Imagined Subjects: Polygamy, Gender and Nation in Nia Dinata's Love for Share

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By Grace V. S. Chin[1]

Abstract

In this paper, I explore polygamy in Nia Dinata's Indonesian film, *Love for Share*, and how it can be used as a key signifier to analyze the construction of gendered subjects, identities and relations in the phallocentric discourses of family and nation. In Indonesia, the family structure is inherently patriarchal and hierarchical in nature, one which exhorts wives to stay at home while husbands are seen as breadwinners and whose roles are non-domestic. However, women are doubly marginalized in Indonesia as their subordinate status in the domestic space is reified at the national level through the state ideology of the nation as a "united and inclusive family". Moreover, using the doctrine of Ibuism, or Motherhood, the government encourages women to stay at home and conform to the ideal roles of wife and mother, thereby restricting their rights as citizens. Using Benedict Anderson's theory of the nation as an "imagined political community", I will consider how *Love for Share* ideologically constructs and imaginatively situates its characters as gendered subjects in the spaces of family and nation through the representations of polygamy, and how the film imagines and expresses female desire, agency and freedom. In this manner, the film both reflects and contributes to the ongoing discursive negotiations and transformations in gender identities and relations occurring within the sociopolitical landscape of contemporary Indonesia.

Keywords: Indonesia, polygamy, gender, nation, imagination

Introduction

Polygamy was a subject of heated discussions and irreverent gossip among my family members, relatives, and friends while I was growing up in Malaysia. As a young girl, I had witnessed the distressing scene of my cousin's first wife crying and screaming over his second marriage, and my aunt's attempt to console her, having gone through the same experience herself[1]. My uncle had a secret, second family who, on the day of his funeral, suddenly made their first public appearance, much to the shock and dismay of my aunt and cousins. At university, one of my Muslim friends married an aging professor as his second wife. Considering her outspoken and strong personality, our circle of friends was taken aback by this development; however, she pragmatically pointed out that she had gained financial security and more freedom this way[2]. Whilst living in the southern state of Johor Bahru, I had also heard stories of Singaporean Chinese men who came across the southern border to marry a second, Malaysian, wife behind the backs of

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their Singaporean wives. Later, I was informed that my Singaporean cousin had followed this trend by taking a second wife in Malacca, located north of our state. The same phenomenon also occurred in the northern borders between Thailand and Malaysia. The laws, I realized, did nothing to deter straying husbands from committing polygamy illegally; they merely found a convenient loophole by "avoid[ing] the laws in their own state" (Zaitun Mohamed Kasim, 2002, p. 6).

Having lived abroad for so many years, I had all but forgotten what I had heard and seen where polygamy was concerned. Then I watched Nia Dinata's satirical take on polygamy in *Love for Share* (or *Berbagi Suami* in Bahasa Indonesia), and the memories came flooding back. Set in Indonesia's post New Order era, this 2006 award-winning film adopts a woman-centered viewpoint to tackle the thorny subject of polygamy and its effects on women's lives through the intersecting narratives of three women: Salma, Siti and Ming. All three protagonists, who differ from each other in terms of age, class, education, race, culture and religion, meet as acquaintances or strangers through brief encounters in the crowded urban spaces of Jakarta. Alone in their personal experience of polygamy, each character offers a distinctive viewpoint and voice about the subject. Salma the gynecologist represents the first wife angered by her politician husband's secret second marriage, but she eventually accepts his other marriages and even endorses polygamy on national television. Siti is reluctantly coerced into a polygamous marriage as the third wife; in the end she rebels in the most unexpected way by falling in love with her co-wife, Dwi, and by persuading Dwi into leaving their husband and home. While the first two narratives are told from the dominant Indonesian Muslim perspective, the third narrative captures the voice of the non-Muslim Chinese minority in Indonesia through the character of Ming.[3] Ming's narrative is the counterpoint to Salma's as she represents the woman who willingly becomes Koh Abun's secret, second wife in order to have financial security. In the end, Ming is discovered and attacked by Abun's first wife, Cik Linda, and the event leads to the disintegration of her marriage.

Although *Love for Share* takes place in Indonesia[4], the film struck a deep chord in me. I couldn't help but think of my aunt when Salma and her two co-wives were suddenly confronted with the existence of Pak Haji's secret fourth wife (and family) during his funeral. Images of my cousin's wife cropped up as I watched a betrayed Salma in the grip of helpless anger and pain, and I recalled my university friend when Ming agreed to become a second wife to gain financial security. Polygamy, as the film clearly conveys, cuts across all boundaries of class, race, religion, and even place; in fact, the film renders the local global in meaning by speaking directly to women[5] affected and disenfranchised by polygamy all over the world. It is also important to note that all three narratives specifically represent polygamy as polygyny, whereby a man can have two or more wives, and is considered the most common form of polygamy in patriarchal societies.[6] As a social practice, polygamy is, as Blackburn (2004) says, the "symbol of man's power within marriage" (p. 113). By showing the power husbands have over their wives, and by stressing the lack of legal recourse for women caught in polygamous marriages, *Love for Share* makes emphatic the secondary and subordinate positions of women as subjects and as citizens as they inhabit the margins of the dominant discourses of family, society and the state. I cannot help but wonder, under such circumstances, how do women in polygamous marriages mediate their identities, desires and agency? More

pertinently, how are such gender-based power hierarchies and practices of the family reflected in Indonesia as a nation space?

