

**School of Media, Culture and Creative Arts
Faculty of Humanities**

The Representation of Children in Garin Nugroho's Films

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Abstract

The image of the child has always been used for ideological purposes in national cinemas around the world. For instance, in Iranian cinema representations of children are often utilized to minimise the political risk involved in making radical statements, while in Brazilian and Italian cinemas children's portrayal has disputed the idealized concept of childhood's innocence. In Indonesian cinema, internationally acclaimed director Garin Nugroho is the only filmmaker who has presented children as the main focus of narratives that are oppositional to mainstream and state-sponsored ideologies. Yet, even though his films have been critically identified as key, breakthrough works in Indonesian cinema, no research so far has specifically focused on the representation of children in his films.

Consequently, because Garin Nugroho has consistently placed child characters in central roles in his films, the discussion in this thesis focuses on the ideological and discursive implications of his cinematic depiction of children. With the central question regarding the construction of children's identities in Garin's films, the thesis analyzes in detail four of these films, dedicating an entire chapter to each one of them, and with the last one being specifically addressed in cinematic essay form. The films discussed are *Surat untuk Bidadari* (Letter to an Angel, 1993), *Aku Ingin Menciummu Sekali Saja* (2000), *Rindu Kami Padamu* (Of Love and Eggs, 2004) and *Daun di Atas Bantal* (Leaf on a Pillow, 1997).

The textual analysis of films that is carried out is framed by two key ideas: firstly, Garin's position as an auteur and, secondly, the specific ways in which he deploys representations of children against mainstream discursive constructions in Indonesia. Following the argument that Garin has used a form of "strategic intervention" to explore particular political issues in Indonesia (Hanan 2004), the thesis identifies ways in which Garin deconstructs children's images and provides alternatives to dominant discourses on childhood in Indonesia. Through the analysis of selected films, the thesis reveals that while the identities of children are constructed in his films against the idealized image of Indonesian children, they are also utilized by him to convey more broadly his political views about Indonesia.

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Notes on Spelling and Translations

This thesis uses the Indonesian spelling standard (EYD) applied since 1972. This standard is followed for Indonesian words, including personal names and titles of publication, with one exception: personal names throughout the thesis are spelled according to the preferences of the person named, and Indonesian names of authors in non-Indonesian publications are spelled in accordance with the publication.

Indonesian sources in the forms of both interviews and publications are cited in English translation throughout the thesis. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations are mine.

Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature

Date

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Thesis Introduction

This thesis discusses the representation of children in specific films by the acclaimed Indonesian director Garin Nugroho. Even though film scholars have discussed his films as significant works in Indonesian cinema, none has specifically focused on the representation of children in his films (Hoskin, 2004; Spyer, 2004; Hanan, 2004; Ajidarma, 2004; Sugiharto, 2004; Cheah, 2004; Sen, 2003). Thus, this thesis aims to explore how Indonesian children's identities have been constructed in Nugroho's films within the wider context of Indonesian cinema. The discussion in this thesis refers to two key aspects of Garin's films: Garin's authorship and the way he represents the identity of children in Indonesia against mainstream representations. To meet the primary objective of this thesis, the following films, which place children in central roles, will be analysed: *Letter to an Angel* (1993), *Leaf on a Pillow* (1997), *Birdman Tale* (2002), and *Of Love and Eggs* (2004).

The thesis is divided into six written chapters and a filmic chapter. In the first chapter I discuss the theoretical context of the representation of children in world cinema, and then focus on Indonesian cinema, Garin's films and his authorship, and cinematic representation within the context of the theory of auteurism in film studies

In the second chapter, I analyse the construction of children's identity in Indonesia in the period of the New Order through a critical application of the key literature in the field. In this chapter, I discuss the role of three social institutions, such as the school, the family and the media, to identify the way the New Order set up the mainstream identity of Indonesian children.

In chapter three, I explore the representation of children in Garin's *Letter to an Angel*. This analysis reveals Garin's approach to the problem of ethnicity in Indonesia by using a child's perspective. *Letter to an Angel* is the first film in the 1990s, a period when the Indonesian film industry was collapsing, to place children in a central role. In this chapter I discuss childhood-related issues that appear in the film's main narrative, such as the loss of the mother figure, adolescence, the model

of the family, the schooling system, the violence within children's culture, and the clash of local, national and global icons.

In chapter four I examine the way in which representations of children are utilised to discuss politics in West Papua in *Birdman Tale*; for example, how a child's adolescence is used to symbolise political issues. I discuss the position of *Birdman Tale* in the discourse of Indonesian film and the political context of West Papua, as well as issues such as religion, adolescence and race, which are depicted in this film.

In chapter five, I explore the representation of children in *Of Love and Eggs* through a discussion of the position of this film within Indonesia cinema's discourses and its engagement with childhood-related issues, such as the relationship between children and adults, the concept of the family, and mother-father relationships.

Additionally, I include a 36 minute film essay as my final chapter, which visually explores Garin's depiction of the marginalised identity of Indonesian children in *Leaf on a Pillow*. The cinematic essay is a mix of interview with Garin Nugroho, narration, and footage from his films and other sources. My motivation behind this cinematic essay in the context of my thesis is to allow for a comprehensive visual understanding of my argument about Garin's films. The cinematic essay, as a film form in its own right, has been discussed in the field of film studies. For example, Thompson (2005) describes the cinematic essay as another form of contemporary cinema that is suitable for integrating documentary, fiction and experimental genres. Thompson lists several significant aspects of the cinematic essay as:

Meditation on a theme substituted for plot; disunity of time, space, tone, materials, style; modularity; suspension of belief; self criticism or self reflexivity; non-anticipatory camera; medium shots; and editing strategies varied. (p.2)

Similarly, Lopate (1996) states that a cinematic essay is an interesting and powerful text, which expresses a strong personal point of view and can be used to discuss particular issues. In addition, Lopate suggests five propositions that apply to the cinematic essay. Firstly, a cinematic essay should have some form of words: written text, direct speech, or captions, because "conveying a message of politics through

images does not alone make an essay” (p.246). Secondly, Lopate explains, this text in some form should articulate a single tone/perspective of the filmmaker, and he adds that “there is nothing wrong with lots of citation or quotes in an essay, so long as a unified perspective is asserted around them” (p.246). Thirdly, Lopate suggests that the cinematic essay should involve a logical discussion or “discourse on a problem” (p.246). Lopate’s fourth proposition is that the text should present a “strong, personal point of view” (p.246). This means that the text should convey a specific perspective from which a filmmaker discusses a topic or issue in the film. Finally, as part of its aesthetic value, the text should be persuasive, attractive, and skilfully written.

Additionally, Lopate (1996) suggests three optional strategies to produce a cinematic essay: firstly, write a text and find the images to visualise it; secondly, shoot or assemble previous footage, then write the essay that comments on the combined footage; thirdly, utilise an unstructured work process by assembling/shooting footage and writing text continuously in order to accomplish the cinematic essay holistically. In producing my film essay, I have followed Lopate’s second option. This allowed me to compile footage from a diversity of sources: firstly, documentary footage and TV programmes about Indonesia’s socio-political situation obtained from TV stations, private companies, schools, personal collections, and libraries; secondly, a recorded interview with Garin Nugroho; and thirdly, footage from the films *Leaf on a Pillow* and *Kancil’s Tale of Independence*. These visual materials were combined with my own narration and text to produce a short cinematic essay focusing on Garin’s representation of the marginalised identity of children in Indonesia. Works by Chris Marker (e.g. *Sans Soleil*, 1982; *The last Bolshevik*, 1992; *One Day in the Life of Andrei Arsenevich*, 1999; and *A Grin without a Cat*, 2002) and Clara Law (*Letters to Ali*, 2004) are relevant examples of cinematic essays and were the primary visual references used in producing my own film essay.¹

It is my hope that this thesis will add to the understanding of the representation of children within contemporary Indonesian cinema and contribute substantially to the

¹ For further explanation about film/cinematic essays, see M. Alter, N (2007). Translating the Essay into Film and Installation. *Journal of Visual Culture*, 6 (44), 44-57

limited literature on Garin's films. In addition, it is expected that this thesis will more generally enhance the academic discourse on film authorship in Indonesia and that my film essay will contribute to the limited use that the cinematic form is generally given within academic research in film studies

Chapter 1

The Representation of Children in Cinema

[C]hildren were freer than adults;
they could go anywhere and do more or less anything
(Sadr, 2002: 235).

Children and childhood's appearance in cinema are part of the ongoing discourse of children's films. The idea of children's film is described by Bazalgette and Staples:

This term can mean simply the exhibition of films for general audience containing some children; it can also mean the dedicated production of films for children. By 'children' we mean people under the age of about twelve (Bazalgette & Staples, 1995:92)

This definition, in certain cases, is still debatable because many films are made which present children or contain some children in the main story, but which are not primarily for child audiences. To explain difficulties in defining children's films, Wojcik-Andrews (2000) argues that "not all children's films are just about children and not all films children see are just children's films" (p.7). The idea of children's film is shaped by various perspectives of thinking. Wojcik-Andrews (2000) describes these perspectives as follows:

There are films aimed at children, films about childhood, and films children see regardless of whether or not they are children's films. There are 'children's films' but there is no such thing as 'children's films' (p.19)

Furthermore, children's film, adapting Buckingham's (1995) idea of children's television, is not produced by children but for children. Therefore, it is suggested that children's film:

should be read as reflection not so much of children's interests or fantasies or desires but of adults'. The texts which adults produce for children represent adult construction, both of childhood and (by implication) of adulthood itself (Buckingham, 1995:47)

Both Wojcik-Andrews and Buckingham's ideas suggest the difficulties to define a film that is purely for children; moreover, both reflect the adult's perspective in children's film.

Thus, while children and childhood are popular cinematic subjects, they are represented in many ways in film but always from the adult's perspectives. Valet describes children's appearance in cinema as a representation that:

sets up the relation of an order which is para-social, para-historical. The child ceases to belong to society and situates himself [sic] on the margin of the story where he is filmed. More than the reflection of a given period and certain customs, he becomes the living witness which speaks itself, concretizes itself, which remembers itself to us in its pure ontological truth, its absolute presence (cited in Kelleher, 1998: 30)

Buckingham and Valet's ideas of the presence of children in film lead to the idea that children's presence in film conveys adult's point of view, the director's in particular, of certain issues for different purposes in the society. Therefore, in order to examine the way Indonesian children are represented in film by Garin Nugroho, this chapter will discuss such topics, and is divided into four sections. Firstly, I will explore the representation of children in world cinema. Secondly, I focus on the representation of children in Indonesian cinema. Thirdly, I will explore Nugroho's films and the way he works. And, fourthly, in order to examine Nugroho's films, I will briefly discuss my approaches of narrative and textual analysis closely linked to auteur film theory.

The Representation of Children in World Cinema

Traditionally, childhood has been seen as an innocent world. The European Christian tradition has represented children as irrational and marked them as "little monsters". The Romantic perspective, for example, depicted children as lacking adult's negative aspects (Bazalgette & Buckingham, 1995:1). Writing in 1762, Rousseau described "the child's original naturalness and innocence" (cited in Konigsberg, 2000: 277) while recognising that these characteristics are easily affected by the child's social and cultural context. Jenkins describes childhood as a separate domain from the world of adult problems, suggesting that children can be used both as symbols of passing life as well as hope for the future. Furthermore, Jenkins conceives children as active subjects who are engaged in determining their own lives, and who can "construct their own culture" (cited in Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2004:8).

Hollywood has often portrayed children as innocent. As Konigsberg states, “Children in film, from Shirley Temple in *Little Miss Marker* (1934) through Jonathan Lipnicki in *Jerry McGuire* (1996), have largely remained innocent and good” (2000: 277). Films produced by Disney provide particularly good examples of children portrayed in an ideal family and social life, making Disney’s films acceptable to the general public as representative of traditional children and family values (Kramer, 2002). Since millions of people worldwide watch Disney films, these may be influential in reinforcing an idealised view of childhood. Tanner suggests that Disney’s animated films place a strong emphasis on family relationships, while simplifying the diversity of concept of the family and representing couples in traditional gender roles (2003: 366). Similarly, Giroux (2004) reveals that while Disney’s films merge an ideology of enchantment with an aura of innocence, which are constructed around children’s understanding about themselves and their world, they tend to broader conservative views, such as male dominance and racial stereotyping. As cited in Tanner (2003) earlier studies by film scholars such as Tseelon in 1995, Beres in 1999, Wiersma in 2001, and Dundes, also in 2001 found that in Disney’s films female characters are consistently placed as subordinate to male characters. These features also can be found in Steven Spielberg’s films. Mann argues that Spielberg’s films mostly portray boys as “representatives of innocence at risk from the adult world” (2005:196). Mann also points out that in Spielberg’s films girls are subordinated to a dominant brother.

In contrast to their innocent appearance in Hollywood cinema, children in early British silent films were portrayed as “rebellious, prankster children” (Sobchack, 1989:15). British silent cinema depicts the idea of rebellious children as a symbol of power and authority vested in the upper-class over the lower class. According to Sobchack:

Gysies, children, tramps, and criminals appear continually during the period in plots that represents attacks on conventional manners and mores, attacks on the patriarchal, authoritative structures of society. [...] Rebelliousness against authority is often seen as adolescent preoccupation, and so it is fitting that children were able to represent this energy in the early films. (1989:19)

Politicisation of children in films is also found in the genre of animation film from US cartoons to Japanese anime. Spigel (1999) finds that children have been politicised and commoditised in US cartoons, with the characters in the cartoons representing the nation, spirit and identity of the United States. Meanwhile, Japanese anime convey Japanese identities through their child characters.²

In Iranian cinema portraying children has been a strategy to defuse political risk, since the Iranian revolution's censorship restricted the scope of political discourse in cinema. Sadr (2002) argues that children in Iranian cinema have become a substitute for adult roles, in order for filmmakers to be able to discuss sensitive issues. Sadr adds: "children were freer than adults; they could go anywhere and do more or less anything" (2002: 235). This is in line with Ziba Mir-Hosseini's statement (2000) that, since the Iranian Government restricted love and women in film in the early 1980s, children have been used to convey human emotion.

Children can also be found as the central focus of the narrative in both Italian neo-realist and Brazilian films. In these cinemas, children are presented in a real world that has complicated problems, thus destabilising the "innocent child" myth (Traverso, 2005). Traverso recounts that, while children are portrayed in Brazilian film as parentless but independent, Italian neo-realism portrays the struggle of children and their problems within the family. Fisher discusses Deleuze's ideas about Italian neorealism to suggest that in this cinema children represent more than just weakness and lack of identity. In Fisher's words:

The passive child however is only part of the story, only half of the constructed contradiction of youth. Deleuze's concept of the child as a naturally weak observer reeks of a constructed discourse about youth as much as any, particularly because children, even in Italian neo-realism, are anything but simply weak and passive (Fisher, 2001:99)

² Yoshida states that Japanese anime has also been identified as expanding Japanese cultural imperialism in Asia. Thus, Yoshida suggests that, in circumventing apprehension towards Japanese imperialism, the anime's producers present a "statelessness and japanese-ness" (2004:11).

The contradictory representation of children in cinema can also be found in early German DEFA films.³ Fisher (2001) argues that in these films children are represented both as social threat and, in contrast, as social cement. Children's presence, according to Fisher, is a symbol of anti-conservative middle class social relations and denotes "the lack and castration of the patriarch in inverted gender relations" (p.100). Furthermore, Fisher states that in early DEFA cinema children also symbolize the conservative values of "bourgeois social relations" by shoring up the subjectivity of masculinity. Fisher goes on:

Children personify the bright future, the inheritance and continuation of everything for which the ideal male subject stands and works. Children constitute the foundation of society, its bricks and struts, the very vessel around which the bourgeois house is organized and into which the house pours its resources and ideology. (2001; 102)

Like German filmmakers, Chinese filmmakers combine two images of children in their films to portray both a real and a dreamed world. Donald (2005) argues that children in Chinese films are utilised as "political messengers" to construct a model of citizenship, both as an ideological and an economic icon. Donald further explains that child portrayals in Chinese films focus on "sentiment, emotion and iconic description" of China as a nation. Thus, in the new era of reform, children are portrayed as successful citizens who make great efforts for the future of China.

In French cinema, the child is presented as a "victim of loss" either in their own life or in their relationship with adults (Hayward, 1999:99). However, Hayward also points out the political use of representation of children in French cinema to discuss several significant issues such as nationalism and motherhood. Similarly, Powrie finds that in French cinema children are depicted as a means to discuss family relationships: accordingly children's representation in French cinema would question the very existence of the family. Powrie goes on to ask: "is the family a place of protection, or is it a place of death?" (2005: 351)

³ Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft (DEFA) was the state film monopoly in the German Democratic Republic, founded in 1946. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Deutsche_Film-Aktiengesellschaft&printab (Last accessed: 04/10/2007)

Thus, the images of suffering children in global cinema suggest that the Romantic vision of innocent and happy children is not eternal. On the contrary, in contemporary European films the portrait of the missing child suggests the “lost object of desire, origin and vanishing point” (Wilson, 2005:340). Furthermore, another image of children, one that “deconstructs cuteness” is portrayed by ‘bad’ children in film (Jackson, 2000:6). In summary, the various ways of portraying children in cinema emphasise the significance of children’s presence in film.

The Representation of Children in Indonesian Cinema

Film was introduced to Indonesia by the Dutch colonial government on 5 December 1900. The first films were short documentaries about the Netherlands and South Africa, as well as the daily lives of the Dutch royal family. Since then, film has evolved into a culture and an industry in Indonesia. *Loetoeng Kasaroeng* (1926) directed by L.Houveldrop and G.Kruegers, was recorded as the first Indonesian film although it failed commercially.

Heider (1991) divides Indonesian film history into three different periods up to 1991: the first period comprises the Dutch colonial era to 1942; the second period goes from the Japanese invasion and the start of the Indonesian independence era from 1942 to 1949; and the third period goes from 1950 at the start of the Soekarno regime and continues through the Soeharto era. Sen (1994) also divides Indonesian film history into three different periods but she sets the first one from the early 1900s to 1956; she defines the second period as one of ‘political polarisation’ in cinema, from 1956 to 1966; and she calls the third period 1967 to 1994, ‘Institutions of New Order Cinema’.

In this historical context the record is unclear about films for children and films about children produced in Indonesia. Kristanto (2005) notes that when G. Krueger released *Terpaksa Menika (Forced Marriage)* in 1932 children were permitted to watch it. Heider (1991) describes ‘kid films’ as films about children although not essentially intended for children. Thus by Heider’s definition, *Si Pintjang* (1951)

would be the first Indonesian kid film as it presents a story about a child: Gimán, the son of a farmer, becomes a war victim and street kid in Jogjakarta.⁴

Kristanto (2005) notes that since the 1950s Indonesian filmmakers have presented children in a variety of situations: as casualties of war in *Si Pintjang* (1951), children's everyday lives in *Lajang-lajangku Putus* (1958), as victims of domestic violence in *Arie Hanggara* (1985), and as street children amidst the poverty in Indonesia in *Langitku Rumahku* (1989). Significantly, while *Langitku Rumahku* failed commercially in Indonesia, it nevertheless went on to receive several national and international awards. Earlier on, *Ratapan Anak Tiri* (1973) had become a trendsetter for melodramatic films about children in Indonesia. When it was released, the critics and film distributors claimed the film would not attract audience; in fact, the film was commercially successful. The story is about a child who suffers unfair treatments from his stepmother. The producer made several sequels of this film, while other producers also produced films with similar themes.

In the 1990s the Indonesian film industry started to collapse; the number of Indonesian films significantly declined from 101 in 1989 to 20 films in 1992 (Heider, 1991, and Sen, 1994), and only 12 films in 1993 (Wibawa & Sumarno, 2004). Wibawa and Sumarno (2004) also describe the declining cinema audience, down 50% from an average of 150,000 people in 1987-1988 to 77,665 in 1992. Sen (1994) believes that the development of private television and the expansion of American films contributed significantly to the problem. More specifically, Wibawa and Sumarno (2004) describe three significant contributing factors: firstly, the film industry was deficient in human resources, especially technical personnel; secondly, an unfair distribution policy disadvantaged Indonesian films against foreign films; and thirdly, there were infrastructure problems related to equipment availability. However, while from 1992 to 2004, the number of films produced sharply declined⁵,

⁴ The film is produced by *Perusahaan Film Negara* (State Film Company) and participated in an international film festival at Karlovy-Vary Czechoslovakia in 1951.

⁵ Between 1992 and 2004 only 13 films a year on average were produced, while in the 1971-1991 period about 100 films a year on average were produced (Kristanto, 2005).

at least fifteen of these placed children as central characters, including four of Garin's films.

