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The Transformation of the Social Imaginary on Women's Sexuality in Indonesian Literature from the New Order to *Reformasi* Eras

By Wening Udasmoro¹ and Nur Saktiningrum²

Abstract

In this research, we explored the social imaginary that relates to women's sexuality based on the writings of several prominent Indonesian female authors. We argue that the social imaginary is not only a social construction but also a construct created through an individual's active participation. Historically, the social imaginary in Indonesia has been tied to nationalism; however, it has gradually shifted toward the individual perspective. In particular, this study examined the construction of the social imaginary in Indonesia by comparing and differentiating literary works created under two political regimes: the authoritarian New Order regime (1968–1998) and the more democratic *Reformasi* regime (1999–present), wherein individuals—especially women—were given more space and liberty to participate in the construction of the social imaginary of their sexuality. This study focused primarily on two important research questions. First, how has the social imaginary of women's sexuality, as contested by Indonesian women authors in their literary works, changed from the New Order era to the *Reformasi* era? And second, how has the re-emergence of religious, political, and social powers during the *Reformasi* era contributed to authors' contestations of women's sexuality? The content analysis of selected literary works revealed that the social imaginary of women's sexuality changed alongside the changes in Indonesia's political regimes. During the New Order era, the social imaginary was controlled by the hegemonic power of the State. In the early period of Suharto's rule, women authors were co-opted by the State's power, whereas its later years were marked by the struggles of women authors against his authoritarian government. The *Reformasi* era gave way for liberty in women's discussions of their sexuality, but this freedom was found to be temporary, its ephemerality compounded by new, religiously oriented conservative powers' attempts to push back against the new wave of self-expressive women authors and restore women's position to one of suppression and subordination.

Keywords: Social imaginary, Women, Sexuality, New Order, *Reformasi*

Introduction

Women's sexuality is the subject of ongoing critical discussion in numerous works of literature across societies. One aspect of understanding is by analysing the social imaginary on women's sexuality as presented in a given period's literary works, the latter of which reveal an individual's perspective on women's sexuality. At the same time, an individual author's social imaginary of women's sexuality must occur in a social context, thus allowing for an

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understanding of this issue that is contextualised according to the values and norms of the time. In Indonesian society, the social imaginary of women's sexuality is discussed widely, but appears to vary across the different eras of political rule. This article consequently ventures into analysing these literary discussions to provide a broader understanding of the political and ideological influences on sexuality, along with how political power influences discussions on women's sexuality, by examining the relation between social imaginary and the changes in political regimes that impacted women's sexuality, through its portrayal in Indonesian literature during the New Order and *Reformasi* eras.

Conceptualization of the Social Imaginary and Women's Sexuality in Indonesia

The concept of the social imaginary is derived primarily from the imaginary, the latter of which was first elaborated by the French scholar Jacques Lacan, which he derived from the earlier work of Louis Althusser in his theory on ideology. According to Althusser, the imaginary is the image of reality (cited in Ingraham, 1994), which occurs in a social context and is viewed as the social imaginary. The social imaginary is defined in a variety of ways. One of the definitions relevant to this discussion is offered by Charles Taylor, who conceptualises the social imaginary as an "ensemble of imaginings that enable our practices by making sense of them" (Taylor, 2003, p. 165). Taylor (2003, p. 23) defines the social imaginary as a "common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy." It comprises the images created by people of the world in which they live, and thus is built on a social structure of the imaginations of what they wish their society to be like (Taylor, 2003). Moreover, Taylor (2003) argues that the social imaginary is a set of self-understanding, background practices, and horizons of common expectations, which is not always explicitly articulated but nonetheless gives people a sense of a shared group life. The social imaginary enables people to interact with one another in shaping their views of both themselves and others. The study of the social imaginary of women has been approached from a number of different perspectives. Many of these studies have concentrated on sociological aspects, focusing on women's roles in families and workplaces (Grunberg & Matei, 2019), or women's roles in organisations and networks (Fotopoulou, 2014). The issues of their identities as single women or their imaginations as married women or mothers have also been broadly discussed (e.g., Almeras, 2001; Cooper, 2003). The image of being a mother is one presented in many different cultures. Conversely, the dual image of women, as both mother and worker, has also been elaborated on in numerous works (e.g. Suryakusuma, 1988). In the Indonesian context, for instance, Julia Suryakusuma (1988) explains that the position of women as mothers has been structurally created through both symbolic and systemic mechanisms. Symbolic mothers in this context refer to the role of women as the mothers of the Nation; i.e., women should contribute to the Nation using their body and sexuality. The mechanism used is through the state's policies, such as its regulations and organisations.

