

Challenging tradition: the Indonesian novel *Saman*

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Abstract

Indonesia has witnessed the birth of a new generation of (female) writers. Many of them are young, cosmopolitan female whose work often challenges tradition, and are quite radical at that. One such writer, Ayu Utami, had won an award for her first novel *Saman*. This novel has invited critics, particularly because the writer has challenged tradition, both in the theme and content as well as in narrative style. Themes such as sexuality, which had been considered taboo in the past, is explored and challenged in an almost blunt way. Her frequent references to female body parts have been most strikingly merged into her critical views on tradition. Also, her rejection of conventional ways of writing can be seen, for example, in her almost 'stubborn' way of switching from first person to third person on the same character in virtually the same paragraph. This, as many have said, would confuse readers. She concocts her challenges to tradition by intertwining the shifts in her narration. These two main aspects of *Saman*, ie content and narrative style are analysed in this article, with an emphasis on the first, as it is this aspect that most clearly reflects the writer's break from tradition.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, Indonesia has witnessed a significant change in its literary tradition. The era of a new generation has begun, with a writing tradition markedly different from that by earlier Indonesian literary writers. The new generation of women writers constitutes young people, many of whom are in their 30-s. They have been described as ‘a group of new, young, female writers whose appearance on Indonesia's literary scene has coincided with the country's six-year experiment with democracy; women whose handbags and hairstyles are straight out of Vogue and Cosmopolitan.’ (as Dhume puts it, in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July/August 2004 edition).

Young women writers such as Ayu Utami (*Saman, Larung*), Dewi Lestari (*Supernova, Akar*), Djenar Maesa Ayu (*Jangan main-main dengan kelaminmu* ‘Don’t play with your genitals’), Nova Riyanti Yusuf (*Mahadewa Mahadewi* ‘God, Goddess’) have been classified by critics as Sastra Wangi (lit. *fragrant literature*). The basic similarity in this genre, as one of the writers puts it, is that they talk about sex in a liberal way (Nova, in an interview with the BBC, Jakarta 10/09/2003). These writers, however, have rejected this categorization, arguing that such label has underestimated women’s work, as though other works (ie male’s) are more substantive.

Many critics consider that the writers’ works ‘*push the boundary of what is acceptable*’ (Dhume, loc cit). Presumably, ‘acceptability’ in this case seems to be based on the fact that the writers explore themes that had been considered taboo in the past, such as sexuality, male homosexuality and lesbianism. In this context, some cultural observers see ‘Sastra Wangi’ as a form of rebellion against these taboos and established values (Media Indonesia, December 2004).

Such rebellion can be seen in the novel written by Ayu Utami, ‘Saman’. In the discussion that follows, all quotations in Indonesian are accompanied with their English version (presented as endnotes). In any case, the translation should be seen as approximate, since it may not capture the aesthetics of the original, particularly when quotations from the novel are presented.

2. Ayu Utami and her novel Saman: a brief introduction

Whatever the genre is called, Ayu Utami has certainly started some changes in Indonesian literary tradition. In her novel *Saman* (1998) she has made and started new and radical innovations in terms of presentation of themes and taboos and in narrative style.¹⁾ *Saman* was welcome with enthusiasm after winning the *Sayembara Roman Dewan Kesenian Jakarta 98*. Literary critics and reviewers wrote favourable and fantastic comments on the novel. The renowned Indonesian cultural analyst, Umar Kayam, for example, has said:

¹⁾ Layun Rampan in *Angkatan 2000 dalam Sastra Indonesia* sees her as ‘...novelis ini merupakan pemimpin literer fiksi novel Indonesia mutakhir’ (Grasindo, 2000, p.lv).

“Semua keluar di situ. Terutama tentang keterikatan wanita terhadap tradisi, tentang hubungan seks, dan sebagainya itu. Yang menyenangkan bagi saya, dia ini anak muda. [...] Apa yang ditulisnya merupakan wakil dari anak muda yang kosmopolitan dengan bacaan banyak, pengalaman dan pengamatan yang tajam [...]” (Kompas, 5 April, 1998). [see endnote 1 for its English version] – (underlining added)

Thus, the writer’s critical observation of tradition, of sexual relationship, etc is central to the novel. Her cosmopolitan experience is reflected not just in the themes of the novel, but also in the language used. In many cases the words used go beyond just words—they reflect particular discourse ideology and perspective as well as reflecting the writer’s reaction towards aspects of culture that she challenges. For example, her frequent reference to the word *keperawanan* ‘virginity’ indicates her critical reaction towards the way the society values this notion.²⁾ The value is such that its loss (before marriage) is comparable to the person being considered as *sampah* ‘garbage’ (Saman, page 124). Similar reactions towards other aspects of (cultural) tradition are also found in the novel, which are discussed further in Sections 3 & 4 below.

