

“Anak Itu Istimewa:” Disability, Feminism, and Discourses of Development in the Indonesian Film *Perempuan Punya Cerita*

Annie Tucker, M.A, University of California at Los Angeles, actucker@ucla.edu

Abstract: My paper concerns *Cerita Pulau*. Written by Vivian Idris and directed by Fatima Tobing-Rony, *Cerita Pulau* is the first vignette of the four-part film *Perempuan Punya Cerita*. It tells the story of Sumantri, a midwife, and her friendship with Wulan, a teenage girl with autism. Living on a small island off the coast of Jakarta, each must struggle for justice, self-determination, and empathetic care in the face of Sumantri’s breast cancer and Wulan’s brutal rape.

In my paper, I tease out the parallels between the plot and themes of the film and works of the *sastrawangi* literary movement, which emphasizes truth telling about female sexual experience and offers a phenomenological exploration of women’s sensuality as a means to empowerment. I ask how the film calls upon tropes of autism and disability to convey these feminist ideals, suggest new resistant subjectivities, and critique Indonesia’s own national “developmental disabilities” as it negotiates policies concerning gender and access in the context of globalization.

I seek to understand the role of disability in the film. In particular I explore how the representation of disability can be mobilized to express major issues of concern in contemporary transnational feminist discourse, seek out new ways of valuing and representing women’s sensuality and authority, and speak to the pressing issue of acknowledging and supporting diversity on individual and national levels. I end the paper by questioning the role of disability awareness and diversity in Indonesia and Indonesian studies today : are efforts such as autism awareness a sign of successful development ? How can contemporary Indonesian media and discourse make room for disabled subjectivities ? How might disability theory, which is an emerging and exciting field of academic study, inform the discussion of identity and self-advocacy in Indonesia today ?

Key Words: *sastrawangi*, feminism, disability studies, autism, the sensory, resistant subjectivities

Introduction

Perempuan Punya Cerita is an Indonesian omnibus feature film, which uses four discrete stories to address various aspects of women's struggles to commandeer their own fate in the face of misfortune and oppression. Produced in 2007 and released in 2008, the film was heavily censored for viewing in Indonesian theaters due to its controversial subject matter, which includes rape, abortion, underage promiscuity, drug use, HIV infection, human trafficking and the sex trade. Since its release it has toured internationally to such venues as The Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film and Video Festival and The US ASEAN Film and Photography Festival in Washington, DC where it has garnered both shock and praise from international audiences. It is also available uncensored in the original Bahasa Indonesia online via Youtube.

Perempuan Punya Cerita emerges as a part of remarkable effort in the history of Indonesian cinema; while there has been an explosion of creativity and productivity in the film industry since 1998 and the fall of the New Order, the number of films produced and directed by Indonesian women remains quite small. The film is the fruit of a collaborative effort from the few most influential female filmmakers working in Indonesia today including Nia Dinata, the renowned director of such popular films as *Arisan!* (2003) and *Berbagi Suami* (2006), Upi Avianto, Lasja Fauzia Sustato, and one American-based collaborator Fatimah Tobing Rony who holds a PhD in from Yale University and is also the author of the book *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (1996). It features both well-known celebrities and lesser-known actresses, with a cast that includes Rieke Dyah Pitaloka, Rachel Maryam, Arswendy Nasution, Kirana Larasati, Fauzi Baadila, Shanty, Susan Bachtiar, and Sarah Sechan.

The mission of the female-dominated production seems to be a paradoxical effort to speak with groundbreaking frankness about sex and women's sexuality, while still speaking primarily about how heteronormative sexual relationships hurt and manipulate women. Through telling highly personal and locally specific stories the film explores themes of enduring patriarchy and gender exploitation, suggestively situating these particular stories within broader structures of power in order to at times obliquely and at other times more directly critique the contemporary Indonesian state and the role of women in national policy, media representation, business, entertainment, and commerce. In concert with these concerns, the film seeks to understand what kinds of love and what kinds of lives are possible for women and how women might successfully care for each other across their differences. In doing so it poses familiar questions and sketches new opportunities for identity and expression at the intersection of gender and disability, family and nation, development and diversity.