Women are positioned as subordinated subjects and men have determined their roles. In particular, women are positioned to have more limited roles than men in the participation of the construction of the social imaginary, because of men's domination in the structural positions of society (McClintock, 1993; Nagel, 1998). The social imaginary, in terms of what society should be, is considered to be dominated by male voices, values, and ideas (Friedan, 1963). Friedan emphasises this by arguing that a woman might be living in a family with a good husband and good children, but this will not be enough for her; she also wants to do something more for their own expressions and professional interests.

In the context of nationalism, the roles of men and women have commonly been delineated according to masculine ideologies and concerns (Nagel, 1998). Under the New Order government of Suharto (1968–1998), for instance, Indonesian women participated in the construction of nationalism (Udasmoro, 2003), but their role in doing so was to aid the

promotion of the position of men, something Suryakusuma referred to as *State Ibuism*. She defined *State Ibuism* as the function of motherhood or the positioning of women as that of a mother in the making of the Nation (Suryakusuma, 1988). This positioning of women as mothers marginalises those who choose not to engage in maternal practices.

As political changes occurred in the country, so did the social imaginary evolve dynamically according to the social issues of the time, among them women's position in society. This evolution in the social imaginary can be defined through various writings in this domain. The *Reformasi* movement, which in May 1998 transformed the government of Indonesia from one that was authoritarian into a more liberal and open regime, built a new horizon in how women were to be placed in different perspectives. In particular, women were placed in many different positions in society. The subsequent ascendancy of religious groups and communities, continuity of nationalism, and increase in freedom of expression have in many different ways given nuance to this new conceptualization of the social imaginary.

Theories that Underpin the Social Imaginary

In order to understand the changes in the ideas about women in Indonesian society, we adopt Charles Taylor's (2003) theory on the social imaginary, as previously defined in the introduction of this article. However, because of the diversity of the practices of this social imaginary in Indonesia, we also discuss the social imaginary on women's sexuality reflecting from Bourdieu's theory relating to the concept of structure, which he introduced as the structure structured and the structure structuring (Bourdieu, 1980b, 1994). According to Bourdieu, the structure is not a fixed and rigid one. Rather, it is evolving, as both the individual and society progressively construct the structure in various ways.

Furthermore, for us to understand it in a social context, we posit that Taylor's social imaginary becomes broader and more comprehensive when extending his definition to Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Bourdieu defines habitus as a system of acquired dispositions functioning on the practical level, as categories of perception and assessment or as classificatory principles, as well as being the organising principles of action (Bourdieu, 1980b). According to Bourdieu, in habitus, the structure is not a stagnant phenomenon, but rather a progressing reality. Based on Bourdieu's conceptualization of habitus, Wacquant adds that it is "the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel, and act in determinant ways, which then guide them" (Wacquant, 2005, cited in Navarro, 2006, p. 16). Thus, habitus "is not fixed or permanent. Habitus is a disposition that can be changed under unexpected situations or over a long historical period."

Bourdieu also conceptualised it as a marriage between the social and the individual, and therefore habitus is used in this article to illuminate the structure of the social imaginary as an arena of contestation (*champs de force*) rather than a taken-for-granted imagination (dream) and tradition that people maintain and reproduce from time to time (Bourdieu, 1980b, 1980a). Habitus is a system of disposition where the individuals perceive the social world and react based on their views of the society.

In that regard, we argue that apart from the construction of the social imaginary, the individual's imaginary has also contested the social imaginary in a binary fashion and contributed to the creation of the social imaginary of the imagination. We further argue that the construction of the social imaginary is a *dynamic* process. The social imaginary of certain social structures is always progressing dynamically, because this structure is structuring itself (Bourdieu, 1980b). However, the individual who attempts to create or propose an alternative social imaginary also structures the structure. They creatively formulate the social imaginary of the social structure and are an active participant in the process, which involves the psychology of the individual's "social cognition" (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

The social imaginary also entails different practices in a society, such as literature, which can be used to understand how different authors in their literary texts construct the social imaginary of an issue. According to Barthes (2008), there is an inter-dependency between shared meaning (*langue*) and individual meaning (*parole*). The *langue* is defined as the abstract system of signs or social expression of language, while *parole* is the actual usage or individual expression of language (Barthes, 2008). *Langue* cannot be separated from *parole*, nor vice versa. In the context of literature, literature itself can be positioned as *langue*, a shared meaning that reveals literary ideas, whereas *parole* in this case is an individual or group expression within literature. Literature is consequently part of the social imaginary that emerges within discussions on gender relation literature.