This article examines how *Love for Share* ideologically and imaginatively situates its female characters as gendered subjects in the nation space as they negotiate their identities, roles and positions as wives and as individuals in polygamous relationships. Visual anthropologists have theorized that films are social or cultural texts that carry specific signifiers and meanings that must be read within specific cultural and national contexts.[7] I argue that polygamy is a key signifier that can be used to query the gender-based power hierarchies in the tropes of family and state as well as the role it plays in the wider national imaginary. There is a close correlation between the discursive tropes of the family and those of the nation in Indonesia as both are inherently phallocentric constructs premised on ideologies that perpetuate male superiority and authority. By representing polygamy as polygyny, the film directly taps into the inequities and imbalances that underscore gendered positions and relations in the nation space by highlighting the wider male-oriented power structures operating at inter-related cultural, socio-economic and political levels. Polygamy thus involves the imagining of Indonesia as a nation; furthermore, this imagination is heavily drawn along gendered lines.[8]

Image, Imagination, Nation

Benedict Anderson's seminal work on the nation as an "imagined political community" (1983, p. 6) is central to my thesis for it highlights the critical link between imagination and nation. According to Anderson, the nation "is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion" (p. 6). In other words, the nation is a mental landscape borne out of the "image" of shared cultural experiences and meanings, such as a common vernacular language[9], and through which the powerful feelings of "fraternity" (p. 6) arise, binding individual members of the collective together within limited yet sovereign territorial boundaries. However, what facilitates and sustains the imaginary communion between fellow-members, and indeed the shared vision of "nation" itself, is the development of mass communication through print technology.

In today's globalized economies, Anderson's theory has been extended to include digital and visual media in its various forms: film, television, and internet. The rise of mediascapes — the electronic production and dissemination of knowledge which underpinned images of the world created by the mass media (Appadurai, 1990) — has had an undeniable impact on public and private lives, perceptions and experiences in the past few decades[10]. Cinema, arguably "the most important mass medium in the twentieth century" thus plays a vital role in narrating the nation for it "participates—in both enabling and critical modes—in representations and discourses of community building" (Gemünden, 2004, p. 181). Like print technology, cinema contributes to the implicit shaping and expression of ideas through a discursive system of signs and representations. By reproducing specific meanings and symbols that speak to collective identities and consciousness, films have the ability to sustain and even reinforce the national imaginary.[11] Higson (2000) draws the parallels between cinema and Anderson's theory when he argues that "films will construct imaginary bonds which work to hold the peoples of a nation together as a community by dramatizing their current fears, anxieties,

pleasures and aspirations" (p. 26). Imagination, as Appadurai (1990) established years ago, constitutes not only as "a social practice" (p. 5), but it has become "central to all forms of agency" (p. 5).

As a creative product which involves the mediation of "reality" and imaginative interpretation to express distinctive viewpoint(s) and meaning(s), *Love for Share* provides us a means of critiquing the interrelated meanings of polygamy, gender and nation in its representations of women and family. My analysis will show how such meanings and representations mutually inform and engage each other in the ideological formation of identities and subjects in the national imaginary. Furthermore, I argue that the film's sensitive exploration of the female subjective state, articulated by acts of agency, desire, and freedom, significantly contributes to the ongoing deconstruction of the official discourse of "nation" in Indonesia.

Polygamy in Indonesia: An Overview

Although *Love for Share* is set in the post New Order, some historical context is necessary for us to fully appreciate the cultural and sociopolitical relevance of polygamy in contemporary Indonesia. Research by scholars has shown that polygamy is historically embedded in religious and ideological beliefs as well as cultural traditions in Indonesia. Although widely perceived by Indonesian Muslims today as "part of *syariah*" (Nurmila, 2008), polygamy has been established long before the arrival of Islam and was considered a common cultural practice among the elite and wealthy Hindu and Javanese circles (Blackburn, 2004). Within the Chinese culture, polygamy was traditionally upheld by Confucian ideology which ensures the perpetuity of the patrilineal line by allowing the husband to take "any number of secondary wives until a son is born" (McNabb, 1903, p. 38). Similar to the Javanese situation, polygamy was usually practiced by the Chinese elite who had sufficient wealth "to maintain a large joint-family household organized according to a strict hierarchy based on age and gender" (Johnson, 1983, p. 9).

