

Post-Suharto Screens: Gender Politics, Islam and Discourses of Modernity

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POST-SUHARTO SCREENS: GENDER POLITICS, ISLAM AND DISCOURSES OF MODERNITY

Leonie Schmidt*

“If I may not reach my final goal, if I should die halfway, I will die with a sense of happiness, because I helped pave the road that leads to the freedom and independence of women.”

These words were written by Raden Adjeng Kartini in 1900 (cited in Keesing 1996:8). Kartini is considered to be Indonesia’s first feminist. She wrote about the conditions of native Indonesian women in her time. Her writings particularly protest the tendency of ‘Javanese culture’ to impose obstacles for the ‘emancipation’ of women. Many others have followed the road Kartini paved and more than a century later, the fight for better conditions for women still continues and feminist critiques can be found in many fields, one of them being media studies. In this field, critiques have often focused on the ‘stereotypical’ representations of gender that served a specific national function during the New Order regime of President Suharto (1966 to 1998). The fall of the Suharto regime in May 1998 has drastically changed the Indonesian cultural scene. How the representations of gender have changed under the different circumstances of media production in the post-Suharto era (1998 to present), which is characterised by (more) freedom of press, a newly liberated public sphere and the rise of identity politics, is still an unexplored topic in academic research. It is exactly with this project that this paper is concerned.

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Before turning to this project, we need to take a step back several decades to gain insight into the (gendered) media practices of Suharto's New Order regime and the changes that took place after his fall. During the New Order, media in Indonesia were strictly controlled by the state. The state subsidised media products which could support Suharto's ideas on the nation. Often, media products were co-productions between state departments and production companies, which caused these products to carry with them a 'message' from the government. Frequently, these 'messages' had a strong gender implication, linking good citizenship for women to good domestic qualities (Brenner 1999). Women were particularly targeted, as they were seen as closely linked to the family, while 'the family' was seen as 'the nation on a smaller scale'. Hence, to control women was to control the family, and to control the family was to control the nation. This way, representations of women in media served a specific national function during Suharto's New Order.

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Saraswati Sunindyo's (1993) study of gender discourses on Indonesian television during the New Order provides a specific example of how in media products, good domestic qualities were linked to good citizenship. Sunindyo cites the 'Panca Dharma Wanita', the five duties of women, which were promoted through state-run women's organisations. The five duties promoted by the state were: "a wife's role is to support her husband, provide offspring, care for the children, be a good housekeeper and be the guardian of the community" (Sunindyo 1993:135). These duties were distributed through the state-owned television network TVRI and were woven into the narratives of their television programs. This way, media products, and more pointedly, representations of women, could function as part of the state's ideological apparatus (Sunindyo 1993:134). Consequently, portrayals of women in state-produced media products were often 'stereotypical'; they showed women mostly in the domestic sphere, while catering to their husbands and taking care of the children. It should be noted that this does not mean that there were no 'non-stereotypical' representations of women during the New Order period. Particularly

in the late New Order, media control loosened and affirmative gender politics could be observed in the media sphere.

However, it was not until after the collapse of Suharto's regime in 1998 that a newly liberated public sphere opened up a space for the construction of gender representations that at first sight radically differed from the New Order stereotypes. Under Suharto, practices of identity politics in media were suppressed out of fear that they might lead to conflict between groups in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious Indonesia. But now in the post-New Order era various groups have taken advantage of the considerate freedom of press to participate in the national public discourse. Following from this, (female) artists and media producers have started to construct the 'new female gender'/'the modern woman'. These are representations of women that blatantly defy the proper behaviour of the ideal New Order woman. The appearance of the 'modern woman' in media products does not mean the disappearance of 'old' stereotypical representations. Nevertheless, the 'modern woman' has in post-New Order popular culture, and particularly in cinema, become a highly popular character. She can be seen as having at least two appearances: she appears as an uncontrollable *wild girl*, who is enjoying (sexual) freedom and she appears as a *wanita karier*, a career woman (Schmidt 2006). In both variants, women are constructed as (financially) independent, ambitious and as persons with sexual desires. From a 'feminist perspective', which champions these ideals, these representations seem to mark a departure from the New Order stereotypical image of the docile, dependent (house)wife, and might therefore hold 'progressive' potential. However, how we can understand these seemingly 'new' representations of women, and how exactly do they differ from the government-created New Order representations?