The Social Imaginary and Women's Sexuality in Indonesian Literature

We illustrate this emerging Indonesian concept of the social imaginary with examples from various Indonesian women authors' relevant literary works, written during the New Order era or subsequent *Reformasi* era. This set of selected works reflects the social imaginary that oscillates between politics, religion, and culture, with regard to women's sexuality within Indonesian society.

Works focused on women's sexuality that are written by women are a relatively new trend in Indonesian literature. Until recently, it has traditionally been approached from the perspective of male authors. The shift in this perspective is especially evident among the young, urban Indonesian authors, such as Ayu Utami and Djenar Mahesa Ayu (Arum & Pujiharto, 2020; Marching, 2007; Sudarmoko, 2013), who started, around the turn of the century, to write about women's sexuality and even discussed some grey areas such as queer phenomena. In order to show how this perspective has evolved over time, we compare the literature on the social imaginary of women's sexuality during the New Order and *Reformasi* eras of literary creation.

Research Questions and Method

In this research, we explored two crucial questions: (i) what kind of change occurred in the social imaginary of women's sexuality from the New Order to the *Reformasi* eras, as contested by Indonesian women authors in their literary works; and (ii) how does the re-emergence of religious, political, and social powers during the *Reformasi* era contribute to women authors' contestations of women's sexuality?

In analysing these two research questions, we carried out content analysis of various works written by Indonesian women authors, using the diachronic method to understand the social imaginary on women's sexuality in these works. From the New Order era, we chose the novel, *Badai Pasti Berlalu* (The Storm Will Surely Pass), published between 1980 and 1990, and the monologue, *Marsinah Menggugat* (Marsinah Accuses), released and performed between 1990 and 2000. From the *Reformasi* era, Ayu Utami's *Saman* was selected to show the tendency of novel stories from 2000 to 2010, and *Bunda Kisah Cinta 2 Kodi* (Mother the Love of Two Codies) by Asma Nadia to represent the social imaginary in the years between 2010 and 2020. We focused on the issue of how the social imaginary of women's bodies and sexuality was discussed by these authors in their respective works.

From Melancholic Mothers to Fighters: Women's Social Imaginary during the New Order Era

The New Order government, lasting from 1968 to 1998 and also known as Suharto's era can be categorised into two periods. The first period comprises the decades before the 1990s, while the second is that from 1990 to the end of Suharto's rule in 1998. The early period of Suharto's political rule—from the 1970s up to the end of the 1980s—is perceived as his

glorious power of rule (Aspinall, 2016). He dominated all aspects of Indonesian people's lives, wielding power through claims of enhancing economic prosperity and fostering rapid development of the nation.

Suharto's power during this first period can be seen from the literature that was screened and sanctioned by the State, as well as how the positions of men and women were controlled in literary works. One prominent male author who was critical of the government's power was Pramoedya Ananta Toer (Akmal, 2012, p. 3; Indrastuti, 2019, p. 107). He wrote comprehensively about women and defended their position in society. His most popular novel, written while in political imprisonment, is titled *Bumi Manusia* (1980), later translated into English as *This Earth of Mankind*. Toer positioned Indonesian women as powerful and influential. His writings were thus also considered by the regime to be in opposition to the New Order ideology—which positioned women in the domestic sphere—and as promoting communism. All of his novels were consequently forbidden by the State from being discussed in public, sold in bookstores, or kept in libraries (Atikurrahman, 2014), while the author himself was ultimately kept under house arrest until 1992. Because of the government's restrictions on freedom of expression in politics, many authors chose to be careful in how they composed their writings, using symbolism to convey their stories. This included creating symbolic language in poems when expressing their imaginations in regard to women's issues. According to Pramoedya Ananta Toer, this era could be referred to as the rise of the banality of literature. The novels and other literary works produced during this period underscored the voice and importance of the State's propaganda. Thus, the space for the individual to create and contribute to a *new* social imaginary was very limited, as it was co-opted by the State (Kunz, Myrntinen, & Udasmoro, 2018).