Despite its historical roots, polygamy has come under intense spotlight in the last few decades as a contentious political issue that reflects, to an extent, some of the divisive forces of at work in the Indonesian nation space[12]. For decades, women's organizations and Muslim feminists who recognized the "negative consequences [of polygamy] for women and children" (Nurmila, 2009, p. 28) had championed for reforms that allowed for greater protection of women's rights under the marriage law. Following several proposals, all of which were rejected by members of Muslim parties, the New Order government — under the leadership of President Suharto — finally legislated the 1974 marriage law, a secular law which aimed to unify the Indonesian marriage law regardless of religion[13]. All ethnic groups, whether non-Muslim or Muslim, are subjected to this law, and encouraged to follow Article 2(1) which states that "a marriage is legitimate, if it has been performed according to the laws of the respective religions and beliefs of the parties concerned."[14] Under this law, "polygamy is legal [but] the law discourages and restricts its practice" as it "requires court intervention" (Nurmila, 2008, pp. 30-1)[15].

To an extent, the 1974 marriage law helped advance the rights of Indonesian women not only by discouraging polygamy, but also by establishing a minimum age for marriage, by allowing women to initiate the proceedings for divorce[16], and by protecting women from being coerced into marriages against their will. Nevertheless, the Indonesian

legal system has not always succeeded in protecting women's rights in polygamous marriages. According to Kurnia (2009), most polygamous marriages in Indonesia are practiced illegally through *kawin siri* or *kawin diam-diam* (both are secret marriages). *Kawin siri* is "legal under Islamic Sharia law, but illegal under state law" while *kawin diam-diam* refers to a situation when a man gets a fake identity card to in order to marry another woman in a different town; such marriages are "possible because Indonesia keeps no national data on marriage."[17] The prevalence of such marriages reveals how the patriarchal system allows men to get away with illegal practices of polygamy, and how women are left in a vulnerable position as they are not entitled to legal protection when their marriages fall apart. With the law on their side, men are the ones with the power to "decide the form of polygamy and take advantage of polygamy" (Kurnia, 2009).

Furthermore, while political reforms like the 1974 marriage law appear to be an "act of a secular, modernizing regime" (Robinson, 2000, p. 147), the system clearly privileges male authority in its recognition of "the husband as the head of the family and the wife as the keeper of the household" (Robinson, 2000, p. 147). By enforcing this patriarchal ideal, the state implicitly sanctions the subordination of women's position and rights within the family institution. This carries serious implications for women as citizens, for it stresses the insidious manner in which the state has colluded in the continued political disenfranchisement and marginalization of women in the nation space. The following section will discuss how the state — through the gendered tropes of nation and family — contributes to the ideological construction of knowledge's and images in which female powerlessness and inferiority are embedded.

Women, Family, and the Nation

Under the New Order administration, the representation of women as housewives has been endorsed by law within the national discourse. In her research into the rural middle class women in Java, Hull (1996) notes that women were exhorted to perform the following "ideal" duties prescribed by the government-sponsored welfare (known as PKK or Organization for Family Welfare) program during the New Order era: 1) Producer of the nation's future generations 2) Wife and faithful companion to her husband 3) Mother and educator of her children 4) Manager of the household 5) Citizen (p. 95). Hull's much-cited example reveals the entrenched gender bias towards women being championed at a political and state level, whereby the feminine roles of "mother" and "wife" are prioritized and esteemed over that of "citizen."[18] As Sullivan (1991) maintains, the "program offers women a new (but tightly circumscribed) public stage on which to play out their `age-old private roles' […] as dependent assistants to males" (pp. 69-70). She also remarks on the absence of "women's *rights* in the family, neighborhood, society, nation" (p. 69) in the PKK ideology. The pervasiveness with which women have been ascribed subservient and marginal roles in the family and nation has resulted in lop-sided and stereotyped representations in Indonesian cinema. In her research on Indonesian films, Sen (1998) observes that most critiques that she read "implicitly assumed the citizen/subject to be male" (p. 37). She goes on to state thus: "Agency, whether in reproducing or challenging the political and economic structures of Indonesia, is thus ascribed almost exclusively to men. In all these scenarios women play the roles of victims or, at best, survivors against great odds" (p. 37).

Thanks to the repressive state apparatuses of the New Order government, of which the 1974 marriage law is a part, it is not surprising to find that the Indonesian national imaginary has revolved around the phallocentric rhetoric and representation of women as secondary citizens. The dominant, "nationalized", and "naturalized", images of women as housewives and mothers would have had profound effects on the perceptions and imagination of the citizenry; such representations regulate the norms of socially-acceptable gender identities, roles and behavior, and define gendered spaces and subject-positions in both the private and public spheres. After all, "symbols of nationalism are not gender neutral but in enforcing a national norm, they implicitly or explicitly construct a set of gendered norms" (Sharp, 1996, p. 97).[19] Such an insidious construction, authorized at the highest political levels, would have indirectly reinforced the polemical structures of domination that underline gender relations and positions in the social and cultural arenas as well.