Children are popular as characters in Indonesian films; nevertheless, little attention has been given to the subject in academic discussion. While there are very few works that discuss the representation of children in Indonesian cinema, those published outline a similar argument about the portrayal of innocent children to reduce political risk. Strassler (1999), who discusses *Children of a Thousand Islands*,⁶ states that use of innocent children as representatives to discuss cultural differences attempts to defuse political effects. Strassler argues that although *Children of a Thousand Islands* is "more pseudo than actual documentary" (p.4), the series places children as cultural subjects, presenting them within the diversity of Indonesia as a nation and attempting to discover resolutions for conflict among the different ethnic groups in Indonesia.

Spyer (2004), who examined *Viva Indonesia!* (2000),⁷ argues that the representation of children enables the discussion of current issues, such as the ethnicity conflict in Kalimantan and terrorism in Jakarta. Spyer suggests that the children of *Viva Indonesia* are used to voice adults' ideas. The image of the innocent child provides a naïve outlook, which reduces the political risk in such circumstances. Spyer goes on:

the child in *Viva Indonesia!* and other current productions voices, makes visible, authenticates, and suffuses particular positions with the necessary sentiment that mobilizes their appeal. The child is no mere ventriloquist for adult opinions – rallying recognition and sentiment for certain positions and views, he or she is always much more than that (p.244)

Furthermore, in Indonesian cinema children are also used to construct an icon of proper citizenship. Kitley (1999) suggests that the Indonesian government constructed an idealised homogenous identity of Indonesian children through *Si*

⁶ *Children of Thousands Island* (1996) is a docudrama series which presents Indonesian children from various backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities.

⁷ *Viva Indonesia!* is a film of four stories about children wherein each story was directed by a different young director.

Unyil.⁸ Kitley adds that *Si Unyil* was produced for children to create an example of “good Indonesian citizens who were knowledgeable about and committed to national development” (pp.129-130). Thus, while *Si Unyil* disclosed a diverse Indonesian culture, the series politically eliminated the variety and distinctiveness of this diversity by constructing a single identity.⁹ By contrast, Garin Nugroho explores the different identities of Indonesian children in his films

Garin Nugroho’s Films

Garin Nugroho was born on June 6, 1961 in Jogjakarta. He went to Islamic Elementary School, then studied at St Yoris Catholic Secondary School and Loyola Catholic High School. He graduated from the School of Film and Television at the Jakarta Institute of Art in 1985. Garin made his first film, entitled *Saat Cinta Lewat di Depan Rumah* (*When Love Passes My House*), when he was 19 years old and in the first semester of his film course. His final work for his film degree, entitled *Gerbong 1, 2, 3... (Railway Coaches 1, 2, 3...)* attracted comments from the critics. Garin’s career in the Indonesian film industry started when he worked as a visual researcher in Gemini Satria Film, one of Indonesia’s leading film production houses in the 1990s.¹⁰

Garin Nugroho’s name came to prominence upon the release of his first commercial film, *Cinta dalam Sepotong Roti* (*Love in a Slice of Bread*) in 1991. Since then, Nugroho has released *Surat untuk Bidadari* (*Letter to an Angel*), 1994; *Bulan Tertusuk Ilalang* (*And the Moon Dances*), 1995; *Daun di Atas Bantal* (*Leaf on*

⁸ *Si Unyil* was a popular puppet television series from the government television company: TVRI (Televisi Republik Indonesia), from 1981 to 1993.

⁹ The homogenous identity of Indonesian children is also constructed formally through schooling. Parker (1992) emphasises that from primary school, children in Indonesia have been taught to be good citizens. The Indonesian government set up a curriculum within Indonesia’s national school system to promote a proper model of Indonesian citizenship. Shiraishi (1997) states that while children come from different backgrounds and cultures, the Indonesian government attempts to reduce the perception of diversity by instructing children to wear uniforms, buy and read the official textbooks, and attend the regular flag raising ceremony on Mondays. Schools present citizenship lessons at all levels through the official subject titled PMP. PMP (*Pendidikan Moral Pancasila*) or Pancasila as Moral Education is an official subject to teach how to be a good and moral Indonesian citizen based on Pancasila, the official national ideology. This subject has another practical implementation called P4 (*Pedoman Penghayatan dan Pengamalan Pancasila*) or Upgrading Course on the Directives for the Realization and Implementation of Pancasila. These lessons are viewed as a structured construction of national identity for Indonesian children

¹⁰ See details in Trimarsanto & Rahzen (2004), Bende Mataram, Garin Nugroho, and Jackson Pollock, in Cheah (2004), *And the Moon Dances: The Films of Garin*, Bentang, Yogyakarta.

a Pillow), 1997; *Puisi tak Terkuburkan (The Poet)*, 1999; *Aku Ingin Menciummu Sekali Saja (Bird-Man Tale)*, 2002; and *Rindu Kami Padamu (Of Love and Eggs)*, 2004. Even though these films have received several national and international awards, most of them have failed commercially or have not been screened in commercial cinemas in Indonesia.

Garin's films have been produced during important periods in Indonesian politics. When the New Order regime still had authority in Indonesia, Garin produced and directed three feature films. In 1991 he directed his first feature film, *Love in a Slice of Bread*, which explores the sexual problems of a newly married young couple, Harris and Mayang, who take a journey to rejuvenate their relationship. However, Topan, their childhood friend, appears and their relationship is complicated, with their childhood emerging as the dominant reason for their problems. *Love in a Slice of Bread* achieved best film, best editing, best music, best artistic direction, and best cinematography awards at the Indonesian Film Festival in 1991. In addition, Nugroho received the best young director award at the Asia Pacific Film Festival in South Korea in the same year.

His second film, *Letter to an Angel* (1993) tells the story of Lewa, an orphan boy of nine years of age who is trying to find his mother. Through Lewa's experience the film explores problems such as cultural shock due to modernization and ethnic and cultural violence. While the film received several awards in international film festivals¹¹, ironically, it was never commercially screened in Indonesian cinemas.

In 1995 Garin produced and directed *And the Moon Dances*, which tells the story of two students, Ilalang and Bulan, who study Javanese traditional art with Waluyo at Surakarta. Both have problems with their own life; Ilalang is trapped in a traumatic childhood memory, while Bulan seeks out her own clear identity. Conversations and problems during their student life change their perspectives about themselves. Yet

¹¹ Best Film award at the Taormina Film festival (Italy) and the Tokyo Film festival; Berliner Zeitung Award Forum des Junges Film at the Berlin Film Festival; Republika Award from Republika daily in Indonesia; Horizon Award from Horizon Magazine in Indonesia; and Best Director at the Pyong Yang Non-Aligned Film Festival

again, despite the fact that *And the Moon Dances* received several awards,¹² this film has also failed to be screened in commercial cinemas in Indonesia.

When the New Order regime started to collapse and Indonesia entered a political transition from 1997 to 1999, Nugroho produced and directed two more feature films: *Leaf on a Pillow* and *The Poet*. *Leaf on a Pillow* produced in 1997, depicts the lives of street children Kancil, Heru, and Sugeng, who struggle to survive in Yogyakarta, while being threatened by social problems that characterise their neighbourhood. Before making this film, Garin had made the documentary titled *Dongeng Kancil tentang Kemerdekaan* (Kancil's Tale of Independence)¹³. Then, Garin convinced Kancil and his friends to be the lead actors in the feature film, which dramatised their true story. *Leaf on a Pillow* invites the audience to consider Indonesian socio-political problems through the examination of family relationships, love-friendship values, street violence, and childhood-adolescence problems. Contrary to the experience of Nugroho's earlier films, *Leaf on a Pillow* was commercially successful, attracting large audiences and remaining in the cinemas for more than two months, while Indonesia struggled with the political and economic crisis in 1997 – 1999.¹⁴ Following its commercial success, the film also received several national and international awards.¹⁵

In 1999 Garin took on a taboo subject in Indonesian political history by producing *The Poet*, a film that explores the tragic political events that shocked Indonesia in 1965.¹⁶ The film is based on the true experience of Ibrahim Kadir, a traditional *didong* artist from Aceh, who was detained for 22 days wrongly accused of being a

¹² NETPAC and FIPRSECI Award at the Berlin Film festival; Best Director at the Three Continents Festival – Nantes France; and Best Film at the Hanoi Film Festival

¹³ Kancil is a nick name of one of three street children who are documented in *Kancil's Tale of Independence*.

¹⁴ At that time, Indonesia struggled with the global monetary crisis that affected the political situation by ending the new order regime in 1998.

¹⁵ Best film and Best Actor at the Asia Pacific Film Festival in Taiwan; Best Actor at the Cinemaya Film Festival in India; Jury Award at the Tokyo Film Festival; Best Director at the NOVO Film Festival in Belgium; and Best Film, Best Director, Best Editing, Best Music, Best Camera, Best Screenplay, and Best Artistic Direction at the Kine Club Film Festival in Indonesia.

¹⁶ The tragedy is known as 30 September Movement of The Indonesian Communist Party (G30S/PKI). This tragedy, in which thousands of Indonesians were killed, has been the most controversial political event of Indonesian history.

member of the communist party.¹⁷ *The Poet* was the first film to explore this historical tragedy from a perspective different from that of other films previously released, which told only the official version of the events.¹⁸

After the resignation of Soeharto, when Indonesia was experiencing great political change, Garin produced two more films. The first was *the Birdman Tale* (2002), which tells the story of a teenage Papuan boy, Arnold, who, becoming obsessed with a woman he meets at the wharf, is then driven into the complex problems surrounding West Papua's political situation. Using the Christian community in West Papua as a cultural background in the film, Garin depicted the difficulties West Papuan people were facing.¹⁹ In 2004 Garin produced *Of Love and Eggs*, which tells the story of a group of Moslem children, Rindu, Asih and Bimo, all of whom miss someone close to them. In a local newspaper, Garin describes how he tries to create a religious film without falling into dogmatism.²⁰

Indonesian film critics often regard Garin as the founder of the new generation of Indonesian filmmakers, known as the Generation of School (Ajidarma in Cheah, 2004).²¹ According to Turner (1996), filmmakers are produced by their culture, rather than just producing the culture. In this sense, Garin produces a kind of cinematic culture that evolves directly from his broader cultural background. Nugroho has similar ideas about his role as a film director: "In my opinion, a film director is a composition made up of listening (33 %), observation (33 %), feeling (33 %) and the remaining 1 % for giving an instruction 'action – cut'" (Cheah, 2004). Similarly, Hanan (2004) suggests that Garin utilizes a method of "strategic intervention" (p.177) in portraying particular issues in Indonesia. In addition,

¹⁷ "Didong" is a popular Gayo dance where group of 20 to 40 men and women compete in different aspects of dance, such as song, movement and voice. It can be performed at any kind of occasion. For details see <http://www.aceh.net/dances.html> (last accessed: 05/10/2007)

¹⁸ The Indonesian Government in fact had funded and produced two films about these events: *G30S/PKI* and *Operasi Trisula*.

¹⁹ See http://www.thingsasian.com/goto_article/article.2065.html (last accessed: 05/10/2007)

²⁰ See <http://www.suaramerdeka.com/harian/0409/21/bud2.htm> (last accessed: 05/10/2007)

²¹ Ajidarma (2004) describes the first generation as the generation of apprentices, started by Wim Umboh; and, the second generation as the generation of theatrical expansion which is represented by Teguh Karya, Arifin C.Noer, Slamet Rahardjo, and Putu Wijaya Then, the third generation is a generation who has formally studied film theory in film school and then made a film, which is represented by Garin Nugroho, Mira Lesmana, Nan T Achnas, and several other directors.

Hoskins (2004) states that Garin is concerned with presenting “the paradoxical contrasts of the juxtaposition of modern signs against a very different cultural landscape”(p.126). Furthermore, Sugiharto (2004) argues that Garin is able to uncover contradictions related to local–global cultural divergence.

Garin’s trademark style consists of documentary-based narrative films that use non-professional actors and often centre on narratives about women with children, usually involving violence but also presenting stories about love. Garin believes that an artist must assure “anarchy” in the process of producing works (“Garin Nugroho: Alat ukurnya Festival Film”, 1998). This explains Garin’s insistence on real acts rather than tricks and effects. According to Garin: “the actor must feel the sense while he is bleeding” This approach would explain what appears to be “brutal” in his films, and what sets his works apart from other films in Indonesian cinema.²²

It has been suggested that while Garin has developed a unique approach to filmmaking, his works do not consistently assume one particular style. Indrarto (2003), for example, states that while Garin constantly and radically changes his style in making films, he is consistent in using his own film languages. Similarly, Ajidarma (2004) suggests that Garin mixes contradictory elements to explore ideas in his films. Moreover, Tony Rayns (2004) agrees that the mix of styles makes Garin one of the few film directors in the world who do not repeat a style in order to express ideas. Rayns argues that Garin’s stylistic distinctiveness implies that he and his films are not stereotyped as are most other third-world filmmakers.

Garin’s works articulate his thoughts on contemporary issues in Indonesia: ethnicity, national identity, marginalization, cultural diversity, and religion. At the same time, Garin’s stylistic diversity demonstrates his capacity to explore new ideas about making films in Indonesia. As Andrew Sarris (1981) outlines, there are three principles that define auteur theory: firstly, the director’s technical competence; secondly, the director’s discernible qualities; and thirdly, the director’s concern with the critical point of film as an art by merging personality and material. By applying

²² For example, in making *And the Moon Dances*, Nugroho directed his actors to pierce their fingers and feel their blood. In addition, the scene of the sacrifice of a horse in *Letter to an Angel* is real.

these principles to the analysis of Garin's films I would suggest a reading of his films as auteurist cinema texts.

Auteurism and Cinematic Representation

The foregoing discussion suggests questions about the importance of authorship for a reading of Garin's films. Since Andre Bazin's outline of the importance of authorship in his article "La Politique des auteurs" in 1957, auteur theory has been the object of an ongoing debate in film studies. Even though Roland Barthes's 1968 article, "The Death of the Author" questioned auteur theory, authorship in cinema is still discussed as significant. James Naremore (1990) suggests three key reasons to consider auteur theory an important aspect of film studies: Firstly, authorship is constructed dynamically from the relationship among institutions, artists and aesthetic choices: Secondly, auteur theory can be utilised to distinguish films of particular directors: Thirdly, film audiences interpret messages better by identifying the author. Even Barthes, (cited in Staiger, 2003) acknowledges the existence of the author as a category: "as institution, the author is dead...but in the text, in a way, I desire the author..." (p.29)

Thus, the debate about auteurism within film studies suggests the possibility of referring the idea of the auteur to specific works and ideas, rather than focusing purely on individual directors. In this sense, Stam (2000) defines authorship as "the site of encounter of a biography, an intertext, an institutional context and a historical moment" (p.6). Similarly, Coward (2000) argues that authorship combines a technique of film production with a directing approach to create a distinctive film style. However, Flitterman-Lewis (2000) states that while authorship is not the exclusive signature of a sole director, it still presents an opportunity to consider the personal history or thought of a particular director.

Flitterman-Lewis' ideas can be better understood through Janet Staiger's theorisation of authorship. Staiger (2003) organizes authorship in terms of seven approaches based on historical change: as origin, as personality, as sociology of production, as signatures, as reading strategy, as site of discourses, and as technique of the self. In

particular, Staiger describes authorship as a “technique of the self” in so far as it is a way for filmmakers to assert their perspective within their historical situation. In other words, authorship provides the self with a voice and this voice can be signified through film images.

Garin’s work, from the Janet Staiger’s theory, can be viewed as Garin’s signature and also the way Garin Nugroho emphasizes his personal perspectives. As discussed earlier in this chapter, though Garin radically changes his filmmaking style, his works consist of documentary-based narrative films. He uses non-professional actors, centres on narratives about women with children, with the stories usually involving violence but also love. As a director and scriptwriter, Garin deliberately creates symbols through the stories and images of his films to convey his views on particular social and political issues in Indonesia.

Consequently, interpreting the meaning of the images of films is an important part of understanding a film as a product of authorship. Meaning, according to Brannigan (1984), is not distinctive because interpretation depends on the acknowledgment of a system, including elements such as; “origin, vision, time, frame, object, and mind” (p.57). These terms refer to specific applications which are considered as the classical elements of representation in film. Origin, according to Brannigan, refers to “a general, structural description of narration and is more than its manifestation in any particular case” (p.61), and it includes several elements which build a narrative, such as camera movement and characters. Furthermore, Brannigan describes vision as symbolization of the eyes’ capability “to generate images and space by glance, look, sight, and gaze” (p.63) for the analysis of representation in film. In addition, time for Brannigan has two types: the time of the representation and the time of the represented (p.64). He further emphasises that through narration, time exists and is constructed by the film text. Finally, frame, as Brannigan explains, sets a discursive limit to a film text by selecting and organising its elements; object is “what is represented”, and mind is subjectivity at the level of narration (p.65). Brannigan’s terms of film elements can be utilised to interpret meanings in Garin’s films

The interpretation of meaning in film involves film elements which are understood as a language, such as sign and symbols through which meanings are constructed within a representational system (Hall, 2003). Hall also identifies three different representation approaches: firstly, the reflective approach, which refers to reflecting meaning existing in the reality outside language; secondly, the intentional approach, which refers to the construction of personal meaning by the speaker; and thirdly, the constructive approach, which refers to the understanding that meanings are constructed within language. Thus, in analysing Garin Nugroho's films, I will elaborate on the construction of meaning in his auteurist film texts within the social, political, and cultural context of contemporary Indonesia.

In this thesis I utilise the approaches of narrative and textual analysis closely linked to auteur film theory, to discuss the representation of children in film texts. Narrative analysis is used to discover the way children are portrayed in film, drawing on analysis of such elements as story outline, plot structure, point of view, and narration (Stam et al, 1992). Stam et al. quoting Victor Shklovsky (1981), define story outline as the "pattern of relationships between characters and the pattern of actions as they unfold in chronological order" (p.71). They emphasise story outline as a site of comprehension for the audience made from a variety of signs and clues supplied by a sequence of events. The story outline builds a complex chronological narrative structure known as plot structure. Stam et al. describe this as:

The basic armature of fabula events is refashioned into an aesthetically satisfying form through the use of artistic devices such as in medias res construction, retardation, parallel plots, ellipsis, and others. (p.71)

Point of view, according to Stam et al. (1992), is a dominant general outlook of the narrator expressed through the characters and events in the film. This leads to the importance of narration as another element to be analysed, which Stam et al. define as:

the act of communicating a story to a spectator through images, editing, verbal commentary, and point of view, as distinct from the narrative world itself in which the characters perform (p.84)

By analysing these elements, as visualised by child characters in Garin's films, I will utilise Barthes' five levels of connotative coding: the hermeneutic code, the proairetic code, the semic code, the symbolic code, and the referential code (Barthes, 1974).

To explain the film reading process, borrowing Barthes's description, the hermeneutic code is the first step in identifying stipulations to develop questions in the film story; put the question in tension, then reveal the answer at the end of the story. The hermeneutic code, which is based on "a simple articulation: that of question and answer", utilises a question, its answer, and probability variation to create a further question or postpone its answer (Barthes as cited in Mayne, 1976). Standard elements of structure of conventional plot such as exposition, climax and denouement, as Barthes suggests, can be utilised as hermeneutic codes. Mayne points out that "the most basic effect of the hermeneutic code is expectation" (p.12).

According to Barthes:

Expectation thus becomes the basic condition for truth: truth, these narratives tell us, is what is at the end of expectation (cited in Mayne, 1976:12)

In order to link the question to the answer in hermeneutic code, the director needs to create a film narrative. Film narrative should present a logical sequence of story determined by the discourse of the film. This is referred to as the proairetic code as Barthes states: "In narrative ... the discourse, rather than the characters, determines the action" (cited in Mayne, 1976: 12). The code pertains to dividing a chronological storyline into logical parts, which can be built by "scriptwriting, directing actors, deciding where to cut," (p.13).

The code of semes is explained by Mayne as "units spread throughout the text which regroup concepts and elements fundamental to the narrative" (p.12). Barthes describes the seme as:

a connotator of persons, places, objects, of which the signified is a character. Character is an adjective, an attribute; a predicative ... The seme is only a departure, an avenue of meaning (cited in Mayne, 1976: 12)

This code precedes an assemblage of definite film elements; as mentioned above persons, places, and objects denote particular characters or themes in film.

The last two in Barthes's levels of coding are the symbolic code and the cultural code. The symbolic code refers to the connotative meaning which can be interpreted from particular signs and symbols in film text (Mayne, 1976). Symbolism, thereby, is the way to build the representative value of such signs in film text. Finally, the cultural or referential code, following Barthes, refers to "a science or a body of knowledge" (p.20). This implies a way to understand the element of film text through references or "authoritative knowledge outside the text" (p.13). I will utilise these codes to examine the denotation of specific signs in the narratives that portray the identity of children in Garin's films.