During the first period of Suharto's rule, the social imaginary of the State on women's sexuality was based on a family planning policy to curtail over-population and combat economic poverty. The orientation of Indonesian families, with the clearly defined roles of a mother, father, and two children, became a nationally constructed social imaginary. The State's family planning slogan was: "*Dua anak cukup laki-laki perempuan sama saja*" (only two children is enough, boy or girl is the same), with the resulting image of a good nuclear family consisting of a father, mother, and two children (Asmara & Kusumaningrum, 2018). This is an example of how the positions of men and women were constructed toward a small family size. Through this government propaganda of nation-building, the women in this era were directed to support their husband's career (Udasmoro, 2012). This can be seen in the various State-devised organisations, policies, and jargon, such as *Pendidikan Kesejahteraan Keluarga* (PKK, or Education for Family Prosperity) and *Panca Dharma Wanita* (Five Duties of Women), which were aimed at promoting women's roles in the domestic sphere (Suryakusuma, 1988). This period was also known as the "successful years" of Suharto's development program, in which his policy on family planning was acknowledged by the international community.

Religious groups and leaders succumbed to the State's authoritative power, which reinforced the government's development agenda of small nuclear families. Literature of the time was occupied with images of women having a small number of children. *State Ibuism*, in which the State positioned women as *ibu* (mothers), could be reflected in the literary works of the New Order. In response to that, Titi Said Sadikun, Marga T., Mira W., and La Rose were among the popular women authors who wrote mostly about the social imaginary of women in Indonesian society as subordinated, melancholic mothers—sad and dominated by men. These works were published in women's magazines and read mostly by urban women. Titi Said Sadikun, for instance, wrote *Jangan Ambil Nyawaku* (Don't Take My Soul, 1979), Marga T. wrote 128 short stories and 67 novels for teenagers and adults, among them *Karmila* (1973) and *Badai Pasti Berlalu* (The Storm Will Surely Pass, 1974). La Rose wrote *Dalam Wajah-Wajah Cinta* (In the Faces of Love, 1976), *Psssst (Jangan Bilang Siapa-Siapa)* (Psssst (Don't

Tell Anyone), 1977), *Benang-Benang Kusut* (Tangled Thread, 1983), *Lingkar Hidup* (Circle of Life, 1983), and *Takdir* (Destiny, 1983), among others (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 2017). From the titles of these novels, we can see that the authors mostly portrayed the roles of women within the domestic sphere and, in everyday life, in subordinated relationships with men, the latter of which were imagined as powerful beings who controlled the public space.

Among the above novels, one of the most important ones was *Badai Pasti Berlalu*. Incredibly popular when it was published, it sold over 24,000 copies and was subsequently adapted into a film, which was seen by 202,551 people and went on to win four Indonesian Film Festival awards in 1978 and an Antemas Award in 1979 (Kumparan, 2017). It tells the story of a woman, Siska, who is betrayed by her fiancé, and then falls for a man who is later revealed to have married her only as part of a bet, followed by one who blackmails her into marrying him. After losing her child, she attempts to regain her life (Tjoa, 2007). In this story, Siska is positioned in the subordinated and melancholic position vis-à-vis the men she encounters. In such novels, a heavy emphasis is placed on the domestication of women and their fragile bodies and emotions. And in the Suharto era, this was the dominant portrayal of such women.

The following examples show how women were portrayed in *Badai Pasti Berlalu* as victims and powerless objects.

“That sentence isn’t finished. She’s just lost her boyfriend. No wonder she’s so cold that you need to cover yourself with a blanket when she’s around. The second sentence: let’s make a bet that if you can make her fall for you, there’s 100 thousand rupiahs in cash for her and ...” (Tjoa, 2007, p. 9)

“Can you imagine, we had all the wedding invitations ready? All was fully set.

– Then ... came his letter telling us that he’s married! How can anyone do that to my sister!

– Oh ... I never thought it could be that bad.

– Johnny threw an incredulous look at his friend.