This paper will explore these questions by analysing two films: *Berbagi Suami* (2006) an art-house film about a female doctor and *Virgin* (2004), a teen-flick about rebellious Jakartan high-school girls. Both films were highly successful, attracting large audiences. In addition to the popularity argument, there are several other reasons for focusing on these specific films.

First, *Berbagi Suami* and *Virgin* both feature a different variant of the ‘modern woman’ in a leading role: ‘the career woman’ in *Berbagi Suami* and ‘the wild girl’ in *Virgin*. This makes it possible to study the representation of ‘the modern woman’ inclusively from these two angles. Second, these two films represent two different production sites in the Indonesian film industry where a representation of ‘the modern woman’ is constructed. While *Berbagi Suami* is an art-house project by the feminist artist/writer/director Nia Dinata, who explicitly aims to practice feminist politics, *Virgin* is a commercially viable big-budget blockbuster targeted largely at a young urban (female) audience. Despite the different (alleged) agendas of production, both films construct representations of ‘the modern woman’, and studying these specific films would then also enable a comparison between both production sites. Moreover, both *Virgin* and *Berbagi Suami* are produced by independent production companies in the post-New Order era. Therefore,

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these films are useful materials for a comparison with cultural artefacts produced during the New Order era when the government sought control over media. I am fully aware that for a (more) thorough study of the representation of ‘the modern woman’ in Indonesian cinema more films should be studied, and that representations of masculinity should also be critically scrutinised. This, however, is beyond the scope of this research. This paper will hopefully form a starting point for such a study.

Through analysis of the representation of ‘the modern woman’ in *Virgin* and *Berbagi Suami*, thereby paying particular attention to discourses constructed on the level of the narrative, this paper will suggest that, like the stereotypical representations of the New Order, the representation of ‘the modern woman’ in post-New Order cinema, serves a specific ‘national function’ in contemporary Indonesia. Currently, Indonesia is undergoing processes of modernisation, which confront it with the question of what it means to be ‘modern’ and whether or not Indonesia is on the ‘right’ path toward the ‘right’ kind of modernity. This constructs a national context in which ‘modernity’ is publicly negotiated. This paper will suggest that it is exactly the representation of ‘the modern

woman' which forms a site for the negotiation of modernity. It will be proposed that in its representation of femininity, *Virgin*, as well as *Berbagi Suami*, negotiate a specific 'right' female modern Indonesian identity in an era of modernisation and Islamisation. Importantly, it will be suggested that precisely this national function of 'the modern woman' renders her representation contradictory, and marks the 'break' with the preceding New Order representations ambivalent.

THEORIZING GENDER, NATION AND MODERNITY

To propose that the representations of 'the modern woman' in *Berbagi Suami* and *Virgin* have their 'own national function' in present day Indonesia, conceptual links between 'gender', 'nation' and 'modernity' need to be established. To link 'gender' to 'nation' and this way embed the representations of gender in the national context of Indonesia, Judith Butler's intersectional theory of gender here forms a point of departure. In this theory, Butler emphasizes that gender is a meeting point where cultural and historical specific relations intersect (Butler 1990: 10). With these relations, Butler refers to the various aspects of identity such as class, sexuality, race, ethnicity and national identity. What is important is how the various elements and relations are combined with each other in a specific historical context. Butler's notion of gender is useful to demonstrate that gender identities constructed in *Berbagi Suami* and *Virgin* are not only about men and women, but are being used to express national identities.

A connection between women and the nation in the theorisation of national(ist) narratives is not new. A considerate body of work has pointed at the intersections between these two concepts. Neloufer de Mel (2001) for example describes how national(ist) discourses often frame the man as the author and subject of the nation, while the woman stands for the nation itself, which needs masculine protection. Similarly, Nira Yuval-Davis (1997) argues that the construction of nationhood brings with it specific notions of manhood and womanhood. She delineates how women produce the nation biologically, symbolically and culturally.

Contributions like these have challenged major theoretical treatments of nationalism in the social sciences (e.g. Anderson, Ernan, Hobsbawm) which have not taken gender into account as part of the analysis. Drawing on the idea that women figure prominently in producing narratives of the nation, this paper will study how through representations of women in cinema discourses related to a national project of modernisation are articulated.