It is also noteworthy to point out that the "national" symbol of the patriarchal and hierarchical family structure has been heavily emphasized by the New Order government as the cornerstone of its main ideologies: *State Ibuism* (or State Motherhood) and *Pancasila*[20]; the former "assigns greater value to [woman's] status as wife and mother than to her individuality and agency" (Siddique, 2002, p. 27) while the latter promulgates the principle of "unity in one nation" (Bertrand, 2004, p.31) throughout the Indonesian archipelago of 17,500 islands, where 230 million people of diverse ethnicities, cultures, religions and languages reside. On the surface, the *Pancasila* principle of national unity promotes harmony and unity amongst its diverse cultures and ethnic groups, but in reality, the state sought to represent "the nation as a family [by] portraying those who espoused alternative discourses as challenging the idea of an inclusive Indonesian family to which all […] belonged" (Lloyd & Smith, 2001, p. 11). The construction of Indonesia as a nation has thus been premised on a homogeneous "concept of nationhood" that Lloyd & Smith call "inclusive unity" (2001, p. 3). This idea is further perpetuated through the national slogan "Bhinekka Tunggal Ika" or "Unity in Diversity", which has been employed by the New Order government to control the potentially explosive regional, ethnic and religious differences among its people.

However, the national image and rhetoric of Indonesia as a united and inclusive family is a heavily contested one, considering the disparities in cultures and identities, and the resulting ideological conflicts and challenges which include, broadly speaking, "the role of Islam in political institutions, the relative importance of the central and regional governments, [and] the access and representations of ethnic groups in the state's institutions" (Bertrand, 2004, p. 3). Kingsbury (2005) argues that "it was always a rhetorical, if not actual, tenet of faith" (p. 136) that national unity can be achieved; in short, the united and inclusive nation is an imaginary and elusive vision. To sustain this image of unity, the government has, in the past, employed repressive measures and military violence to subjugate rebellious regions that included Aceh, Kalimantan, and East Timor. While the post New Order era, established after Suharto's resignation in 1998, has seen political leaders adopting a more democratic approach in governing Indonesia, the challenges that presented themselves at the inception of the Indonesian nation are still present. The reading of the film as a social text therefore takes into consideration the paradoxes and contradictions that underpin the film's imagining of gender and nation; such inconsistencies reveal the continuous grappling and negotiation

with the terms 'gender' and 'nation' within the changing and dynamic, interactive, social spaces of the country.

Given that the national imaginary and indeed, the national consciousness, have been nurtured on the symbolic representations of the "united and inclusive family" for decades, it is hardly surprising to find that it is the patriarchal model that has become the premise of such representations. As Robinson (2000) perceives, the "gendered model of political authority [has] its origins in an imagined tradition of a patriarchal family" while political leadership is "understood implicitly as the `natural authority' of the father" (p. 141). By disseminating the idea of the nation as a natural extension of family and kinship relations[21], the "Guided Democracy" government under President Sukarno and the New Order government under President Suharto had respectively championed its political `father' figures; Sukarno is recognized as its "founding father" (he was also fondly known as *Bapak* or "father") while Suharto is the self-styled "father of development" during the 1980s. The patriarchal and paternalistic models on which the imagining of the nation was based were reified during Suharto's New Order regime when "the patriarchal family [was] invoked as the basis of authority relations within society" (Robinson, 2000, p. 141). This again confirms that women are officially subordinated to men both "within the family and the State" (Robinson, 2000, p. 141). The underlying message to this ideology is that "national unity would be achieved if women would continue to operate as wives and mothers, striving to maintain the integrity of the Indonesian family" (Siddique, 2002, p. 27).

Love for Share: **Imagined Subjects**

The patriarchal family structure, which is considered the basis of national culture and is reflective of the state ideology of inclusive unity, underscores the film's imagining of Indonesia as a nation. The biggest polygamous family is that of Pak Lik's in the second narrative. Pak Lik's masculine identity and male sexual power is emphasized by his three wives — Sri, Dwi and Siti — and several small children and infants, all of whom appear to live quite harmoniously under one roof. Unable to curb his sexual appetites while in Aceh, he marries a fourth wife, Santi, whom he brings back to Jakarta and whose presence fuels tension in an already congested small house. Kurnia (2009) perceives this big family as a symbol of the "overpopulated Javanese family typical of the most overpopulated island in Indonesia", and that the film "gestures towards the issue of the lack of family planning, and the associated poverty and overpopulation". The imagery of one man ruling a house full of women and children is representative of the model on which the nation state is based. The camera projects Pak Lik's sexual and masculine power in certain scenes: he is depicted as lounging on the bed, waiting for his wife/wives; and he pins Siti to the wall when she resists his advances. In one scene, Siti likens him to a "Sultan surrounded by his concubines"; Pak Lik, with his fourth wife and current favourite, Santi, seated beside him, proudly surveys his other wives as they work — Siti who is ironing clothes and Dwi who fetches his coffee. Although the film represents the co-wives as energetic, industrious and strong, they are all mainly confined to the domestic home and its many responsibilities. The co-wives, when not giving birth, have to take care of their children, or do the laundry, cooking and cleaning. At the same time, they are expected to be sexually available; this imagery underscores the dominant discourses on Muslim women whose "purpose is to reproduce healthy citizens and satisfy

their husbands" (Blackburn, Smith, & Syamsiyatun, 2008, p. 12). Above all, the co-wives fulfill *State Ibuism*'s definition of femininity as "procreators of the nation, as mothers and educators of children, as housekeepers, and as members of the Indonesian society — in that order" (cited in Siddique, 2002, p. 31).