– I ... I mean I know that your sister is broken-hearted. All of her friends know it. But, I never imagined the situation was much more shocking than I had expected...” (Tjoa, 2007, p. 25)

In the context of the social imaginary, this novel portrays women as sad human beings. They cannot stand for their independence, because they are too closely attached to men who also control their lives. Women are described as submissive to men’s love. Such stories could be found in most of the novels of this period.

The depressing situation of women was present in other social contexts, as well. In music, for instance, most of the songs written about women focused on their sadness over being betrayed by their husbands or boyfriends. Popular songs like “Hati Yang Luka” (The Wounded Heart) and “Gelas-Gelas Kaca” (Glasses of Glass) discussed women who had broken hearts. In spite (or because) of their popularity, the Suharto government, through its Minister of Information at the time, Harmoko, banned these melancholic songs, finding them to be inadequate at motivating women and the society at large (Matanasi, 2019).

The shifting political winds of the 1990s, which saw Suharto begin to lose his grip on power, created other streams of literature. This second period of Suharto’s rule was marked by

the struggle of different social actors to contest his power. Previously silenced religious leaders began to gain prominence with the rise of Islamic discourse in the political and cultural arenas. The establishment of hundreds of non-governmental organisations also influenced the efforts of civil society to push back against the New Order regime, while student demonstrations and protests were held regularly in university campuses across the country (O'Rourke, 2003). These political contestations, combined with the economic crisis at the end of the decade, allowed the different political, social, and religious actors to express their criticisms toward the regime. The defining characteristic of this period was the struggle to criticise Suharto's power, through different points of view.

At the same time, many of the literary works of this period were written as a form of protest against Suharto's power. One of the prominent authors here was Sena Gumira Ajidarma, whose book, *Ketika Jurnalisme Dibungkam Sastra Harus Bicara* (When Journalism is Silenced, Literature Should Talk, 1997), contained several essays criticising Suharto's power.

Even though his power was waning, several authors who criticised Suharto's political rule were jailed, and others disappeared under mysterious circumstances (O'Rourke, 2003). Cognizant of these dangers, many poets employed symbolic language to contest Suharto's power. One of the most important poems was written by Wiji Thukul. Titled "Suara dari Akar Rumput" (The Voice from the Grass Roots), it criticised the failures of Suharto's development policy, arguing that he had plunged lower class people into the unfolding economic crisis. Thukul subsequently disappeared after writing this and other poems critical of the regime.

In spite of the heightened aggression of the regime during this period, authors continued to struggle through their literary works. Authors, intellectuals, and artists were frustrated with the situation under the oppressive New Order government. As a consequence of these many different forms of protest against his rule, Suharto began to lose some support from the military (Aspinall, 2016). Nonetheless, he was still in power, for the time being, necessitating the continuation of authors' usage of covert opposition strategies. For example, some authors used the form of parody, while others used theatres to criticise Suharto's government. Teater Koma was one of the most prominent groups of theatre production, putting on plays backed with the ideology of contesting the regime. They used sarcasm and metaphors to criticise Suharto. Of these performances, two notable ones are *Konglomerat Burisrawa* (Burisrawa Conglomerate) and *Sukses* (Succession). The former criticised the Suharto family's supremacy over Indonesian business, and specifically the fact that Suharto and his cronies and family had built a business empire from his consolidation of power. *Sukses*, meanwhile, rapidly became well-known (and subsequently banned) for its sharp critiques of Suharto's nepotistic mechanisms of choosing a successor, namely that they could only originate from his own family and group of close associates. In particular, after winning the general election in 1996, he appointed his eldest daughter as the Minister of Social Affairs, a move quickly realised by the Indonesian people to be Suharto's attempt to groom and reserve a place for her as the person who would ultimately succeed him as ruler.