Conclusion

As part of ongoing discussion, the idea of children's films suggests the presence of children in film to express adults' point of view. While children are assumed as active individuals, in film children are presented in the way adults see and construct them: from Hollywood's image of innocence to Germany's social threat. Within its various images, children also are deliberately utilised in film to convey various ideas for various purposes, with some of the ideas not merely about children, but adults' ideas of adults' lives through the image of children.

Indonesian cinema, as in some other countries, also presents children in various ways to convey social and political messages. Children are seen as able to discuss current sensitive issues because of their image of innocence. Within the hard period of the film industry in 1990s, several films have been produced that present children in main role, including Garin Nugroho's films. Nugroho, as a director, is acknowledged to have a unique style of filmmaking. Garin's thoughts on contemporary issues in Indonesia are articulated in his films, while Garin's stylistic shows his ability to present new ideas in Indonesian cinema.

In this chapter, I suggest that reading of Garin's films as auteurist cinema texts will be useful. Thus, elaborating on the construction of meaning in his film texts within the social, political, and cultural context of contemporary Indonesia will be the next important stage. The narrative approaches and textual analysis are used to discuss the representation of children in his films. Therefore, this chapter has provided an overview of my research prior to discussing the construction of Indonesian children's identity during the New Order in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

The Social Construction of Indonesian Children: The Family, The School and The Media

Childhood – a temporary state – becomes an emblem for our anxieties about the passing of time, the destruction of historical formations, or conversely, a vehicle for our hopes for the future. The innocent child is caught somewhere over the rainbow – between nostalgia and utopian optimism, between the past and the future. (Henry Jenkins, 1998: 5)

Introduction

I will start this chapter by relating one of my own experiences as a primary school student in Kuta, Bali, in the 1980s, a time when the New Order was at its peak. One day during art lessons our teacher set the theme as free drawing. However, this ‘free drawing’ was in practice not free because the teacher gave us an example of what he meant and instructed us to copy it. Our teacher’s example was a landscape, which had two big green mountains side by side, surrounded by white clouds and birds against a background of blue sky, and in the foreground there was a road, trees, electricity poles, and, of course, rice fields and small houses. We would be required to reproduce this picture in every free drawing lesson, even using the same colours! All students would draw the same picture and none ever questioned the practice. I did not even think to ask a question; this was simply the way we learnt.

Later, when I became a judge at a children’s drawing competition, I found the same type of pictures. At first I thought this was odd, because the children were accompanied by their parents, and some of the parents gave instructions to their children. I remember this particularly, because when I and other judges gave our evaluation speech, we criticised those parents who instructed their children. Then, I realised that all this was not so odd after all.

This anecdote shows the power of teachers and parents to indoctrinate students. In this sense, it illustrates Parker’s argument of the way the New Order constructed

citizens, children in particular. The New Order, according to Parker (1992), promoted the concept that:

The state assumes that its inhabitants are not necessarily born as good citizens; children must be taught and socialised by the state to become good citizens (p.42)

A 'good citizen' is defined by the New Order as one "who would be knowledgeable and committed to national development" (Kitley, 2000; 113).

Parker (1992) also points out that the New Order expects the children to learn how to be good citizens through two basic social institutions: the school and the family. While children have to be taught an identity as Indonesian citizens through schooling, James (1993) stresses that family life is also a contributor to the construction of children's national identity. Citizenship implies the concepts of belonging and loyalty of people to the state, while encouraging general thoughts and ways of life that suits the national identity and confirms an individual's membership to the state (Wilkin, 2000).

Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford and Davies (2006) identify that the identity of children is built through two approaches. Firstly, children have a cultural identity constructed by the family and the society. Secondly, the state formally constructs their identity through schooling as part of its political agenda. Similarly, Wyness (2006) argues that the family and the school are socializing agents that strongly influence children's identity in society, with the family establishing a mutual relationship with the schooling system in guiding children to enter the wider community. Children are seen as "unfinished projects who require the continuous involvement of socializing adults before they are complete and can enter the society as full members" (Wyness, 2006;121). In addition to these basic institutions – the school and the family – the New Order also utilised the media to construct its citizen's sense of identity. Sen & Hill (2000) argue that the New Order used the media as "vehicles for the creation of a national culture that would allow uncontested implementation of its development policies and more generally its authoritarian rule" (p.11).

Such state-based strategies, directed to the construction of Indonesian children's sense of identity, are discussed in detail in this chapter. This chapter examines the construction of Indonesian children in the New Order period era through three specific systems: the family, the school, and the media. Firstly, I will discuss the way in which the New Order constructed a notion of children through the family system and how this was extended through the schooling process. Further, I will examine the use of schooling to inculcate a national identity into children. Finally, as the media was controlled by the state during the New Order, I will also discuss the use of the media in constructing the social and cultural identity of children.

The New Order and the Politics of the Family

According to Shiraishi (1997) in Indonesia the dominant concept of family is influenced by traditional Javanese culture. In Javanese culture a family is a morally unequal institution that encourages respect for a hierarchy, with the father at the apex (Mulder, 1996). Each member of the family should consider his or her responsibility: parents must guide their children and children are obliged to obey and follow the guidance from their parents as their patrons. In this family system, the father holds the highest honour in the hierarchy and has authority in and over it. The family culture places children at a low level and sees them as controlled by the father. Top down communications apply within the family, which means that parents tell their children what they are supposed to do, while for the children there is no opportunity for questioning or even discussing their parents instructions. This patriarchal family model is replicated in the New Order political system. The father or "*bapak*" figure is considered as a patron who personifies a paternalistic vertical relationship (Chalmers, 2006). This figure is not unlike the Victorian idea of the father: authoritarian, resistant, and "imposing structure, but unconcerned with nurture" (Carpenter, 2002: 196). In contrast, Javanese culture places mothers as "appendages of their husbands and casts female dependency as ideal" (Suryakusuma, 1996:98). Suryakusuma calls this State *Ibuism* (p.98) and describes it in the following terms:

It derives from the most oppressive aspects of both bourgeois 'housewifezation' and *priyayi* [white collar Javanese] *Ibuism*. As in *priyayi* *Ibuism*, it commands women to serve their men, children, family, community and state. As in 'housewifezation'

women are assumed to provide their labour freely, without expectation of prestige or power (1996:101-102)

Furthermore, according to Suryakusuma, *Ibuism* is integrated in the New Order political concept of family:

Given the image of the state as family, one might call the predominant gender ideology *Bapak Ibuism* (father motherism), with *Bapak* [father/man] as the primary source of power and *ibu* [mother/woman] as one medium of that power. (Suryakusumah, 1996: 102)

Suryakusumah's concept of *state ibuism* assures the lowest position of children in the family hierarchy. I point out that while the figure of mother is constructed to serve children, she is also a medium that represents the power of father as supreme in the family. Children, in this context, are placed as passive, non authoritarian objects in the family.

The relationship between construction of the nation-state and the family has been discussed by Hearst (1997): the significance of the family is marked by the state as being an important institution to produce proper citizens, and as a mediator in socialising people towards the state's values. In terms of nation building, the New Order assured the importance of the family in its political agenda and this was represented in its national program, *Panca Krida*:²³

The family household is the smallest unit of a nation [...] The (nation) state can only be strong if it is made up of strong families. A just nation can only be achieved through a just arrangement of families. For that reason, building a family implies participation in the building of the foundation of a nation (cited in Suryakusumah, 1996: 97)

I believe that the notion of family in the New Order national program does not reflect a concept of family as a proportional form of each member in the family

²³ For detail see Suryakusuma, 1996, "The state and Sexuality in New Order Indonesia" in Laurie J Sears, (ed) (1996) *Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia* Durham & London, Duke University Press, p. 92

hierarchy. Children, in this context, will only be used to maintain the power of father at the centre of the family, and in certain cases only be used as a tool to reflect a father's dominance. In fact, according to Shiraishi (1997), former president Soeharto directly included terms about children in his political agenda. For example, in his biography,²⁴ Soeharto describes the relationship with his ministers as a father-child relationship:

In my eyes, there is no favourite child (*anak emas*), and also no child (*anak*) whom I do not like. None. All of them, each in his/her own duty and field have the same trust from me.
(Cited in Shiraishi, 1997:9)²⁵

Soeharto uses the word "child" to show his supremacy over his cabinet ministers. By setting his ministers as his children, he then places himself as *Bapak Presiden* or father president (Shiraishi, 1997: 9), that is, as the power source of Indonesia. As a result, he was free to run the state as if it were his own family. Shiraishi goes on:

Yet, it is important to underline the oddity about all this: Soeharto runs the state and guides the nation as Father President; his officials as well as citizens follow him as children; and the entire nation is imagined as a family. (Shiraishi, 1997:11)

Thus in Shiraishi's argument, the use of family terms demonstrates the way paternalistic culture has been utilised by the New Order to support the political power. Furthermore, in making Indonesia a nation, Soeharto utilized his political power to portray himself as the one "who connects people to each other...forming (thereby) the vast array of acquaintances ... thought eventually to lead from remote parts of the archipelago to seats of authority" (Siegel 2002: 212). Similarly, according to Spyer (2004), Soeharto used terminology related to the family both to show his power as the father of the nation and in order to transform every citizen into a member of the Indonesian family.

²⁴ Soeharto: *Pikiran, Ucapan, dan Tindakan Saya: Otobiografi seperti dipaparkan kepada G.Dwipayanan dan Ramadhan KH* (Jakarta; PT Citra Lamtoro Gung Persada, 1989)

²⁵ "Di mata saya tidak ada anak emas, juga tidak ada anak yang tidak saya senangi. Tidak ada. Semua mereka itu, dalam tugas dan bidangnya masing-masing, mempunyai kepercayaan yang sama dari saya"

However, well after Soeharto, this use of a family metaphor remains strong in Indonesian political discourse. The fourth Indonesian president, Megawati Soekarnoputri projected herself as a mother to her followers (Parker, 2003). Indeed, in her presidential speech on 21 October 1999, Megawati expressed:

To my children throughout the homeland, I ask that you return wholeheartedly to your work. Do not act emotionally, for at this podium, you can see your mother standing here (cited in Parker, 2003: 269)

Megawati places herself as a “mother” who calms down her “children”. As did Soeharto, she uses a notion of family. Thus, the state conceptualised as family, according to Parker, extends the concept far beyond a ‘natural’ institution to a political structure (2003:269). Shiraishi (1997) explains the place of the family system in the New Order’s political strategy:

The family network has developed [by the New order] as a way of overcoming powerlessness and vulnerability of the citizenry. The protector [*bapak* – father] has to be ready to shoulder the potential danger. (p.34)

Therefore, the relation between the State and its citizens is similar to the father-children relationship in Javanese family culture: father takes control of children in the name of protection. In this context, citizens likely are used only for strengthening the state’s power.

In certain cases, the state even takes control of family matters for national purposes. For instance, the family planning program became an integral component of the New Order’s development program. According to Hull & Jones (1997), the New Order utilised the family planning program to maintain the regime’s stability. The program was socialised nation-wide, and in many ways the family was forced to be cooperative. The New Order related the advantages of family planning to positive values of national development, such as family welfare and growth of national economy. The family planning program seemed to conceptualise children as a form of family capital that should be controlled and in this sense, supported the New Order’s need to maintain the stability of the state. Thus by promoting the ideal model of family—a father, a mother and two children—nation-wide through school curricula and the media, the New Order propagated the image of Indonesia as a grand family.

The Family Discourse and the Schooling Process

The school is another institution that significantly affects children's lives. As in most other countries, schooling is an important method in Indonesia for children's socialization as it supplies them with materials that prepare them to enter adult life (Shiraishi, 1997; Aitken, 2001). According to Wyness (2006), schooling has similar powers to those of the family to prepare children to become adults. Firstly, the school implements formal rules and procedures. Secondly, the school establishes formal relationships between children as students and adults as teachers. Thirdly, the socialization process is more easily carried out in a formal environment that is controlled by authority figures. In this sense, at school the children encounter characteristics that are not necessarily different from those defined by family life.

According to Shiraishi (1997) and Parker (2003), the Indonesian schooling process builds a strong mutual relationship with the family system through the education of children. For instance, at school children are taught a model of the Indonesian family as a small, modern, nuclear, social unit in which the type of occupation of each member is differentiated along gender lines. Additionally, the concept of the nuclear family, which defines the national family planning program, is incorporated into language lessons. Indonesian language textbooks, for example, describe a single model of family constituted by an office worker father, a housewife mother, and three children, with one of the boys being highlighted as the central character in the narrative.²⁶ While a recent version of the language textbook presents the central character as female, it nevertheless continues to promote the same ideological framework through a narrative of harmonious family life in which families live together in a model village (Shiraishi, 1997).²⁷ Indeed, this ideal model of the family is defined as a main goal in Indonesian development programs. Shiraishi (1997) describes the learning process in the classroom:

²⁶ The family in the narrative is generally known as *keluarga* Budi (Budi's family). They are *Bapak* Budi (Budi's father), *Ibu* Budi (Budi's mother), Kakak Budi, Wati (Budi's older sister), Budi, and Adik Budi, Iwan (Budi's younger brother). Budi, a primary school student, is the central character as each family member is identified through their relationship to Budi.

²⁷ The recent version presents a female character names Kiki.

Teaching Indonesian at school involves constructing and reconstructing the family anew and, in its extension, the nation. The classroom is constituted as the space separate from the family where, in fact, the mothers are politely excluded. In the Indonesian textbook, however, it is this family that is constructed and plays the cardinal role (p.130)

As Shiraishi observes, while (real) mothers are excluded, the learning process creates a new form of family which is constituted as a temporary family at school, where the teacher becomes parent. Classroom instruction, according to Shiraishi (1997) follows a similar pattern to family instruction, in that a hierarchy of teacher as parent and student as child is created. This hierarchy is represented by two significant features: firstly, students address the teachers as *bapak* and *ibu*; secondly, the teacher stands in the front of class while students sit properly and wait for instructions. Indeed, this teacher-student relationship models the Javanese family culture of high respect for elders (Mulder, 1996). Furthermore, the hierarchical pattern in the classroom is such that teachers place themselves as the representatives of the state.²⁸ As a result, teachers transfer the ideology of power within a dictatorial situation rather than building an open democratic learning environment that empowers students in the class room. Meanwhile, students have to be loyal to the teachers, their lessons, the curriculum, and ultimately, the State. This process represents the traditional approach in education in which teachers form and establish positive values, as expected by the state (Benninga, 1997).

As in the formal textbook, the model of the ideal Indonesian family life is also found in Indonesian children's fiction. The story presents: "the authoritative – all knowing father, the ever giving – never angry – and also all knowing mother, and obedient children whose mistakes start in stories and are corrected by the parents at the end" (Shiraishi, 1995: 170). These narrative and discursive patterns produce a uniform image of the family that is, of course, not necessarily reflected in Indonesia's social reality.

²⁸ For detail, see http://www.duniaguru.com/Pengembangan%20Profesi/takut_jadi_guru.htm (last accessed 10/10/2007)

The abovementioned teaching and learning process reflects an autocratic society that has a powerful authority figure who pressures children through a system of punishment or reward (Dreikurs, 1998). In the New Order's schooling system, children were placed in a subordinate position where adults had all the authority to control their lives. Critical thinking was not necessarily seen as important because students were only required to repeat and act passively. Therefore, there was no space for challenging or questioning what the teacher presented (Parker, 1992). As reflected in my story at the beginning of this chapter, the New Order constructed children as controlled followers, and no longer as protected citizens, because their inferior status was strengthened by the rules, values and routines of their school lives (Wyness, 2006).

Creating Proper Citizens within the Class Room

The school plays a significant role in producing children both as full members of society and citizens for the state. The schooling system, in setting up role models in the New Order, is described by Parker (2003) as a series of "overwhelmingly powerful institutions of national culture and state power" (p.206). The State, according to Gellner (2006), provides in this way a systematic national education system that encourages children to endorse national values. In this approach children are seen as apprentice citizens who are to be filled with adult values.

The New Order set the objectives of national education to serve the political purposes of the state, which was to unite citizens under one political ideology and to supply the demands of economic development (Leigh, 1999). As discussed above, Indonesian students are treated as passive learners with very little opportunity for discussion in the classroom. The state exacerbates this situation by setting up a curriculum that shapes loyal students into apprentice citizens who believe in the schooling process as the foremost mechanism of accomplishing personal improvement. Leigh (1999) refers to this process as "enclosing of intellectual commons for the purpose of the state" (p.52).

Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford and Davies (2006) concur that the State stimulates nationalism deliberately through the schooling process, where the discourse of national identity is targeted to children. In Indonesia, the New Order managed to create a sense of uniformity among Indonesian students in spite of their diversity, and at the same time helped to shape students' ideas about Indonesian identity. While children come from different backgrounds and cultures, the Indonesian government continues to counter this diversity by instructing children to wear uniforms, buy and read the official textbooks, and study and speak in *bahasa Indonesia*²⁹ (Keane, 1997; Shiraishi, 1997). Furthermore, school imparts citizenship lessons at all levels through the official subject *Pendidikan Moral Pancasila* (Pancasila Moral Education).³⁰ Citizenship education through schooling emphasises both the importance of school and promotes acceptable thoughts and behaviours (Wilkin, 2000). In some circumstances, according to Wilkin, citizenship education is mostly associated with political campaigns and propaganda to build a strong support for the nation's existence. *Pancasila* is seen as a vital aspect in constructing 'proper citizens' in the classroom in order to integrate them into Indonesia as a nation (Leigh, 1991; Parker, 1992; Vicker & Fisher, 1999).

Indonesian Children also learn to embrace their country and its values, by saluting the national flag, singing the national anthem every Monday morning, and acknowledging their national heroes, and all the cabinet ministers (Shiraishi, 1997). Additionally, while the students learn that their national icons are part of their identity, they are pressured by the education system to work harder (Parker, 2003). By third grade, Indonesian students understand *Bahasa Indonesia*; all symbols, mottoes, songs, pledges and photos; the state's chain of command; and the meaning of citizenship. According to Parker, students at the end of primary school will be familiar with the Indonesian provinces and capital cities, the structure of the Indonesian bureaucracy, the content of the Constitution and the complete history of Indonesian independence. Knowing the icons of the State is an integral requirement for a proper citizen. Furthermore, a good Indonesian citizen is modelled by teachers

²⁹ *Bahasa Indonesia* or Indonesian language is the official language

³⁰ *Pancasila* or Five Principles is the national basic philosophy in Indonesia (for more detail, see Morfit, 1981)

through their roles in the classroom. Parker found that teachers equate class orders and rules with values of good citizenship.³¹ According to Parker:

[T]he teacher's monologue enmeshed the fields of health, civility, self-and social respect, hygiene, diet and civic responsibility. It was clear that proper, modern, educated Indonesian citizens had a responsibility to exercise, to eat well, to have only two children, to dress circumspectly, wear shoes, say good morning and piss in the toilet (p.256).

It seems the teacher's monologue simplifies the idea of an ideal (Indonesian) citizen. However, I argue, the monologue implies the power of the New Order to dictate its policy through the figure of teacher. In other words, the teacher as an element of the education system is deliberately used to impart the State's agenda.

The relationship between the education system and the State's political agenda appears unequal (Buchori, 2005). In fact, while the education system is encouraged to fulfil both individual and state purposes, the State's highest priority is its political agenda of constructing a national identity. Thus, national identity as a political obligation of citizenship reflects the idea that children as future citizens are not outside of adult's political agendas; more likely, children will experience the politics of nation during their everyday lives (Coles, 1986, as cited in Stephens; 1995). The myth of innocent childhood in view of the relationship between children and the state is described by Jenkins (1988) in the following terms:

Too often, our culture imagines childhood as a utopian space, separate from adult cares and worries, free from sexuality, outside social divisions, closer to nature and the primitive world, more fluid in its identity and its access to the realms of imagination, beyond historical change, more just, pure, and innocent, and in the end, waiting to be corrupted or protected by adults (p.3-4).

Jenkin's idea of the myth of innocent childhood is useful to explain the way the New Order utilised the image of children and in the same way, constructed the identity of Indonesian children for its own political agenda

³¹ Parker observed the teaching process in primary schools in Bali and noted the rules that the teacher gives the students: Parker, Lyn, *From Subjects to Citizens, Balinese Villagers in the Indonesian Nation-State*, Denmark, Nias Press, 2003.

The New Order, according to Leigh (1999), has successfully constructed and conveyed the idea of the Indonesian state and citizenship in students' minds through the schooling process. Recently, the State has modified the citizenship curriculum at school to promote democratic values among students (Fearnley-Sander, Moss & Harbon, 2003). The new curriculum proposes a democratic approach to building citizenship commitment to the State. It also purports to reduce the totalitarian approach by integrating the State and its citizens under a "national philosophy" (p.205).