The film's portrayal of gender based power relations and its abuses are made even more glaring through the depiction of polygamous relationships. Examples of gender inequity and injustice abound in the narrative of Pak Lik and his wives. One of the problems is highlighted through Sri, Pak Lik's first wife, who unknowingly contracts a venereal disease from him and is persuaded by Siti to seek treatment at a clinic. Sri's story reflects lower class women's lack of access to education on health and family planning (Kurnia, 2009); since they have no control over their bodies or lack access to fertility control and treatment, women are thus prone to being infected with venereal diseases. Moreover, the film calls to attention the manner in which women are reduced to sexual objects and playthings; all the co-wives are at the beck and call of Pak Lik and, in Siti's case, she is even deprived of the right to say "no" to sex. By voicing the powerlessness of women as secondary subjects, the film showcases the repressive and authoritarian discourse at work in the patriarchal family where the "ideological devaluing of women and the feminine" (Robinson, 2000, p. 145) takes place. Despite the post New Order context of the film, Siti's narrative reminds the audience that traditional attitudes and viewpoints towards Indonesian women, strengthened by the tenets of State Ibusim, have prevailed in certain sections of the society.

Women's dependence on men and their segregated space in the home is, time and again, stressed in the Siti's narrative. In another scene, Pak Lik gives Sri some money just before he departs for Aceh, and asks if it is sufficient during his absence. While this scene depicts the dependence of an entire household of co-wives and children on one man's ability to make ends meet[22], it is also relevant for another reason. There are striking parallels between this scene and the following observation made about the Javanese household: the wife "plays a dominant role in household affairs. Having given his wife the money to run the household, the husband rarely interferes" (cited in Sullivan, 1991, pp. 75-6) as he fulfills the role of provider and protector. Upheld as the national model for the "separate-but-equal" (Sullivan, 1991, p. 74) positions and spaces for men and women, this family structure is also validated by *State Ibuism*. As a result, any power ascribed to the wife is effectively limited, as she is "circumscribed by her association with domestic life" (Sullivan, 1991, p. 76). This point is visualized by the co-wives' collective financial dependence on Pak Lik and their lack of mobility, bound as they are to their positions and roles as housewives and mothers.

The hegemonic discourse of the united and inclusive patriarchal family is so pervasive that even highly-educated and career minded women find themselves subjected to its vision. Salma the gynecologist is a case in point. Not only does she accept polygamy as proof of her Islamic faith by saying that it is "kodrat"[23] or "womanly destiny" (Hatley, 1997, p. 99), she even supports her husband's political career by going public with her acceptance of polygamy on a televised talk show. By accepting and publicly endorsing polygamy, Salma appears to toe the state ideology that "encourages civil servants' official wives to … [support] their husbands in their careers" (Robinson 2000, p. 148). In playing the roles of "good" wife and citizen, Salma unconsciously reproduces and perpetuates the gendered hierarchies of family and nation. However, the

disempowerment and marginalization of women as gendered subjects in the national imaginary is nowhere more clearly seen than in the recurring motif of the 2004 tsunami; this motif can be seen in Salma's and Siti's narratives through the national television broadcasts, and through the newspaper headlines in Ming's narrative.

The 2004 tsunami was an unprecedented international tragedy, affecting not just Indonesia, but also Malaysia, Thailand, India and Sri Lanka, among others. Interestingly enough, the film focuses only on Aceh where the highest number of casualties was also reported. By selectively keeping the focus within Indonesian borders, the film nationalizes what was an essentially international disaster; keeping the event to "bounded territorial space" (Anderson, 1983, p. 173) that is imagined and known as Indonesia. More than any other visual signifiers in the film, the 2004 tsunami is the one which resonates most with the Indonesian audience as it evokes the "emotional power of the `idea of Indonesia'" (Lloyd and Smith, 2001, p. 12) through the tragic loss of lives in Aceh. The recurring motif of the tsunami tells us how characters in each narrative react or respond in ways that emphasize their collective identities as Indonesians through their reactions or responses to the tragedy. But at the same time, this motif also "speaks" to and for certain characters, in that it reveals their gendered identity, role and subject-position in the national imaginary.

For instance, men's rights to positions of authority and power in the nation space are communicated through the actions and movements that emerge as a response or reaction to the televised images of the tsunami. In the first two narratives, the male characters swing into action the moment the tragedy is announced on television. In Salma's narrative, Pak Haji is on the telephone during the broadcast of the tragic events, promising to send aid in the form of food and medicine, and to bring Salma and their son, Nadim, with him to Aceh. Although motivated by political purposes, Pak Haji's involvement in the tragedy nonetheless accentuates his masculine identity and power as a man of action since he arranges to bring aid and his family along to help. In short, his wife and son are props to his political purposes and he establishes his authority as the head of the family by making the decision on their behalf. The purpose of Pak Haji's visit is not lost on Nadim and the latter's criticism of his father reflects the public perception of insincere, deceptive politicians, a well-known theme in the Indonesian sociopolitical landscape where charges of corruption, nepotism and cronyism had been raised during the New Order and the post New Order regimes (Lloyd & Smith, 2001; Bertrand, 2004; Kingsbury, 2005).