Perhaps the strongest work of the four, *Cerita Pulau* tells the story of Sumantri, a community midwife, and her friendship with Wulan, a young woman with autism¹. The two live on the small island in Pulau Seribu off the coast of West Java, which while only a ferry ride away from the wealthy and cosmopolitan urban center of Jakarta seems to be at a different stage of development and modernization. Sumantri is diagnosed with stage three breast cancer and while she decides how to respond, Wulan is gang-raped by local

¹ While the word "autism" is never mentioned in the film, the character presents as a recognizable phenotype, with symptoms of walking on her toes, discomfort with direct eye contact, delayed speech, etc. Many reviewers have considered the character autistic.

youth. Sumantri's attempt to provide Wulan empathetic and appropriate care is hindered by the intimidation of local officials, and her attempt to seek meaningful justice is hindered by Wulan's own family's willingness to accept cash in exchange for silence. Ultimately, Sumantri's concerned husband insists they must move to the city in order for her to get medical treatment. Her house is sold, her midwifery practice is reluctantly passed on to another, and Wulan is left behind.

My paper situates this work within a long and contested history of gender relations and representation in Indonesia and connects it aesthetically and thematically to a contemporary genre of Indonesian feminist writing called *sastrawangi*. Literally translated as "fragrant literature," *sastrawangi* emphasizes truth telling about female sexual experience and offers a phenomenological exploration of women's sensory experiences, sensuality, and sexual subjectivities as a means to empowerment. I suggest that *Cerita Pulau* mobilizes tropes of autism and disability to convey these feminist ideals, suggest new resistant subjectivities, and critique Indonesia's own national "developmental disabilities" as the country negotiates policies concerning gender and access in the context of post-Reformasi globalization.

***Sastrawangi* and The Role of Indonesian Women in Culture and Nation**

Certainly, the role of women in Indonesia has changed over time and continues to vary throughout the myriad cultures active in an archipelago of thousands of islands. However very broadly speaking, many anthropologists from outside of Indonesia have been impressed with the comparative level of status and power women possess in Indonesian society. The support provided for this position has come from diverse sources such as the historical cases of female kings and warriors in Aceh (Clavé-Çelik 2010), Javanese women's powerful economic role in the household and in the market (Brenner 1995), the matrilineal family structure of the Minangkabau of Sumatera (Sanday 2004), and the role of Indonesian intellectuals and leaders such as Kartini and Megawati. But do women really "rule the roost" in Indonesia, as the anthropologist Suzanne Brenner has famously purported? If you ask many Indonesian feminists working within the country today, such as Mariana Amiruddin, they might tell a very different story, arguing that both historically and up until the present time many Indonesian women experience victimization, oppression, and marginalization in their roles as laborers, wives, and citizens (Wieringa 1998; Kuswandini 2010). Such recent political developments as the new anti-pornography law, which places increasing restrictions on self-expression, lead some to suggest that women still very much have to struggle for a sense of ownership over own bodies.

From a historical perspective, many scholars have argued that Suharto's New Order government had a profound effect on gender relations by re-envisioning and re-shaping the role of women in the Indonesian family and the Indonesian nation. For example, during the events of the purported coup of 1965 members of the socialist and feminist women's group Gerwani were targeted as enemies of the state: in the wake of the political upheaval, transfer of power from Sukarno to Suharto, and well into the New Order era, thousands of women were raped, imprisoned, and subjected to enduring stigma. In the film *Pengkhianatan Gerakan 30-S PKI*, which represented the events of 1965 and was shown annually in schools and on television for decades, Gerwani women

were blamed for the murder of six high-ranking generals, framed and represented as sadistic witches who danced with knives and tortured their victims with razors (Blackburn 2004; Weirenga 1998).

While free expression of all kinds was severely limited by the New Order government as structures of nationalism, education, economic development, and citizenship were shaped anew, the family structure also was re-imagined and women's roles within that structure were redefined. Some scholars see this movement as eroding a sense of independence that women had achieved under the previous president Sukarno, who had worked closely with Gerwani. While holding on to patricarchal Javanese *priyayi* values (Blackburn 2004), the New Order government redefined the ideal woman through the ideology of the "Ibu Rumah Tangah," wherein the figure of the housewife was constructed as the supporter of the husband, children, and nation. This supportive role was emphasized and institutionalized to enable a hegemonic control over women and the family. The New Order ideology of Ibuism mobilized a prosthetic motherhood to cultivate national ideology at the family level, without affording such mothers any reciprocal power or prestige.