Creating a Discourse about Children through the Indonesian Media

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the New Order also utilised the media to define and disseminate its discourse on citizenship. Sen (2003) points out that:

The hand of the state in the construction of the Indonesian national culture in the Soeharto years does not need to be analytically uncovered: it was there for all to see. Newspapers and films were censored, television until 1987 was entirely state owned and private radio and television had to broadcast the state station's news bulletin several times a day. (p. 155)

Furthermore, Alfian & Chu (1981) describe how, during the New Order, television was set up to achieve three main objectives:“(1) the promotion of national unity and integration; (2) the promotion of national stability; and (3) the promotion of political stability” (Cited in Kitley, 2000: 4). These objectives intently sought to create a single national identity. In the words of Sen and Hill (2000):

[I]f national identity is 'as much about exclusion as about inclusion', then our reading of Indonesian media policy suggests that the New Order's vision of national culture was about excluding regional cultures, local specificities and local allegiances. In the New Order's curious battle against the 'local', global imports and foreign images were lesser threats than local languages and images that might show up cracks and contradictions, even just differences, in the national body-politic” (2000: 219)

Local identity for the New Order is seen as a threat for the existence of national identity. In this context, I agree with Sen and Hill's argument of the New Order's

vision of national identity, which is excepting the differences and forming a single homogenous national identity. After the resignation of Soeharto in 1998 and the New Order's regime is less dominant, Irawanto (2004) finds that

“Although a nationally pervasive image of the urban middle-class theme is predominant in *sinetron* themes, some *sinetron* successfully utilise local culture and ordinary life of lower-class people in their themes. In this context, Betawi television serial (*sinetron*) are prominent among *sinetron* with a local culture theme.” (p.112)³²

Similarly, Ida (2006) finds that another Betawi television serial, titled *Si Doel Anak Sekolahan* (Doel, A Student) which successfully attracts Indonesian television viewers, also highlightings on Betawi ethnic's culture. Ida emphasises that “this drama is unusual in Indonesian television as much of the dialogue is in Malay dialect mixed with popular urban Betawi slang, peculiar to the Betawi people” (2006:178)³³

In the context of children's identity, Kitley (2000) argues that the media, in particular the state television station or TVRI is used to manage “a development of children into competent adulthood and citizenship” (p.115). Indeed, children are often used to convey various commercial purposes and political views in Indonesian media; for example, TV commercials present children promoting commercial products and TV drama represents children in various narrative roles. In this respect, Strassler (1999) argues that children were used as “national subjects” of the New Order's propaganda in the series of banners that were placed in school areas, at elementary schools in particular. According to Strassler:

One (in 1997) read ‘I am an Indonesian Child: I Love my Family, my People, my Country’ (*Saya Anak Indonesia: Cinta Keluarga, Bangsa, Negara*). Another (in 1996): ‘I am an Indonesian Child: Disciplined and Prosperous’ (*Saya Anak Indonesia: Disiplin dan Sejahtera*)³⁴

³² For further reading about Indonesian *sinetron*, Betawi television serial, and local representation in Indonesian television, see Budi Irawanto's (2004) thesis.

³³ For further reading, see Ida's (2006) thesis.

³⁴ For details see <http://cc.joensuu.fi/sights/karens.htm> (last accessed 10/10/2007)

Similar with Parker's observation of the way the teacher dictates the ideal image of Indonesian citizenship as discussed previously, I argue this propaganda tends to build an identity which formally fits with the New Order's political agenda.

The use of children as innocent ambassadors to convey political ideas was evident in one particular children's TV program: *Si Unyil* (Kitley, 1999, 2000). *Si Unyil* was a popular puppet television series in Indonesia from 1981 to 1993. The series presented a schoolboy figure named *Unyil* (Little) who lived happily with his family in a harmonious neighbourhood in *Sukamaju* village. In fact, *Si Unyil* was produced to teach children Pancasila values within the context of an entertainment series (Kitley, 1999). This role then was adopted formally by the New Order, which promoted the advantages of the series in the National Development Plan. The series, according to Kitley, promoted national values through *Unyil's* everyday life. *Si Unyil* was a model of a proper citizen: an innocent, loyal Indonesian child located in the context of a model Indonesian community.

Kitley (2000) argues that *Si Unyil* conveys the New Order's aspiration to create a single expression of loyalty to the State. In Kitley's words:

[*Si Unyil*] acknowledges cultural differences but erases their range, specificity and potential political significance to produce a unitary, homogenous national family. (p.114)

In addition, according to Kitley (2000), the New Order-defined objective for *Si Unyil* was to create the ideal image of Indonesian children, who wish both to serve and show loyalty to the State. Kitley further explains that *Si Unyil* achieved this objective by figuring the child in three ways: firstly, by constructing ideal characters within a homogenous community and presenting patronage relationships between children and adults; secondly, by presenting the community as a family whose obligation is to develop the country; and thirdly, by presenting local content to balance out the imported programs dominant on Indonesian television. Furthermore, in *Si Unyil* the New Order proposed a genuinely Indonesian national identity. In this respect, Kitley (2000) observes that:

the desire to create an 'authentic' or 'identifiably Indonesia' series by drawing on indigenous aesthetic content and the

decision to use a children's series to popularise and build consent for national development priorities have been problematic for producers. Overly didactic episodes foreground the production conditions of the series and contribute to a perception that the series sought to manipulate audience (p.144)

Yet, *Si Unyil* not only features an ideal image of Indonesian children but also proposed the New Order's national family planning. The series – in a way similar to that of classroom practices discussed earlier – presents an ideal model of family: a father, a mother, and two children. This model is promoted as a better family form for a better future through the slogan “*norma keluarga kecil bahagia dan sejahtera*” (a norm of happy and wealthy small family).

Conclusion

The identity of Indonesian children, during the New Order period, was constructed through dominant systems: the family, the school and the media. These institutions were deliberately set up to support the New Order's political system in order to represent Indonesian children as a model of citizenship.

The New Order created a national identity for Indonesian children through the family system, which is influenced by dominant Javanese culture, and extended this identity through the school. Thus, the schooling system recreated the patriarchal family structure in the classroom, placing children into a subordinate position, as they are in the family. Furthermore, the media, which was controlled by the state during the New Order, was also used in constructing a socially and culturally acceptable idea of childhood, systematically building the image of Indonesian children as ideal citizens. After the fall of the New Order the patriarchal family model remains in place in Indonesian political discourse. The family, in this context, is conceptualised as part of the political structure.

In spite of the widespread influence of the state-sanctioned discourses discussed in this chapter, there has been a recent trend to portray children and the family in different terms in contemporary Indonesian cinema. Inharmonious child-parent

relationships as well as single-parent families are now commonly found in contemporary Indonesian films. Eric Sasono, in an article titled “Single Parent pada Sinema Indonesia” (Single Parents in the Indonesian Cinema), argues that contemporary Indonesian cinema presents an alternative image of the Indonesian family. This is the case in films such as *Pasir Berbisik* (Whispering Sands), 2000; *Ada Apa dengan Cinta* (What’s Up with Love?), 2001; *Eliana-Eliana*, 2002; *Arisan* (The Gathering), 2003; and *Banyu Biru*, 2004.³⁵ *Ada Apa dengan Cinta* presents a girl who lives in a troubled family and suggests her mother should divorce her husband. *Pasir Berbisik*, *Eliana-Eliana*, and *Arisan* exclude the figure of the father in the family while proposing a strong role for the mother in the story. In contrast, *Banyu Biru* omits the character of the mother by presenting the life of a son with his father.

In fact, Garin has presented these alternative forms of family in most of his films: *Letter to an Angel* (1993) presents a boy who lost his mother and lives with his father, who is later killed; *Leaf on a Pillow* (1997) tells the story of a group of street children who have no family but then form another family and choose a woman as their mother; *Of Love and Eggs* (2004) presents a story of a group of children who live in troubled and incomplete families.

The film representations mentioned above go against traditional ideals and may imply that the concept of an acceptable Indonesian family is changing. This significant change may, in addition, serve to question the role of the family and children within the frame of the dominant national identity discourse while highlighting the fact that many children remain in a difficult position in Indonesia’s society. The discussion in this chapter is useful to understand the way Indonesian children are portrayed in Garin Nugroho’s films. Thus, in the next chapter, I will discuss Garin’s representation of Indonesian children in *Letter to an Angel*, vis-à-vis the influence of the New Order’s official discourse on children and the family.

³⁵ For details, see <http://www.kompas.com/kompas-cetak/0505/29/seni/1777697.htm> (Last accessed 05/10/2007)

Chapter Three

The Representation of Children in *Letter to an Angel*: An Alternative Image of Indonesian Children

Dear Angel, once my teacher told me,
if I always want to know the truth, you will take care of me.
But, when I want to show my real father, why am I accused of being a naughty boy?
Please answer my question, dear Angel”
(Lewa in *Letter to an Angel*)

Introduction

This chapter discusses the portrayal of Indonesian children in Garin Nugroho’s *Surat Untuk Bidadari* (hereafter referred to as *Letter to an Angel*, the film’s official English title). Garin directed *Letter to an Angel* in 1993 after a significant decline in the Indonesian film industry in the 1980s. The film is Garin’s second full-length feature film, the first being *Cinta Dalam Sepotong Roti* (Love in a Slice of Bread), produced in 1991. *Letter to an Angel* is not only recognized as an important Indonesian film but also as one of Garin’s most significant works, as it conveys his thoughts on Indonesia in the 1990s.

While Hoskin (1996), Sen (2003), and Hanan (2004) have identified some of the key issues raised in *Letter to an Angel*, such as globalization, national identity, and ethnicity, they have not discussed the particular way children are represented to convey these themes. In this chapter I argue that the child character in *Letter to an Angel* is a means to convey Garin’s ideas about ethnicity within the context of Indonesia as a nation-state. I start this analysis by discussing the importance of the film within Indonesian cinema, where it can be considered as a breakthrough film. There follows a discussion of narrative themes that become key pointers in revealing the meaning of the film, such as childhood, the loss of the mother figure, adolescence, the model of family and the schooling system. In this part of the analysis, I discuss the representation of violence within children’s culture as it appears in the film. Finally, I discuss the film’s use of global icons to counter the New Order’s construction of national identity.

The Importance of *Letter to an Angel*

Following Garin's first feature film *Love in a Slice of Bread*, *Letter to an Angel* is also acknowledged as a breakthrough in Indonesian cinemas. Through *Letter to an Angel*, Garin puts forward several aspects that signify its importance in the discourse of Indonesian cinema. Firstly, *Letter to an Angel* presents the richness of local elements that is rarely seen in Indonesian cinema. Secondly, the film shows Garin's experimental style of filming. Thirdly, the film presents a rare theme in Indonesian cinema.

According to Sen, in this film Garin presents local richness: the players, the story, the location, the language, and the musical composition. Moreover, Sen goes on, Garin attempts to counter Jakarta's domination as a filmic location by producing *Letter to an Angel* in Sumba, East Indonesia (2003:157).³⁶ Only a few well-known professional actors take part in Garin's film. Instead, most characters are played by local non-actors. As a consequence of this, the Sumba language and also Indonesian in Sumba dialect is predominantly spoken in the film. As Sen (2003) points out "no other films in the New Order used local casting to nearly this extent" (p.159). Furthermore, she also notes that the New Order did not allow the use of regional languages as the main form in Indonesian films (2003:157). The use of the Sumba language and Indonesian in Sumba dialect in *Letter to an Angel* thus challenged the hegemony of *Bahasa Indonesia* as a national language. *Letter to an Angel*, therefore, can be seen as an expression of a cultural struggle against the dominant use of *Bahasa Indonesia* as the national language.

Letter to an Angel also demonstrates Garin's experimentation with style, mainly through his mixing of documentary footage and fiction to build the story. Sen explains that there was very little experimentation in Indonesian cinema in the New Order. In fact, *Letter to an Angel* has never been screened in Indonesian cinemas

³⁶ According to Sen, since 1965 the Indonesian film industry has been centralized in Jakarta and other parts of Indonesia were rarely used as a location of film production during the New Order (2003:157)

(2003:158).³⁷ Ironically, in 1993, the film was rejected by the Indonesian Film Festival jury, while in some international film festivals it achieved several awards³⁸

The film presents a situation in which global icons are utilized as local culture to resist a dominant national ideology (Hoskin, 1996; Sen, 2003). Javanese, as a dominant culture, is perceived as a form of “internal colonialism” as it attempts to impose Javanese culture on the local Sumba culture (Hoskin, 1996:139). According to Hoskin, in *Letter to an Angel* Garin portrays contradictory elements to convey ideas of cultural richness while mixing narrative and documentary film to convey alternative techniques of filmmaking. Additionally, Lim (1995) suggests that *Letter to an Angel* is “a film about the existential predicament posed by a symbolic world: what is one to do when ‘reality’ is unknowable beyond its representation” (cited in Hoskin, 2004:138).

Furthermore, *Letter to an Angel*, according to Sen (2003), is a form of challenging the mainstream power of Jakarta and Java, which are framed as the central location of national identity. Therefore, the film “could recuperate the local (not any particular local, but a local-qua-local) as the site of opposition” (p.157). Thus, Sen asserts the importance of the film in the following terms:

If we read *Surat* against the highly restricted formal political language of the New Order, we find that Anderson’s classic ‘imagined community’ evolves into the repressive, unrepresentative state, and an alternative to the national space has to be imagined to ground the opposition to the repressive New Order state (p.157)

Finally, in *Letter to an Angel* several local and national Indonesian cultural problems are depicted, such as “the invasion of regional cultures by the modern media” and “an attempt within state apparatuses at integration of the people into a homogenizing

³⁷ Sen also describes how the cinema distributors did not accept the experimental style of Garin’s film and refused to release it (2003:158). In addition, Ajidharma (2004) argues that Indonesian audiences are not familiar with “selfish film” such as *Letter to an Angel* (2004:69). Ajidharma describes “selfish film” as “one that does not care about the audience at all and also perhaps the producer” therefore the film “is not a film intended for film viewers” (p.69). He stresses that *Letter to an Angel* as a “film must be what Garin has meant it to be, not what the audience wants it to be” (p.69).

³⁸ These awards included: best film at Taormina Film Festival Italy and Tokyo Film Festival, Berliner Zeitung Award Forum des Junges Film – Berlin Film festival, and Best director at Pyongyang Non-Aligned Film Festival. All of these awards were received in 1994

nation state” (Hanan, 2004:159). The film criticizes the dominant discourse of unification of Indonesia as a state. Therefore, according to Hanan, *Letter to an Angel* successfully questions the nationalistic discourse that Indonesia engages in to forge its identity.

A Story of Indonesia in *Letter to an Angel*

Letter to an Angel presents the story of Lewa whose mother and father die because of local violence. Lewa is portrayed as an obedient and sensitive child who dares to ask questions and find answers in his own way. There are some significant adults in Lewa’s life: his father, his best friend: *Malaria Tua* (Old Malaria), his enemy *Kuda Liar* (Wild Horse), *Bu guru* (Madame Teacher) and *Berlian Merah* (Red Ruby). He also shares the problems of many of those adults, and eventually loses the significant adults in his life through the actions of *Kuda Liar*, his enemy

As Lewa misses his mother, he attempts to reconstruct her image using a Polaroid camera that he obtained from a fashion model in exchange for his traditional belt. Using his Polaroid camera, Lewa takes pictures of anything that arouses his curiosity, even though, in some cases, his behavior is unacceptable to people around him. Following a suggestion by his teacher, Lewa writes a letter to an angel to help him solve his problems. Later, he finds out that the angel’s reply had been written by his teacher. He is very disappointed having to face up to the truth. Meanwhile, his life is complicated by the presence of *Kuda Liar*, a local gangster who hurts and kills people close to Lewa. Towards the end of the film Lewa kills *Kuda Liar* and, as a consequence, ends up in a detention centre.

Letter to an Angel starts by acknowledging that the film is inspired by three foreign sources: *The Stranger* by Albert Camus, *Letter to God* by Gregorio Lopez, and *A Village Boy leaves School* by Lao Hsing. In relation to the utilization of these sources, Hanan argues that:

the use of three different sources for the story, all of them sources from outside the culture, is signaled as a way of foregrounding (not so much the use of the camera but) the story as a construction (this stratagem being typically post modern)

even as the film engages with a pre-modern, traditional society, undergoing 'modernization' (2004:158)

The opening credits identify the story as *suatu tempat, suatu waktu* (one place, in one time) and are followed by footage of a local ritual, which shows a group of people wearing their traditional costume pull a big stone up a hill. Even though the landscape in the scenes indicates the place is somewhere in Eastern Indonesia and features some aspects of East Sumba culture, the film itself does not identify the exact location. This may suggest a strategy to conceal that the film represents Indonesia and its problems.

However, several early scenes assist the audience, especially those who are familiar with ethnographic film, to identify the location of the story, since documentary footage is deliberately inserted in the film. For example, in the scene referred to above, a caption explains the ritual as a funeral ritual. The mixture of documentary footage and fantasy story continues throughout the film. *Letter to an Angel* presents several scenes of ritual as part of the story, and these are identified by on screen titles such as "*upacara penguburan*" (burial ritual), and "*upacara meminta maaf*" (ritual for asking forgiveness). Garin's signature technique of combining documentary footage with fiction footage is further enhanced by his typically separating documentary footage from fictional scenes with an explanatory caption. However, the documentary footage is not entirely detached from the story because the plot and also the actors are deliberately adapted to fit the documentary aspect. Nevertheless, as Sugiharto (2004) has pointed out, Garin sometimes mixes "paradoxical facts, unconscious memories and fantasies" (p.186); some fiction segments in this film also have explanatory captions, such as "*kampung seberang sungai*" (village across the river) in the scene where Lewa takes a picture of the girl, and also "*panti rehabilitasi*" (rehabilitation centre) in the last scene after Lewa's trial. This mixture alerts the audience to the fact that the story is a reflection of Garin's thoughts on contemporary Indonesia. Garin's style, at some stage, has similarities with Italian neo-realism's way to represent reality into fictional narratives. Furthermore, according to Andre Bazin, Italian neo-realism successfully shows "a profound respect for reality by finding a narrative voice that was humble and modest but hardly silent" (Nichols,

2001:92). In the sense of Italian neo-realism' style, Garin's *Letter to an Angel* represents reality by juxtaposing three significant elements of realism into his fictional stories, they are: photographic or empirical realism, psychological realism, and emotional realism.³⁹ Garin shows the empirical realism by using the real location, real events and also non professional actor. This empirical realism constructs a psychological realism by inserting actors into real event and convincingly showing their acting as their real everyday behaviour. Thus, the use of traditional music in this film constructs an emotional realism that strengthen empirical and psychological realism in this film.

The film's title *Surat Untuk Bidadari* appears after the ritual scene. According to Mayne (1976), the title of a film can be utilized as a hermeneutic code. By this he means that the title creates some expectation that meaning will be revealed in the film that is the title forms questions that are expected to be answered through the narrative. The title of this film *Surat untuk Bidadari* (or *Letter to an Angel*) creates questions such as who is the sender, why is he/she sending a letter and what is the letter about. However, Hoskin (1996) and Hanan (2004) question this literal translation of the title, arguing that there is a problem in translating "bidadari" as angel. In this context, "bidadari" is closer to "goddess" than to "angel". According to Hoskin,

The English language translation of the Indonesian *bidadari* as 'angel' is a bit problematic, since the term suggests a wood nymph or a beautiful sylph rather than desexualized Christian notion of 'angels'. And it is very clear that Lewa's developing sexuality and erotic curiosity is a major component of his search for this 'angel'" (Hoskin, 1996:9)

In the opening scene, a conversation between Lewa and his teacher, *Bu Guru*, while accompanying *Berlian Merah* and *Malaria Tua*, clearly addresses "*bidadari*"

Apa dokter itu bu Guru? Kenapa malaria (tua) harus dibawa ke dokter?
Kenapa tidak ke bidadari saja
Dokter itu, orang yang bisa mengobati
Tapi bu guru, Bu guru pernah cerita bidadari bisa menyembuhkan semua penyakit, bahkan bisa menyembuhkan yang mati

³⁹ For more detail, see Nichols, Bill (2001), *Introduction to Documentary*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis

What is a doctor, Madame Teacher? Why should *Malaria Tua* be brought to a doctor? Why should not we bring him to the Goddess?
Doctor is the person who can heal
But, Madame Teacher once told us that the Goddess can heal every disease, even heal the dead

Hoskin suggests that Lewa's belief in the existence of the "*bidadari*" is developed through his closeness to *Bu Guru*, his use of a picture of Madonna as his mother's image, and his passion for *Berlian Merah*. "*Bidadari*" in Indonesian myth (or more accurately, Javanese and Balinese myth) is always depicted as a beautiful woman. I prefer to use the term of Goddess rather than Angel in this chapter as the term of Goddess is closely linked with the appearance of beautiful women in Lewa's life. Therefore, both *Bu Guru* and *Berlian Merah* are Lewa's perceptions of "*bidadari*"; they can be asked for help, answers, care. As to the figures of women in the story, Sen (2003) argues that:

It would be easy enough to map this story on to an Oedipal rubric. What drives the narrative is Lewa's desire for his mother, projected (displaced) onto the bodies of other women (p.158)

Lewa's belief in the Goddess is reinforced by his teacher. This imaginary character becomes an important part of Lewa's life because he believes the Goddess will help him solve his problems. Lewa sends letters to the Goddess asking why people see him as a naughty boy, especially since he wants to tell the truth to everybody. The correspondence between Lewa and the Goddess is facilitated by the Postman who delivers Lewa's letters to *Ibu Guru*. Later, Lewa finds out the truth that the Goddess is actually his teacher, who reads and replies to his letters. Lewa is not only disappointed but he feels that there is nothing left to believe in. He loses both his fantasy and hope.