This developing spirit of deconstructing the hegemonic masculine regime was not limited to male authors. Women authors such as Ratna Sarumpaet became the embryo of the struggle for the liberation of expression. The play, *Marsinah: Nyanyian dari Bawah Tanah* (Marsinah: Songs from Beneath the Earth), and subsequent monologue, *Marsinah Menggugat* (Marsinah Accuses), both directed by Ratna Sarumpaet, recount the real-life rape and murder of Marsinah, a 24-year-old factory worker and trade unionist who challenged the military regime (Maharani, Ws, & Zulfadhli, 2018). These works reflected not just the struggle of women for positioning in the face of State power and control, but, according to Sarumpaet, the "deep, trivialising contempt which men, especially powerful men, feel towards women who dare to speak out" (Hatley, 1998). In *Marsinah Menggugat*, the spirit of Marsinah decides to

address the people attending the launching of a book about her, among whom are government officials and other powerful people. She reflects on what has transpired since her passing, how the case has yet to be solved, and concern for her well-being materialised only after it was too late to save her. Marsinah also resolves to face down her killers—represented as the disembodied voices and footsteps of certain members of the audience, who spy on her while hiding among others who call for justice—angrily claiming her voice as she lashes out at the regime for its theft of human life and dignity. Below is an excerpt of the monologue:

“I see a lot of blood ... I see the greediness is continuing, the owner of capital keeps on dredging the benefit, all of the manager and the power keep on gripping my every sweat drops. But a small worker like me dares to struggle for the rise of wages? She will lose her soul.

“And now see how they make me die just like a golden bridge for humanity; for the supremacy of law; for fixing the life of the workers. “Fixing the life of the workers... from 1500 become 100, from 1700 become 1900... One glass of ice tea in the morning, one bowl of meatball for lunch and then one bowl again for dinner. That is to measure the happiness of the workers, who are used to giving all of their energy and thinking, without a space to complain.

“Fixing the life of the worker... How come the death of the small worker like me can humanise all of the workers in a sick Nation?”

From the above text, it is clear that Sarumpaet, as a female writer, was not just referring to private and domestic life, but the struggle for workers whose lives had been left behind by State power, as well. She expressed a woman's struggle for the sake of humanity in a country she considered to be “sick.” Writings such as these were more than objects of entertainment. *Marsinah Menggugat* was a political struggle, an act of bravery during the repressive New Order regime. The monologue was performed in several cities, among them Surabaya and Bandung, where it was disrupted by local police, and ultimately became part of a nationwide struggle for justice at the precipice of the Suharto era.

The theatre found enormous success, despite the political environment's hostility to such activities, playing in many different places, including some universities, such as Gunadarma University, a private university in Jakarta. The motivation for cooperation between this woman author and the university reflects the agency of both the author and this small institution in challenging the power of the State.

Crucially, the social imaginary portrayed in literature during this latter period was totally different from the social imaginary of women during the early period of Suharto's rule. Women were not perceived as weak and subordinated beings, relegated to the private sphere with private struggles. Instead, they began to contest in public and political arenas. The portrait of women authors was also different, wherein some invented new ideas and expressions to be used in challenging and criticising the existing political power.

From Sexual Self-expression to Religious Social Reproduction in the *Reformasi* Era

In May of 1998, having lost public faith and the support of political allies, Suharto officially resigned, marking the culmination of the *Reformasi* movement and the beginning of a new era. Drastic change followed, alongside entirely different struggles. The first period of the social imaginary in the early *Reformasi* era (1998–2010) was not of the individual's dream to attain a position in the public sphere but of the imagination to express one's autonomy

through their body. Rather than being based on the presence or absence of equality with men in the private or public spheres, the freedom of women was reflected in their ability to express their sexuality. Under the New Order, sexuality was a taboo subject, forbidden from conversation in the public arena. It was also the exclusive domain of male authors, who spoke about vulgar sexualities, especially when in reference to women's sexuality. One New Order-era author known for his vulgarity was Abdullah Harahap, who wrote, for instance, *Misteri Perawan Kubur* (Mystery of the Virgin in the Cemetery, 1980). Generally discredited as a serious author, Harahap was seen as a sordid novelist, one who degraded the position of women in society through his depictions of them as objects rather than subjects in his narrations of their sexuality.

Later on, during the *Reformasi* era, it was women who deconstructed this taboo, in a very explicit manner. This repositioning of sexuality—particularly women's sexuality—in Indonesian popular culture was initiated by a young female journalist named Ayu Utami, whose bestselling novel, *Saman*, was launched in May 1998, just days before Suharto's resignation (Utami, 1998). Its sequel, *Larung*, also a bestseller, was released in the early years of the *Reformasi* era (Utami, 2001). In these novels, Utami deconstructs the social imaginary of women imposed by the previous social and political regime of Suharto, namely that of women as the mother (*ibu*) and queen of the domestic sphere. *Saman* emphasized the importance of women's autonomy and freedom, including their sexual freedom. A woman was now defined as an individual who was free to express her body, and in whom freedom was manifested in the expression of her body and sexuality. In *Saman* and *Larung*, Utami redefines women not as objects, but as subjects who narrate the story about their own body and sexuality. The women presented in Utami's novels assert their rights to express their sexuality as men do. This female author broke the long-held New Order taboo of the expression of women's sexuality by women authors.