Marching has described how this ideology of woman as supporter objectified women and subsequently rendered female sexuality taboo:

Julia Suryakusuma sempat menyebut masa Orde Baru dengan "Negara ibu-isme"—yang menyatakan bagaimana sistem politik dibentuk agar bisa memerangkap perempuan lebih jauh dalam peranan mereka untuk melayani dan melupakan keinginan individual mereka sendiri. Lewat kekuasaannya terhadap media, seksualitas perempuan menjadi sorotan: Mereka dianggap sebagai sumber kenikmatan lelaki sekaligus disalahkan bila dianggap membangkitkan nafsu lawan jenisnya. [...] Dalam hal ini, kenikmatan perempuan, apalagi kenikmatan seksual, dianggap tabu. Ketabuan inilah yang membuat perempuan membatasi kebebasan; tidak saja terhadap dirinya sendiri, namun juga perempuan lainnya. (Marching 2010)

The role of the woman came to be seen as existing to support structures of male desire and state development, which led to a reinterpretation of sexuality, which in turn led to self-censorship and self-regulation. This "Ibuism" was manifested and reinforced through representations of women in film and media production. As film scholar Intan Paramaditha describes,

The representation of Ibu in New Order cinema was very significant since the regime viewed cinema as an effective tool of propaganda in shaping peoples imagination of nationhood. Like other media in Indonesia, cinema was strictly controlled by governments institutions and censorship. Films served to represent Ibu as both the proper model of femininity and the marker the national ideals. Ibu was often contrasted to the images of fallen women representing the national otherness: the prostitute or the self-absorbed woman, who are often embodied in one character. It is no surprise that award-winning films of FFI (Indonesian Film Festival) were those upholding the New Order ideology of Ibuism (mother-ism). (Paramaditha, 2010).

After the fall of the New Order in 1998, there was an explosion of art and media production. Artists and creative workers were not just able to express their own opinions without fear, they also gained access to transnational and globalized media. This new freedom of exchange was supported by a ballooning middle class that was ready to

consume more creative capital, by buying books, going to the movies, and etc. (Mulder, 2005). As this outpouring of media production continued, it seemed like finally there would be new opportunities for women's subjectivity to be explored and expressed. One particular genre that blossomed into this wide open field was *sastrawangi* literature. The term *sastrawangi*, literally translated into English as fragrant literature, labels a new genre of writing, written by women and read primarily by women, that first emerged in the post-New Order environment of the late nineteen nineties. Selected representational works include Dewi Lestari's *Supernova* (2001), Djenar Maesa Ayu's *Nayla* (2005), and Dinar Rahayu's *Ode untuk Leopold Van Socher Masoch* (2002). Common themes and elements of *sastrawangi* are sexually daring and explicit subject matter, a focus on female main characters and their perspective on contemporary life in Indonesia, descriptions of new opportunities and persisting restrictions, and an acknowledgement of the bonds that endure between women. The subjectivity represented by this new genre is complex and multi-layered, a subjectivity that interweaves personal fantasy and creativity into the roles and expectations of being a woman. *Sastrawangi* characters negotiate the mandates of career, family, and interpersonal relationships through their roles as professionals, daughters and wives, friends and lovers, all the while filtering these external facets of their life through the lens of their inner narratives that fluidly incorporate additional possibilities borrowed from dream sequences and ancient myth.

The reading audience in Indonesia had mixed responses to this new perspective on, and expression of, female subjectivity. There was disagreement as to whether *sastrawangi* plots were melodramatic or telling hard-hitting truths, and whether the style and subject matter was more aptly described as trashy pulp, or the material of a cutting edge literary movement (Lipscombe 2003). Disregarded as mere "chick lit" capitalizing on new markets by some and considered scandalous by others, *sastrawangi* never the less has reached a significant audience and has received considered critical attention for addressing enduring issues of transnational feminist concerns—for example, in writing about *sastrawangi* for *Indonesia Buku*, Agnus Sulton credited *sastrawangi* authors for carrying on the work of Cixous, Kristeva, and Irigaray while locally situating it within a specific moment in Indonesian social and political history (Sulton 2010).

Perhaps the paradigmatic example of *sastrawangi* is the novel *Saman*, written by Ayu Utami and published in 1998. The novel won the Jakarta Arts Council's first prize the year it was published, was the subject of acclaim and controversy, has now sold over 150,000 copies in the Indonesian language, and is was published in English translation in 2010. Using a complicated and experimental structure that freely moves through time and incorporates multiple narrative voices, Ayu Utami weaves together the twin stories of Indonesian feminist awakening and resistance to neo-colonial policies that devastated farmers and villagers during the Suharto era. The story is build around the central love triange between Laila, a journalist; Sihar, an oil-rig worker she meets and falls in love with on assignment; and Saman, a former priest that Laila once loved as a teenager who has become an activist and whose help she must seek to achieve justice for the death of Sihar's young coworker, killed on the rig due to negligence. The novel moves between quite explicit tales of Laila and her friends' sexual fantasies and experiences, the different possibilities they have and the different choices they make, and Saman's journey from shy seminarian to international resistance fighter against mercantile fascism.