Her writing style has also been considered innovative, as Layun Rampan puts it:

“..... tampak dari pola kolase yang meninggalkan berbagai warna yang dilahirkan oleh tokoh maupun peristiwa yang secara estetik menonjolkan kekuatan literer. Sifat kolase itu menempatkan segi-segi kompositoris dengan wacana gabungan fiksional esai dan puisi. [see endnote 2 for its English version] (underlining added)

(Layun Rampan, 2000, p.iii)

Thus, the ‘collating’ style (*kolase*) used in the novel is considered different from what is traditionally employed by other writers. However, apart from the ‘aesthetic collation’ above, the writer also uses a lot of flashbacks. Some readers may find this narrative style confusing:

“Saman is somewhat confusing, with numerous flashbacks and changes in narrative voice occurring seemingly at random.” (Clark, Inside Indonesia, No. 57, 1999).

Indeed, the various flashbacks can interfere with ease in reading the novel. This is especially the case when readers are not equipped with sufficient background information, not just of the novel itself but also of the literary style that seems to be the ‘orientation’ of Ayu Utami’s writing style. Thus a section of this paper will be devoted to discuss the narrative style further, as presented in Section 6 below.

²⁾ The word *perawan* ‘virgin’ and its derivation (*keperawanan*, *memperawani*, etc.) appear in many places of the novel, particularly at the beginning and at the end, sometimes appearing more than once on a page (see pp 4; 27;29;30;31;120;124;125; 127; 145; 149).

Against the brief background presented above, the paper attempts to discuss two inter-related aspects: firstly, it will discuss the themes that become the writer's focus in the novel and how the themes are intertwined with her break from tradition; secondly, it will discuss the style that the writer uses in concocting the story line, the themes and the characters.

3. Sex, sexuality and gendered identities

When criticized for being too blunt and vulgar in presenting sex as a theme in her novel, Ayu Utami responded: firstly, that she just wants to be frank; secondly, that she does not depict sex as a story about sex but as a proposition that sex is a problem for women. For example, Yasmin and Saman, two of her characters, talk about sex with guilt. So, to the writer, sex has become a subject of discussion, not as an occurrence (see Intisari, September edition, 1998).

In fact, sex and sexuality have been used to challenge cultural beliefs and identities. For example, she questions why women should have hymen:

“Sebab menurutku yang curang lagi-lagi Tuhan: dia menciptakan selaput dara, tapi tidak membikin selaput penis” (*Saman*, p. 149). [see endnote 3 for its English version]

The cultural and religious contexts of this quotation are clear, ie that an intact *selaput dara* ‘hymen’ indicates virginity. Girls should only give up their virginity upon marriage, and if a girl is not virgin when she gets married, her husband and his family may consider this a basis for ending the marriage. There was a case in 1997 when a well-known singer (Farid Hardja) questioned his wife's virginity, which then became a public debate and was very much reported in the media.

This notion of virginity becomes almost an obsession for the author, as shown through one of the characters in the novel, Laila, who wants to give up her virginity to Sihar, a married man. To emphasize the importance of virginity, the author uses the word ‘Chinese porcelain’ as a metaphor:

“... ibuku membuka suatu rahasia besar: bahwa aku ini ternyata sebuah porselin cina. [...] tak boleh retak, sebab orang-orang akan membuangnya ke tempat sampah. (p.124) [see endnote 4 for its English version]

Here *porselin cina* ‘(a piece of) Chinese porcelain’ is used as a metaphor for ‘something priceless or valuable’, ie hymen (and virginity) in this context, and the piece of porcelain should not crack (*tak boleh retak*), as people will throw it into the *garbage bin* to indicate worthlessness. The author seems to be cynical in her view of virginity, which can be seen through the phrase *rahasia besar* ‘big secret’, which, of course is not true in reality. Such message is common knowledge, particularly among Islamic people, thus it is not a ‘secret’ as *ibu* says.

In an interview with Intisari, Ayu says:

“Wanita yang sudah tidak perawan dianggap sudah cacat, tetapi nilai ini tidak berlaku bagi pria. Maksud saya bukannya menganjurkan seks pranikah, tetapi cobalah menempatkan keperawanan itu sewajarnya saja. Karena bila wanita begitu memuja keperawanan, ia sendiri akan rugi. Keperawanan hilang, ia merasa tidak berarti.” (see Intisari, loc cit) [see endnote 5 for its English version]

So, Ayu basically questions the ‘norm’ imposed on this notion by the society, which has been represented by ‘ibuku’ in the novel (See the quotation above).