The Goddess, in this context, exists to symbolize hope for Lewa; he hopes that the Goddess will help him to solve his problems or at least listen to (or read) his whines. The character of the Goddess can be compared with children's imaginary friend or the myth of Santa Claus; they do not exist but the children believe and act as if they

did. Commonly, parents utilize these myths to talk with their children, much as *Bu Guru* talks with Lewa through the myth of the Goddess.

A Story of Indonesian Children

While *Letter to an Angel* “is not a children’s film” (Sen & Hill, 2000:155), the orphan boy character, Lewa, is central to challenging the mainstream construction of Indonesian children. Lewa is portrayed both as obedient and rebellious, and as an independent but lonely child. He believes his teacher but is willing to argue with her in his desire for truth, the dialogue in the opening scene about the goddess and the doctor being an example of this. To satisfy his curiosity he looks for answers, even though his behavior often annoys adults in his village.

The loss of the mother figure and its consequences during adolescence are depicted in this film. The Goddess fantasy as a representation of hope reflects the inability of adults to be models for children. Lewa could not find any adult figure who could be his protector or, at least, anyone who could satisfy his curiosity. All the adults he knows are either part of his problem or unable to help. For example, his mother seems never to have existed because he has never seen her, and his father is killed by *Kuda Liar*. Furthermore, *Berlian Merah* belongs to *Kuda Liar*, and *Malaria Tua* is incapable of answering his questions, since Lewa is presented as being wiser than him. Finally, *Bu Guru* in his eyes is a liar.

Lewa searches for a woman who can be a mother figure for him. There are two women who are involved in his life: his teacher and *Berlian Merah*. At first, he believes in his teacher; then, he loses faith because he sees her as a liar when she pretends to be the Goddess. While Lewa looks for a mother figure, the circumstances of his adolescence trigger other questions about women. For example, he finds a picture of breastfeeding in a magazine interesting (he has not had the breastfeeding experience because her mother passed away while he was an infant). Using his Polaroid camera, Lewa captures images of women’s breasts to satisfy his curiosity. This includes taking a picture of a young girl whose breasts are different compared to a woman’s breast. Not only do the adults call this inappropriate behaviour, but, even

worse, Lewa's picture of the girl's breasts results in a local war between two villages. Lewa's journey in exploring his curiosity about women ends when he meets *Berlian Merah*, who has just had a miscarriage. As a result, Lewa finds a mother figure in *Berlian Merah*, while she substitutes Lewa for her lost newborn baby. In this respect, Hoskin (1996) explains that:

The beautiful *Berlian Merah*, unhappily married to the gangster villain, eventually becomes his protector by offering him a form of consolation which is controversial since it combines both erotic and maternal elements: She allows him to suckle at her breast. (p.68)

Letter to an Angel depicts paradoxical perspectives on the limits of childhood behaviours. Lewa's curiosity about breastfeeding and women's breasts, especially the culturally unusual way in which he satisfies his curiosity, is avenged with anger and conflict, which result in a war for the tribe's honour. However, in the midst of all this no adult answers or satisfies Lewa's curiosity and in this sense the story asserts a gap between adults' and children's ways of thinking. While children have ways and values that are different to those of adults, adults think that children should learn the right way and adopt the appropriate values of adults. Lewa thinks that the pictures will satisfy his curiosity; contrary to the adults, he does not intend his picture as sexual harassment or as an insult to the tribe's honour. This paradox, according to Boettiger (1998), suggests that ways of acting and thinking in the past do not necessarily match children's needs in the present. In other words, the "adult's way" is not necessarily the "children's way" of exploring the world.

However, Lewa is punished for his behaviours. In this way, the film portrays the weak position of children in relation to the power of adults. The village has to conduct a ritual of forgiveness after Lewa steals his father's body (and everyone blames Lewa for causing the local war). However, no one deplors the crimes committed by *Kuda Liar* and at the film's conclusion Lewa ends up in a detention centre because a court has decided that Lewa is guilty of killing *Kuda Liar*.

Questioning the Schooling System

According to Wyness (2006) and Gellner (2006), the state inculcates national values in children. Children are seen as apprentice citizens who are to be filled with the state's values. These values should enable citizens to obtain social, political and economic advantages, and also to manage these through the moral and social obligations implied in being a citizen (Wyness, 2006). These values are implemented through symbols such as the national language and flag. As in other countries, in Indonesia schooling is an effective way to implant national values in children, for example through national icons such as "*Burung Garuda*"⁴⁰.

The Indonesian schooling system is criticized in *Letter to an Angel* for constructing a dominant model of the family in Indonesia. In the film, the schooling system is represented by a small language class. In this class the teacher asks students to follow her voice in reading simple sentences in the textbook. This school scene matches standard teaching procedures in the classroom, as described by Shiraishi (1997), where familial patterns are replicated in a hierarchy of teacher as parent and students as children. Firstly, students address the teachers as *ibu* (mother – Madame). Secondly, the teacher stands in front of the class while students sit at their seats properly and wait for instructions. The teacher reads the book and is followed by the students. It is unclear whether the students read the book, or only repeat the teacher's words. This teaching procedure is identified as textbook culture (Kumar as cited in Parker, 1992)

Schooling has become important in educating Indonesian children into society (Shiraishi, 1997; Aitken, 2001). The New Order created a schooling system that not only supplied educational material but also created a pattern that Pierre Bourdieu calls a master pattern system (Leigh, 1999). As in Kumar's textbook culture, the master pattern system places the textbook as the primary source and the teacher is the only one who has authority to interpret the content. The textbook becomes the only

⁴⁰ *Burung garuda* or the bird of Garuda is a national icon of Indonesia. See details in http://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garuda_Pancasila#Makna_Lambang_Garuda_Pancasila (Last accessed 05/10/2007)

guideline, both for teacher and student. Learning is not necessarily important, because students only repeat and act passively; therefore, there is no space for criticism or questioning of what the teacher presents (Parker, 1992).

In the film, Lewa's questions represent a criticism of this system. For example, when he is asked to read, he thinks that the book is wrong because, while the sentence says "ini ibu saya" ("this is my mother"), the picture that illustrates the sentence does not match his reality. Lewa says: "Ini bukan wajah ibu saya. Buku ini bohong" ("This is not my mother's face. This book is lying"). The picture in the book depicts a woman wearing a *kebaya*,⁴¹ which Lewa has never seen any woman wear. Shiraishi (1997) and Parker (2003) have demonstrated that the family model that has been constructed in Indonesia through the schooling system favours the dominant Javanese culture. Javanese names, roles, and even clothes are preferred elements in the New Order's campaign to build Indonesia's nation-state.

Lewa tries to find his real mother by asking his father and the latter explains that his mother died in a car accident when Lewa was still an infant. Yet, his father's explanation does not satisfy Lewa because he still cannot know what his mother looked like. Then he decides to take a photograph of a poster picturing the famous superstar Madonna, which was on the bus in which his mother died. Consequently, he decides Madonna's picture will be the representation of his mother.

However, the problem of representation still remains in class. When he is asked to read "ini bapak saya" ("this is my father"), written beneath a picture that is totally different from his real father, Lewa looks desperate as he does not understand why the book lies. Meanwhile, his father is killed by *Kuda Liar*. Wanting to show the true image of his father to his classmates and his teacher, Lewa steals his father's dead body and takes a picture of his father's face and shows it in class. He says: "Ini wajah bapak saya yang sebenarnya. Bukunya bohong" ("This is the real face of my father. This book lies")

⁴¹ *Kebaya* is a Javanese women's traditional blouse.

According to Parker (1992), textbooks reflect school curricula as part of the national education system. Teachers place textbooks as their primary sources in the learning process. The textbook, in consequence, turns into “the authoritative encasement for the knowledge contained therein” (Leigh, 1999:47). Lewa’s statement implicitly criticizes the authority of textbooks in the Indonesian schooling system.

Violence and the Disappearance of the Children

Letter to an Angel presents the story of a child who has no friends among his peers. The children who attend Lewa’s school tease him and laugh at his behaviour. Meanwhile, other children in the film are commanded by *Kuda Liar* to do anything he asks from them, including killing. Finally, there is a girl who is presented as the focus of Lewa’s adolescent sexual curiosity. All those children appear as totally apart from Lewa. Lewa is thus an individualized child character who is separated from other children and in this sense, becomes representative of children per se. Incidentally; Lewa appears to be the only child to have problems in the film.

Added to his isolation from other children, Lewa is surrounded by adults: his father, his best friend *Malaria Tua*, his enemy *Kuda Liar*, and Lewa’s favorite women: his teacher *Bu Guru* and *Berlian Merah*. As a result, he experiences most of these adults’ problems. Clearly, Lewa does not live in what Giroux (1996) describes as a children’s culture: “[a] sphere where entertainment, advocacy and pleasure meet to construct conceptions of what it means to be a child” (cited in Jenkins, 1998:4). By separating Lewa from other children and placing him primarily with adults, the film depicts the idea that Lewa’s world is formed from adults’ problems. Therefore, the film seems to suggest that Lewa can only experience his childhood through concepts that adults have constructed.

Like the adults in his world, Lewa lives a hard and violent life. Hoskin (1996) criticizes the violence in *Letter to an Angel* as “too American” (p.72). She states:

With two murders, a suicide, two rapes, and a tribal war in its 118 minutes, it approximates Hollywood penchant for blood and guts, and indeed the bloodier parts of the film are probably its crudest elements (p.71).

Lewa lives within violence: his mother was killed in a car accident, he sees his father kill one of *Kuda Liar*'s men in order to defend his land only to be himself killed by them. Furthermore, Lewa witnesses the murder of *Berlian Merah*'s husband at the hands of children instructed by *Kuda Liar* (who then marries *Berlian Merah*, who is not brave enough to refuse). In addition, *Bu Guru* is raped by *Kuda Liar*, Lewa's horse is brutally killed by *Kuda Liar*, and Lewa's photograph leads to a bloody tribal war. Finally, Lewa's best friend, *Malaria Tua*, commits suicide and Lewa is unable to stop it because no one dares to stand up to *Kuda Liar* in the village.

According to Wyness (2006) children are seen as "unfinished projects" that need continuous attention from adults before they join the adult world (p.121). In *Letter to an Angel* the result of Lewa's "project" seems to solely depend on the way of adults around him; in fact his harsh circumstances have taught Lewa to survive by copying the adults' ways. Thus, following the logic of Wyness's statement, the result of Lewa's "project" is his threat to kill *Kuda Liar* with his bow and arrows. *Berlian Merah* notices this action and tries to stop Lewa. However, Lewa's arrow finally kills *Kuda Liar*.

Lewa's life within these violent episodes shows the irony of children being treated as adults. In this context, the framework proposed by Prout and James (1990), which places children in opposition to adults, is arguable. According to Prout & James, children are personified as natural, simple, amoral, and asocial – a person in waiting – while adults are personified as cultural, complex, moral, and social-personhood. In contrast, in *Letter to an Angel*, Lewa is portrayed as a child who has the same problems as adults and performs the same acts as adults. In Lewa's world adults solve most of their problems in violent ways, so he learns that violence is the way of solving his own problems.

Rejecting the Nation

Issues of national identity and in relation to ethnicity and globalization also appear in *Letter to an Angel*. Jenkins emphasizes that the border line between "ethnicism and nationalism" as part of individual identity is indeterminate (cited in Scourfield,

Dicks, Drakeford & Davies, 2006:40). However, in Indonesia, the New Order aimed to develop a singular national identity. Nationalism is often utilized by authoritarian regimes to unite diverse individuals, groups, or cultures into a single form of national culture (Brown, 2002:557). The New Order brand of nationhood sought to conceal ethnic identity in order to shape nationalism.

According to Hooker (1999), the New Order interpreted the Indonesian Constitution as part of the development plan as a strategic way to either eliminate “old and indigenous” ethnic cultures or to absorb them into the national culture, which is defined as “something that results from the creative effort of the entire Indonesian people” (Hooker, 1999:263). This creative effort, however, could only be defined by the government. This means that the New Order had the authority to decide which culture was to be adopted as the basis of national identity. Moreover, this ensured that a foreign culture could be determined as inappropriate, or even constructed as the enemy of national culture, and thus rejected. In this respect, Vicker and Fisher (1999) paraphrase Siegel’s argument that:

The enemy of revolution was constructed from the forms of fetishization particular to Indonesian modernity. In that fetishization, the foreign is seductive and suspicious, disgorged through forms of violence (p.7)

Vicker and Fisher (1999) refer to a ban of music by *The Beatles* and *Elvis Presley* during the Soekarno era. This ban was viewed as a way to counter the enemy of national culture: western cultural imperialism. In this sense, *Letter to an Angel* offers a paradoxical engagement with fetishization. While Elvis Presley is assumed by the authorities as the “enemy” of national culture, the film presents *Kuda Liar* as an Elvis Presley fan. Simultaneously, *Kuda Liar* is a satirical image of the New Order’s programs of development and modernization: he is presented as a village member who has access to the outside world. This is represented, for example, in his clothes, his business and his devotion to Elvis, as well as in a picture of *Kuda Liar* in Jakarta with the *Monas* in the background.⁴² The film’s elaboration of a superimposed image

⁴² *Monas* is an Indonesian acronym from *Monuman Nasional* (National Monument). The monument is one of Indonesia’s icons, for Jakarta in particular. For details see http://www.jakarta.go.id/jakartaku/museum_di_dki01.htm (last accessed 05/10/2007)

of Elvis Presley and *Kuda Liar* refers to what Tomlinson (1991) describes as cultural imperialism as a critique of modernity.

Letter to an Angel also represents the clash between the official national identity and an ethnic identity that adopts global icons. As mentioned previously in this chapter, the characters in this film speak either Sumba language or a Sumba dialect of Indonesian. Lewa, for example, speaks in a Sumba dialect of Indonesia, and only sometimes in Sumba.⁴³ The New Order marginalized regional languages by focusing on Indonesian language as a marker of national identity (Ridho, 2006:). Regional and non-standard Indonesian dialect speakers were constructed by the New Order as “deficient subjects” and as “lacking competency” as modern Indonesians (Kitley, 1999). Indonesian language has become a part of what Pilliang (2005) calls “apparatus hegemony” (p.198). According to Pilliang, ethnic languages are not given space to exist because they are perceived as a threat to the national language. To establish its hegemony, national language is utilized to disseminate the dominant ideology. Therefore, the use of regional languages in *Letter to an Angel* can be seen as “language subversion” of the hegemony of the national language (Pilliang, 2005:198).

As an expression of apparatus hegemony the Indonesian language is used in several scenes in the film, which represent the state conducting its business, for example, in the classroom or in the courtroom. As discussed earlier, in the classroom, suggests Parker (1992), children have to learn to develop an identity as Indonesian citizens, speaking in Indonesian and reading Indonesian textbooks that contain only materials about Indonesia. This process can be understood as a means to reduce resistance to a dominant ideology by creating a hegemonic common sense (Pilliang, 2005). In Garin’s film, this hegemonic common sense of an Indonesian identity is embodied in the textbooks and in schooling. However, the film also creates a cultural clash, which is represented through Lewa’s resistance to the textbook in class. Sen (2003) describes the clash between national and local cultures in this film in these terms:

⁴³ The actor who plays Lewa – Windy Prasetyo Utomo – is not from Sumba. It is therefore understandable that he does not speak in Sumba.

[T]he institutionally imposed 'national' culture poses the real threat to the local. Lewa's problem starts when the 'national' image of the family, men in slacks, women in *kebaya*, children in neat dresses, confronts his own lived realities of dead mother, illiterate father and life on horseback amongst hill tracks. (p.161)

The film also addresses the State's strategies to discourage resistance to national ideology. This is done, for example, in the scene when Lewa is prosecuted after killing *Kuda Liar*. In this respect, Sen goes on to argue that:

The nation intrudes more brutally after Lewa slays the drunken *Kuda Liar* with an arrow through his heart. Unlike all murders committed in the village by *Kuda Liar* and his men, the killing of the criminal brings the law of the nation into the village. A prosecutor and judge arrive, speaking in formal official Indonesian never used in the film until this point, to establish law and order in the village (2003:161)

While Lewa is presented as a local, his appearance is culturally mixed: he is a Sumbanese boy who speaks a Sumbanese dialect of Indonesian, rides a horse, carries traditional weapons but also a bag printed with an American flag. Additionally, he wears a superman costume and traditional scarf, and he takes photos with a Polaroid camera, using an image of Madonna as his dead mother's image, while placing an Australian Ned Kelly bucket on his head (Sen, 2003:161). Other global icons also appear and are unconsciously utilized in Lewa's life. In one scene, he utilizes the bag printed with an American flag combined with a German radio program to calm his best friend, *Malaria Tua*. Furthermore, Lewa has a friend named *Kakek Jepang* (Japanese Grandpa), who teaches him Japanese songs and dances. And he favors Mikhail Gorbachev as his hero. For the State, those icons are symbols of foreign identity and are positioned as the enemy that must be contained. However, in this film, those icons appear as familiar as local icons. It seems as if there was no gap between local and global icons.

According to Santos (2006) there are two modes of globalization: globalized localism and localized globalism. Globalized localism consists of "the process by which a particular phenomenon is successfully globalized" (Santos, 2006:396), similarly, localized globalism consists of "the specific impact on local conditions produced by transnational imperatives, local conditions are disintegrated, oppressed,

excluded, destructured, and eventually, restructured as subordinate inclusion” (Santos, 2006:397).

In *Letter to an Angel*, the Superman costume, the Polaroid camera, the Madonna image, Elvis Presley, and the United States flag are examples of a globalized localism. These global icons are utilized as counterparts of the local culture. In contrast, localized globalism is expressed in the film through a number of examples: the image of the Javanese woman that is replaced by the picture of Madonna, the United States flag and the foreign radio program that are chosen over the national flag or radio station, and Mikhail Gorbachev who is selected to represent a hero.

The resistance of Lewa against his enemy, *Kuda Liar*, depicts the resistance of local culture against the imperialism of national culture. Local culture unintentionally utilizes global icons, as Sen (2003) points out:

Indeed, global icons like the Polaroid and Madonna become weapons in the local’s struggle for survival against homogenized images of national identity imposed by the national centre (p.162)

In fact, a modern, European-style court session is conducted to try Lewa for the killing of *Kuda Liar*. In contrast, local, traditional ways are used to resolve *Kuda Liar’s* crimes, and also some of the earlier problems he has caused. Hoskin (1996) notes that usually the traditional East Sumba ways are used to solve serious cases such as murder: the murderer has to apologize and pay compensation to the victim’s family. As a result of the trial, the government sends Lewa to the detention centre. Sen (2003) describes the situation in the following terms:

As in the archetypal New Order text, here too the state institution has finally established order out of Lewa’s chaotic search for identity and justice. But this order saps the spirit of youth; it breaks the ties of local culture (p.162)

Rather than to jail, Lewa is taken to a rehabilitation centre. A caption explains that where Lewa is held is “panti rehabilitasi” (rehabilitation centre). Rehabilitation refers to “the restoration of someone to a useful place in society”.⁴⁴ This demonstrates that Lewa is to be “re-educated” to be a good citizen, because what he has done is not

⁴⁴ For details see: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/rehabilitation> (last accessed 05/10/2007)

acceptable to the State. Through this final scene, Garin portrays the complex experiences of Lewa. In his room at the centre, Lewa is alone and silent, surrounded by all his belongings: the picture of Madonna (with his hand written note “ini ibu saya” (“this is my mother”)); his dead father’s picture; the photograph of the girl’s breasts that caused the tribal war only now with his note “air susu sehat” (“breast milk is healthy”); and the picture of Mikhail Gorbachev. He expresses his independence by hanging the picture of Gorbachev on the wall. In an earlier scene, he had asked his teacher about this picture, which he found in a magazine:

Ini siapa bu Guru?
Itu namanya Gorbachev
Kok difoto di sini?”
Dia itu orang terkenal. Berani melawan yang tidak disukainya. Dia itu pahlawan, Lewa
Jadi pahlawan kok bingung

Who is this, Madam?
His name is Gorbachev
Why is his picture here?
He is a famous person. He dares to fight against his enemies. He is a hero, Lewa
If he is a hero, then how come he looks confused?