Saman is a love story, a story about friendship between women who articulate their sensuality and claim their sexuality each in their own way. But the sexuality in the book should not distract readers from the fact that it is also a highly political story about development, corruption, violence, and the new channels of mobility some Indonesians gain access to through their activities in business, study, or activism, all fields which are entangled in globalized networks of media and power. And in fact, rather than seeing the sexuality and the politics as unrelated or paradoxical, they should be read as in direct relation to one another. Partially, because frank sensuality rejects the taboos of patriarchy and the restrictions it places on women, violating the traditional expectations in Javanese and Muslim culture that women be accepting, domesticated, subordinate, and sexually innocent. But the symbolism of sexuality in the novel becomes more aggressively political through the figure of Upi, who haunts the novel *Saman* like a shadow sister to the more powerful, sophisticated, mobile women who are its main characters. Upi is a young woman Saman meets through his work as a priest in a small isolated village in Sumatera. While her disability remains unnamed, she clearly is both cognitively and developmentally impaired, non-verbal and unusual looking, although physically and sexually she is perfectly healthy. Upi clearly has a sensual and sexual awareness of the world and the priest Saman wrestles with the presence of this desire, even as the two become close friends and even as he wrestles with his own priestly vows. When the entire village is brutalized by military forces, Saman is captured and tortured and Upi is raped. The meanings of Upi's sexuality are multiple in the novel: she embodies a female sexuality that is innocent and untamed, an integral part—perhaps one of the most fundamental aspects—of being human, something personal and private that exists before socialization or tutelage. Her character clearly defends sensuality as a way of making sense of and enjoying the world, a way of expressing the desire for and gaining access to self and others, a mode of comfort, etc. Yet her robust sexuality, free of feelings of shame or inhibition, renders clearly the stifling socialization of sexual practice that is thematically mirrored in other stifling of the voices and choices of women and other less-powerful figures. Beyond this, as a poor disabled woman, Upi becomes the embodiment of a subjectivity that is abused and violated, metonymically representing the utter disempowerment and disenfranchisement of local communities in general and the women in those communities in particular.

Disability and Autism in Cerita Pulau

From the descriptions of the plots, we can see that both *Saman* and *Cerita Pulau* express themes of sexuality in conflict with hegemonic power through the character of a poor disabled village woman who is raped. I'm certainly not the first person to mark the influence of Ayu Utami on *sastrawangi*, or the culturally significant emergence of *sastrawangi* (c.f. Bodden 2010). But I would like to pointedly explore the deployment of disability in these works, and to encourage the consideration of the significant overlap between disability and feminist issues. Therefore, the question this paper asks in specific is: read through the lens of *sastrawangi* literature, what are the thematic links between representations of disability and feminist concerns about the body and self-expression? How and why are representations of disability and post-new Order feminist cultural production linked, and how is this expressed in the film *Cerita Pulau*? What does this

connection have to say about representations of disability in the context of national development?

A question that can be asked simultaneously is, what can the perspective of disability studies bring to this discussion? Disability studies is an emerging field in the United States and Europe that came into being following the work and growing voice of disability rights activists who advocated for independent living and equal representation. Building upon and borrowing from theoretical work done by critical race and gender scholars, some key concepts and approaches of disability studies began to solidify in the nineties, and disability studies now provides a framework of questions that can be used to analyze a multitude of issues across the disciplines of history, politics, the humanities, and cultural studies.

For example, the social constructionist model of disability posits that there is no such thing as “disability” outside of culture; in other words, there is a variety of human physical construction, cognitive ability, and personal experience and what renders one a variant a disability and the other not so is up to what the local culture is willing to accommodate and what it isn’t. This social constructionist model of disability often works in concert with the community model of disability, which suggests that those who may have a physical or cognitive impairment but can still fulfill the requirements of their social role, be that through a job, a role as a caretaker, or etc, are not considered “disabled.” While some of these models are contested, the theoretical framework suggests that in the context of physical or cognitive difference we ask how this difference is being constructed through questions such as: whose needs are neglected while others needs are being met? Whose bodies are being harmed or left out of the equation of development? Whose forms of knowledge or authority are being privileged while others are being actively or unconsciously silenced? Answers to these questions have the potential to become politically influential when directly applied to questions of state violence (for example, in the case of the *Saman* plot we can see how some characters are both wounded and killed by those in privileged positions of power) but such questions also seek to understand how power is engendered through the treatment of different bodies. Perhaps most significant for this paper has been the fruitful overlap of disability studies and feminist studies, in such works as “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory” (2003) by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson and *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability* (1996) by Susan Wendell, which ask how women have been to a certain extent “disabled” by patriarchal hegemonic cultural and religious restrictions, in such aspects of life as physical activity to daily mobility to all forms of advancement and achievement. Such scholars argue simultaneously not only that women are perfectly capable of enjoying and succeeding at the same tasks men are, but that additionally the women’s perspective on the body may add important insight into the human experience and therefore should no longer be marginalized: in sum, that the parameters of both value and evaluation of the body and its worth need to change.