Apart from questioning biological differences between men and women (ie that women have hymen but men do not), Ayu also depicts woman’s inferiority over man, as in the quotation below:

“Lelaki itu telah mencambuk dada dan punggung perempuan itu, tetapi ia menemukan di selangkangannya sebuah liang yang harum birahi. “Engkau dinamai perempuan karena diambil dari rusuk lelaki”. Begitu bisikan Tuhan yang tiba-tiba datang kembali. “Dan aku menamai keduanya puting karena merupakan ujung busung dadamu. Dan aku menamainya klenit karena serupa kontol yang kecil.” Namun liang itu tidak diberinya sebuah nama. Melainkan, dengan ujung jarinya ia merogoh. Dan dengan penisnya ia menembus.” (p. 194). [see endnote 6 for its English version]

The clause *karena [engkau] diambil dari rusuk lelaki* ‘because you are taken [ie created] from man’s rib’ indicates that women’s status is inferior to that of men’s. Being a Christian, Ayu must be referring to the Bible on this notion of female creation. Furthermore, men are also depicted as the strong, the powerful, as represented in the first sentence *lelaki itu telah mencambuk dada dan punggung perempuan itu..* ‘The man had whipped the chest and back of the woman’, since he is positioned as the actor of the whipping (*mencambuk*).

The last sentence in the above quotation *dan dengan penisnya ia menembus* ‘And with his penis he penetrated [the hole]’ also seems to be Ayu’s response to the common cultural belief that men are initiators (of action), as shown by the verb *menembus* ‘to penetrate’, while the hole (ie the woman) is the recipient of action, the passive. In fact this (cultural) phenomenon is also encoded in the (Indonesian) language system. For example, while it is acceptable to say ‘*laki-laki melamar perempuan*’ (men make marriage proposal to women), it would be culturally anomalous to reverse the order by placing ‘*perempuan*’ as the subject, thus ‘*perempuan melamar laki-laki*’ is unacceptable, at least culturally speaking. With the exception of the matrilineal society of the Minangkabau in West Sumatra, it is not culturally acceptable in this context for women to take an active role.

Ayu Utami has elaborated further this inequality (between men and women) in relation to marriage, as shown in the quotation below:

“Inilah wewejangnya: *Pertama*, Hanya lelaki yang boleh menghampiri perempuan. Perempuan yang mengejar-ngejar lelaki pastilah sundal. *Kedua*. Perempuan akan memberikan tubuhnya pada lelaki yang pantas, dan lelaki itu akan menghidupinya dengan hartanya. Itu dinamakan perkawinan. Kelak ketika dewasa, aku menganggapnya persundalan yang hipokrit”. (p. 120-121). [see endnote 7 for its English version] (underlining added)

There are basically two things that are challenged by the author here: inequality (between men and women) and marriage. The first notion, inequality, is obvious through the fact that men are providers (*menghidupi*), and women are provided for. Such notion, of course, is nothing new among the Islamic society, since a verse in the holy Qur’an clearly indicates this, ie that men are leaders for women (An Nisa, [4]:34). The first sentence is presented as a contrast, ie that men can go after women (*hanya lelaki yang boleh menghampiri perempuan*), but not the other way round. The use of the word *sundal* ‘prostitute’ indicates Ayu’s strong criticism towards the belief that women should not take an active role vis-à-vis men, since being active in this case is comparable to an act by a prostitute.

The challenge on the notion of marriage is also very strong, ie that marriage is [just] a hypocritical prostitution. In some way this reflects the view of the radical feminists that challenge the institutionalization of marriage (see Phillips, 1987 on ‘radical feminism’).³⁾ In fact, challenging marriage does not stop here; Ayu goes on by imagining the occurrence of polyandry through the character ‘ibu’.

“Sebab ia merasakan ada sesuatu yang lain yang begitu dekat dengan ibu, amat dekat, amat bersatu, ada cinta di sana. “ (p56)

“... saat ayahnya dipindahkan ke Jakarta. Masih teringat oleh Wis bagaimana Ibu meratap seperti seorang janda kematian anak tunggal. Ibu menangis tanpa suara, sebab suaranya habis, tetapi nafasnya dan tubuhnya bergetar, rahangnya gemeretak. [...] Waktu itu Wis sudah cukup besar untuk mengerti dengan intuisinya bahwa kepergian itu menceraikan ibunya dengan sesuatu yang dikasihinya, yang juga mengasihinya.” (p. 58) (underlining added) [see endnote 8 for its English version]

³⁾ Interestingly, another writer of the same generation also questions the notion of marriage. She refers to marriage as *institusi maha megah* ‘institution of great splendour’, which sounds like a cynical view towards marriage (Dewi in *Supernova*, 2001).