On the other hand, Nadim's decision to become a volunteer in Aceh is motivated by his sense of social consciousness. However, like his father's actions, Nadim's too are symbolic to the construction of his masculine identity. The final scene of his departure carries strong patriotic and nationalistic undercurrents due to his khaki green uniform and the military colours of the Hercules airplane that he enters. The Indonesian military symbolically underscores the dominant trope of the nation as it has always been seen as a "major force for state cohesion and the promotion of nationalist sentiment" due to its "self-defined role as guardian of the state" (Kingsbury, 2005, p. 137). Nadim's desire to help the victims of Aceh is significant to his identity as a son and as an Indonesian man who establishes his masculinity and authority within the ordered spaces of family and nation. Nadim is portrayed as a loving son who is very close to his mother and who opposes his father's polygamous marriages. He makes up for his father's absence by

becoming his substitute as the man in the house. Through this self-defined role, he criticizes his mother for not divorcing Pak Haji and often expresses his disappointment with her. I perceive that both his inability to persuade Salma to his point of view and his inability to accept the family situation reflects his helplessness and incapacity as a son and as a man. Significantly, his "child-like" status is stressed in one scene where he sleeps in his mother's bed the way he used to when he was a child. It is by helping the motherland in ways he is unable to help his mother that Nadim is finally able to affirm his identity as a man of authority and of action in the family. Moreover, as a patriotic Indonesian, he can now take his place in the narrative fabric of the nation. In a voiceover, Salma observes that her son can finally "fly free" in his newfound independence.

In the second narrative, Siti and her co-wives Sri and Dwi are watching the live broadcast of the tsunami while their husband, Pak Lik, is packing his clothes and explaining his reasons for going to Aceh. Unlike Nadim, or even Pak Haji, Pak Lik's motivation is purely a financial one as he is paid to bring foreigners who wish to make a documentary about the disaster. Like Pak Haji and Nadim, Pak Lik too is propelled into action by the momentous events in Aceh, albeit for financial gain. In this sense, both he and Nadim are mobile in ways that the female characters are not; the men are able to move regionally, imaginatively crossing from Java to Aceh, while women's space of agency and movement is limited to Java or specifically, the city confines of Jakarta. Siti and her co-wives of the second narrative inhabit an even smaller space, since it revolves round the cramped domestic walls of their tiny two-bedroom home. The segregation of roles and spaces between genders serves to emphasize, once more, that women are displaced in the margins of both family and national discourses; their subordination in the private realm of the patriarchal family is reified in the wider public spaces of the nation.

Acts of Resistance

As a social and cultural text, *Love for Share* is an invaluable resource for understanding certain facets of contemporary Indonesian "reality" or "behavior pattern" (Heider, 1991, p. 10), in that it mirrors the ongoing articulation and contestation of ideas, viewpoints, and acts in the transformative spaces of an increasingly modernized society. Although the film captures women's systemic marginalization and devaluation in the nation space, it also visualizes the smaller, less visible acts of resistance that go against the grain of the dominant national trope of the united and inclusive patriarchal family.

For instance, Salma, despite her acceptance of polygamy, is not represented as a completely passive or helpless woman. As a gynecologist, she's a successful woman in her own right. Moreover, she subverts Pak Haji's authority in small but powerful ways. One example is her refusal to go to Aceh with him, choosing instead to go with Nadim's party. Another is her dismissive attitude towards Pak Haji at the dinner table, which also conveys her lack of respect for him. In short, Salma's acts of resistance occur at a private, personal level that is at odds with her public face of conformity. In Ming's narrative, an admirer named Firman actively encourages her to fulfill her aspirations as a film actress. Firman, whom Ming is attracted to despite being married to Abun, offers her a path to eventual independence should she pursue her acting career. This shows that Ming rejects the ideology of Ibuism; not only does she refuse to conform to the role of the wife staying at home, she is also childless and is represented as a carefree, sexy and active young woman who attends acting classes and who meets with Firman whenever her husband is

not around. In fact, Ming "takes advantage of her single status" (Kurnia, 2009) when not playing the role of wife to Abun. In this way, she "negotiates two identities, that of single young woman and secret second wife" (Kurnia 2009).

However, the biggest act of resistance is contained in the second narrative where in an interesting twist, Siti falls in love with her co-wife, Dwi; their relationship develops to such an extent that they, with Dwi's children in tow, run away together at the end of the narrative. Their acts of transgression — falling in love with each other, and abandoning their husband -- resonate with significant meanings. While Siti's and Dwi's escape can be seen as a potent metaphor of their liberation from patriarchal dominion, the film's exploration of female sexuality and solidarity through the emerging lesbian relationship is nevertheless a bold statement of women's agency and autonomy, as signified by Siti's and Dwi's desire to take control of their bodies and destinies. Furthermore, the narrative's ending suggests an alternative family structure to the patriarchal stereotype through the lesbian-led family, another powerful image that implicitly undermines the phallocentric trope of male authority and sexual potency encoded at cultural, social and national levels.