Ultimately, Gorbachev’s picture represents Lewa himself as a confused hero. He is confused because everything that has happened to him occurred only because the questions he asked were either unanswered by the adults around him or were answered in a way that he found confusing. Accordingly, the head of the village defends Lewa in the trial by stressing that, “mengajukan pertanyaan bukanlah sebuah kejahatan” (“asking questions are not a crime”). Lewa kills someone who killed others but the court only punished Lewa. He seems to think that he has done the right thing, but the adults around him think differently.

Conclusion

Letter to an Angel pushes the boundaries of mainstream Indonesian cinema by providing alternative themes, techniques of production, and perspectives on Indonesia. As Garin’s first film that presents a child as primary character in the narratives, *Letter to an Angel* shows the way the child is utilized to convey Garin’s

thoughts on contemporary Indonesia. Lewa emerges to be an ambassador of Garin's critiques of the way the New Order built Indonesia as a nation.

Indeed, the film critiques some dominant ideas about the construction of national identity in New Order Indonesia and the induction of children into that identity. The film also questions the way in which the New Order shaped the model of Indonesian family based on the Javanese system of family. The role of schooling, which has an important function in shaping children into citizenship, is also criticized as homogenizing the diversity of Indonesian children.

The film central focus is a child who, having similar problems to the adults around him; learns to imitate the ways in which adults solve their problems. One of these is violence, which is represented in the film as being part of both children's and adolescents' cultures. Additionally, *Letter to an Angel* depicts the resistance of a local culture to the imperialism of national culture.

The dominant role of the child character in *Letter to an Angel* puts forward Garin's image of Indonesian children. This image appears to contrast with the mainstream depiction of Indonesian children, which was dominant during the New Order. As in *Letter to an Angel*, Garin also developed alternative images of Indonesian children in *Birdman Tale*, which tells the story of a West Papuan boy who wants to kiss a woman. Indeed, *Birdman Tale* also presents a child as the central character to convey Garin's thoughts on contemporary issues in Indonesia. This film will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

Birdman Tale: The Identity of Children between Religion and Politics

“If you want to give my Rosario back, then why should you enter my home?”
“I just want to kiss your tears...”
(Arnold to the Woman in *Birdman Tale*)

Introduction

Aku Ingin Menciummu Sekali Saja (I Want to Kiss You Just Once) is Garin’s third film in which children are presented as primary players.⁴⁵ The film was produced in 2002 after the fall of the New Order regime. The subsequent political changes provided opportunities for filmmakers, Garin in particular, to explore sensitive issues which had never been openly discussed during the 32 years of the New Order, such as the mass killing of 1965 and the separatist movement in West Papua. Before directing *Birdman Tale* in 1999, Garin had made a film called *The Poet*. Narrated from the perspective of an Acehnese traditional singer, *The Poet* explores the 1965 tragedy in which at least 1.5 million Indonesians were killed.⁴⁶ *Birdman Tale* tells the story of a West Papuan child who experiences the transition into his adolescence against this tense political background.

In order to contextualize the film, firstly, I discuss the position of *Birdman Tale* in the context of both Indonesian cinema and the history of conflict in West Papua. Secondly, I examine the way in which the film offers two perspectives, through both English and Indonesian titles, to approach the theme of kissing. Thirdly, I discuss the film’s reflection on the racialised positioning of West Papua within Indonesia. Lastly, I discuss the film’s depiction of adolescence, which I believe to be an exploration of the idea of political struggle in West Papua. Thus, in this chapter I

⁴⁵ The official English title for this film is *Birdman Tale*. I will refer to this title throughout the chapter.

⁴⁶ The tragedy, known as the 30th of September Movement of the Indonesian Communist Party (G30S/PKI), in which thousands of Indonesians were killed, is the most controversial event in Indonesian history. For a comprehensive reading, see Cribb, 1990, *The Indonesian Killings of 1965 – 1966: Studies from Java and Bali*, Clayton, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University.

argue that through the depiction of a child's transition into adolescence the film symbolises the political struggle of West Papuans.

A Story of West Papua

Birdman Tale is the first Indonesian film in which West Papua is the main location and the central character is a West Papuan. As discussed in Chapter Three, the central position of Jakarta significantly reduced the chances that other regions be used as the main location in Indonesian cinema. Like *Letter to an Angel*, *Birdman Tale* is also locally cast; in fact only two non-Papuan actors appear in this film. They are Lulu Tobing and Adi Kurdi, both Christians.

As is characteristic of Garin's films, *Birdman Tale* combines documentary and fiction footage in various ways. While in *Letter to an Angel*, the documentary footage has captions to enable the audience to easily identify it as such, in *Birdman Tale* the documentary footage, such as an opening scene of the West Papuan Congress, is inserted in the narrative without captions. Furthermore, in some scenes the fictional characters are involved in actual events, such as the funeral ceremony of Theys Hiyo Eluway, who was the chairman of the Papuan Council Presidium. While he was an important and respected leader in the West Papuan independence movement, Theys Hiyo Eluway's controversial ideas and actions may have contributed to some of the tensions within this movement.⁴⁷ Garin filmed the last public appearance of Theys Hiyo Eluway, when he declared the independence of West Papua at the height of the movement for independence. Shortly after, in November 2002, Eluway was found dead.⁴⁸ Thus Garin spent two years on the making of a documentary about Papua. He also obtained documentary footage from the national television broadcaster Metro TV, which he included in *Birdman Tale*.

⁴⁷ Theys was viewed as an ambiguous person. In fact, while he spoke of the need for West Papua to be independent, he was also close to the Indonesian military and government. This created conflict between elements in the West Papua movement. See details in <http://www.insideindonesia.org/edit70/Theys2.htm> (last accessed: 22/11/2007)

⁴⁸ The Indonesian police who investigated Theys's murder revealed that the murderers were members of Indonesian Special Forces Unit. However, some in West Papua believe that the Indonesian Government was involved; See: <http://www.westpapua.net/news/02/02/adi-theysl.htm> (last accessed: 22/11/2007)

Veven SP Wardhana, in his article of 2005, “*Film Indonesia Mati Suripun Tak Pernah*” (Indonesian Films Never Completely Collapsed),⁴⁹ writes that as this film was based on a story about a boy from a *pesantren*⁵⁰ who wanted to kiss a girl; it caused some Muslim communities to protest, even before the film was produced. As a result, Garin changed the religious affiliation of the main character from Muslim to Christian; he became a young helper in a local church who falls in love with a woman. Garin also drew inspiration from a short story by Lazzio Kamondy titled *Sang Mahasiswa dan Sang Wanita* (A student and a Woman). Garin used the strongly Catholic culture of West Papua to express the need for understanding other religions in order for Indonesians to live in harmony (Cheah, 2004). He also applied a strong focus on minorities in a film that mixes religiosity, love, and politics. As a result, in an interview with a local newspaper, Garin described the *Birdman Tale* as his way to give a voice to the Papuan:

Papua merupakan wilayah yang sangat luas dengan geopolitik yang sangat penting, namun sayang tidak mendapat ruang dialog yang cukup dalam sejarah fiksi sinema dan televisi. Melalui film ini setidaknya masyarakat Papua diberikan ruang untuk berekspresi

Papua is a large area that has an important geopolitics, however never has an equal space for dialogue in the cinemas and television. Through this film, at least, Papuans have been given room for expression⁵¹

Birdman Tale represents West Papua’s cultural richness in a way rarely seen in Indonesian cinema. The beautiful landscape, the local dialect, and West Papuan music played by troubadours illustrate not only the rich cultural traditions, but also the aspirations of the West Papuans.

As in most of Garin’s films, *Birdman Tale* features a teenage boy fascinated with an adult woman: Arnold is a Papuan teenager who experiences his adolescent

⁴⁹ See: <http://www.kompas.com/kompas-cetak/0508/20/pustaka/1984518.htm> (last accessed: 22/11/2007)

⁵⁰ Pesantren are Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. For detail see Lukens-Bull, Ronald, 2005, *A Peaceful Jihad: Negotiating Identity and Modernity in Muslim Java*, New York: Palgrave McMillan

⁵¹ See: <http://www.kompas.com/gayahidup/news/0212/20/063219.htm> (last accessed: 22/11/2007)

awakening when he meets a mysterious woman of light skin and straight hair at the harbour. The woman has just arrived and looks very sad. Arnold thinks he has fallen in love with the stranger and this makes Sonja, Arnold's friend who is in love with him, jealous. Arnold thinks that his intense desire to kiss the woman goes against his religious faith and also realises that his feelings for the woman have affected his friendship with his friends Sonja, Minus and Dickson. As a result, Arnold seeks to find a solution to his problems by telling the woman what he wants.

The film begins by introducing Arnold's family: Arnold, his father Berthold, and Mama. The film continues by showing footage of the West Papuan congress in 2000. The introductory scenes are accompanied by a local hymn that expresses the desire of West Papuans to be independent. Then, the two central characters are visually described: Arnold is an ordinary high school student who has several close friends, including Sonja, Minus, and Dickson, Berthold is an art teacher in a local senior high school. He is also a cassowary dancer and an activist in the movement for Papuan Independence.

As stated earlier, the film depicts moments of West Papua's independence movement through documentary segments, such as the major congress of West Papuan people in 2000, the arrest of Theys Hiyo Eluway by the Indonesian military, the situation in West Papua when Theys was found shot dead, and the burial of Theys. In addition, the film includes television and radio news broadcasts about West Papua. Berthold, already traumatised by his father's experience as a political victim of the New Order in West Papua, is an activist of the independent movement. After a clash with the Indonesian militia, he is chased by a group.⁵² Berthold hides in the jungle, disguising himself as a cassowary bird. However, he realises that hiding will solve neither his own nor West Papua's problems. In the end, both Berthold and Arnold solve their respective problems: Berthold returns home and leads the political movement

⁵² To defeat the independence movement, the Indonesian military formed and trained a local militia. They are allowed to act in certain circumstances to suppress the separatists, see: Kimivaki & Thorning, 2002, Democratization and regional power sharing in Papua/Irian Jaya, *Asian Survey*, 42:4, p.651-672.

without fear and Arnold realises that his desire to kiss a stranger is only an expression of his adolescence, not a long-term feeling.

Two Stories, One Idea

Birdman Tale presents the stories of two different characters who are connected by the same idea. The first story builds the character of Berthold, and is about West Papua's political need to become independent from Indonesia. The second story, which builds the character of Arnold, is about the personal problems of an adolescent boy and the way in which these affect his faith and relationships. However, despite their differences, both stories convey a message of love: while Berthold loves his motherland, West Papua, Arnold falls in love with a woman.

Love is signified by the kiss included in the film's Indonesian title: *Aku Ingin Menciummu Sekali Saja* (I Want to Kiss You just once). Significantly, the title appears when the documentary footage shows Theys Hiyo Eluway kissing the West Papuan flag. Thus, the Indonesian title of the film associates the word *menciummu* (kissing you) with two different types of kissing (a meaning that is lost in the English title). Firstly, as in the starting scene, the kiss is linked with the respect and honour that Theys Hiyo Eluway shows for the West Papuan flag. This symbolises a loyalty to the motherland of West Papua. Secondly, the title suggests the idea of a young man's desire to kiss a beautiful woman as he enters the adult world.

The title *Birdman Tale*, instead, focuses on the story of Berthold, who is a cassowary dancer. Cassowary dancers have an important place in the historical background of West Papua. Accordingly, in the starting scene Berthold explains the political history of the Cassowary dancer to his class. The cassowary has been used as a symbol of West Papuan militia since the war against the Dutch. As a result, the cassowary is now used as a symbol of the movement for West Papuan independence. Thus, while the camera focuses on the cassowary puppet, Berthold has a conversation with his wife. This superimposition of image and sound create the illusion that the cassowary puppet is able to talk. In another scene, while Berthold hides in the jungle and his wife, Mama, visits him, the camera focuses on the cassowary puppet, rather than on

Berthold talking with Mama. At the same time, Mama treats the puppet as if it were her husband talking to her. Thus, the incorporation of Berthold's figure within the image of the Cassowary puppet more broadly signifies Papua.

In a further scene, the militia who pursue Berthold wrongly suspect a real cassowary to be Berthold and they kill it, only to find out that it is not Berthold but a real cassowary. This scene conveys the idea of 'hunting'; a term that, according to Kivimaki and Thorning (2002), is used by the Indonesian military to describe the conflict between the Indonesian military and the guerrillas⁵³. This term is utilised to "normalise the killing of enemies" (Kivimaki & Thorning, 2002:657). In consequence, *Birdman Tale* articulates the character of Berthold through the image of a cassowary puppet to stress that the political content of this film represents the political struggle of West Papua.

The Politics of Kissing

As mentioned above, *Birdman Tale* utilises the act of kissing to suggest both the difficulties of adolescence and the political problems in West Papua. Arnold's story starts with the arrival of a mysterious woman on the local harbour at Jayapura. The woman is physically portrayed as a non-indigenous Papuan. She looks sad and tearful. Arnold, who has been in the harbour with his friend Sonja, visibly notices the woman's arrival. The journey of Arnold from childhood to adolescence starts with this accidental meeting.

When the woman cries, in this scene, the Christian cross appears in the background. Thus, *Birdman Tale* depicts the moral conflict within Arnold. On the one hand, he is a religious person who goes to church every Sunday and spends time after school helping the priest at the church. On the other hand, he falls in love with the strange woman and he wants to kiss her. In the following scene, Arnold finds a rosary belonging to the woman. Since he wants to give it back to her as a way of getting

⁵³ West Papuan pro independence guerrillas are known as OPM or Organisasi Papua Merdeka (Independent Papua Organization). See details in Kivimaki & Thorning, 2002, Democratization and regional power sharing in Papua/Irian Jaya, *Asian Survey*, 42:4, p.651-672.

close enough to kiss her, Arnold retraces the woman's journey until he finds her temporary residence.

Arnold's desire to kiss a woman is implied by his keeping a picture that shows a man kissing a woman. Mama finds the picture while she washes Arnold's clothes. "*Itu gambar porno*" (That is a porn picture). Mama thinks the picture is inappropriate and scolds Arnold for keeping the picture. Meanwhile the priest gives a speech that describes two types of kissing in Christian belief, which are explained in the Bible:

Ada dua peristiwa ciuman. Pertama, ciuman pengkhianatan yang dilakukan oleh Judas Iskariot kepada gurunya, Tuhan Yesus Kristus. Dan ciuman Yesus sendiri kepada Petrus muridnya.

There are two kissing events. First, the betraying kiss of Judas Iscariot. And, second, the kiss from Jesus when he washed the feet of Peter, His student

Arnold feels that neither of these options accords with his desire. In the middle of his confusion between falling in love and falling into sinfulness, Arnold is advised by the priest that his feeling is absolutely normal for a boy who is experiencing adolescence. Arnold's feeling reflects the concept of children in the European Christian tradition, which Bazalgette & Buckingham describe in the following terms:

Children used to be seen as marked with original sin, and it was thought by most that they needed to be disciplined – sometimes savagely – into acceptable adult behaviour (1995:1)

This adult moral panic places children as "sexual beings, resulting in the perception that children require constant adult surveillance at all cost" (Robinson, 2005:69). According to Robinson, this perspective on child sexuality arises from a "historical, puritanical and religious discourse" that assumed the activity of sexuality as sinful and immoral (p.69). Arnold's desire, which suggests adolescent sexuality, is viewed as "a challenge to adult power and authority" and, therefore, it needs to be controlled by adults (Robinson, 2005, 69). This is a dominant perspective on children that contradicts the one above as it places children as "innocent and asexual beings," thus building a boundary that implies that sexuality is exclusively for adults (Robinson, 2005:70).

However, *Birdman Tale* also suggests an alternative perspective on kissing: as a way for Papuans to express passion and loyalty towards their beliefs, friendships, religion and motherland. Accordingly, the film contains scenes that present the act of kissing for these different purposes. The first one is the opening scene that presents the actual event of Theys kissing the West Papuan flag and which signifies the loyalty of all West Papuans – embodied in Theys as their great leader – to their motherland. This “kissing” was seen as a rejection of the official national flag: *merah putih*, the red and white flag, and forbidden by the Indonesian government. In Indonesian regions that have separatist agendas, such as West Papua, Aceh, and East Timor, expression of respect for a flag other than the official national flag is viewed by the Indonesian government as rejecting authority and considered a serious offence. Secondly, kissing as the way of showing loyalty to or love for God is presented in the film through a scene in which Arnold kisses Jesus Christ’s statue in the church. Thirdly, the film conveys the idea that the desire to kiss is not merely a part of human sexuality but broader than that. This idea is expressed in a conversation between Sonja and Minus, who is jealous because Sonja only cares about Arnold:

Kau tidak pernah tahu kalau saya sesungguhnya sayang sama kau.
Dan saya sering ingin seperti Arnold yang ingin mencium perempuan lain
Apa maksudmu, Minus?
Jangan kau bertengkar. Kata para orang bijak itu, saat dua orang saling berciuman. Dan bibir mereka saling melumat, maka tidak ada pertenggaran dan peperangan.

You never know that actually I care about you. And I also have a feeling like Arnold. I want to kiss a girl.
What do you mean, Minus?
Don’t fight Sonja. Wise men say, when couples kiss each other, there will be no fighting or war.

At the end of the film, Sonja kisses Minus and with this she makes him able to whistle again – an ability he had lost after seeing the mysterious woman. Minus and Sonja’s story conveys Garin’s message clearly: “make love, not war.”

Finally, while utilising the theme of kissing to signify the hope for peace, *Birdman Tale* also explores political issues through the relationship between Arnold and his

parents. Arnold's parents encourage him to be aware of the political problems in West Papua, rather than only his own problems. They say to him:

Arnold, jangan di kamar saja. Keluarlah biar kau tahu apa yang sedang dialami negerimu. Arnold, kalau kau ingin jadi pemimpin umat, kau harus turun langsung dan tahu apa masalah umatmu

Arnold, do not lock your self in the room. Come out and see what is going on in your country. Arnold, if you want to be a leader then you should come and find out about your people's problems.

Arnold's parents think he is not able to choose the right way for his life and, therefore, they need to tell him what he should do. Yet, Arnold's problems are not what his parents think they are. His problems relate to his first adolescent experiences, for example, his first desire for a woman and his relationship with his friends. The relationship between Arnold and his parents suggests Seaton's idea that children are "political actors-in-waiting" (2006:125). Indeed, even though children may not be directly involved in politics, they experience the politics of nations during their everyday lives (Coles cited in Stephens: 1995). However, the advice given to Arnold by his parents suggests the idea that children are disabled in determining the right or wrong of their problems. In other terms, the child is constructed in terms of a "temporary disability form that is defined by its inabilities and immanent need of correction" (Benporath (2003; 131). Therefore, adults will decide for children because the "political community has an exclusive adult membership with children unable to provide qualification for entry" (Wyness, Harrison, & Buchanan, 2004:82). In addition, through this scene Garin also critiques Indonesian leaders, intimating that they are not doing their job properly because they are not seeking and finding out what West Papuan problems are.

The Politics of Race

The official discourse about West Papua in Indonesia is a discourse that defines minorities as part of the nation. For example, the first president of Indonesia, Soekarno in referring to the issue of the Papuan race, in his speech about West Papua's integration with Indonesia in 1963:

"A nation is not only a matter of race or the colour of skin... Are Americans all white[?].... The Hawaiian are another race, and black

Negroes are another race; the Papuan – yes – they, too are another race, and so are the Dayaks. But the Dayaks are happy as Indonesians”(cited in Kivimaki & Thorning, 2002:654)

Birdman Tale proposes that race is still an issue in West Papua. In this respect, Cheah (2004) suggests that in this film, Garin offers a different perspective of the issue of Papua’s minority position by casting Lulu Tobing as the mysterious woman arriving in Papua. According to Cheah, the film intends “to invert the roles of Indonesia and Papua. ...Indonesia inadvertently becomes the minority culture” through the presence of the mysterious woman (p.117). The woman is set as “other” by presenting her as physically different: her light skin and straight hair contrast with the appearance of other people around her in the harbour. Furthermore, some shots set the woman apart from other people and objects. Her presence, thus, creates a contrast in the frame, which makes her embody what Hall calls “the spectacle of the other” (1997:225).

Race is clearly addressed by the film when Sonja perceives the changes in Arnold’s behaviour after he follows the woman in order to return her rosary. Sonja accuses Arnold of falling in love with the woman because the woman is “not black” as she is:

Arnold, kenapa kau tidak jawab puisiku? Kenapa kau hanya ingat perempuan yang bukan kulit hitam? Kau malukah Arnold? Saya ini kau punya teman. Kau pikir saya tidak tahu apa yang ada di kau punya pikiran, Arnold? Kau merasa rendah diri, Arnold. Siapa yang kau kejar? Kenapa kau tidak jawab? Kau munafik Arnold.

Arnold, why didn’t you respond to my poem? Why did you only remember the non black woman? Are you ashamed, Arnold? I am your friend. You think I don’t know what is in your mind? You feel inferior. Who are you chasing after? Why don’t you answer my question? You are a hypocrite, Arnold.