Through this narration, Ayu tries to describe that *ibu* 'mother' has two parallel lives: the real and the 'unreal'. *Ibu* is depicted as having another life with a 'being' who loves her and whom she loves. Her separation from this *being* (when her husband was transferred to Jakarta) has caused sadness for *ibu*. The dramatic description of her sadness (*wailing, as if lamenting the death of an only child, etc*) indicates that *ibu* is not willing to be separated from her 'other life'. In some other parts of the novel, the author narrates other occurrences when *Wis*, the priest, hears the voices of a man and children, whom he cannot see and who he believes to be his younger siblings (see also Section 4 below).

The message that the author wants to deliver in this case seems to be that polyandrous marriage can happen or, rather, should be allowed to happen. Probably, Ayu wants to present this as an antithesis of Polygamy, a notion that is legally recognized in the Islamic world and in Indonesia. Indeed, after the fall of the New Order regime in Indonesia, polygamy has emerged as a topic for public debate. This topic was 'prevented' from being a public debate during the New Order period, ie when polygamy was controlled through a legislation called PP10/1974. The main purpose was to control promiscuity among public servants, based on the assumption that polygamous marriage could lead to corruption, due to a man's having more than one wife to provide for.

Considering the novel was mainly written when the New Order regime was still in power, Ayu seems to 'rebel' against polygamous marriage by using the occurrence of polyandry as an antithesis to polygamy, although in a subtle way through *ibu*'s two parallel lives.

4. Religious Dimensions and Magic Realism

As mentioned above, Ayu presents the character *ibu* as having another, unreal or magical, parallel life. This is much depicted in Part II of the novel, ie an episode on *Saman* (see especially attachment 2). In this episode the author critically presents *Saman*'s life, and she depicts his life by way of magic realism. Umar Kayam sees this in reference to the work of Gabriel Garcia Marquez in *One Hundred Years Solitude*". This novel is known for its miraculous, bizarre and supernatural happenings (see Kompas, 5 April, 1998).

The episode starts on page 40 of the novel, when *Saman*'s original name was Anasthasius Wisangeni (shortened to *Wis*). It was 1983, and *Wis* had just been ordained a new priest. Then, in 1984 he was assigned to a parish in Perabumulih (South Sumatra) at his request. He used to live there as a child in 1962 (pp.44-56), and had experienced an unexplainable mystical experience:

“Suara anak-anak balita serta lelaki di belakang tengkuknya, dekat sekali, alam yang nyata di balik wajahnya. Jika suara itu datang dari arah depan, maka itu berasal dari kamar yang ia tidak sedang di sana. Mereka kadang datang, siang atau malam, pagi atau sore. Lama-lama *Wis* terbiasa dengan anak-anak dan lelaki yang menjumpai

ibunya tanpa sepengetahuan bapaknya. Yang tak pernah ia lihat sosoknya. Apalagi wajahnya.” (p. 53). [see endnote 9 for its English version]

Here, again, Ayu depicts ibu’s other life, while at the same time depicting Wis’ acceptance of this happening *terbiasa dengan anak-anak dan lelaki yang menjumpai ibunya* ‘[Wis] has become used to the visit made by a man and children to his mother’. Ayu’s proposition that a woman can have two parallel families (thus two husbands) is subtly presented here. This is rather different from the way she explores sexuality, which is more blunt. Maybe Ayu does not want to offend her Islamic readers by being too blunt on this. Furthermore, the emphasis in this case is on the magical aspect of the occurrence, which she explores further, as in the quote below.

[Then, 11 years later when Wis returns to to the same place as a priest, he hears the voices again]:

Ketika bohlam dipadamkan, ia merasakan sesuatu. Bukan suara, bukan pula bunyi, tetapi perasaan ambang indrawi bahwa ada orang lain di ruang itu, di dekatnya. Saraf-saraf refleksnya mencuatkan cemas, jari-jarinya kembali menyalakan lampu. Tapi dalam terang ia tak melihat siapa-siapa. Syukurlah bukan rampok atau maling. [...] Tapi perasaan itu semakin akut. Ada orang di dalam udara ruang, masuk bersama molekul angin. Wis menghanyutkan diri dalam sensasi itu. Dari arah belakang ia mulai mendengar suara perempuan, terkadang lelaki, lebih sering perempuan, berbicara bukan dalam bahasa apapun yang ia kenal, namun ia merasa orang itu menyapanya. Wis menoleh ke belakang cepat-cepat seperti hendak menyergap suara itu dengan matanya. Ia tak melihat apapun. (pp.61-62). [see endnote 10 for its English version]

It may be that the episode is part of the subconscious mind of the writer. However, to a superstitious Javanese, it may be perceived as a ‘real’ experience. The many Javanese words used in the novel indicate that the writer has drawn from the life and animistic belief of a Javanese in depicting the life of Saman.