The film challenges the state ideology of the united and inclusive patriarchal family in other ways too. *Love for Share* is not just a film about the effects of polygamy on women; it also reflects the changing attitudes of young men towards polygamy and how such changes can alter the shape of future gender relations and positions. The film pits the viewpoints of young, educated and liberal-minded men like Nadim and Firman against those of the older men like Pak Haji and Koh Abun. Salma's acts of resistance are supported by Nadim who condemns his father's practice of polygamy; he displays his anger to an extent where he is seen as a disrespectful son. In an ironic reversal, a dying Pak Haji finally acquiesces to his son's thinking when he advises Nadim to marry only one wife. Firman too questions Ming's status as a second wife when she can be independent on her own. By depicting the ongoing shifts in the perceptions and attitudes among young Muslim men, the film contributes to the dismantling of the state's hegemonic and phallocentric discourse by voicing the need for different definitions and representations of masculinity and femininity to take place in the national imaginary.

Conclusion

Love for Share should be seen as the positive result of the democratization processes occurring in Indonesia after Suharto's resignation in 1998. Baird (2009) observes that the "decade since the end of the New Order has seen an increasing public presence of women and enhanced freedom of speech for all" (p. 1), and that Dinata belongs to this new wave of Indonesian film directors who are "making films that deal with issues relating to gender and sexuality that previously would not have found public space" (p. 1). By boldly tackling previously taboo subjects like homosexuality, women's sexuality, and polygamy, *Love for Share* brings to light the double marginalization of Indonesian women and their discontent against patriarchal control and dominance in both the nation and family spaces. Furthermore, with its focus on women's freedom and agency, albeit in restricted ways, the film reveals the ongoing changes in perceptions and attitudes towards gendered relations and identities in Indonesia[24].

As other critics have noted, despite the entrenched national institution of the patriarchal and hierarchical family, and despite the insidious ideology of *State Ibuism*, gender identities and relations are slowly changing shape in Indonesia due to the determination of women's movements and NGO groups who have been fighting for women's rights and issues, including greater protection for women at work and for women subjected to violence (Robinson, 2000; Blackburn, 2004). Feminists and activists have also demanded for the state to recognize women's contributions to the economy, society, education and politics (Robinson, 2000; 2004). In addition, contemporary Indonesian women have access to different kinds of media representations of women other than the traditional images of mothers and wives (Sen, 1998). The changing constructions of femininity ongoing in the public, social spaces can be seen in the rise of educated young women and affluent career women in the cities; it is hoped that such positive movements will help redefine women's traditional identity, role and place in the national imaginary.

Ultimately, the film suggests that, despite the overarching narrative fabric of the united and inclusive nation, one shouldn't forget the varying and fragmented "smaller" imagined communities contained within, such as the minority communities of lesbians and non-Muslim Chinese Indonesians. By giving voice to the smaller, less visible acts of resistance practiced at the micro-level of everyday life, the film challenges the state's "fixed" rhetoric and regulated imagining of the nation as a united patriarchal family. Instead, it counters this rhetoric with its vision of a nation space that is vibrant, dynamic, and transformative, where minority voices and identities struggle for political expression and representation, and where different "other" gendered identities and relations are continuously being formed, and are able to emerge from / escape the regulated dominant discourse of the nation. These emerging voices and imaginings — both of the film and the characters it contains — not only challenge the state ideology of Indonesia as a united and inclusive patriarchal family, but also reflect the ongoing democratic transformations in the post New Order Indonesia, and should be considered as a promising sign of better things to come.

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NOTES

[1] Polygamous marriages were practiced among the Malaysian Chinese community until the Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) Act 1976 was enforced in 1982; the Act banned polygamy for non-Muslims. Despite the ban, my cousin went on to marry a third wife during the 1980s.

[2] In Malaysia, as in Indonesia, polygamy among Muslims is controlled by Syariah law. For further information, refer to Zaitun Mohamed Kasim, 2002.

[3] Indonesia supports the world's most populous Muslim population, which currently stands at 86%, while the Chinese minority only accounts for about 3% of the population. For details, please refer to the latest census report (http://dds.bps.go.id/eng/).

[4] Indonesia is a neighbouring country to Malaysia; they share striking parallels in that they are both Islamic countries supporting a Muslim majority and non-Muslim minority ethnic groups that include the Chinese.

[5] Dinata believes that those who appreciated her film comprised mainly of women; she notes that "women came with women in the middle of the day. They didn't want their husbands to know" (Perlez, 2006) or that they are women like herself, "the daughters of a polygamous father that want to prevent this from happening in their own marriage" (Tehrani, 2007).

[6] Polygamy is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "the practice or custom of having more than one wife or husband at the same time." Polygamy also includes polyandry, in which a woman can have more than one husband. In Indonesia however, polygyny is commonly practiced as Muslim men are permitted by the Koran to marry up to four wives.