Ayu Utami's novels were viewed as vulgar by many contemporary male authors and literary analysts. However, their criticisms did not dissuade other women from expressing their own ideas about women's sexuality in society. Utami's ideas of women's sexual freedom stimulated many other young women authors, such as Djenar Mahesa Ayu with her novel, *Jangan Main-Main dengan Kelaminmu* (Do Not Play (with Your Genital Part); Ayu, 2004), Dinar Rahayu with *Ode untuk Leopold von Sacher Masoch* (Ode for Leopold von Sacher Masoch; Pujiastuti, 2002), and Ratih Kumala with her novel, *Tabula Rasa* (Kumala, 2004). All of these women writers emphasised the position of women as free subjects, which included freedom of expression on sexuality, something that was absent among women authors in previous political eras. Below are some quotations from *Saman*:

“Saman,
Orgasm through penile penetration is not the be-all and end-all. I always have an orgasm when I think about you. I come because of everything you are.”

“Saman,
You remember that night, that very night, when all I wanted was to caress your body and watch your face as you ejaculated? I want to come to you. I'll teach you. I'll rape you.” (Utami, 2001, p. 196)

In *Saman*, Utami focuses on women's pleasure, their freedom of sexuality, and their freedom to express their body and sexuality. She also takes the position of women as subjects vis-à-vis men, not the mere objects of male fantasy.

During this early period of the *Reformasi* era, the attention paid by authors and writers to female–male relations expanded to other minorities' issues. Homosexuality, lesbianism, and other forms of transgender phenomena were also written about and made into films. Ayu Utami, for example, also wrote about the practice of lesbianism in *Saman*. This literary movement was ultimately labelled *Sastra Wangi*, or “perfumed literature.” They were also supported by a group (Community of Utan Kayu) who advocated strongly for civil rights in Indonesian society. Both *Sastra Wangi* literary works and the Community of Utan Kayu were subject to heavy criticism, especially from male literary analysts, who accused the writers of promoting American capitalism.

Responding to the contestation from these authors on the social imaginary of women's sexuality from within the open space for religious expression and ideological debate provided by the collapse of the New Order, numerous authors from different religious backgrounds emerged with their own writings and perspectives on these issues. An alternative to the Community of Utan Kayu quickly developed in Forum Lingkar Pena, which challenged the former's liberal approach to the positioning of women in society. The latter was founded by two sisters, Asma Nadia and Helvy Tiana Rosa, who represented young Muslim women. Their literary works have religious nuances. Many other religious novels were also written by other authors, such as Abidah el Khalieqy's *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (Woman with a Turban, 2001), and one of the most popular religious male authors, Habiburrahman El Shirazy, who published the bestselling novel, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (The Verses of Love, 2004).

The most important aspects raised in these novels were tied to religious issues and practices that determine how men and women are to be positioned, based on the religious perspective (Latifi, Udasmoro, & J, 2019). As a result, the practice of polygamy, for instance, was described frequently during this period, particularly a decade after the *Reformasi* movement's elevation in 1998. This religious literature challenged the image of what it meant to be a “good wife.” Does being a good wife mean that she obeys a husband who wants to practice polygamy? The contestation of what it means to be a good wife implies that, in these novels, there was still some degree of unresolved gender issues regarding the role of women as wives. These works reacted to the social phenomena of polygamy, which had come to be increasingly practiced by people.

Asma Nadia's *Bunda Kisah Cinta 2 Kodi* (Mother the Love of Two Codies) relates the story of two women, a mother and a daughter. The mother is pictured as a subordinated woman, who accepts her husband's decision to practice polygamy. The daughter is pictured more liberally, refusing polygamy; however, it is the good mother who is portrayed in the representation of the novel. The mother is a good wife because she obeys her husband, while the daughter is also a good wife because she prefers to work from home and concentrate on her family life. Below is one passage from the novel.