So, there are two ways of interpreting the magical phenomenon above: readers may see this episode in a metaphorical way and interpret it as the writer’s subconscious mind, or readers may see it in the light of magic realism, ie depicting a reality in a particular community (in this case the Javanese). In her subconscious mind, the writer may try to depict a situation, an impossible one in reality, where the character *ibu* can have another parallel life, with another family (see section 3 above). The clause ‘cannot always be logically explained’ in the quote of Section 3 seems to reflect an imagination in the writer’s subconscious mind.

A closer interpretation would be to see it as part of the superstitious belief that becomes a special reality among a particular society (in this case the Javanese), which the writer observes. This is obvious from the character 'ibu' (*mother*) below:

“Ibunya yang masih raden ayu adalah sosok yang tak selalu bisa dijelaskan oleh akal. Ia sering nampak tidak berada di tempat ia ada, atau berada di tempat ia tak ada. Pada saat begitu, sulit mengajaknya bercakap-cakap, sebab ia tak mendengarkan orang yang berbicara di dekatnya. Kadang kebiasuannya diakhiri dengan pergi ke tempat yang tak diketahui orang, barangkali suatu ruang yang tidak dimana-mana: suatu suwung.” (p.44) [see endnote 11 for its English version]

Here the Javanese phrase *Raden Ayu*, a term of address for female aristocrat, and the word *suwung* 'empty' are Javanese concepts, which is why it is better to interpret the occurrence in terms of the Javanese belief system than in other terms. The concept *suwung* is explained further elsewhere as *manusia berasal dari kosong dan kembali ke kosong* 'human being comes from emptiness and will return to it' (p.44). Also, why 'ibu' is doing what she does is obvious from the fragment below:

“Bapaknya tak punya darah ningrat dan memilih nama Sudoyo ketika dewasa. Lelaki itu berasal dari Muntilan dan beragama dengan ketat, agak berbeda dari sang ibu, yang meskipun ke gereja pada hari Minggu, juga merawat keris dan barang-barang kuno dengan khidmat” (pp44-45). [see endnote 12 for its English version]

So, being a pious Christian (*beragama dengan ketat*), his father does not worship the *kris* like his wife does. Ayu utami seems to reject the idea that piety does not go together with animism.

Interestingly, the *magical realism* depicted above is intertwined with the religious dimensions that the writer challenges. For example, there are times when Wis thinks God is not there when needed:

“Ia merasa telah mati. Dan ia amat sedih karena Tuhan rupanya tidak ada. Kristus tidak menebusnya sebab ia kini berada dalam jurang maut. (p. 102) [see endnote 13 for its English version]

Although Ayu Utami softens the challenge (of God's existence) by using the word 'rupanya', she actually challenges God's existence even stronger:

“Tapi ia tak bisa lagi berdo'a untuk itu. Setelah semua kepedihan ini, agaknya Tuhan memang tak menyelamatkan mereka. Tak mau, atau tak sanggup. Atau Dia memang tak ada.” (p.106). [see endnote 14 for its English version]

The challenge is strong because, because the character who challenges God's existence is a priest (ie Wis). In this episode, Wis thinks that, instead of God, it was the voices (and their power) that help him (*Wis*):

“Ia tahu ia mulai keracunan asap. Ia akan mati sebelum terbakar.

Tapi didengarnya suara-suara itu. Betul, suara-suara yang dirindukannya, yang meninggalkan dia sejak dipenjara. Makin lama makin ramai di sekelilingnya, seperti nyamuk, seperti membangunkan atau membingungkannya. Lalu ia merasa ada energi menyusup ke dalam tubuhnya, ada nyawa-nyawa masuk ke raganya. [...] Rasanya ia bisa terbang. Ia bangkit dan menjebol pintu yang telah keropos oleh api, lalu berlari di lorong yang mulai terbakar.” [...] (pp. 108-109) [see endnote 15 for its English version]

In all this, Ayu Utami depicts syncretism in the Javanese belief system. Such system has been described in great details in the classic work of Geertz ‘The Religion of Java’ (1964). In his anthropological research, Geertz found that certain Muslims, whom he calls the *abangan*, would worship both Allah as well as the *kris* (as having magical power). So, in this episode Ayu seems to support syncretism and explores it in her novel.

5. The Socio-political dimensions

In the same episode, particularly pp.81-114 of the novel, the socio-political dimension is most obvious. Here *Wis* has been involved in an armed struggle between the villagers in the rubber plantation and the government-backed developers. *Wis* was arrested, imprisoned and tortured.

This dimension forms a large part of the novel. The theme of this episode is characteristic of the writers of the 2000 generation, ie rebellion against (political) establishment and corrupt regime. Being part of this generation Ayu Utami makes the theme one of the concerns critically observed and narrated in her novel. There are certain key words, phrases and statements which are typical of this dimension and which represent the discourse ideology of the Indonesian New Order regime. The following quotes are some examples (underlining added):

(p. 21) Texcoil punya uang lebih dari yang diperlukan untuk membungkam keluarga Hasyim dan polisi.

