformasi when the public had access to media venues to convey their protests and opposition against any attempt of control by those claiming to hold authority. The stamping of dangdut singers as erotic aggressors was not specific to Inul. However, never before had a condemnation of sexy female dangdut singers been followed by the positioning of, and public support for, those women as victims. Her come-back television programmes became celebrated spectacles that symbolised not only the freedom of expression, but also the power of the producers of the entertainment industry.

This thesis has two major conclusions. First, it concerns context. The context becomes very important in reading representations. 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 the feminist movement. Criticism of the state's failure in handling the crisis had been voiced by a few women activists. However, it was only after Suharto's resignation when public discussions concerning cases of state violence against women flourished, that many feminist groups working on crisis and conflict emerged. 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 conclusion concerns how the representations of female victims discussed in the empirical chapters build a framework for the new identity of women during reformasi. It addresses the concept of ideology, interpellation and identity 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. It also discusses the issue of agency of the female victims. The discussion of agency also becomes important when reading the representations of female victims in the context of disruptive regime change.

As the production and reproduction of new identities are never disentangled from the social and historical contexts of the society concerned, it is discernable that the images of women 'newly' identified as female victims have become abundant during Indonesia's reformasi. Further, the female victims' appearances 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. 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.