[7] For their insightful analyses of Indonesian films as social or cultural texts, read Heider, 1991 and Sen, 1994, 1998.

[8] For a comprehensive study of the key issues involving gender relations, citizenship, subject-identities, and how they are affected by nationalism and nationalist projects, refer to Yuval-Davies, 1997. For a general overview of the arguments and debates on gender and nation, read Day & Thompson, 2004.

[9] Language plays a key role in situating the individual as part of the national collective. Anderson contends that the birth of Indonesia as a nation was enabled by the spread of *Bahasa Indonesia* across the archipelago as the emerging lingua franca; nationalist movements later recognized it as the national language (pp. 132-34). Heider (1991) expands on the argument, stating that the exclusive use of *Bahasa Indonesia* is what makes Indonesian films "truly national" (p.11).

[10] Appadurai's influential essay develops the theoretical underpinnings of Anderson's "imagined communities" and "print capitalism" by describing the complex relations between cultural flows around the globe — ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes — and the multiple imagined worlds that we inhabit.

[11] By "national imaginary", I refer to the specific set of ideological meanings and representations — historical, sociopolitical, cultural — that underline the formation of subjects and identities.

[12] For a brief overview of the opposition against polygamy by Muslim feminists, women's organizations, and secular nationalists, as well as the issues involving Muslims and non-Muslims, please refer to Blackburn, 2004, and Nurmila, 2008. For the types of polygamy practiced in Indonesia and how it is represented in *Love for Share*, please refer to Kurnia, 2009, and Imanjaya, 2009.

[13] According to Robinson (2000), this law was enacted despite protests from "religious groups, particularly Islam that challenged the right of the state to intervene in matters of personal life" (p. 146).

[14] Cited from Law Library of Congress, retrieved from <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/religious-marriage.php>.

[15] For further details of the reforms on the marriage law in Indonesia, please refer to Robinson, 2000, Blackburn, 2004, and Nurmila, 2008.

[16] For those of Islamic faith, they have to go through the religious courts to initiate proceedings.

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[17] Examples of such secret marriages are represented in all three narratives in *Love for Share,* and have been extensively examined in Kurnia, 2009, and Imanjaya, 2009.

[18] For an invigorating discussion of Indonesian women's political engagement with the state over their rights as citizens, refer to Blackburn, 2004, pp. 84-110.

[19] Sharp's position has been reiterated and elaborated on by other scholars in the field, including Yuval-Davies, 1997, and Siddique, 2002.

[20] Established by President Sukarno since the birth of Indonesia as a nation state in 1945, *Pancasila* contains five principles that form the premise of state ideology: 1) nationalism, 2) internationalism or humanitarianism, 3) representative government or consent, 4) social prosperity or justice, and 5) belief in God (Bertrand, 2004, pp. 31-2). For details, refer to Bertrand, 2004, and Bourchier & Hadiz, 2003.

[21] While such ideas have been displaced by modern theorists like Anderson, the "naturalized" view of the nation as an organic "extension of family and kinship relations" (Day & Thompson, 2004, p. 119) have had a historical standing. The sociopolitical order of feudal China was based on the Confucian family whereby "the wise father was a model for the wise ruler or minister, and dutiful children were the models for properly submissive subjects who knew their place, their role, and their obligations to others" (Wright, 1964, p. viii). Modern nation-states that include Malaysia and Singapore have also adopted this view of the nation, resulting in the paternalistic and patriarchal forms of governance. For further details, refer to Chin, 2005/2006.

[22] This scene also raises questions about poverty and its related social ills, even though Dinata did not fully engage these issues in her film.

[23] Hatley (1997) maintains that the concept of "kodrat wanita" or "womanly destiny" is "focused on nurturance of husband and family" (p. 99), which conforms to the ideals of *State Ibuism*. Additionally, "Kodrat" is insidiously "justified as indigenous, "traditional", "our Indonesian way" — as opposed to alien, excessively Western-influenced conceptions of female equality and independence" (p.99) in order to keep women toeing the line in both family and national discourses.

[24] Naturally, the film has its weaknesses. At certain points of the narrative, the film's liberal stance fails when its imagination shifts beyond Java, and beyond the dominant Muslim worldview. This is seen in two instances. First, when the film allegorizes the peace accord between Java and Aceh through the union between Pak Lik and his fourth wife, Santi, it inadvertently perpetuates the national ideology of "unity in diversity" as well as the myth that Indonesia is one big happy family. Moreover, the gendered hierarchy between Java and Aceh is reflected in the triumphant, sexually virile Pak Lik and the subordinated pious Santi. Second, the film's projection of the Indonesian Chinese as economically-driven characters (evinced by scenes of Koh Abun's successful duck restaurant, Cik Linda holding a fistful of cash, Koh Abun giving Ming a packet of money, and Ming's own admission that she wants financial security) stresses its failure to look beyond the typical racial stereotypes. Both instances highlight the essentialist lenses of the film's perspective on Aceh and Indonesian Chinese, which contradicts its liberal views on gender agency and freedom.

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