The concept of modernity has been used by various authors in different ways. Therefore clarification of this concept is necessary. It is first important to stress that there is no such thing as 'the modernity'. Partha Chatterjee (1997: 3) emphasizes that there cannot be one modernity irrespective of geography, time or social conditions, as he writes that: "the forms of modernity [...] vary between different countries depending upon specific circumstances and social practices."

Second, modernity should be considered in relation to the condition of 'postcoloniality'. Leela Ghandi's (1998) unhyphenated 'postcoloniality' is used here (instead of 'post-coloniality'), as this term does not imply a chronological separation between colonialism and its aftermath on the grounds that the postcolonial condition is inaugurated with the onset rather than the end of colonial occupation. According to Gandhi, a Western modern-world system has led to the experience of the 'forced' appropriation of modernity. Therefore, 'non-Western' countries tend to look to 'the West' to interpret their own modern experiences.

Dipesh Chakrabarty (1992), in his account on the aftermath of colonialism in India, tries to grasp the reason why 'non-Western' countries look to the West to interpret their own modern experiences. He explains that in the production of the discourse of history, 'Europe' remains the sovereign theoretical subject of histories. Chakrabarty recognizes a peculiar way in which all other histories tend to become variations on the master narrative 'the history of Europe'. In a postcolonial situation in which 'the West' still is the point of reference we can understand the interpreting by non-Western countries of their own modernity in terms of their distance from 'Western modernity', as their history, their modernity, is always skeptically read in terms of a lack or an incompleteness (Chakrabarty 1992: 5).

A third facet that needs to be stressed is that the advent of modernity marks a break with the past, a break with ‘tradition’, creating a new condition in the present that is nothing like the past. As Koichi Iwabuchi puts it: modernity is “often being conceived as the place where the traditional society is being displaced by a new world” (Iwabuchi 2004: 3).

In the politics of media representation, these conceptions of modernity (and tradition) may be invoked to construct discourses that support either conservative agendas or demands for change or, quite frequently, a combination of both. The popular media then play an important role in defining both the hazards and benefits that modernity presents. They can bring to public consciousness the problems often seen to be engendered by modernity. The ‘manipulation’ of the figures of tradition and modernity is all the more potent when a society envisions itself, collectively and self-consciously, as standing poised at the threshold of modernity (Brenner 1999). As will be shown in the following sections, in *Virgin* and *Berbagi Suami*, women’s sexuality, family life, and professional life all serve as arenas in which symbolic battles over modernity are waged and through which national narratives about modernisation are orchestrated.

BERBAGI SUAMI: THE WANITA KARIER, JUGGLING PROFESSIONAL AND PRIVATE LIVES

Berbagi Suami is the second film of the feminist artist/director Nia Dinata. Dinata is known for her explicit use of the medium ‘film’ to practice affirmative identity politics. Her first film, *Arisan!* (2003), was the first Indonesia film to show a gay couple kissing. In the mosaic-film *Berbagi Suami*, Dinata tackles the ‘issue’ of polygamy. One of the stories *Berbagi Suami* tells, is the story of Salma, a woman sharing her husband with four other women. Salma is a *wanita karier*, she is a middle-class gynaecologist working in a clinic where she monitors pregnant women and conducts research. Her husband is a politician and bears the title ‘Pak Haji’, meaning a holy man who has gone through pilgrimage in Mecca and made an important religious contribution to society. Together they have a son, Nadim. Salma has questioned polygamy and wished it

would not happen to her marriage, however she finds out that her husband is married to four other women. The film focuses on her struggle of dealing with this situation. Central to this struggle is Salma's identity as 'a modern woman'; as a *wanita karier*, Salma is financially independent which provides her with the opportunity to get out of a painful situation, however her roles as mother and Muslim make her stay with her husband. As will be demonstrated here, *Berbagi Suami* negotiates and offers women a 'right' kind of modern Indonesian identity which is resting on the pillars of the family and Islam.