Disability studies also draws our attention to how disabled characters and representations of disability is used in narratives as a metaphoric or creative device to express other struggles. In my paper I suggest that *Cerita Pulau* calls upon disability and autism as a narrative device perhaps because of its significance in transnational discourse with regards to how it has been mobilized in discussions of the body and the senses,

diversity of experience and ability, and a stubborn presence amidst the mandates and upheavals of contemporary globalization.

One way questions of autism align with questions of feminism is the focus on the sensory interface. From a scientific perspective, the most up-to-date understanding of autism considers the fact that those with autism may sense the world around them in an unusual or atypical way: for example, some people with autism are very sensitive to external information, such that sounds may be amplified so that a normal speaking voice sounds like a scream or a the gentle touch of fabric against skin may feel quite painful. Others experience heightened sensory perception, such as an exquisite sensitivity to color or an ability to memorize and play a piece of music they have only heard once. Many people with autism become fascinated with a particular kind of sensation that they may explore with a tenacity such that what may seem like a boring or repetitive activity to a typically sensing person may remain compelling for many hours at a time.

In the film, we see that Wulan is fascinated by light: this fascination might in fact be one of the defining factors of her character, as when the film opens she is playing by herself in a peaceful and idyllic patch of woods, completely absorbed with tilting a mirror at the sun. Throughout the film Wulan continues to be enchanted by light. This focus on the primacy of individual sensory experience in the film creatively mobilizes autism as a diagnostic criteria with specific symptoms in order to represent women's natural access to sensual pleasure. In the film, Wulan's fascination with light emphasizes the sensory and corporeal interface as a way of knowing someone and a way of knowing the world, while suggesting that an underlying similarity of sensual experience cannot be taken for granted, either across gender or from individual to individual.

Of course, sensuality is linked to, although not wholly encompassed by, sexuality. Both *sastrawangi* and *Perempuan Punya Cerita* represent the sensual and sexual pleasure women crave and access, but also explore the ways sexuality remains a source of pain and subjugation for women. In the case of Wulan, it is precisely her fascination with and affinity for light that is used against her. Wulan is returning home at night with Sumantri, but does not want to enter her house because she is transfixed by the sight of the moon shining in the night sky. Unfortunately, some neighborhood boys are familiar with her proclivity and turn it into a vulnerability, luring her to them with a flashlight in order to rape her. This exploitation of Wulan's enjoyment and sensual perception becomes a metaphor and a metonym for sexual relations between men and women throughout the film, where in different contexts men take women's desire for the pleasures of sex or love and end up manipulating or abusing it. It calls attention to the challenges of acknowledging yet protecting women's desire for pleasure.

Indeed, throughout all four segments of *Perempuan Punya Cerita*, heteronormative sexuality seems fraught with dangers for women: besides providing more run-of-the-mill objectification and trash talk on the part of the men involved, in the movie intercourse leads to unwanted pregnancy and forced marriage, abuse, enslavement, and death via HIV infection. In case viewers might mistakenly think that these fatally unhealthy gender relations are being equalized with the effects of "modernization" or "globalization" the film emphatically underscores the opposite; the internet brings access to pornography and an instrumental view of women's bodies in *Cerita Yogy*, while what seem like new labor opportunities lead to forced prostitution in *Cerita Cibinong*.

Heteronormative sex seems to be in a certain sense the opposite of fruitful for women in this film, foreclosing a truly generative or productive function to heterosexual relations. Even Sumantri's comparatively loving relationship with her husband has not led to a child, alluded to in a scene where they sit next to each other and her husband hands her food, suggestively saying, "*perutmu belum diisi,*" or, your stomach hasn't been filled, which in Indonesian as in English is a double entendre. Furthermore, despite her role as a midwife the film is clearly supportive of her right not just to deliver babies but to conduct abortions if they are necessary for the health or needs of the mother. This perspective is directly at odds with traditional and religious approaches to sexuality still quite active in Indonesia today, which is to say that one of the main functions of intercourse is to provide descendants. This shift in focus encourages the viewer to recognize different forms of sensuality, sensual pleasure, and physical expressions of love that exist outside the boundaries of heteronormative sexual intercourse. We see not only Wulan's sensual enjoyment of the natural landscape, but the tender and flirtatious friendship that Wulan and Sumantri share. The scene of Sumantri bathing Wulan after she has been raped is filled with sorrow, but it is also filled with love and care as Sumantri gently caresses Wulan's naked back, and the camera hovers on the gentle motion of the girl's shoulders rising and falling with her breath. Sumantri sings a tender and plaintive song that seems to sonically comfort Wulan. The two women share a lamentative moment of sensual togetherness.