(p. 88) Anson yakin bahwa pemeriksaan itu adalah salah satu bentuk terror dari orang-orang yang hendak merebut lahan itu.

(p. 89) Kami menjalankan tugas dari Bapak Gubernur.

(p. 102) Sebab itu merupakan penangkapan gelap.

(p. 103)Kamu pasti mau membangun basis kekuatan di kalangan petani!

Kamu pasti mau menggulingkan pemerintah yang sah.

(p. 111) Ia dituduh menghasut penduduk Lubukrantau untuk

menghalangi pembangunan.

(p. 111) Ia juga dituduh mengacaukan stabilitas.

[see endnote 16 for its English version]

The underlined words are typical jargons of the New Order (Orde Baru) era. The words/phrases such as *membungkam* ‘to stifle’, *pemeriksaan-teror* ‘rape-terror’, *menjalankan tugas* ‘carrying out orders’, *penangkapan gelap* ‘illegal arrest’, *menggulingkan pemerintah yang sah* ‘to topple legitimate government’ are all indicative of the New Order era and are found in use by many writers of that era, to challenge and criticize the government, overtly or covertly. Words such as *pembangunan* ‘development’, *stabilitas* ‘stability’, etc. are indicative of the New Order Governments’s perspective and ideology (see especially the language of the GBHN ‘the State Policy Guidelines’), particularly in the last 15 years of the regime.

Of the many writers included as Angkatan 2000, at least 15 have made this socio-political aspect an explicit theme in their writing (see Layun Rampan, loc cit). So, rebelling against an established and corrupt regime seems to be a common theme and phenomenon among this generation of young female writers, apart from foregrounding gendered identities (See section 2 on sexuality). The question is: where does Ayu Utami stand among this 2000 Generation of novelists? It lies in the fact that she manages to “collate” and interrelate characters and events in a different way (see Section 6 below on narrative style). She defies narrative tradition by almost ignoring a plot, and by depicting her characters and events in two main ways: through exposition and through a combination of it and poem.

6. The Narrative Style

The writer’s defiance of linearity in plot is shown through the numerous flashbacks and changes in narrative voice and orientation (see attachments 1 and 2 for charts indicating story line and flashbacks).

The ‘collating’ technique is reflected in the narrative voice: from first-person to third-person orientation and to the narrator. An interesting fragment that Layun Rampan quotes is from page 105 of the novel (numbering added):

(1) Ia terbangun dan merasa dirinya sebesar kepala. (2) Hanya kepala. (3) Tanpa badan. (4) Dia tidak eksis di luar kepalanya. (5) Tak ada jari-jari, tak ada jantung. (6) Lindap. (7) Warna dalam atukah aku berada dalam rahim? (Layun Rampan, op cit p. iiv) [see endnote 17 for its English version]

Traditionally, first person narration would take the form of a dialogue, for purposes of making the narration and depiction of characters more vivid. However, we can see in the quote that sentences (1) to (6) refers to *ia/dia* ‘he’, narrating a situation when the character feels that he does not exist in this

world apart from just his head. Thus, third-person narration has been used. Then the narration changes in (7), ie into first-person narration with *aku* 'I'. This kind of shifts occurs in many parts of the novel, almost randomly. It seems that, once again, Ayu defies (grammatical) convention and tradition.

As stated at the beginning of this paper, this style can be confusing for readers, especially when the narration is of the same character. Changes of orientation (from first-person to third or vice versa) can usually be considered as a significant change in narration, scene, etc but that is not the case here. So, while it is true that Ayu Utami introduces a new narrative style, it does not necessarily indicate a positive move, at least not in a narrative sense.

Another example of the collating (narrative) style can be seen in the quote below, where the author combines an exposition and a poetic form in fiction (from page 3):

“ Dan kalau dia datang ke taman ini, saya akan tunjukkan beberapa sketsa yang saya buat karena kerinduan saya padanya. Serta beberapa sajak di bawahnya. *Kuinginkan mulut yang haus/ dari lelaki yang kehilangan masa remajanya/ di antara pasir-pasir tempat ia menyisir arus.* Saya tulis demikian pada sebuah gambar cat air. [..]”[see endnote 18 for its English version]

Here, the poem (starting from '*Kuinginkan...*' to '*...menyisir arus*') forms part of the occurrence. Traditionally, the poem would be separated, as a poem (not in a linear form like an exposition), to distinguish it from the story line. However, the author seems to combine these two different forms on purpose, thus defying convention: a narration is a narration, and a poem is a poem, each of which are traditionally presented in different forms. On comparing this with a writer from the same generation, Dewi Lestari (in '*Supernova*') retains these different forms.