Sonja indirectly claims herself as “black” by stating explicitly that the woman is “not black”. This is in line with Luke & Carrington’s (2006) argument that race is not only “a historically and socially constructed identity imposed or named as other by others, but also is claiming an identity or self naming” (p.6) Sonja’s statement thus depicts the problem of blackness and whiteness in the Indonesian context as a paradox. While on the one hand Sonja criticises Arnold for feeling inferior because

he is black and has a black female friend, the other hand she implies a racial prejudice that places whiteness as “other”. The situation is explained by Fechter (2005) as

“...whilst ‘the gaze usually refers to white gazing at a ‘Black Other’, conversely it can hold for whites themselves being fixed in the gaze of this other – thus becoming a ‘White Other’” (p.91)

While the woman’s skin is not as ‘white’ as a Caucasian’s, Sonja’s statement reflects Miron’s argument that “the darker the skin, the greater the subordination” (1999:82). In fact, indigenous West Papuans have darker skin than most other Indonesians, such as the woman in this film. This is generally experienced as a sense of inferiority, which turns into anger and frustration in Sonja’s confession to the pastor in her church:

Tiba-tiba hati saya penuh kebencian. Saya benci kulit lain. Saya merasa tidak percaya diri lagi. Apa yang harus saya lakukan. Kenapa disaat kita merasa tidak punya apa-apa, ditindas, ditinggalkan, kebencian itu hadir? Saya punya bapak mengajarkan saya untuk saling mencintai, berkumpul dan memaafkan. Tapi, tiap kali saya membaca buku, kenapa kata “hitam” itu selalu berarti jelek, gelap dan juga tertekan? Saya menjadi marah dan benci terhadap semua itu, bapa. Saya benci terhadap kata-kata, televisi dan juga cinta. Kenapa Tuhan Yesus tidak dilahirkan dari orang yang berkulit sama dengan saya, Bapak?

My heart is suddenly filled with hatred. I hate other skins. I don’t feel confident anymore. What should I do? Why when we have nothing, being oppressed, being abandoned, the hatred rises up? My father taught me to love each other, staying together and giving forgiveness. But, every time I read a book, why did the word “black” always means bad, dark and oppressed? I am angry and hate all those things. I hate words, television and also love. Why wasn’t Jesus born black like me?

The problem of the opposition between blackness and whiteness (or lighter skin in this film) has been discussed by Dyson (1999) in terms of an ideological construction that postulates “whiteness as the positive universal versus blackness as the negative particular” (p.220) While Sonja’s skin is not really black and the woman’s skin not

really white, Sonja's words imply a criticism of this social construction, which places "blackness" as a problem in Indonesia. Astuti (2007) argues that whiteness is constructed as the new standard of female beauty in contemporary Indonesia, one which stands in opposition to the classical Indonesian concept of beauty, such as *hitam manis* (sweet black) and *kuning langsung* (bright yellow). This includes the media's construction of the ideal image of beauty as whiteness and its concealment of blackness. Similarly, Yulianto (2007) states that the media promotes whiteness as the contemporary ideal of Indonesian (female) beauty while reinforcing a negative perception of blackness, which is constructed as *kotor* (dirty), *jelek* (ugly), *dosa* (sinful), *gelap* (darkness), and *sedih* (sadness). In contrast, white is associated with *bersih* (clean), *cantik* (beautiful), *suci* (holly), *baik* (good), and *tinggi* (high class) (Yulianto, 2007). Therefore, in *Birdman Tale* the inferiority that has been ascribed to Arnold by Sonja suggests the broader feeling of inferiority experienced by West Papuans because of their skin colour difference.

West Papua's Children

In the context of West Papua's separatist aspirations, the film presents the idea of adolescence to address political issues through the characters of the children and the woman. In this sense, Garin Nugroho presents what Sugiharto (2004) describes as "a weird combination of paradoxical facts, unconscious memories and fantasies" (p.186). Therefore, while Arnold and Sonja are dominant in the narrative, all the children portrayed have links with political histories in West Papua. Arnold, as discussed previously, has a father who is chased by the Indonesian militia. As a result, he worries that his desire to kiss a mysterious, beautiful woman will make him ignore the problem around him as the militia threatens his family. Arnold expresses his concerns through his confession to the priest:

Pengakuan dosa saya sekarang adalah saya sekarang tidak lagi merasa perlu mencium Tuhan. Saya merasa berdosa. Karena saya selalu ingat kepada perempuan itu. Saya mencium dia, bapa. Saya tidak lagi tahu bagaimana caranya menolong saya punya bapak. Apalagi membantu minus. Saya merasa berdosa karena saya selalu ingat perempuan itu dia punya bibir, mata. Saya juga merasa berdosa karena saya simpan dia punya rosario

I am feeling guilty because I don't want to kiss Jesus anymore. This is because I always remember that woman. I just want to kiss her, father. Now, I don't know how to help my father and Minus. I feel guilty because I always keep thinking of her lips and eyes. I also feel guilty because I keep her rosary

Similarly, Sonja, who has lost her father, also confesses to the priest in the church. In this scene, the priest describes Sonja's father as a West Papuan fighter who loved to tell a story about Mussolini. Both Sonja's confession and the priest's response convey Garin's criticism of the Indonesia government's treatment of West Papua. In Sonja's and the priest's words:

Bapa, kenapa saat kita tidak punya apa-apa, merasa tertindas, merasa ditinggalkan, perasaan benci itu muncul?

Why when we have nothing, being oppressed, being abandoned, does the hatred rise up?

Ayahmu senang sekali bicara soal Mussolini, tokoh fasis itu yang diawalnya menangis terharu memeluk seorang buruh yang jatuh. Dia berjanji akan membela buruh itu. Tapi setelah Mussolini memiliki banyak pengikut, dia tidak pernah menangis lagi. Hatinya penuh kemarahan dan kebencian. Karena itulah, kekasihnya berkata kepada Mussolini: aku tidak ingin mendampingiimu lagi karena kamu tidak lagi bicara dengan hatinuranimu lagi, kamu tidak pernah melakukan apa-apa untuk rakyatmu, kamu hanya bekerja untuk dirimu sendiri. Hanya kekerasan dan kekuasaanmu yang bicara

Your father loved to talk about Mussolini, the fascist leader. Before Mussolini had many followers, he always swore to help all of his poor people. However, after he became a leader, he forgot his promises. He oppressed his own people. That's why his lover left and critiqued him: 'I would not ever want to be with you anymore, because you have done nothing for your own people. What you have done, you have done only for yourself. You never talk from your heart to your people. You use your power and violence against your own people'.

This dialogue seems to express that the problems of West Papua are the result of the oppressive way in which the Indonesian state has treated West Papua for years. Sonja's confession of her own hatred as a result of being oppressed and feeling abandoned reflects West Papua's hatred for being treated unfairly by the Indonesian government. Furthermore, the story of Mussolini and his lover questions the policy

of the Indonesian government towards West Papua, which has changed radically since Soekarno's initial promises when he persuaded West Papua to join as part of the Indonesian territory.⁵⁴ This history is reflected in Sonja's disappointment in Arnold who abandoned her to seek the attention of the mysterious woman.

Additionally, another child, Minus, is described as a boy who can whistle very loud. Because, he never knew his father, he hopes his whistle will make his father come back home, following his tribe's belief that a whistle can make a dead person live again. Unfortunately, when he and Arnold try to find the mysterious woman, he loses his ability to whistle. Minus believes this is because of the woman's presence and he is distressed because he won't be able to make his father live again. A confused Arnold, a jealous Sonja and a miserable Minus convey the idea of children suffering from the political problems of West Papua.

The Image of the Motherland

Significantly, the mysterious woman who is depicted as non indigenous, for example speaking non Papuan dialect, remains without a name. People simply call her *Perempuan Cantik* (Beautiful Woman). In the opening scene, when Arnold sees her at the Port, the woman is portrayed as being different through both her physical characteristics and camera movement. She is also portrayed as having problems: she looks sad when she arrives, cries when praying in the church, is confused when confessing, and seems to be trying to find something on the island. She visits places that have Christian icons and reminds herself not to be afraid by writing the number of a chapter in the Bible. In the end she finds peace after Arnold sees her and describes his dream to her.

Some critics have argued that the woman is an undeveloped character in this film, adding that little information is given about her (Cheah, 2004). Furthermore, her image changes: in one scene she seems like an ordinary visitor to West Papua, while in another scene, when she is surrounded by indigenous tribes, she looks like an image of the Virgin Mary. The woman prays and confesses like other Christians, yet

⁵⁴ See details in Mote & Rutherford (2001), From Irian Jaya to Papua: the Limits of Primordialism in Indonesia's Troubled East, *Indonesia*, 72.

in one scene she looks very scared and seems to be in a trance, writing the number of a chapter from the Bible, and at one point she even tries to kill herself (this makes the children become afraid).

Nevertheless, the mysterious woman is at various stages connected with other characters and situations in West Papua. For example, she is involved in the scenes where Arnold, Sonja, Minus, and Berthold struggle with their problems. She also appears among the documentary footage related to West Papua's struggle for independence. This suggests the idea that the mysterious woman may be a symbol of *ibu pertiwi* (the motherland) of West Papua. As suggested by Loomba (2005), the image of a woman has been utilised by the nationalist movement to represent their land or the nation. Therefore, in the film the appearance of the woman symbolises the struggle of West Papua against Indonesian colonialism.

Furthermore, as discussed earlier in the thesis, the nuclear family is utilised as a metaphor for the modern nation, in which the woman's figure then becomes the "mother of the nation" (Stephens; 1997). According to Innes (1994), in symbolising motherland, a female is described as "nurturing mother and sensual maid" by nationalist and colonial writers (3-4). In Loomba's words "as national emblems, women are usually cast as mothers or wives and are called upon to literally and figuratively reproduce the nation" (2005:180). However, Loomba also suggests that "across the colonial spectrum, the nation-state or its guiding principles are often imagined literally as a woman" (p.180). In the Indonesian context, the motherland is indeed represented as "a suffering feminine beauty" (Sunindyo, 1998:4). She, adds Sunindyo, is constructed as a "fragile feminine being who needs to be rescued and protected" (p.4)

As mentioned previously, there are several scenes in the film that portray the woman in a way that resembles the image of the Virgin Mary, for example when the woman is surrounded by indigenous West Papuan dancers,⁵⁵ and when she is alone in her

⁵⁵ Garin admitted that he put a white tissue on the actress' head to make her look like the Virgin Mary; see Cheah (2004), It's About Loving the Others, in Cheah (ed): *And the Moon Dances: The Films of Garin*, Bentang, Yogyakarta, p.117

room intending to commit suicide. According to Ostrowska (1998) “the myth of the ... mother, being an embodiment of an ideal femininity, is deeply rooted in the maternal discourse of Christian religions” (p.3). In addition, Zindar-Swartz states:

At the personal level, Mary is viewed as the nurturing, concerned mother who saves her children from evil and from the wrath of God. On a social level, particularly as reflected in her apparitions, Mary is seen as a leader of a mighty army of faithful who will do battle with evil. (cited in Ostrowska, 1998:3)⁵⁶

These perspectives are applicable to the character of the mysterious woman in *Birdman Tale*. This is so even though Garin portrays the character not as nurturing mother but as an attractive woman. Also, she is not a brave leader of an army; she is a distressed woman who is scared of something. However, when she searches the island and meets Arnold, she can release her fear and also, at the same time, help Arnold to solve his own problems. Thus, the woman in the *Birdman Tale* symbolises the motherland of Indonesia who is confused and distressed because one of her sons is having a problem. Arnold is the representation of West Papua. The situation in West Papua is portrayed as an adolescent’s situation: feeling alone, looking for love and peace. Arnold’s feeling of inferiority reflects that of West Papuans oppressed by the New Order. Selo Sumardjan, an Indonesian sociologist, describes how the New Order constructed a stereotype of Papua as “underdeveloped, uncultured and wild”.⁵⁷ Thus *Birdman Tale* portrays the motherland Indonesia as a woman who feels scared on a strange island, especially in the scene when she is alone in the middle of a traditional dance of indigenous Papuans. This image conveys the idea that not even the motherland acknowledges the existence of West Papua as one of her children.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that *Birdman Tale*’s portrayal of children is a metaphor for political havoc in West Papua in the context of its conflict with the Indonesian state. As the maker of the first film in Indonesian film history to present West Papua as the main setting, Garin Nugroho combines documentary footage and narrative

⁵⁶ The image of the Virgin Mary representing the Polish as a nation can be found in Polish Cinema. See Ostrowska, E. (1998). Filmic Representations of the 'Polish Mother' in Post World War Two Polish Cinema. *The European Journal of Women's Studies*, 5, 419-435.

⁵⁷ See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/low/asia-pacific/2642783.stm> (last accessed: 22/11/2007)

film with a strong West Papuan cultural background. Thus *Birdman Tale* depicts racial tensions and politics in West Papua, through the exploration of adolescence.

The film presents the various meanings that idea of kissing carries for West Papuans: love of God, friendship and also loyalty to the motherland. The idea of kissing, then, conveys Garin's thoughts on the racialized positioning of West Papua within Indonesia, while also questioning the unfair treatment of West Papuans by the Indonesian government. *Birdman Tale* ultimately suggests that it is children who mostly suffer in West Papua's political struggle.

Through the character of Arnold, Garin portrays the image of children as an allegory of the nation. The experience of Arnold's adolescence is utilised as a symbol of a struggle seeking the motherland. Again, while Garin explores the politics and culture of West Papua in his film, he also opposes the constructed national identity of Indonesian children against his images of West Papuan children. Thus, Garin portrays the identities of Indonesian children in various ways. In the previous chapter, for example, I discussed Garin's characterization of Lew, a child from the remote village of East Sumba. In this chapter, I have focused on Garin's portrayal of Arnold, a catholic boy from West Papua. Both of these children are represented as members of a constructed minority in Indonesia, both in terms of region and religion. In the next chapter, I discuss Garin's film *Of Love and Eggs*, where he portrays Indonesian children from yet another perspective. In this film, Garin presents a group of Muslim children who live in the centre of Indonesia: Jakarta. As in Garin's other films, these children also become ambassadors to convey Garin's view on contemporary Indonesia.

Chapter Five

Of Love and Eggs: Questioning the Concept of Family

The market is full of stories, like soap opera on television. There are some weird, funny, and sad stories. Sometimes, the children are not allowed to watch because the story is about adults who get angry with others.
(Rindu in *Of Love and Eggs*)

Introduction

Rindu Kami Padamu (2004), Garin Nugroho's seventh film, focuses on Islamic values.⁵⁸ Critics saw the film as Garin's most communicative film and as the one film by Garin that sought to entertain without detracting from aesthetic values.⁵⁹ Indeed, *Letter to an Angel* and *Birdman Tale* were perceived as abstract and difficult for ordinary viewers. In response to this critique Garin claimed that his films have their own market. In an interview with *Kompas* daily he explains:

Saya juga sangat sadar, film-film saya akan diterima di ruang public yang mana. Karena itu saya tidak pernah merasa kecewa ketika ada karya saya yang cuma dikonsumsi oleh sekelompok kecil orang. ... Seperti ekosistem, ada tanaman langka yang dikonsumsi sedikit orang, ada buah mangga yang dikonsumsi banyak orang. Kadang saya menjual buah mangga, kadang saya menjual tanaman langka.

Pasar saya bukan pasar tunggal. Orang hanya berpikir soal pasar ekonomi – di gedung bioskop lewat tiket, di televise lewat rating. Padahal ada pasar-pasar lain. Pasar sosial, pasar politik. Setiap ide ada pasarnya sendiri. Seperti tanaman punya tanah yang cocok untuknya.

I am aware which public will accept and enjoy my films. Therefore, I won't be disappointed when my works are accepted by only a few people. Film is similar to our ecosystem. There are rare plants that are consumed by only a few people, but there are also mangos that are enjoyed by many people. In this case, sometimes I sell mangos, sometimes I sell rare plants.

⁵⁸ Although the film's original title can be literally translated as 'Our Longing for You', the official English title is *Of Love and Eggs*. I will use the English title to refer to the film in the remainder of the chapter.

⁵⁹ See http://www.se7enmagazine.org/film/film_03.htm (last accessed 6/12/2007)

My market is not a single market. Some people only consider the economic market such as ticket sales or television ratings. They don't realise that there are other markets such as social and political markets. Each idea has its own market. Like plants, they have their own suitable soils where they can grow.
(Interview with *Kompas* daily, 14/06/2006)⁶⁰

Of Love and Eggs seems to present less visual symbolism than his previous works; however through this film, Garin presents a more personal take by portraying Indonesian children through their dealings and their relationships with adults. I start the chapter by describing the position of the film within the contemporary Indonesian cinema. *Of Love and Eggs* introduces another portrait of Indonesian children: children who have problems with their family. I identify several issues that are depicted in *Of Love and Eggs*. *Of Love and Eggs* challenges the ideal image of the Indonesian family by exclusively portraying children outside the 'normal' family structure while at the same time emphasising the significance of parenting. This film also challenges the dominant position of the father in Indonesia's paternalistic culture. Thus, I argue that the child characters in *Of Love and Eggs* are utilised to question the mainstream image of family.

Contemporary Issues within a Religious Film

In his previous films Garin often combined documentary and fictional footage to build a story. For instance, in *Letter to an Angel* he included ethnographic footage of Sumbanese rituals. Similarly, *Leaf on a Pillow* is based on Garin's documentary about Yogyakarta's street children, who then become the film's main players. In *Birdman Tale* he mixes footage of political activity in West Papua within his fictional film. In contrast *Of Love and Eggs* is a more conventional feature film without any documentary material. The film is made entirely in a studio as in the style of Indonesian cinema of the 1950s. This style was appreciated by the jury in the Osian Cinefan Festival 2005 as "an interesting technique [that counters] contemporary cinema's form by re-actualising an old form of Indonesian cinema."⁶¹ Indeed, Garin had a replica of a market built inside a hangar in Jakarta, much as he

⁶⁰ See <http://www.kompas.com/gayahidup/news/0206/14/221510.htm> (last accessed 6/12/2007)

⁶¹ See <http://www.kompas.com/gayahidup/news/0507/25/183411.htm> (last accessed 6/12/2007)

had done in 1999 when he produced a public service advertisement to promote the democratic general elections.

Of Love and Eggs also explores a religious theme, as did *Birdman Tale*. However, while *Birdman Tale* was filled with catholic symbolism, *Of Love and Eggs* presents Islamic symbols in the context of a particular Muslim community in a small market. As Garin said, he intended to create a different portrait of the Indonesian Muslim community because for the past ten years he has watched Islamic movies that would suggest that “Islam has become too serious and humourless”.⁶² Thus, Garin gave the film an Islamic aura with such symbols as a mosque and its cupola, a prayer rug, and the headscarf. Furthermore, the Indonesian title of this film is also the title of a contemporary religious song by Bimbo, a popular Indonesian music group.⁶³

Like most of Garin’s films, *Of Love and Eggs* failed commercially in Indonesia.⁶⁴ Despite the fact that this film is viewed as one of Garin’s most accessible works, it ran for only two weeks in Indonesian cinemas. In the Indonesian cinema industry, which is dominated by the 21 group,⁶⁵ a film that during the first couple of weeks of screening attracts only a small audience is withdrawn from the cinemas.⁶⁶

⁶² See <http://www.thejakartapost.com/yesterdaydetail.asp?fileid=20050729.R05> (last accessed 6/12/2007). *Of Love and Eggs* was partly made by Garin as a critique of an Indonesian Muslim cleric, AA Gym, who caused another Indonesian film, *Buruan Cium Gue* (Kiss Me Quick), to be banned, because, the cleric claimed, the film promoted inappropriate sexual values to Muslim teenagers. While the cleric admitted that he had not watched the film, he argued that its title reflected inappropriate sexual values. Yet provocative titles had been used in Indonesian films well before *Buruan Cium Gue*. In the 1990s, for example, most Indonesian films contained sexual themes and had provocative titles, such as *Akibat Bebas Sex* (Effects of Free Sex) in 1996, *Ecstasy dan Pengaruh Sex* (Ecstasy and Sexual Influence) in 1996, and *Skandal Erotis* (Erotic Scandal) in 1997. Additionally, as discussed in the previous chapter, Garin produced a film with the word “mencium” (kiss) in its title: *Aku Ingin Menciummu Sekali Saja* (I Want To Kiss You Just Once) in 2002. Nevertheless no one condemned those titles.

⁶³ See <http://www.pikiran-rakyat.com/cetak/2006/032006/15/1002.htm> (last accessed 6/12/2007)

⁶⁴ It also failed to impress the Indonesian Film Festival jury.

⁶⁵ 21 Group is a private company owned by Probosutedjo, a brother of Soeharto. This company controls the distribution of foreign films and owns a majority of cinemas in Indonesia.