This is not to say that Wulan and Sumantri have a sexual relationship, rather to suggest that some of the pleasures that have been attributed to heteronormative sexuality can be found outside the boundaries of heteronormative sexual intercourse. This aligns with the goals of sastrawangi literature, wherein "*Perempuan selama ini dianggap tidak berhak untuk menyuarakan potensi seksual tubuh mereka, tetapi para penulis ini telah menawarkan satu pandangan baru, bahwa seks juga milik perempuan*" (Sulton 2010) and to broader feminist thought about women's sensuality and sexuality which emphasizes over again that a woman's sensual pleasure is not only the object of men's arousal, and does not necessarily depend on a man to be awakened and enjoyed. From this perspective the sensual experience of women becomes grounds to articulate new forms of authenticity, exploration, and self-expression. The focus on the sensual is ended all the more clearly through the character of Wulan, who because of her disability may not have access to other forms of expression, eg verbal.

Disability, and autism, also draws attention to the concept of diversity: at its most basic, because of sensory and other differences, the presence of disability reminds viewers that the human experience is quite varied beyond the norm. Disability stretches the notion of "diversity" to include modes of being-in-the-world that have previously been neglected, considered lesser, unimportant. Diversity as a concept is just as important in Indonesia as it has become across the globe, perhaps even more so as it has historically been a founding tenet of nationalist development under the state motto of "Unity in Diversity." Under the New Order Government, this unity in diversity paradoxically quite often manifested as a homogenization and an eradication of difference through hegemonic policies and more direct persecution. While the overwhelming diversity of arts and cultures has become a well-deserved point of pride for Indonesia and a key to its popularity as a tourist destination, the New Order simultaneously oversaw a repression and eradication of local cultures, languages, and

spiritual practices. The state maintained a surface of diversity, encouraged diversity as a public performance of national culture, while simultaneously banning many forms of free expression with regards to politics and the state, with dissidents or alleged dissidents being jailed for many years. Autism is also commonly understood as a developmental disability, a delay or a disturbance in the process of development; therefore its presence in the film symbolically begs the question of who and what has been ignored in Indonesia's "developmental" trajectory of "unity in diversity"? Whose forms, or what forms of diversity are welcomed and what forms are considered better left by the wayside? It is important here to see development not as a single fated trajectory but as an ongoing negotiation of values and priorities, perspectives and knowledges.

This dialogue over knowledge is represented through questions of medical care that arise in the film. For example, after she is gang raped, Wulan becomes pregnant and Sumantri, to protect the girl from further stress and from the role of motherhood that she is certainly unable to assume, wants to provide her with an abortion. She also wants justice for the girl and her family and for the rapists to be prosecuted; but rather than recognizing the obvious sin of the rape, the local police officials and village leaders criminalize Sumantri's previous abortion case, treating it as a moral issue rather than an exercise of Sumantri's expertise as a midwife and her care for another woman who's life was in danger. Here the viewer joins Sumantri in her frustration at deeply entrenched patriarchy, which takes for granted male control over women's bodies and men's right to make decisions for women's fates. Even Sumantri's well-meaning and kind husband makes an executive decision to move them off the island, and counsels Sumantri out of further action because, "*kita harus meninggalkan pulau dengan nama baik.*"

But the film does not fault traditional or religious patriarchy alone for the mistreatment of women, or necessarily see technological or globalized "development" as an equalizing force. This can be seen in the difference of care between "traditional" midwifery skills that Sumantri provides and the more "advanced" or "developed" medical care Sumantri herself receives in Jakarta. The establishing shots of the film render the developmental difference between Jakarta and the islands clearly, as Sumantri makes the journey home from the doctor's office, walking past silver shining skyscrapers and luxury cars to the crowded bemo ride to the port and ferry crossing that takes her to her quiet island home with children bathing naked in the sea and simply designed thatch houses. This visible economic disparity signals broader Indonesian policies, major governmental blind spots, and persistent inequality when it comes to regional development and allocation for funding for even basic infrastructure off the island of Java. Yet despite the obvious surplus of funding in the hospital where Sumantri is treated, something quite valuable is missing. The medical care Sumantri receive is cold and unfeeling, practically inhuman as in the opening scene she faces a medical machine with a bare back, vulnerable in the face of an impersonal technology. The clear difference between the positioning of Sumantri's body in this scene and Wulan's back in the previously discussed scene is the total lack of an art of comfort or any sense of interpersonal support. This support, as represented by Sumantri's skillful and valued local midwife care, represents a particular form of women's expertise that manifests not only through remedy and life-saving technique but through touch and empathy that the other female villagers value.