So it seems that the narrative style that Ayu Utami employs is an expression of 'rebellion' against established (ie traditional) writing style. As it is, her 'rebellious' way can be seen as an assertion in her part that, ie of her existence and the emergence of a new and different generation of writers.

7. Concluding Remarks

The generation of young female writers has emerged in Indonesia. They write with a vengeance, challenging taboos and established traditions. Among these writers, Ayu Utami stands out, because of her break from tradition. Although many critics see this break as something that is not necessarily positive, one thing is clear: she voices her opinion clearly and loudly. In this 'loud' voice, she talks about themes which had been taboo in the past, and due to this, she is said to be pushing 'the boundary of what is acceptable' (as quoted in the Introduction of this paper). Her defiance of and break from

traditional writing style and convention has also stirred criticisms. In any case, however, as Ayu herself puts it, she just 'wants to be frank' in presenting what she has presented.

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End notes: English versions of the Indonesian quotations

[1]

It's all out, especially about women's being bound by tradition, about sexual relations, etc. What I like [about her] is that she is young, [...] What she has written represents the cosmopolitan youth who read a lot, and with critical observation and a lot of experience, and, of course, she is a young intellectual.

[2]

...[it] appears from the concoction [of story] which shows the various colours realized through the characters and occurrences which produces an aesthetically literary power. The concoction has placed composition aspects [in line with] a combination of fiction, essay and poem]

[3]

[because] I think, again, it's God who's cheating: He creates hymen[for women], but He does not do so with male genital.

[4]

...my mother reveals a big secret: that I am in fact a Chinese porcelain. [...] .. [it, ie virginity] should not crack, because people will throw [it] into the garbage bin.

[5]

A girl who's lost her virginity is considered defective, but such norm is not applicable to men. I don't mean to suggest pre-marital sex, but [please] just try to think of virginity in a natural manner. When women worship virginity so much, they would suffer. [When] their virginity is lost, they would feel useless.

[6]

The man had whipped the chest and back of the woman, but he found between her legs a hole with an aroma of lust. "You have been given the name woman because you come from man's rib", so whispered God as He suddenly came back. "And I name these [tips] nipples because they are the tips of your breasts. And I name this [thing] clitoris because it looks like a small penis". But he did not give the hole a name. Instead, he groped with his fingers. And with his penis he penetrated [it].

[7]

This is the advice [telling readers of an advice that a character gets from her mother]: Firstly, only men can approach women. Women who go after men must be prostitutes. Secondly, a woman will only give [up] her body to a suitable man, and the man will provide her with his wealth. This is called marriage. Later on [when I became an adult], I call this a hypocritical prostitution.

[8]

Because he felt that there was a being that was so close to mother, so close, so united, [and] there was love between them.

.. when his father was transferred to Jakarta. Wis still remembered how mother was wailing, as if lamenting for the death of her only child. Mother cried silently, since she'd lost her voice [from crying], but she shivered, her jaws chattered. [...] At the time Wis was old enough to understand, intuitively, that the departure [from the place] had separated his mother from a being that she loved and that loved her.

[9]

The voices of man and small children 'on his nape' are so close, a real world [behind him]. When the voices come from the front direction, they are from another room. The voices are heard sometimes at day or nighttime, or morning or afternoon. Gradually Wis has become used to [the fact] that children and a man who visit his mother without his father's knowledge; whose figures he [can] never see, let alone their faces

[10]

(When the light was switched off, he felt something. No sound, no voice, but through his sixth sense he felt presence, close to him. He became anxious, and switched on the lights. But he did not see anyone. Thank God it's not a robber or a thief. [...] But that feeling became really strong. There was someone in the 'space', who enter it together with molecules, brought by the wind. Wis let himself swept by this sensation. From behind him he began to hear a woman's voice, sometimes man's, but more often a woman's. They talked in a language he does not understand, but he knew that the 'beings' greeted him. Wis quickly turned his back, trying to 'catch' it/them with his eyes. He saw nothing.

[11]

His mother, who was an aristocrat, is complicated person, who was hard to understand. She was present and absent at the same time, or she was around without being physically present. At this time, it was hard to talk to her, because she did not listen to those around her. At times, after her muteness, she went to a space unknown [by anyone], maybe a space that is nowhere: a *suwung*. (a *suwung*= lit. an emptiness)

[12]

His father was no aristocrat dan had chosen the name Sudoyo when he grew up. He was from Muntilan and is a pious person, rather different from mother, who, although she went to church on Sundays, she also worshipped [the Javanese] kris and other sacred things.

[13]

He thought he was dead. And he felt sad because it seems that God does not exist. The Christ does not save him because he is now in the brink of death.

[14]

But he cannot pray anymore. After all this sufferings, it seems that God indeed does not save them. No will, no power. Or He simply does not exist.