Salma embodies a 'right' modern female identity on two levels: on the level of her professional life (1) and on the level of her private life (2). On the level of her professional life Salma, in being a gynaecologist monitoring pregnant women, literally made safeguarding the life of women and their children her calling. Her job is to protect the production of Indonesia's next generation and to secure its health. As symbolic mother of the nation, she is closely linked its future. The film orchestrates theories on gender and nation, for instance, the idea of Nira Yuval-Davis who sees women, because of their ability to have children as biological and symbolical reproducers of the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997: 145). In the film it becomes clear that Salma loves this 'task', as she says that her job "gives more meaning to my existence."

Salma, in being a *wanita karier*, however occupies a problematic position. One of the challenges faced by *wanita karier*, as often presented by the media, is to be 'modern' without compromising the integrity of the family or one's 'essential nature' (*kodrat*) as a woman. A *wanita karier*, while generally admired for her successful entry into the modern world, is often seen as a potential problem for her family and society. Her role as a working woman may come into conflict with her duties as wife and mother. Salma, however, avoids these dangers as she does seem to balance her professional life and her family life. Although she says her job gives her existence meaning, her son is most important to her and he motivates all her actions. On the level of her professional life, Salma thus maintains her *kodrat wanita* through the way she balances her professional and family life and this way embodies a 'right' modern identity.

It becomes clear that Salma's son is most important to her when analysing her acts and behaviour in the private sphere. In the film, Salma's polygamous husband threatens harmony of the family. Being a first wife is extremely painful for Salma, but she wants to stay in the situation for the well-being of her son, as she says: "loneliness comes when he has to share his time, but I have to be strong for Nadim and looking at his peaceful face gives me the power to go on." Salma wants to offer her son a family with a father and a mother, and because she is a devoted Muslim, Salma accepts her fate to have a polygamous husband. When asked if she sees polygamy as a setback for women, she answers: "the Qur'an is my guide, it is written in the an-nisa verse, marry another woman that you like, two, three, four." Family and the Islam thus are her motivation to stay in a difficult and painful situation.

Salma does everything she can to protect her family and most important; Nadim. When she notices a crack in the bond between father and son because of her own bitter attitude toward her husband she tries to repair it: "apparently my bitterness has caused him [her son] to become a cynical young man. I think it is time to repair the bond. I've bought their [her husband and son's] favourite roasted duck for dinner tonight." When Salma bought the duck earlier that day, she ran into her husband and another wife having lunch in the duck-restaurant. Despite the painful situation, she sits at the table with her husband and Nadim, acting like nothing has happened to not disturb the father-son bonding. Salma manages her life like this, until one day her husband suffers from a heart attack and becomes bedridden. Salma's situation becomes even more painful as she has to take care of her husband, while she also has to face the other wives, who want to visit him, on a regular basis. Again, because her son loves his father, Salma keeps going: "looking at Nadim and his dedication adds to my drive to care for Pak Haji."

Berbagi Suami takes a stance against polygamy when Pak Haji in the end dies, regretting that he, through practicing polygamy, has made a terrible mess of life and now pays for it with his life. Men are also responsible for the family, but the weight of keeping the family together and raising a good son is put on Salma's

shoulders. After Pak Haji's funeral, Salma is 'released' from her painful situation and is 'rewarded' for being a good mother, for keeping her family together and passing 'national values' on to her son Nadim, as he becomes a 'national hero'. Nadim becomes a volunteer for the Red Cross to help people who have been hit by the 2004 tsunami. In his explanation for volunteering, he blames sensation-seeking Indonesians who do not contribute to society: "I really don't get it, we are Indonesians, every time we want to help we always just look for media exposure... everybody is lining up to go there [Aceh], religious leaders, movie stars, rock stars... after taking some snapshots of them with the disaster they run back home." This way, Salma has become a harbinger of the future of Indonesian society as her son, for whom she has suffered so much, actively and genuinely contributes to society. In her role of mother, the responsibility for national development is put on Salma's shoulders.

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culine protection

Thus, in *Berbagi Suami*, women and the family become the focus of national narratives of development and modernisation in Indonesian society as gender identity is converted into national identity. Salma produces the nation both biologically and symbolically. What can furthermore be recognised is Yuval-Davis's (1997) argument that the man is the author and subject of the nation, while the woman stands for the nation itself, which needs masculine protection. It is Salma who stands for the nation through her role as mother, while it is Nadim who protects the nation by volunteering in Aceh. The choices Salma makes are then not just individual choices, but choices that would have a bearing on the future of Indonesian nation.