With different values and approaches to development, the question of naming, or renaming, becomes important in order to stake a claim for that which must be preserved and renegotiated outside patriarchal genealogies of power. Sumantri engages in this resistive renaming as she defends Wulan from cat calls on the beach saying “*Dia punya nama, dan namanya bukan cewek.*” Then, responding to a village headman who asks, “*Di mana cewek kesambet itu?*” Sumantri responds, “*Bukan kesambet anak itu istimewa,*” lexically redefining difference not as something foreign, frightening, or vacant, but as something unique, special, and valuable.

In real-life autism intervention, the discourse of autism awareness in Indonesia is linked to development. It seems to some that as other more pressing problems are managed or solved, attention can be turned to those who previously were neglected due to necessity. For example, on its website Yayasan Peduli Autis Indonesia says,

Selama tujuh tahun terakhir ini, Pemerintah Indonesia menghadapi berbagai tantangan dalam menstabilkan perekonomian, sosial, politik dan keamanan nasional yang ditandai dengan terjadinya krisis moneter 1998, bom Bali 1 dan 2, bom kedutaan Australia, bencana Tsunami dan Nias, flu burung, dan lain sebagainya.

Sebagai akibat dari ketidakstabilan politik dan ekonomi tersebut, perhatian pemerintah terhadap pendidikan untuk anak dengan kebutuhan khusus bukanlah menjadi prioritas utama, meskipun topik pemberitaan di media massa mengenai Autisme semakin sering muncul. (Mpati website, 2010)

This quote suggests that it is national stability and prosperity which allows for a rearranging of priorities or a broadening of scope with regards to who needs special attention, and therefore acknowledging autism represents a successful developmental trajectory and requires a shifting ideological stance based on a certain national condition. *Cerita Pulau* represents a similar effort to bring attention to the subjectivity of Wulan, who would normally be left out of most history books or stories about Indonesia.

But beyond using autism as a way to draw attention to pre-existing feminist and developmental concerns, what about the autistic presence itself? Can the autistic character self-narrate? Some critics felt like the film offers no opportunity for self-narration or change. For example, in Eric Sasono’s review of the film he says,

Cerita Pulau menggambarkan tekanan lingkungan dan tak memberi ruang sedikitpun kepada perempuan. Tak ada pilihan bagi perempuan kecuali pilihan yang tambah menyudutkannya. Mulai dari lembaga medis, lembaga penegakkan hukum, kekuatan finansial (baca: kelas menengah), hingga kehidupan domestik, semuanya menyudutkan perempuan.

Segmen ini berhenti pada keinginan untuk memotret. Ketidakberdayaan perempuan dipotret untuk menjadi semacam representasi bahwa perempuan di negeri ini memang tak berdaya dan perlu ditolong. Perempuan hanya menjadi semacam layang-layang yang pasrah diterbangkan angin dan tak punya kuasa sendiri mengendalikan arah. (Sasono 2008)

Yet the story *Cerita Pulau* seems to suggest that there is an excess to the process of development—both the New Order development and the Post-New Order development that continues a trend of broadening prosperity and globalization. In this case excess might mean that which is ignored but which remains, that which persists despite outright brutalization or lack of attention, and that in this excessive presence might have a very real resistive potential. Wulan represents this kind of resistive presence, in her loud

wailing at the police station and in the final scene of the film, as she is left behind on the pier in her scarlet dress, crying out with a protest that is almost more powerful for its lack of delineation or elaboration. The viewer leaves the film with many feelings, but perhaps the strongest impression of all is that Wulan is still here, and her grief *will* be heard.

Conclusion: Autism, Disability Studies, and Indonesian Studies

A well known disability studies scholar, Maja Nadesan, has said that the perception and representation of disability “reveals current desires, anxieties, and opportunities for personhood in the early twenty-first century.” (Nadesan 2005, 7-8) Hopefully, through the case study of *Cerita Pulau*, this paper has suggested how the representation of disability can be mobilized to express major issues of concern in contemporary transnational feminist discourse, seek out new ways of valuing and representing sensuality and authority, and speak to the pressing issue of acknowledging and supporting diversity on the levels of individual interaction and national policy.