[15]

He knew that he began to inhale the smoke. He would be dead before the fire caught him. But he heard the voices. That's right! the voices he'd longed to hear, that have left him since he was in prison. Gradually it became noisy around him, like the [sound of] mosquitoes, as if to wake him up or to get him confused. Then he felt that some energy had got into him, some spirits had entered his body. [...] he thought he was flying. He rose up and broke the door down, which was on fire, [and] he ran along the corridor, caught by the fire.

[16]

(p. 21) Texcoil has more than enough money for silencing Hasyim's family and the Police.

(p. 88) Anson is sure that the rape is a form of terror stricken by people who want to take over the land.

(p. 89) We carry out orders from Mr. Governor.

(p. 102) Since it constitutes illegal arrest.

(p. 103) You must want to establish a support base among the farmers!

You must want to topple the legitimate government.

(p. 111) He has been accused of instigating the people of Lubukrantau to hinder development.

(p. 111) He is also accused of disturbing the stability.

[17]

He woke up and felt [that] he'd shrunk to the size of a head. Only head, without body. He did not exist outside of his head. No fingers, no heart. Obscured. Is it [just] the colour of something inside or am I in the womb?

[18]

And when arrives at this park, I'll show him some sketches that I've made because of my yearning for him, with some poems accompanying them [sketches]. *I am yearning for the thirsty mouth/ of a man who's lost his teenage life/ among the sand where he follows the stream.* I've written them so in the water-coloured paint.

Attachment 1:

Main storyline and flashbacks in Saman

(pages in the novel are between brackets)

Main story line	Flashbacks	Title/subtitle	Main events/points in flashback
<p>Central Park (New York) 26 Mei 1996 Jam 10 pagi <p style="text-align: right;">(pp1-6)</p> <p>- Laila is waiting for Sihar in the Central Park (Laila a virgin, Sihar a married man)</p> </p>			
	<p>Flashback 1 (pp 7-16) (pp 17-23)</p>	<p>“Februari 1993” “Pulau Matak ...”</p>	<p>- Accident in oil rig, Laut Cina selatan (ahere Sihar works); - Laila offers to obtain legal aid (and will contact SAMAN, an activist)</p>
<p>Jam 12 siang (remembered 3 years ago when she met Sihar)</p>	<p>Flashback 2 (pp23-30)</p>	<p>“Pukul dua belas”</p>	<p>- Laila & Sihar plan the legal aid; - plan to go to the USA; - Laila’s imagination of sleeping with Sihar -</p>
	<p>Flashback 3 (pp31-36)</p>	<p>“Prabumulih 1993”</p>	<p>- Laila & Sihar on the way to Hasyim’s family’s house (victim at the oil rig)- resting on the way; - will meet SAMAN at the house</p>

<p>Jam 3 sore (pp 37-39) -Laila is still waiting for Sihar (to give up her virginity to him)</p>	<p>Flashback 4 (pp 40-114) & (pp 156-164)</p>	<p>About SAMAN: his life (Phase 1) (see separate box next page):</p>
<p>New York 28 Mei 1996 (115-155) - Laila still waits for Sihar; - Another character – her perspective on Laila & Sihar. - Then the story of Laila and Sihar stops here</p>		<p>SAMAN' life: Phase II (in New York – in political asylum)</p>
	<p>Flashback 5 (pp165-197)</p>	

Notes:



Indicates flashback



Indicates return to the main (present) storyline

Attachment 2:

Flashbacks 4 & 5: SAMAN's life

(Contains a flashback within a flashback)

When	(sub) title in the novel & Point/event
<p>1983 (pp40-43)</p>	<p>“Dia belum memakai nama Saman”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When Saman was a Catholic priest and his name was (Anasthasius) Wisanggeni or Wis; - Assigned to a Parish in Perabumulih (South Sumatra)- returning to his childhood place (when he experienced mysterious events in 1962; <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin: 10px auto; width: fit-content;"> <p>Prabumulih 1962: (pp44-56) Wisanggeni's childhood</p> <p><i>Flashback within flashback:</i></p> </div>
<p>1984 (pp 57-86)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Wisanggeni at 26 - encounter with people at the rubber plantation.
<p>1990 (pp86-114)</p>	<p>“Sesuatu terjadi pada Upi”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wisanggeni's life as activist - imprisonment; torture; escape—and change of identity to SAMAN
<p>11 Desember 1990 (pp156-164)</p>	<p>“Perabumulih, 11 Desember 1990”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - life in hiding as SAMAN; - a long letter to his father.
<p>7 Mei 1994 (pp165-197)</p> <p>The novel ends on page 197, but the story doesn't.</p>	<p>“New York, 7 Mei 1994”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Writing an email to Yasmin from New York, in political asylum (Yasmin & Cok, Laila's childhood's friend helped Saman escape to New York)