To understand why women, more than men, are viewed as the harbingers of the future of Indonesian society, we need to look at the association of women with tradition and men with modernity. Suzanne Brenner (1999) explains this association:

"As tradition and modernity are conceptualised, women tend to be identified as the keepers of tradition and the guardians of those institutions, domains and values that are most closely linked to tradition. This

does not confine them conceptually to the past, however, because their duty is to maintain continuity with the imagined moral values of the ancestral past and to transmit them to future generations.” (Brenner 1999: 21).

According to Brenner, particularly in their role as mothers, women are considered to hold the moral fate of the nation in their hands. In contrast, men are typically envisioned as the pioneers of the economic, political, and social innovations associated with modernisation; they are not burdened with the moral baggage of the past to the extent that women are. This places the weight of maintaining ‘traditional values’ on women’s shoulders (Brenner 1999: 21). In this reasoning, it is Salma’s task to keep her family together and pass values on to her son.

In *Berbagi Suami*, Salma’s role as a mother and her role as citizen of the nation are linked together in a ‘right’ modern identity, while finding in religion the strength to continue her task and keep her family together. This way, *Berbagi Suami* negotiates and offers women a ‘right’ kind of modern Indonesian identity which is resting on the pillars of the family and Islam. Importantly, ‘religion’ was not part of the female Indonesian identity that was promoted through New Order representations. *Berbagi Suami* suggests Islam as a fundamental part of the ‘right’ modern female identity. This can be understood in the light of processes of Islamization that are currently taking place in Indonesia.

VIRGIN: DISCIPLINING ‘WILD GIRLS’

In Indonesia, the state has a strong role in defining sexuality, frequently intervening in matters of sexuality for ‘moral reasons’. An example is the anti-pornography law that was passed in October 2008. Since 2006, the draft of the bill has caused debate for its attempt to not only restrict artistic displays of sexuality, but also public displays of sexuality (‘pornoaksi’), including kissing in public and the exposure of body parts. Sonja van Wichelen (2007) examined debates around this law and noticed the centrality of *morality talk*. This morality talk entered the public sphere in a time

in which the subject of sexuality became more openly discussed. The national newspaper *Kompas*, for instance, introduced the ‘curhat-session’, a space for readers to discuss issues relating to sexuality in an open manner. However, certain groups (mostly Muslim) criticised this development and it did not take long until this *talk of sexuality* was followed and challenged by *talk of morality* (Van Wichelen 2007: 113). As will be shown here, the film *Virgin* demonstrates this tension between talk of sexuality and talk of morality. It will be suggested that *Virgin* internalises this interplay in its narrative and makes the constant struggle between the two central to the negotiation of modernity that takes place at the site of the representation of the modern woman.

The film *Virgin* was produced by Kharisma Starvision, a multi-media production company which mainly targets Indonesian youngsters. *Virgin* shows the lives of three Jakartan high school girls as seen through the eyes and diaries of Biyan, a girl who desperately tries to keep her virginity in a climate where this is seen as old fashioned. Biyan’s two friends Keti and Stella lose their virginity quickly and Biyan is constantly challenged to keep hers, as the girls become involved in all kinds of situations in which alcohol, sex and money play a central role.

Virgin was tremendously popular among Indonesian youth who seemingly could relate to what was being depicted and who were attracted by the fashionable and ‘materialistic’ lifestyle that was portrayed. However, not surprisingly, “the film also shocked many who did not appreciate the provocative language and vulgar behaviour being portrayed” (Barendregt 2007: 2).

In the following analysis, it will be demonstrated that in *Virgin*’s narrative, a recurring pattern can be recognised in which the ‘provocative language’, the *sexuality talk*, leads to ‘vulgar behaviour’, to *pornoaksi*, which is in turn constantly criticised by *morality talk* that focuses specifically on the female body. It will be argued that this pattern negotiates ‘modernity’. The constant interplay between sexuality talk and morality talk is to be recognised at two interlocking levels. The threefold pattern of sexuality talk – *pornoaksi* – morality talk first informs the girls’ individual stories and

events happening to them, while second, it is also reflected in the larger overarching narrative that is pushed forward by these events.