⁶⁶ I have a personal experience related to audience policy in 21group cinemas. When I went to watch *Of Love and Eggs* only 4 persons – including myself – bought tickets. When the time for the screening came, the cinema’s manager explained that he had cancelled the screening because the minimum audience for each screening is 5 persons. I argued his decision and told him that I never knew about such a policy, but he refused to answer.

Seno Gumira Ajidarma, an Indonesian journalist and film critic, questioned why *Of Love and Eggs*, which had achieved international appreciation, was not valued by the Indonesian film festival.⁶⁷ According to Ajidarma (2006), the festival had unfairly privileged a dominant narrative standard: Hollywood classical narrative. Furthermore, he criticises the festival assumption that “a good film is a film which is easy to understand because the film then will be easy to sell”.

An Indonesian Children’s Soap Opera

Of Love and Eggs starts with Rindu, whose name literally means “longing”, a headscarf-wearing young girl who introduces the main story of the film. Rindu is played by a girl who has actual hearing and speaking disabilities, thus making her speech unclear:

Teman-teman, hari ini aku ingin bercerita tentang tempat tinggalku. Sebuah pasar kecil di tengah kota Jakarta. Aku mau bercerita tentang sajadah dan telur ayam sahabatku.

Dear friends, today I want to tell a story of my neighbourhood. It is a small market in the middle of Jakarta. I would like to tell a story of my friend’s *prayer mat* and chicken eggs.

This scene opens the plot and introduces the main players of the story: Bimo and Asih who sings a traditional song. Rindu again appears in the middle and at the end of the film. In the middle of the film, she explains the complex story of the film as a sort of soap opera:

Pasar penuh sekali cerita seperti opera sabun di televisi. Ada saja kejadian-kejadian aneh, lucu, sedih. Kadang-kadang anak-anak tidak boleh nonton karena ceritanya orang-orang tua yang marahan

The market is full of stories, like soap opera on television. There are some weird, funny, and sad stories. Sometimes, the children are not allowed to watch because the story is about adults who get angry with others.

The concept of soap opera is described by Ien Ang as “characterised by an accent on human relations, domesticity and daily life” (cited in Kitley, 2000:150). Indeed, *Of*

⁶⁷ For detail see: <http://www.kompas.com/kompas-cetak/0612/17/seni/3166926.htm>

Love and Eggs presents daily life stories of its characters and emphasises emotional relationships and connections between them. Yet, through Rindu's statement, Garin implicitly criticizes Indonesian soap operas as being mainly about adults who get angry with others and are inappropriate for children. *Of Love and Eggs* ends in a manner that Ajidharma (2004) sees as "giving a complete solution" (p.67). This solution is described by Rindu in her closing remarks:

Teman-teman, seperti di buku-buku semua menemukan cinta.
Setanpun tidak lewat di samping Asih karena ibunya sudah datang.

Friends, like in the books, everyone finds a love. The devil does not pass by Asih because her mother has come.

The way the film introduces both the story and the main characters is reminiscent of the chorus in ancient Greek theatre, in which one player spoke to the audience and interpreted the action to the audience. Mong (2005) sees this as a "post-modern touch" by Garin.⁶⁸

As mentioned before, like soap operas *Of Love and Eggs* presents several characters: each with their own separate story but all inter connected. Furthermore, at the end of the narrative, each character's problem is resolved happily. The film is set in a small traditional market in a suburb of Jakarta a few days before Lebaran.⁶⁹ The stories of the community in the market are articulated through three children: Bimo, Rindu and Asih. Bimo is a boy who has lost his parents and lives with his oldest brother, Seno, who sells eggs. Bimo adopts Cantik (whose name literally means "pretty"), a woman who left home for work, as his "mother". As Garin's previous films, *Of Love and Eggs* also depicts a child who is fascinated by an attractive woman. Indeed, as seen in earlier chapters, in *Letter to an Angel*, Lewa finds a 'mother' in *Berlian Merah*; *Leaf on a Pillow* depicts a street child who is attracted to a woman who is supposed to be his adopted mother; and *Birdman Tale* depicts a boy who falls in love with a woman.

⁶⁸ See http://www.se7enmagazine.org/film/film_03.htm (Last accessed 6/12/2007)

⁶⁹ *Lebaran* is the holy Muslim festival which marks the end of Ramadan, a fasting month. *Lebaran* is also known as Idul Fitri or Eid Al-Fitr.

The second child character in *Of Love and Eggs*, Rindu, is an orphan deaf girl who lost her family when the government demolished her house. She has an older brother who abandons her for many years. Since her brother is known to be a maker of cupolas for mosques, Rindu always draws a mosque without a cupola. Rindu, who misses her brother and has been traumatised by the demolition of her house and the loss of her family, is adopted by a woman who also lost her children, Bu Imah. As mentioned previously, Rindu is played by a girl who is deaf in real life; therefore, the odd way in which she speaks is not acted but genuine.

The third child character, Asih, is a girl who is abandoned by her mother because of her father's abusive behaviour. Asih refuses to let anyone touch her mother's prayer mat, because she believes her mother will come back and sit on that mat again. This becomes a primary cause of conflict between Asih and her father.

There are several other characters that play significant roles in the film. Bagja, a teacher who takes care of the mosque, hopes someday the cupola of the mosque will be finished. Beni, Asih's father, regrets his abuse towards his wife and tries hard to change his behaviour to make her return home. Seno, Bimo's brother, acts like a parent towards Bimo and this creates tension in their relationship. Cantik is adopted as Bimo's surrogate mother and then falls in love with Seno. All of these characters represent adults who have problematic relationships with the children and have to find solutions to resolve their problems.

Questioning the Concept of Family

Of Love and Eggs challenges the New Order model of the Indonesian family which has been described by Kitley (2000), Shiraishi (1997), and Parker (2003) as constituted by a mother, a father and two or three children, all in good health, and having sufficient food, clothing, and shelter. This model is systematically promoted both by the education system and the media. For example, the national broadcast of *Si Unyil* and *Keluarga Rakhmat* on government television was one strategy for promoting the New Order's family model (Kitley, 2000). As discussed earlier in the

thesis, the figure of Budi and his family in the school compulsory textbooks also promotes a similar ideal family model (Shiraishi, 1997; Parker, 2003).

In contrast to this ideal model, *Of Love and Eggs* portrays both the characters and the family as “incomplete” and troubled. Furthermore, the film is located in the centre of Indonesia, Jakarta, which has represented the ideal image of Indonesia in cinema. Through this film, however, Garin suggests another image of Jakarta and shows that it is similar to more impoverished areas in Indonesia. Garin seems to underline that, in many ways; Jakarta is no different from any other area. The image of a family in trouble can also be found in *Letter to an Angel*, which portrays an incomplete family in a remote area of Indonesia, somewhere in East Sumba. In *Leaf on a Pillow*, a family is formed from several people who have trouble with their own relatives. They come from different parts of Indonesia and develop a new form of family in the streets of Jogjakarta.

In *Of Love and Eggs*, Bimo and Seno lost their family and struggle to make their living by selling eggs. While Bimo misses his parents, Seno tries unsuccessfully to undertake the parental role for Bimo. The relationship gets worse when Bimo as indicated earlier, finds a mother figure in Cantik, a young woman who then falls in love with Seno. Cantik was also having difficulties with her family, especially with her father, as a result of which she ran away from home and found a job in Jakarta. Here, she begins to get more attention from men. There is a scene, for example, that shows Cantik with a ‘special guest’ in her room: her boss who has fallen in love with her.

Rindu is also an orphan child, having lost her family when her home was demolished by the government. The only family she has left is her brother, who, however, has abandoned her. Bi Imah adopts her as a daughter while Rindu longs for her brother. Bu Imah is a woman who was herself abandoned by her husband and her children for a long time. Similarly, Asih lost her mother when she left home because of Asih’s father’s abusive behaviour. Therefore, even though Asih still has her father (Beni) living with her, she denies his authority, and as a result, lacks a father figure.

While portraying incomplete and troubled families *Of Love and Eggs* suggests the idea of replacing the lost figures with surrogates, although sometimes the missing figure reappears. In this sense, each character possesses a symbol of their own struggle. Bimo utilises eggs to attract the attention of Cantik. Rindu keeps drawing a mosque without cupola and hopes that her brother will come back to complete the cupola; for this reason, she steals a pigeon, hoping it will deliver a letter to her brother. Asih keeps her mother's prayer mat empty – even in the mosque – and hopes that her mother will come back to pray. The Eggs, the cupola picture, the pigeon, and the prayer mat are the symbols of these children's hopes of having their family back.

In portraying how children have their own specific way of struggling against difficulties, the film asserts that adults do not understand children's ways of thinking. For example, in one scene, Pak Bagja becomes upset because none of the children brings paper or pen to school; instead, they bring eggs, a pigeon and a prayer mat. In addition, Pak Bagja, who found a little bird, asks the children what they should do in order to care for the bird. In response, each child gives the answer that reflects their specific problems: Bimo suggests that the bird should be given an egg that could make the bird strong; Rindu advises that they should give the bird a proper home; in contrast, Asih runs away because she feels that the little bird has been abandoned by its mother in the way her mother abandoned her.

Thus, the film portrays how the different ways in which adults and children think can result in conflict. The conflict between the children and the adults in this film suggest that the way in which an adult treats children reflects the adult's own problems. For example, Pak Bagja finds that Rindu always draws a mosque without cupola. He assumes Rindu has made a mistake, but when asked, she refuses to change her drawing. Pak Bagja insists that Rindu should draw as he suggests, because he thinks his concept is the right one. As a result, Rindu becomes angry with Pak Bagja. This scene portrays adults' emphasis on their authority over children who are considered apprentices and are expected to imitate the adults' ways (Mills, 2000).

This film portrays the adults' hypocrisy in handling their own problems and their relationship with children at the same time. For example, Seno, who is not brave enough to express his feeling to Cantik, resents Bimo's defiance of his order to stop visiting Cantik. On other hand, Seno uses Bimo to express his feelings to Cantik by changing the stamp on the egg to a heart-shaped one. Similarly, Beni is always upset by Asih's insistence in keeping her mother's prayer mat empty in the mosque. He tells Asih that her mother is gone and will not come back. However, Beni acts similarly by buying extra food and keeping the chair empty at home for his wife, hoping his wife will come back and forgive him. Bu Imah also tries to get Rindu to change her drawing of a mosque without cupola, even though Rindu explains that the picture is her way to express her longing for her brother. Then, Bu Imah realises she herself has the same longing for her children, who left her when they went to work overseas and have failed to send any messages. These portraits of conflict depict how adults, although in a similar situation themselves, still insist on protecting the children while concealing their own problems from them (Mills, 2000).

Of Love and Eggs shows that even though adults and children have similar problems, they express and resolve their problems in different ways. While children are more honest and expressive, adults, in contrast, are presented as hypocritical, as they attempt to maintain their socially constructed image of "being person" (Prout & James, 1997). Borrowing Jenkins (1998) idea that children are "no less than adults" the film explores the notion that adults, in some ways, may be less than children. While linked by strong similarities, adults and children are shaped as belonging to two different worlds. Pak Bagja, for example, feels he is a teacher who understands how to draw a mosque, just as Seno thinks Bimo should obey him because he replaces their father. Similarly, it is his authority as a father that makes Beni forbid Asih to keep the prayer mat. These are examples of adults who feel they have authority over children, a feeling based on an adult way of thinking.

Signifying Mother, Questioning Father

Mulder (1997) and Shiraishi (1997) have argued that the influence of Javanese culture places the father in a pre-eminent position in the Indonesian family structure.

In this family system, the father holds the highest honour in the hierarchy and has authority in and over the family. The father or *bapak* figure is considered as a patron that personifies a paternalistic vertical relationship. This figure is similar to the Victorian father: authoritarian, resistant, and “imposing . . . , but unconcerned with nurture” (Carpenter, 2002: 196).

Eric Sasono (2006) argues that recent Indonesian cinema depicts the new trend in portraying the family by marginalising the role of the father. He points out that significant changes in the concept of family have enabled the depiction of a single parent family as a “normal” family form in Indonesian cinema.⁷⁰ Similarly, *Of Love and Eggs* questions the role of the father and proposes the importance of motherhood. For instance, in the story of Bimo and Seno, Seno attempts to replace Bimo’s father; however, in doing so Seno acts like their father did in the past: he is disciplined, hard working, and authoritarian. As a result, Bimo cannot tolerate this relationship and seeks a mother figure to take care of and protect him. One day, Bimo is so disappointed with his brother that he locks himself in the store. When Seno asks Cantik for help, Cantik blames Seno for this incident, asking “Why do you always act like his father?” However, after questioning Seno, Cantik solves the problem, ironically, by calling herself Bimo’s mother: “[Bimo] please open the door. This is your mother. Your mother asks you, Bimo. Please open the door”. This happens in spite of the fact that in general Cantik refuses to allow Bimo to call her mother; Cantik’s relation with another man is damaged because Bimo calls her mother.

The mother figure imagined by Bimo and the way Cantik construct herself as Bimo’s mother in this scene implies a Javanese mother figure of the kind described by Mulder (1997): “earthy, actively caring for things, emotional and not so restrained in their behaviour” (p.84). In contrast, Seno’s projection of his father’s past behaviour, portrays a Javanese idea of a father who has the highest respect in the family hierarchy; one who represents “the world of work” and “is remote from his children” (Mulder, 1997:83-84)

⁷⁰ For detail see <http://www.kompas.com/kompas-cetak/0505/29/seni/1777697.htm> (last accessed 6/12/2007)

The story of Asih is another example of signifying a mother's role in the family. Romlah, Asih's mother, left her family because her husband, Beni, abused her physically, and because she could no longer tolerate his gambling habit. Beni becomes a single parent taking care of Asih. However, Asih denies Beni's existence and keeps hoping her mother will be back. Asih keeps her mother's prayer mat, disobeying Beni's order to throw the mat away. The father-daughter relationship becomes worse when Beni steals and sells the prayer mat. Asih feels upset and steals the mat back from the buyer. The emotional relationship between Asih and her mother signifies the mother figure as "the most important person in children's early life because creates an emotional bond between mother and children" (Mulder, 1997:83).

Of Love and Eggs also depicts the problem of the father figure in some of the adult characters. Cantik, for example, was disappointed with her father, running away from her family. She refuses to talk to her father and refuses to go home even though her mother asks her to. Similarly, Bu Imah, Rindu's adopted mother, was abandoned by her husband who went overseas to work but never sent any messages. In addition, Fara has also run away from her family because of her conflict with her father; she feels her father has changed and has no time for her. When her father comes to the market and begs Fara to go home, Beni becomes involved, trying to persuade Fara to go back home.

Thus, *Of Love and Eggs* questions the dominant position of the father in the typical Indonesian family against the New Order's construction of the father figure as the key one in the family (Shiraishi, 1997). The dominant construction of father therefore shapes the position of mother as a secondary person in the family, which means "less refined, less potent, and also less deserving of prestige" (Mulder, 1997:84). To some extent, *Of Love and Eggs* reduces the dominant representation of father by portraying father figures as less responsible, less authoritative, and relatively powerless. The figure of mother, on the contrary, is proposed in *Of Love and Eggs* as a responsible, powerful figure that deserves respect and prestige in the

family structure. *Of Love and Eggs* depicts mother figures not only as “the most important person in early life” but as a figure that is not “undone by the passage of time” (Mulder, 1997:83).

By the end of the film, all the problems have been resolved: Bimo finds his mother figure in Cantik, who falls in love with Seno; Asih reunites with her mother; Rindu meets her brother, while her surrogate mother, Bu Imah, finds her soul mate: Bagja. As Ajidharma (2005) suggests, despite the film’s complete resolution of conflict (which is typical of Hollywood films), *Of Love and Eggs* offers a different kind of happiness, one that suggests that a happy family is not always an ideal family, at least as constructed in New Order propaganda. Therefore, a happy family can be formed from children without parents, such as Bimo and Seno, or Rindu and her brother, from parents without children, such as Bu Imah and Pak Bagja, or from a child and his/her mother, which marginalises the father’s position, such as Asih and her mother.

Conclusion

Of Love and Eggs constitutes a shift in film style for Garin. This film is viewed as his finest work without documentary footage. The technique of using a film set in a studio harks back to the studio system that was commonly used in the Indonesian film industry in the 1950s.

The film suggests a religious focus by placing Islamic symbols within the story and depicting contemporary Indonesian themes. However, it focuses more specifically on the model of the family and the roles of the mother and the father within it, which in fact are exclusively neither Islamic nor Indonesian issues. Through the film, Garin challenges the constructed Indonesian family model that was systematically promoted by the New Order. The film portrays the children of incomplete families as having difficulties in their relationships with adults. *Of Love and Eggs* suggests that children have a different way of thinking that is often difficult for adults to

understand. Furthermore, the film depicts the idea that adults, in some ways, develop similar strategies to those used by children when facing and solving their problems.

Thesis Conclusion

The presence of children in films, as suggested by Buckingham (1995), Strassler (1999), and Spyer (2004), does not merely represent children's ideas about themselves. Children are represented in order to manifest adult perspectives about childhood. In addition, since filmmakers as auteurs are known deliberately expresses their views through the film. I have argued that in Garin Nugroho's films children are constructed as an alternative representation of Indonesian children. Thus, four films are analyzed through narrative and textual analysis, closely linked to auteur film theory. The films are *Surat untuk Bidadari* (*Letter to an Angel*), *Aku Ingin Menciummu Sekali Saja* (*Birdman Tale*) and *Rindu Kami Padamu* (*Of Love and Eggs*). Another of Garin's film, *Daun di Atas Bantal* (*Leaf on a Pillow*), along with Garin's perspectives on Indonesian children, is discussed in my cinematic essay, which is an integral part of this thesis. The analysis of these films reveals three primary issues emergent through the way children's character are constructed in Garin's films: These issues are adolescence, parenthood, and the relationship between children and the state.

The adolescence theme is portrayed in various ways, but the different depictions are similar in that they concern the relationship between a boy and a woman. In *Letter to an Angel*, Lewa, who is seeking a mother figure, finds it in the person of Berlian Merah, who gives him a childhood experience: breastfeeding. Similarly, in *Of Love and Eggs*, Bimo has lost his mother and deliberately builds a relationship with Cantik. Even though the female figures in these films are used as substitutes for a lost mother, issues related to the children's transition to adolescence appear within their relationship with the mother figure. For example, Lewa seeks answers through the difference between a woman's and a girl's breast. Similarly, Bimo calls the woman "cantik" (beauty) and acts protectively to damage Cantik's relationship with a man. In contrast, Arnold in *Birdman Tale* is portrayed as falling in love with a woman and openly voicing his desire to kiss the woman. These images, which are rarely seen in Indonesian cinema, suggest an alternative image of Indonesian children.

The issue of parenthood is articulated in two ways in Garin's films. Firstly, the importance of the family is highlighted through the narrative. This is in line with the New Order ideology, which also underlined the importance of the family. However, in contrast with the New Order's idealized image of family, Garin portrays an incomplete model, such as a girl with an adopted mother (in *Of Love and Eggs*) and a boy who lost his mother (in *Letter to an Angel*). Secondly, while proposing the importance of the family, Garin undermines the dominant position of the father in the family. In contrast to mainstream depictions, most of Garin's films promote the importance of the role of the mother, while the father is marginalized. For example, in *Of Love and Eggs* a father is rejected by his daughter; in *Birdman Tale* a brave mother stands up against her husband's enemies while he hides in the jungle; and in *Letter to an Angel* the dominant role of a woman affects a child's life. These representations are quite a shift from the New Order's mainstream construction of family. However, sometimes stereotypical images of Indonesian women do appear in Garin's films, for example, the way a wife is portrayed to serve her husband in *Letter to an Angel* and *Birdman Tale*.

In Garin's films children are generally utilized to convey social political critiques of the state. In *Letter to an Angel*, for example, Garin critiques the way the state promotes one local culture above others to create a single national identity. Likewise, in *Birdman Tale* Garin critically explores the racialized position and unfair treatment of West Papua by the Indonesian government. Similarly, through Rindu's character in *Of Love and Eggs*, Garin critiques the ideology of development that disadvantages marginal people in Indonesia.

Thus, the theme of childhood appears in most of Garin's films, either as the main narrative or as the social context of the narrative. For example, in *Cinta dalam Sepotong Roti (Love in a Slice of Bread)*, and *Bulan Tertusuk Ilalang (And the Moon Dances)*, the experience of childhood itself is portrayed as the cause of the main characters' problems. In this thesis, however, only films that present children as their main characters were examined. The limited number of films discussed aimed to

highlight specific works that broadly represent some of the many images of Indonesian children. Therefore, while the specific limitations of this thesis may preclude a broader perspective on media representation of Indonesian children, this research has provided a solid starting point by examining in detail some of the key films of Indonesian auteur Garin Nugroho.

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