Even as the nascent disability awareness movements in Indonesia point to work that remains to be done, much as truthful representations of women’s sexuality still seems to reveal the many hurts that need to be healed, some see the emergence of this movement as a sign of “successful development” and national progress that enacts one aspect of acknowledging diversity and diverse needs in Indonesia today. It is my hope that this paper might also trigger thought on how contemporary Indonesian media and discourse can make room for disabled subjectivities and how disability theory might inform the discussion of identity and self-advocacy in Indonesia today, augmenting national discourse and advocating for the recognition of radically different subjectivities as key within the praxis of unity in diversity.

Bibliography

Arisan! (2003). DVD. Dir. Nia Dinata. Kalyana Shira Films.

Blackburn, S. (2004). *Women and the state in modern Indonesia*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.

Bodden, M. (2010). “Cosmopolitanism, transgression, and public debates about culture in contemporary Indonesia: Ayu Utami *Saman* and its successors.” Presented as part of the panel “Between Old Roles and New Desires: Conflicted Representations of Women in Post-Soeharto Indonesian National Culture.” At the International Convention of Asian Scholars. Korea. 6 August 2009.

Brenner, S. (1995). Why women rule the roost: Rethinking Javanese ideologies of gender and self-control. In A. Ong and M. G. Peletz (Eds.) *Bewitching women, pious men: Gender and body politics in Southeast Asia*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 19-50.

Clavé-Çelik, E. (2010). The Acehese women warriors: Between image of the past and reality of the present. *Komunitas Tikar Pandan*. Retrieved 10 August 2010.

- http://www.tikarpandan.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=54&Itemid=69
- Garland-Thomson, R. (2002). Integrating disability, transforming feminist theory. *NWSA Journal* 14.3, 1-32.
- Hanan, D. (2010) 'Innovation and Tradition in Indonesian Cinema', *Third Text*, Vol 24 (1).
- Kuswandini, D. (2010, October 24). The rise and fall of Indonesia's women's movement. *The Jakarta Post* online version. Retrieved October 24. <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/04/21/the-rise-and-fall-indonesia%E2%80%99s-women%E2%80%99s-movement.html>
- Lestari, D. (2001). *Supernova satu : Ksatria, puteri dan bintang jatuh*. Jakarta: Truedee Books.
- Lipscombe, B. (2003, September 10). Chick-lit becomes hip lit in Indonesia. *BBC Jakarta*. Retrieved on 10 August 2010. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3093038.stm>
- Marching, S. (2010). Ekspresi Seksualitas Dalam Buku Harian Tiga Perempuan. *Gandrung* 1.1, 32-66.
- Masyarakat Peduli Autis Indonesia. (2010). Latar Belakang. Retrieved 10 August 2010. <http://www.autismindonesia.org/index.php?menu=latar>
- Mulder, N. (2005). *Inside Indonesian Society: Cultural Change in Java*. Singapore: Pepin Press.
- Nadesan, M. H. (2005). *Constructing autism*. New York: Routledge.
- Perempuan Punya Cerita* (2007). Dir. Nia Dinata, Fatimah T. Rony, Upi Avianto, Lasja Fauzia Sustato. Kalyana Shira Films.
- Paramaditha, I. (2009). "Motherhood in Post-New Order Indonesian cinema." Presented as part of the panel In Between old roles and new desires: Conflicted representations of women in Post-Soeharto Indonesian national culture. At the International Convention of Asian Scholars. Korea. 9 August 2009.
- Rahayu, D. (2002). *Ode untuk Leopold Van Socher Masoch*. Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya.
- Rony, F. T. (1996). *The third eye: Race, cinema, and ethnographic spectacle*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Sanday, P. (2004). *Women at the center: Life in a modern matriarchy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Sasono, E. (2008, June 20). "Perempuan punya cerita: Para perempuan malang." *Rumahfilm.org*. Retrieved on August 10, 2010. http://old.rumahfilm.org/resensi/resensi_perempuan.htm
- Sulton, A. (2010, April 4) Sastra wangi aroma selangkangan. *Indonesiabuku.com* Retrieved 10 August 2010. <http://indonesiabuku.com/?p=4887>

- Suryakusuma, J. I. (1996). The state and sexuality in new order Indonesia. In L. J. Sears (Ed.). *Fantasizing the feminine in Indonesia*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Utami, A. (1998). *Saman*. Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia.
- Wieringa, S. (1998) *Sexual politics in Indonesia*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wendell, S. (1996). *The rejected body: Feminist philosophical reflections on disability*. New York: Routledge.