Virgin's three-part opening scene is illustrative for the three-folded pattern of sexuality talk – *pornoaksi* – morality talk that informs the girls' individual stories and events happening to them. In the first scene, the girls are sitting in a café in one of Jakarta's shopping malls. It starts with sexuality talk as the girls talk about who has the biggest breasts. Ignoring the other visitors of the café, the girls put their mobile phones with camera into their blouses to take pictures and compare the size of their breasts. They then start talking about virginity. Keti decided to give up hers: "Stel, Stel!! I want to give up my virginity!" Biyan is surprised and asks Keti if she is kidding, but Stella answers: "Finally! What did I say? You won't survive that long! Who do you want to do it with?" Keti answers: "anyone who is willing to pay a lot!" Stella then proposes to sell Keti's virginity right away. Here, the sexuality talk leads to *pornoaksi*, not only because after talking openly about who has the biggest breasts, the girls, in public, try to answer the question by making pictures of their breasts, but also because sexuality talk leads Keti in the second scene to have sex in a public space.

In the second scene, the girls walk out of the café into the mall and look at men passing by to pick a man to sell Keti's virginity to. When the girls try to pick a man for Keti, the girls treat men as sexual objects and talk about them in a denigrating manner. For instance, when Keti points at a man, Stella answers: "no... he is the kind who is afraid of his wife! He is so afraid of his wife that his penis cannot stand!" Finally they pick a man and after negotiating a price with him, Keti has sex with him in a public toilet. The girls then spend the money which Keti earned by buying clothes in the mall. The *pornoaksi* that started with the girls in public touching and showing each other their breasts, thus culminates with Keti's public sex act.

The morality talk occurs in the third scene. The girls drive home after their day in the mall and a song is played, which in the film becomes Biyan's theme song. The song goes: "I'm a virgin, I'm a virgin, my perspective is different, I don't regret it, I don't care

if people say I'm outdated, I'm a virgin, I don't care what people say." Here, morality talk focusing on the female body challenges the sexuality talk and what followed from it, the *pornoaksi*, by happily singing that it is acceptable to be a virgin.

The individual stories of the girls and the events happening to them (Ketie going into prostitution and becoming pregnant and Stella ending up on a porn DVD) follow the above-demonstrated threefold pattern of sexuality talk – *pornoaksi* – morality talk. And as everything is seen through the eyes and diaries of the lead character Biyan, each event ends with Biyan writing on her laptop, sharing with the viewers her reflection on events. The story of Ketie selling her virginity is also closed with Biyan sharing her reflections. We see Biyan writing on her laptop while we hear crying, her voice sounds: "Ketie I love you. But I don't know whether I have to be happy or sad in knowing the loss of your virginity. Because for me, losing a virginity means losing dignity as a girl. But, I do not understand why did I join you spending the money?" This event, as well as other events happening to the girls, thus ends with morality talk criticising the *pornoaksi* which was, in the first place, mobilised by sexuality talk.

This three-folded pattern of sexuality talk – *pornoaksi* – morality talk which structures individual events is also reflected in a larger overarching narrative. In this narrative, a morality discourse against sexuality talk and *pornoaksi* can be recognised which focuses directly on the female body. In the beginning of the film all girls have their own dream, Biyan for instance wants to be a writer and Stella an actress. But when the girls start having 'sexual things' on their mind (sexuality talk), they start to lose themselves in a fast and seemingly hip Jakartan 'modern life' of partying and having sex (*pornoaksi*). The actions of Stella and Ketie are characterised by a lack of 'bodily integrity'. They 'mistreat' their body as they constantly break down 'bodily boundaries', by letting 'dirty' things enter the body which, in popular discourse, should not enter a young girls' body, like drugs, alcohol, a man's penis during the sex act, or by violating bodily boundaries through smoking or having a tattoo. Importantly, all this takes place in public places. Ketie and Stella, however, pay a high price for *pornoaksi* and disrespecting

bodily boundaries. Keti goes into prostitution and ends up pregnant, while Stella has sex with a man she auditions for and who secretly tapes her and distributes the DVD. In the end, only the dreams of Biyan, who maintains bodily integrity, come true. Her diary containing all her moral reflections is published and she becomes a successful writer. The film ends with a moral message that when you maintain bodily integrity, your dreams will come true, but when you violate bodily boundaries punishment will follow.