“Kartika Sari never understood what made her mother stay; where this woman got such a tremendous strength to put up with her husband all her life. Love? But Papa's presence has never put a sparkle in Mama's eyes. She looks tensed up and wary every time Papa sets foot in our home. Once there was a rumour that he had secretly married a woman in Bandung. But it was nothing compared to Papa's another marriage with a widow with three children. One time Aryani calmly responded to her daughter's query, ‘My priority in life is living with the fate that Allah has assigned to me with forbearance, a surrendering heart, and gratitude. Allah creates blessings for every trial.’” (Nadia, 2017, p. 210–213)

The subordinated women reappear later in the novel when they are placed in a difficult situation in which they must follow the rules imposed by their husbands. Here, women's obedience is justified through the Islamic understanding that they will have the grace of God if they accept this situation as *takdir* (destiny). The function of women as reproducers is also clear in the novel, with the women shown sacrificing their lives to care for their children, husband, and the family. The above quotation is used to show the position of a subordinated old woman in the story. Nadia also attempts to show another view, where the position of women appears to be better, as in the case below.

“Kartika held her husband's hand and kissed it lovingly, “Promise me, you're gonna tell me every time I'm too busy and forget to spend time with our kids.” Farid's eyes were glistening with tears. Since they built their business, this issue has caused many arguments between them. There were times when he had second thoughts about supporting Kartika's business, although he knew that it would be very difficult for him to stop her doing something that she's good at. Even so, if the worst should happen, if these things diverted his wife from her duties as a mom for her children and increased her absence from her family, he would make a firm decision about it.” (Nadia, 2017, p. 316)

The above case shows the life of Kartika, the daughter of the subordinated mother. It is explained that she is luckier than her mother because she has a better husband, one who understands her. Nonetheless, the discourse is still the same in how the position of women is depicted, vis-à-vis men—her desire to work is a source of friction between the couple, and the husband can't help inwardly questioning the dedication of his wife to his children, even while acknowledging the fulfilment she receives from working. The question of the destiny of women as mothers is still emphasised.

Conclusion

The social imaginary cannot be seen only as a construction of society. The individual also contributes to how society should position man, woman, and any other gender orientation. During the *Reformasi* era, there was *interaction* and an intensive process in which the religious tendencies of people and the State's more open perspective gave rise to the freedom of many different Indonesian authors to express their own social imaginary of Indonesian society. With the dissolution of the New Order and its compelled homogeneity, people no longer shared the same meanings with the same interpretations, as is evident in the above discussion. This arose from the authors' different backgrounds, be it class, social ethnicity, or religion, which alongside greater freedom of expression resulted, via their writings, in diverse social imaginaries of what gender relations should be like in their society.

From the analyses and discussion of the transformation of the social imaginary from the Suharto to the *Reformasi* eras, it is clear that women's bodies also came to be viewed in a different manner. Under the New Order, women and their bodies were objects to be managed through various programs in various fields, including in social life and literature. Women and their bodies were domesticated in different ways, depending on the social actor involved. When the State managed women in this manner, the social imaginary to be explained was its function in society. Women were considered to function as simple tools for nation-building, and their roles as mothers (fulfilling the social function of child-rearers) were emphasised hegemonically. As such, different social actors, including women writers, felt compelled to position women in accordance with the State-constructed imaginary. Several female authors

struggled against this, but the supremacy of the military's power almost inevitably meant it would be the victorious side in any contestation.

Meanwhile, in the *Reformasi* era, keeping in mind the high contestation between social actors from a wide array of groups—running the gamut from the nationalist to the religious, the radical to the liberal—women and their bodies were positioned in accordance with these different social actors' backgrounds. Liberal writers, which in this case can be understood as the women writers who believed that women have historically been marginalised in their self-narration, produced a new social imaginary linked to freedom of expression, most fundamentally in women's sexuality and body. This subsequently shifted, over the past decade, to women and their bodies once again being subject to hegemonic management, albeit a more religious one. Radical religious groups have used women's bodies as objects of management through increasingly intense social pressure based on religious norms and practices. Women's obligations apropos their sexuality, which includes veiling and acceptance of polygamy, have become a new chapter in the developing social imaginary regarding what it means to be a woman in Indonesia.

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