We can understand the punishment via the body when reading *Virgin's* body politics in the light of Mary Douglas' analogy between 'the body and society' (Douglas 1966). Douglas identifies the concern for purity as a key theme at the heart of every society. She sees an analogy between body and society. However, instead of seeing the body simply as society, Douglas sees the body as a coding and transmitting machine: "the body communicates information for and from the social system of which it is part" (Douglas 1966: 172). Hence, the body expresses the relationship of the individual to the group and contributes to the social situation at a given moment. When considering this analogy between the body and the society in the light of the ideas that conceptualise women as standing for and producing the nation, the punishing of the girls can be understood. Instead of keeping their body pure, the girls pollute and violate the body and with this, if we follow Douglas' insights, the society. As women are held responsible for future of the nation, they endanger this future by polluting their bodies.

Women pollute
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lifestyle'

Important is that the girls pollute their bodies by adopting a 'modern lifestyle'. By setting the story in Jakarta, the film links this 'modern lifestyle' with 'Western modernity', as in public debates, Jakarta is often criticised as being the overtly 'westernised' metropolis which is not a particularly healthy environment for Indonesian youth to grow up (Van Wichelen 2007: 115). An official statement on the banning of the film in a few provincial towns said that it was "feared that the film might be taken as an all the rage role model for teenagers trying to ape a 'western inspired' lifestyle" (Barendregt 2007: 2).

The attitude toward ‘modernity’ that is displayed via the representation of ‘the modern woman’ is ambivalent. On the one hand, *Virgin* fetishizes consumerism and a Jakartan modern lifestyle by dressing its characters in the hippest outfits, letting them use new media gadgets (mobile phones, laptops) and having them dance in the hippest clubs. On the other hand, the film can be read as suggesting that the adoption of a ‘western lifestyle’ leads to a pollution of the body and with it a pollution of society.

While *Virgin* rejects a ‘Western-style modernity’, it offers Islam as an alternative, this way reflecting current processes of Islamisation in Indonesian society. It should be emphasised that the morality discourse in *Virgin* is strongly linked to Islam. For instance, when Biyan in the beginning of the film runs away from her dysfunctional home she finds refuge with a Muslim man, who provides her with a safe home and keeps her from losing herself in modern life. This man’s home is also the place where Biyan starts writing her moral reflections as closures to each event. Furthermore, it is exactly this man who notices Biyan’s writing talent and who supports her in becoming a writer. Hence, ‘Islam’ through the figure of this Muslim man both provides the base for morality talk and keeps Biyan from losing herself in a modern life. This can be read as orchestrating specific national narratives as government officials and religious leaders have often warned Indonesians of a ‘Western-style modernity’ and promoted Islam as alternative modernity (Brenner 1999).

THE ‘NATIONAL FUNCTION’ OF POST-NEW ORDER FEMININITY

The post-New Order films *Berbagi Suami* and *Virgin* show a public fascination with what it means to be modern and engage with the question whether or not Indonesians are on the ‘right’ path to the ‘right’ kind of modernity. In constructing women’s professional, private and sexual lives as arenas in which battles over modernity are waged, the two films focus much of the public anxiety about modernisation on women, suggesting that women’s behaviour is crucial in determining the course that an ‘Indonesian

modernity' might take. This way, these two post-New Order films articulate a similar discourse as the New Order films, namely that control over the (future of the) nation can be gained through control over women. Significantly, despite the fact that men as well as women are involved in sexual activities in the films, attention seems to be directed specifically at women's behaviour. Even when it concerns the issue of polygamy, it is the woman who is burdened with the task to control the situation and safeguard the nation's future. Hence, female sexuality and behaviour seem to be issues which cross both private and public domains.

While the New Order gender stereotype of the housewife had a specific national function during the New Order, namely to teach women how to be a good citizen, I would like to suggest that the representation of 'the modern woman' in these two post-New Order films also serves a specific national function. The representation of 'the modern woman' demonstrates a 'right' female modern Indonesian identity in an era of modernisation and Islamisation. It has been shown that in both *Berbagi Suami* and *Virgin*, images of women become symbolic representations of current processes of Islamisation, the rise of a consumer culture and of the (moral) dangers of a modern society. Like Brenner (1999) also observed in her analysis of images of women in Indonesian glossy magazines, the conversion of gender to nationality in *Berbagi Suami* and *Virgin* demonstrates that female identities are not only about 'women', but are being used to express national identities. The female characters in the films not only represent the representations of the choices, dangers and anxieties of modernity: women become the focus of national narratives of modernisation in the Indonesian society, as well as of persistent fears underlying those narratives (Brenner 1999: 15).

The national function of the representation of 'the modern woman' as a site for the negotiation of modernity renders contradictory her representation, and marks ambivalent the 'break' with the New Order representation of the housewife that she at first seems to signify. The 'modern woman', whether as *wanita karier* or wild girl may seem to be the opposite of the stereotypical domesticated New Order woman. Contrary to the New Order stereotypical

image of the docile (house)wife, the ‘modern woman’ in post-New Order cinema is constructed as (financially) independent, ambitious and as a person with sexual desires. However, the analysis of the films shows that ‘the modern woman’ is still subject to, and disciplined by, a seemingly patriarchal project of modernisation.

It is important to again emphasise that this paper has focused only on two films. To provide a more complete picture of gender representations in the New Order and post-New Order era, more research is required, research that not only cuts across different media and genres, but also different genders (masculinity, homosexuality, transgender). This paper will hopefully form a starting point for such projects.

Importantly, what we can observe from the analysis here is that through the representation of ‘the modern woman’ in these two films, a strong ambivalence towards ‘Western modernity’ and a fear of the present is articulated. An explanation for this ambivalent discourse might be found in the work of Partha Chatterjee (1997), who emphasised that we should always consider discourses about modernity in relation to the condition of postcoloniality. According to Chatterjee, the advent of modernity is often perceived with a sense of scepticism: “there must be something in the very process of becoming modern that continues to lead us to a certain scepticism about its values and consequences” (Chatterjee 1997: 14).

Chatterjee explains this scepticism by looking at the ways in which the history of modernity has been intertwined with the history of colonialism, as he writes:

We [referring here to India] have never been quite able to believe that there exists a universal domain of free discourse, unfettered by differences of race or nationality. Somehow, from the very beginning we had a shrewd guess that given the close complicity between modern knowledges and modern regimes of power, we would forever remain consumers of universal modernity; never would we be taken seriously as producers (Chatterjee 1997: 14).

Chatterjee in this quote thus emphasises that there is a scepticism over the present, because it is marked by subjection, by the inability to be subjects in one's own right. According to Chatterjee, the modernities of the once-colonised therefore need to be viewed in the situation of postcoloniality. Coloniality has taught ex-colonies the value of modernity, but at the same time has also made them 'the victims of modernity'. It is because 'they' want to be modern that their desire to be independent and creative is transposed to a 'traditional' past which at least was their *own* creation. This past is not a historical past, but is imagined to mark the difference with the present. Chatterjee continues that:

All that needs to be noticed is that whereas Kant, speaking at the founding moment of Western modernity, looks at the present as the site of one's escape from the past, for us it is precisely the present from which we feel we must escape. This makes the very modality of our coping with modernity radically different from the historically evolved modes of Western modernity" (Chatterjee 1997: 14).

The attitude toward modernity of the formerly colonised, therefore, cannot but be ambiguous. According to Chatterjee, for formerly colonised societies to be subjects in their own right again, they need to reject the modernities established by others and be the creators of their 'own' modernity.

As shown through the analysis, *Berbagi Suami* and *Virgin* display a scepticism and a fear of modernity, which brings to the present danger, immorality and individualism. The rejection of 'modernities established by others' seems to be exactly the project that *Berbagi Suami* and *Virgin* undertake, as they articulate, through the figure of 'the modern woman' a critical attitude toward 'Western modernity'. While rejecting a 'Western-style modernity', *Berbagi Suami* and *Virgin* envision a modernity of which Islam should be part, reflecting the current trend of Islamisation in Indonesia. *Berbagi Suami* and *Virgin* echo here Chatterjee's call to reject of the modernities established by others to become the creator of one's 'own' modernity again. The films can be read as encouraging Indonesia to produce its 'own' modernity, which is, according to Chatterjee "the key to becoming a subject in one's own right again in the postcolonial situation" (Chatterjee 1997: 20).

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